

Utopian Deconstruction: Ernst Bloch, Paul de Man and the Politics of music

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The signs are that Marxist criticism is at present undergoing one of its periodic shifts of theoretical vision. What is at stake is a widespread revaluation of utopian or visionary thought as it bears upon the Marxist project of historical understanding. This amounts to a questioning of the received view that utopian reverie was a kind of infantile disorder, an escape from the problems and exigencies of materialist critique into a realm of unanchored speculation where thinking encountered no resistance to its wildest dreams. This attitude was supposedly warranted by Marx's scattered allusions to utopian mystics and ideologues like Saint Simon, Fourier and Robert Owen. It was also based on a decidedly selective reading of Engels's *Communism: scientific and utopian* (1880) where the argument for Marxist 'science' in fact goes along with a qualified respect for the genuine emancipatory impulses embodied in utopian thought.

Fredric Jameson's book *The Political Unconscious* (1980) sets out to reclaim a positive or future-oriented version of Marxist hermeneutic, a philosophy of principled utopian faith to set against the purely demystifying drive of so much recent theoretical work.¹ He is even willing to enlist various patristic, theological and other-worldly schemes of interpretative thought, provided these can be effectively coopted into a master-narrative whose ultimate terms are secular and Marxist. Thus Jameson argues for a reappropriation of the traditional four 'levels' of exegesis- the literal, moral, allegorical and analogical- as stages on the path to an enriched understanding of Marxist hermeneutic method. History remains, in Jameson's words, the 'untranscendable horizon' of thought, the point toward which all meanings converge in the quest for some ultimate 'totalizing' grasp. Dialectical materialism is the only standpoint from which these various partial narratives and perspectives can at last be seen as composing a history that makes sense of them

in adequately complex and non-reductive terms. Otherwise Marxism is always in danger of imposing a monological scheme of understanding, either through some variant of the crude base/superstructure model, or - as in Althusser's case - by reducing consciousness, history, culture and subjective agency to mere effects of a dominant structural complex whose workings can only appear under the aspect of detached theoretical knowledge.²

Jameson's ideas are expressly indebted to the greatest of modern utopian thinkers, the German Marxist and visionary philosopher Ernst Bloch. There is a well-known passage from one of Marx's letters that Bloch was fond of quoting, and that indicates something of his own close but ambivalent relationship to Marxist thought.

So our slogan must be: reform of consciousness, not through dogma, but through the analysis of that mystical consciousness which has not yet become clear to itself. It will then turn out that the world has long dreamt of that of which it had only to have a clear idea to possess it really. It will turn out that it is not a question of any conceptual rupture between past and future, but rather of the *completion* of the thoughts of the past.³

This passage is remarkable for the fact that it prefigures all the major themes of Bloch's utopian thinking. It is also of interest, in light of what I have said so far, for rejecting the idea of revolutionary change as a rupture with past ways of thought, or as striving to achieve, in Althusserian terms, a decisive 'epistemological break' that marks the transition from lived ideology to genuine theoretical knowledge. One can read Bloch's work as a sustained, indeed lifelong effort to give substance to the kind of alternative vision held out by these comments of Marx. That they strike a note distinctly alien to most subsequent versions of Marxist thought is a fact to which Bloch's own fortunes, and the reception-history of his writing, bear eloquent witness.

Up to now it has been difficult for the monoglot English reader to obtain more than a hazy impression of Bloch's enormously ambitious and wide-ranging work. Apart from Jameson's pioneering chapter in *Marxism and Form* (1971), the main source was through Bloch's various debates and polemics with other Marxist thinkers, notably Adorno, Lukacs and Brecht.⁴ The sheer bulk of his writings, as well as their charged poetic style and resistance to orderly exposition, have so far conspired against his entering the mainstream of Western Marxist

debate. However, this situation has now begun to change with the appearance of two major texts in English translation. One is Bloch's magnum opus *The Principle of Hope*, a three-volume work which ranges over the entire compass of his thinking, from the politics of popular culture and everyday life to philosophy, religion, aesthetics, psychoanalysis and every sphere of thought where Bloch detects the latent signs of an as-yet unrealised utopian potential.⁵ The other is a collection of essays *On The Philosophy Of Music* which brings together work from his early 'expressionist' period with pieces written much later when Bloch's thinking had undergone a shift toward more overtly Marxist concepts and categories.⁶ Between them, these volumes make it possible at last for the English reader to grasp the full extent to Bloch's innovatory thinking.

In what follows, I shall concentrate on those aspects of his work most directly concerned with music in its political or utopian-redemptive aspect. For Bloch, as for others before him in the German philosophical tradition - notably Schopenhauer and Nietzsche - music was at once the most humanly-revealing form of art and the form most resistant to description or analysis in conceptual terms. But this was no reason, he argued, for retreating into an attitude of mystical irrationalism which denied music any kind of cognitive import, or (conversely) for adopting the formalist standpoint which reduced it to a play of purely abstract structures and relationships devoid of expressive content. If musical aesthetics had hitherto tended to vacillate between these extremes, it was not so much by reason of some ultimate deadlock in the nature of thinking about music, but more an indication of the limits placed upon thought by its present confinement to a rigid categorical logic and a subject-object dualism incapable of transcending such antinomies. Bloch sees an example of this limiting perspective in the way that Bach's music has been praised alternately for its qualities of 'pure', mathematical structure and its power to move emotions by a kind of effective contagion quite beyond reach of analysis. 'Utterly wrong though the romanticizing which occurred in Mendelssohn's rendering of Bach is, equally an understanding of Bach cannot be achieved by mere dead dismissal of romanticism, as if nothing remained after it but reified form'⁷

Here Bloch concurs with Adorno's argument in the polemical essay 'Bach defended against his devotees'.⁸ Critics and performers who celebrate Bach in the name of 'absolute music' are in fact submitting

their judgment to those forces of inhuman abstraction and reification which mark the latest stage of capitalist social relations. 'This "new objectivity" in relation to Bach reproduces with a supposedly positive significance the judgment which was common half a century after Bach's death and which in fact submerged him as the greatest musician' (*Principle of Hope*, p. 1064). And such excesses always lead to a swing in the opposite direction, in this case toward a style of sentimentalized performance which lacks any feeling for structure or form. Thus 'a poorly overcome romanticism took revenge by again introducing expressive interpretation, but now not even in the Mendelssohnian style but in the style of the sentimental bower' (p. 1065). This reception-history is for Bloch symptomatic of everything that presently stands in the way of an adequate musical response. It reflects the kind of bad dialectic, the shutting back and forth between extremes of 'objective' and 'subjective' response, which leaves its mark on every thought and perception in an age of commodified cultural experience. Bloch would no doubt have found this judgment amply confirmed had he lived to witness the present-day obsession with 'authenticity' in musical performance. Such ideas can only be deluded, he would argue, in so far as they substitute a dead, monumentalized concept of tradition for the living, evolving, dialectical process of change which has come between us and the cultural products of an earlier age. The jargon of authenticity is in fact nothing more than a kind of self-defeating nostalgia, a harking-back to ideas and practices that are falsified as soon as one sets them up as absolute, ahistorical values.

For Bloch, the only way to transcend such reified notions is by a new kind of listening, one that effectively opens the path toward a state of redeemed utopian promise. This 'surplus' of future-oriented meaning was ungraspable, he thought, within the terms handed down by Western philosophical tradition. Certainly music had figured at various points in this tradition as a kind of qualitative touchstone, a name for whatever surpassed or eluded the powers of abstract conceptualization. For Schopenhauer especially, music gave access to a realm of primordial experience - the will in its all ceaseless strivings and desires - which the other arts (painting, architecture, poetry) could only express at a certain distance of formal representation.⁹ Thus music was the truth to which philosophy aspired but which could never reach the point of articulate understanding since language itself, and philosophical language in particular, dealt only in concepts or

abstract figures of thought. And there is a deeper ambivalence about Schopenhauer's attitude to music, since he commits himself to the following contradictory propositions. 1) that the highest point of human wisdom and felicity is to achieve detachment from the restless activity of will, this state to be arrived at through a kind of self-disciplined contemplative repose, much akin to the Nirvana of Buddhist teaching; 2) that music most directly embodies the unconscious, inarticulate strivings of will; and 3) despite this, that music is the highest form of art since it dispenses with the various intermediary concepts and representations which characterize other kinds of aesthetic experience. All three propositions are integral to his thinking, but there is no way of squaring their plainly contradictory entailments.

This problem has been recognised by Schopenhauer's commentators, even the more sympathetic among them, who treat it as a curious logical flaw in his otherwise intensely single-minded philosophy.¹⁰ For Bloch, on the other hand, it is a sign of Schopenhauer's failure to grasp the utopian or forward-looking element in music, its appeal not to a realm of archaic, instinctual desire that precedes articulate thought, but to that which lies beyond the aporias of self-conscious reason and which draws thinking on toward the promise of transcending all such antinomies. Schopenhauer can conceive of no ultimate good save that which comes of escaping the will, putting away all objects of desire and thus enjoying that long-awaited 'sabbath' from the penal servitude of instinct when 'the wheel of ixion stands still' and the mind achieves a state of perfected stoical indifference. But what then of music, the experience of which - as Bloch says, paraphrasing Schopenhauer - 'speaks of the exclusive essence itself, weal and woe only, the universal 'will' and that alone as the most serious and the most real thing of all we can find' ? (PM, p. 127). This desperate conclusion is forced upon Schopenhauer by his equation of 'reality' with the dark, destructive, self-preying nature of human instinct, and his total disbelief in the redemptive power of history, politics or secular reason. By renouncing all hope in the future, by ignoring the utopian dimension of music and hearing it only as the record of archaic struggles and defeats, Schopenhauer condemns his own philosophy to self-contradiction and ultimate nihilist despair.

Bloch's can be seen as the affirmative counterpart to Schopenhauer's gloomy metaphysics of will and representation. He concurs in treating

music as the source of primordial truths that can as yet find no voice in philosophy or the other arts. This power he attributes to music's peculiarly inward character, its capacity to call out feelings and responses that have hitherto existed only in confused or inchoate form but which now find expression in the realm of ordered sound. Such is the capacity for 'visionary listening' (*Hellhören*) that can work to transfigure the very conditions of human sensuous awareness. What music embodies in potential form is 'a figuring-out in *fonte hominum et rerum* that is utopian and fermenting, in an area of intensity that is open only to music' (PAM, p. 228). For music provides the most striking intimation of that always conditional future state when subject and object, mind and nature might yet be reconciled beyond their present, divided condition. Like Schopenhauer again, he contrasts this inwardness of musical experience with the external, phenomenal or visual character pertaining to other artforms. Of course this is not so obviously the case with poetry or literary language. But in so far as these partake of representation - of that which, according to Schopenhauer, exists only at a certain remove from the primordial experience of will - they are likewise to be thought of as mediated forms of expression which lack the sheer intensity of musical experience.

This is not to say that Bloch in any sense devalues literature, or sets up the kind of rigid hierarchical system that one finds in Schopenhauer's theory of art. Indeed, some of his most powerful writing in *The Principle of Hope* is devoted to Goethe's *Faust* and other such works where the impulse of utopian thought is expressed through images of secularized mystical experience or Promethean overreaching. But it is in music that his thinking finds its elective homeground, a domain where the subject-object relation takes on a peculiarly charged and prophetic character. This is why its meaning eludes any theory based on notions of 'absolute form', or of structural relations, numerical proportions and so forth as the ultimate constituents of music. Such ideas are *theoretical* in the root sense, going back to the Greek terms for seeing, contemplation and other essentially visual metaphors raised into concepts of purely intellectual knowledge. As Jacques Derrida reminds us, these sublimated figures so permeate the discourse of Western philosophy that it is impossible to escape their influence.¹¹ But we can, according to Bloch, at least imagine an alternative realm of experience, one which points beyond the kind of static ontology enforced by these visual analogues, and which thus opens up a more

active, transformative grasp of the subject-object dialectic. 'Music is, for a deeper reason than was hitherto evident, the latest of the arts, succeeding visuality and belonging to the formally eccentric philosophy of inwardness, its ethics and metaphysics... This means objectively penetrating to the core of the listener instead of the savant, instead of mere form-analysis... Both the existence and the concept of music are only attained in conjunction with a new object-theory, with the metaphysics of divination and utopia.' (*PM*, pp. 130-31). Thus music holds out the promise of a radical transformation, not only in our habits of aesthetic response but in every sphere of thought, ethics and politics included - where the relation between knower and known is a field potentially open for creative reimagining.

II

Of course there are problems in coming to terms with any philosophy which stakes its faith on such a leap outside all past and present categories of thought. The difficulty is posed most acutely by Bloch's attempts to explain the 'dialectic of nature' in terms of an envisaged utopian overcoming of the subject-object dualism. This might seem to place him in dangerous proximity to that current of vulgar-Marxist materialism which naively conflates the dialectical process of thought with the antagonistic forces (or so-called 'contradictions') of external nature. In fact Bloch is everywhere alert to such confusions, and regards them as determined in part by the inadequate heritage of formal, post-Aristotelian logic, and in part by the pitiless divorce between subject and object imposed by an alien, dissociated sense of how thinking relates to the world of sensuous experience. His reiterated *nicht noch* ('not yet') is therefore both a kind of logical shifter - designed to bring about a qualitative change in the order of classical logic - and a means toward imagining the ultimate transcendence of man's alienation from nature. (In this respect Bloch comes close to the position adopted by the early Lukács in *History And Class-Consciousness*, although their paths diverged sharply when Lukács came to repudiate his own 'idealist' leanings in the name of Stalinist orthodoxy.) Yet this transcendence can only be achieved through a veritable leap of faith, since Bloch's arguments depend absolutely on a speculative concept of nature and a logic (as some would say, a pseudo-logic) whose potential is as yet unrealised in any presently-existing system of thought.

These problems are addressed by Wayne Hudson in the only full-length study of Bloch yet to appear in English. If it is not possible, as Hudson says, 'to extract much emancipatory potential from the dialectical process of nature in its present form', then there is always the risk that this process will be 'arbitrarily transferred to history, despite the fact that in history, unlike nature, a subjective factor has emerged with conscious purposes'.¹² In a sense this criticism undoubtedly hits the mark. One could cite from almost every page of Bloch's writing sentences which metaphorically double back and forth between images of natural growth and development on the one hand, and figures of utopian-redemptive promise on the other. Very often they strike an apocalyptic tone which does indeed suggest that these metaphors are carrying a burden of meaning that resists articulation in more prosaic terms, and that might appear largely nonsensical if so treated. The following passage may stand as a fairly representative instance:

Only the musical note, that enigma of sensuousness, is sufficiently unencumbered by the world yet phenomenal enough to the last to return - like the metaphysical word - as a final material factor in the fulfilment of mystical self-perception, spread purely upon the golden sub-soil of the receptive human potentiality. (PM, p. 120)

Such writing is clearly open to the charge that it works by assimilating nature or a certain quasi-dialectical image of nature to a language shot through with metaphors of human purpose, activity and conscious striving for change. To this extent it bears out Hudson's argument that Bloch is in danger of collapsing ontological distinctions, treating history as a kind of organic process, and thus producing a mystified account of those social and material forces that shape human existence.

One response to this charge might be that Bloch is after all attempting nothing less than a full-scale revision of the concepts and categories that have hitherto governed what counts as 'rational' argument. This takes back to the heritage of German metaphysical and speculative thought, to those philosophers (Kant, Fichte, Schelling and Hegel) in whose work there unfolds a dialectical debate on the relationship between subject and object, knower and known. It also leads to his revisionist account of those ancient, medieval and renaissance thinkers whom Bloch regards as having opened up a space for utopian

divination. In his late work *Experimentum Mundi* (1975), he explores the lineage of an 'Aristotelian left' which worked to convert the 'immaterial forms' of a Platonizing Greek philosophy into an 'active form-laden matter', a realist doctrine which nonetheless rejected any notion of the real as fixed in terms of its presently existing attributes.¹³ For Aristotle, reality is not exhausted by giving an account of what offers itself to immediate knowledge and perception. It must also include an aspect of future possibility, a dimension wherein things are latently other than they seem, and where knowledge takes on a forward-looking modality adequate to this sense of the capacity for change possessed by objects in the natural world. Aristotle's potentialist metaphysics was largely lost to view through the subsequent growth of more narrowly empirical philosophies of mind and nature. But its promise was maintained by those heterodox thinkers - notably Avicenna and Averroes - who continued to develop a kind of utopian materialism, one that held out against the reification of matter as inert substance, and the consequent reduction of knowledge itself to a passive contemplation of external forms. Even where this tradition led into byways of mystical and pantheist thought - as with Bruno and renaissance neo-Platonism - there was still, Bloch argues, a materialist subtext of unrealised hopes and desires which might yet be reclaimed by a Marxism open to such heterogeneous sources.

But there remains a real problem with any such use of organicist or naturalizing images and metaphors. This problem takes on a political edge when one considers the role played by such analogies in the history of aesthetics - and especially of musical aesthetics - in the wake of German romanticism. For Schopenhauer, as we have seen, music gave access to a realm of experience beyond words or concepts, a realm of ultimate truth, to be sure, but of a truth which could never find expression in articulate form. For Nietzsche likewise, music holds out the promise of a knowledge beyond mere conceptual reason, a knowledge forgotten since the time of Socrates, when Greek tragic drama entered its period of decline and philosophy, in the shape of Socratic dialectic, asserted its claims to rational mastery.¹⁴ Nietzsche is very firm in rejecting what he sees as the world-weary quietism and escapist ethos of Schopenhauer's thinking. Music - and specifically Wagner's music - brings with it a force of creative renewal which will make of nineteenth-century German culture a second great age of world-historical achievement, one in which the two great opposing

impulses - the Dionysian and Apollonian - will again be interlocked in the kind of titanic struggle that engenders great works of art. Up to now, Nietzsche argued, this vital energy had been lost through the predominance of the Apollonian principle, of everything that belonged on the side of form, self-discipline, abstraction and rational control. Hence the conventional view of Greek culture promulgated by scholars like Winckelmann, the notion that its highest attainments consisted in the 'classical' ideals of harmony, grace, perfected balance and proportion. What was lost to sight through this civilizing process was precisely the repressed Dionysian element, the dark side of irrational energies and drives which could scarcely be contained by that other, form-giving principle.

Such is the pseudo-historical myth of origins that animates the argument of Nietzsche's early tract, *The Birth Of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music*.¹⁵ It seeks to transform the very nature of thought and perception by asking us to hear, in Wagner's music, the signs of a new aesthetic dispensation that would overcome all forms of conceptual abstraction, including the subject-object antinomy that had plagued the discourse of philosophy from Socrates to Kant. In this respect Nietzsche is simply pushing to its extreme that high-romantic faith in the synthesizing powers of creative imagination that typifies the work of philosopher-critics like Goethe and Coleridge. Aesthetics takes over the burden of achieving what cannot be achieved by any form of theoretical reason, namely that union of sensuous experience with concepts of pure understanding which had figured, since Kant at least, as the main preoccupation of philosophy. Kant himself had claimed to resolve this problem in some notoriously obscure passages where he appeals to the 'productive imagination' as a faculty that somehow manages to synthesize the forms of *a priori* knowledge (for instance, our concepts of causality, time and space) with the concrete data of phenomenal experience which alone give substance to those concepts.¹⁶ Otherwise thinking would soon become lost in the toils of metaphysical abstraction, in those airy regions of speculative paradox which Kant describes under the heading 'Paralogisms of Pure Reason'. And this would lead inevitably to the dead-end of 'epistemological scepticism, the despair of discovering any valid or necessary link between concepts and phenomena. Hence his dictum that 'concepts without intuitions are empty; intuitions without concepts are blind'. But this claim is made good at crucial points in Kant's argument (including the 'Transcendental

Aesthetic' that lays out his groundwork for the *Critique Of Pure Reason*) in terms that derive, more or less obliquely, from the discourse on art and the modalities of aesthetic experience that will occupy Kant in the Third Critique.¹⁷

So it was that such questions were installed at the heart of subsequent (post-Kantian) philosophy of mind and knowledge. In Hegel, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, aesthetics comes to play an increasingly central role, as the emphasis shifts from a critical account of reason, its constitutive powers and limits, to a kind of expressionist philosophizing that tries to make sense - narrative or mythical sense - of the various forms and manifestations of human creative activity. Two themes in particular emerged in the course of this development: the preeminence of music as the highest realm of aesthetic experience, and the superiority of Symbol over Allegory in terms of artistic beauty and truth.¹⁸ And these assumptions went together to the extent that language in its symbolic mode was treated, like music, as a means of overcoming the otherwise insurmountable split between thought and perception, subject and object, concepts and sensuous intuitions. If literature henceforth aspired to the condition of music, then it did so in the shape of a symbolist aesthetic which dreamed that language might at least momentarily transcend these hateful antinomies, thus managing to reconcile the world of phenomenal perception with the realm of noumenal reason. And this remains the belief of those modern interpreters for whom the Romantic ideal of 'unmediated vision' retains its considerable seductive power. In the words of M. H. Abrams, 'the best Romantic meditations on a landscape all manifest a transaction between subject and object in which the thought incorporates and makes explicit what was already implicit in the outer scene'.¹⁹ Such moments can only come about through the power of language to fuse organically with nature and the objects of sensory perception, so that meaning is experienced as somehow consubstantial with the images, memories or natural forms which evoke these visionary states of mind. The relation between signifier and signified is no longer conceived (in Saussurian terms) as an arbitrary link, one that exists solely as a product of linguistic and social convention. Rather, it is thought of as a constant struggle to transcend that unfortunate condition, to achieve a kind of hypostatic union between thought, language and reality where all such distinctions would at last fall away.

Paul de Man's classic essay 'The Rhetoric of Temporality' sets out to deconstruct this high-romantic dream of origins, truth and presence. De Man mounts a case against the Symbolist aesthetic which draws attention to the blind-spots of argument that recur in the various programmatic statements put forward by its past and present-day adherents. Such thinking is a potent source of ideological mystification, a habit of thought that persistently ignores or represses those aspects of language that resist assimilation to an order of transcendent, ahistorical truth. It does so primarily by masking the temporal aspect of all interpretation, the fact that knowledge can never achieve such a moment of ecstatic visionary inwardness with nature. In the criticism of neo-Romantic theorists like Abrams it is made to seem at times as if 'imagination did away with analogy altogether and replaced it with a genuine and working monism. "Nature is made thought and thought nature" [Abrams writes] both by their sustained interaction and by their seamless metaphoric continuity".²⁰ But such ideas are undermined by a reading that shows how the Symbolist aesthetic cannot in the end make good its claims; how language itself undoes the illusion that mind and nature might ever attain this kind of idealized organic relation. For it always turns out, according to de Man, that the passages in question depend for their effect on tropes and devices which stubbornly resist this will to aesthetic transcendence. Chief among these is the figure of allegory, treated condescendingly by critics and philosophers like Goethe, Coleridge and Hegel. For allegory works precisely by insisting on the arbitrary character of signs, the lack of any ultimate or quasinatural bond between signifier and signified. To interpret a text allegorically is to read it as a artificial construct whose meaning unfolds in a narrative or temporal dimension, and where signs point back to no ultimate source in the nature of 'organic' or phenomenal perception.

Thus allegory serves as a powerful demystifying trope, one that resists the truth-claims vested in Romantic or Symbolist conceptions of art. In these latter, 'the valorization of symbol at the expense of allegory' can be seen to coincide with 'the growth of an aesthetics that refuses to distinguish between experience and the representation of experience'.²¹ This can never be the case with allegorical modes of understanding, marked as they are by a constant awareness of the gap that opens up, as soon as we begin to interpret, between subject and object, nature and language, the desire for a purely self-originating source of meaning and the knowledge

that no such source can be found. Thus 'the prevalence of allegory always corresponds to the unveiling of an authentically temporal destiny ... [and] this unveiling takes place in a subject that has sought refuge against the impact of time in a natural world to which, in truth, it bears no resemblance'.²² In this relatively early (1971) essay, de Man has nothing explicit to say about the political or ideological values that attach to these opposing conceptualizations of language. But his later work brought a sharper awareness of the ways in which aesthetic ideology worked to mystify the relationship between history, language and the process of critical thought.²³ For it was, he argued, precisely by construing that relationship in terms of an organic or quasi-natural principle that various forms of post-kantian aesthetics had managed to avoid any rigorous reflection on the historicity or temporal predicament of all understanding. And in the case of allegory, conversely, it is the material resistance that language puts up - the discrepancies between what a text actually says and what a mainstream, traditional or conformist reading would predictably have it mean - that opens a space for political or counter-hegemonic readings.

Hence de Man's claim that such textual complications in some sense 'generate history', a claim that is all too easily misread as a species of mystifying 'textualist' rhetoric designed to head off any serious thought about the relationship between literature, politics and history. In an essay on Rousseau's *Social Contract* he even goes so far as to assert that 'the political destiny of man is structured like and derived from a linguistic model that exists independently of nature and independently of the subject'. And yet, the passage goes on, 'contrary to what one might think, this enforces the inevitably political nature, or more correctly, the "politicality" (since one could hardly speak of "nature" in this case) of all forms of human language, and especially of rhetorically self-conscious or literary language'.²⁴ For it is language that works to promote the various forms of ideological misrecognition, forms whose common feature is the habit of confusing the cultural-linguistic with the natural-phenomenal realm. But it is language also that provides a model for deconstructing that conservative mystique, for showing how organic or naturalizing metaphors begin to break down, and how history effectively reasserts its hold at the point where understanding is forced to recognise its own temporal condition. And this conflict of interests

is sharpened and intensified when language has to bear - as it does in all versions of aesthetic ideology - a weight of significance tied up with its presumed capacity to articulate the claims of sensuous cognition and conceptual understanding. 'What gives the aesthetic its power and hence its practical, political impact, is its intimate link with knowledge, the epistemological implications that are always in play when the aesthetic appears over the horizon of discourse'²⁵

III

This excursion into the province of literary theory may help us to grasp what is at stake when Bloch insists that the meaning of music can only be grasped in alligorical terms. For there is, as we have seen, a strong countervailing tradition of post-romantic thought, one that treats music as the highest form of art on account of its unique expressive power, its capacity to fuse the phenomenal sound-world of sensuous experience with a sense of some ultimate significance beyond the grasp of mere reason. When literature seeks to emulate this condition, it does so in forms - like that of lyric poetry - where language seems closest to the lived actualities of sensuous experience, where the sound (in pope's phrase) is supposedly 'an echo to the sense', and where subjectivity is felt to exist in a peculiarly intimate relation to the objects of outward, phenomenal experience. As the language of symbolism takes precedence over that of allegory, so the lyric achieves absolute pride of place in a scale of hierarchical values which tends to demote those other, more extended or narrative forms where language cannot possibly achieve this degree of aesthetic formalization.

Michael Sprinker has addressed this topic in a book that seeks to articulate the claims of deconstruction with those of Marxist ideological critique.²⁶ He shows just how close was the perceived relationship between music, lyric poetry and those versions of the Symbolist aesthetic that found their way into literary criticism through the precepts and practice of poets like Gerard Manley Hopkins, writers who determined to break with the conventional forms of their day and achieve a more 'musical', sensuous or immediate quality of language and style. To their way of thinking, 'lyric poetry not only aspires to the condition of music, it offers instances (in meter and in its various phonic devices) of genuine musicality'.²⁷ But what Sprinker finds in his reading of a Hopkins sonnet

is evidence that language resists this kind of ultimate musicalization; that meaning cannot in the end be assimilated to the order of phenomenal perception, since language turns out to signify in ways that exceed and complicate the presumed correspondence between sound, sense and the realm of phenomenal experience. The standard exegetical line with Hopkins is to argue that the poetry achieves such correspondence to a quite remarkable degree, and can thus be said to manifest God's presence in the world through a kind of literalized incarnationist metaphor. 'Nothing is more familiar ... than [this] claim for the aesthetic unity of a work based upon the congruence of the work's phonic and semantic features.²⁴ But in fact, as Sprinker shows, such readings are highly selective, ignoring those dissonant details of sound and sense that cannot be reduced to such a preconceived order of aesthetic harmonization. When read deconstructively, with an eye to such details, the poetry can appear to suggest just the opposite: that language is not so much an 'organic' phenomenon as a field of conflicting rhetorical forces where unity is achieved only through a naturalized habit of reading that ignores these signs of internal disruption. Like de Man, Sprinker locates the source of this delusion in a form of deep-laid 'aesthetic ideology' that blinds critics to the various ways in which language inevitably fails to 'harmonize' with the world of phenomenal cognition. And it is precisely in so far as it encourages such forms of aesthetic mystification that music comes to occupy its privileged place in post-symbolist aesthetic theory.

This is why Bloch in the end asserts his distance from the potent ideology inscribed in such forms of organicist thinking. 'Nothing in his [Schopenhauer's] account is more obscure than "the ineffably inward nature of music", and nothing is more incomprehensible than "the profound wisdom it contains as a language which reason does not understand"' but which Schopenhauer still claims to have fully decoded'. (PM, p. 220) Such notions are at odds with his own belief that music is not a 'natural' phenomenon, or at least not one whose nature could ever be theorized in terms borrowed from the realm of perceptual experience. They are regressive in the sense that they betray the listener back into a world of inchoate sensations, emotions and fantasies where thought - as in Schopenhauer - becomes the mere plaything of archaic instinctual drives. In Wagnerian opera Bloch hears something like a full-scale programmatic

realisation of Schopenhauer's aesthetic creed. Only rarely is this music 'attuned to a signal of liberation that would break Nature's spell ... Nearly all Wagner's creatures are at home in the volcanic world of impulse, in the Schopenhaurian Will, acting and talking from within this natural dream-state' (PM, p. 222). As Bloch understands it, this confinement to a realm of dark, destructive, elemental passions is a price that is inevitably paid for the identification of music with nature, and of nature in turn with those inhuman forces that exist beyond hope of redemptive change.

So Bloch's utopianism doesn't at all imply that the history of music as we have known it so far has been a progress toward ever more refined or humanly adequate means of expression. Such ideas are just a version of the shallow optimism which equates the utopian element in music with the signs of mere technical advance, like Wagner's exploitation of hitherto unknown harmonic and chromatic resources. It is thus bound up with that same aesthetic ideology which identifies the ultimate meaning of music with its power to evoke ideas directly through sensuous intuitions, without (as in the case of other art-forms) any detour by way of mere words, concepts or mediating representations. Bloch never ceases to denounce the idea that musical progress can be read off as so many stages on the path to some ultimate fulfilment that had always, so to speak, been latent in its nature as an organically evolving language. On the contrary, as he writes: 'social trends have been reflected and expressed in the sound-material, far beyond the unchanging physical facts ... No other art is conditioned by social factors as much as the purportedly self-acting, self-sufficient art of music; historical materialism, with the accent on "historical", abounds here' (p. 200).

Organicist ideas of music tend to go along with evolutionist accounts of musical history, both being governed by the same root metaphor, one that traces the development of forms and expressive styles through a process of quasi-natural growth and fruition. This metaphor is particularly prevalent in treatments of the German line of succession from Bach, through Beethoven to Brahms, Wagner, Mahler and Schoenberg. Often it is presented in terms of a struggle for legitimacy, a debate as to where exactly the line runs, or which composers are the rightful heirs. Thus

loyalties divided over the rival merits of claimants like Brahms and Wagner, the one representing a development primarily in formal or structural terms, the other seen as extending the harmonic resources of musical language to a point of extreme chromaticism that was always latent, just waiting to be realised, in earlier stages of the same evolution. Hence Schoenberg's polemical essay 'Brahms The Progressive', intended both to rescue Brahms from the misconceived devotions of his more conservative admirers, and to establish the claims of his own (Schoenberg's) music as deriving simultaneously from Wagner and Brahms, and thus carrying on the high destiny of German musical tradition.²⁹

This argument is connected with Schoenberg's attempt to establish the legitimacy of atonal and twelve-tone music by deriving its harmonic innovations from the very nature of the sound-material that composers had to work with. If such music encountered widespread resistance, it was only because it reached out into more remote regions of the overtone series, renouncing the desire for home-keys and familiar tonal centres that continued to exert a regressive hold upon listeners trained in the old expectations. Thus Schoenberg's defence takes the form of an appeal to nature as the ground of all musical experience, the source of phenomenal perceptions whose validity is beyond all doubt, since they correspond to what is actually given in the sound-world of music itself.³⁰ His own passage from a post-wagnerian chromaticism, through atonality to twelve-tone technique can thus be presented as the outcome of a dynamic process set in motion by the very nature of music, but finding its highest, most evolved forms in the great tradition of German composers from Bach to Schoenberg. One can trace the emergence of this organicist doctrine through the various theories and critical approaches devised by nineteenth-century commentators in the effort to make sense of music that defied analysis on the older, more conventional terms.³¹ It took hold at about the same time that post-Kantian philosophers and literary theorists were elaborating an aesthetics of the Symbol that likewise claimed to reconcile concepts with sensuous intuitions, or to provide a bridge between the natural world and the realm of articulate thought. And indeed, the two developments are closely allied, since they both locate the ultimate value of aesthetic experience in the power of art to reconcile otherwise disparate orders of experience. History itself can then be viewed in a

providential light, as the process whereby certain languages, artforms and cultural modes of expression evolve toward a state of 'organic unity' in which consciousness discovers its authentic relationship to nature. And it is, as we have seen very often in connection with music - or with various images and metaphors drawn from the realm of musical experience - that this aesthetic ideology achieves its most seductive and plausible form.

Bloch holds out against all versions of this organicist creed, whether applied to individual works of art or to the history through which these works come into being. 'A rudimentary musical theme', he writes, 'however well chosen, sharply delineated and productive of movement, is no acorn from which ... the forest of the symphony will grow.' (*PM*, pp. 108-9). His reason for resisting such analogies is that they carry along with them an inbuilt tendency to treat the work as something closed, finished, possessed of its own self-determining principle and thus incapable of taking on a new significance. And when this same aesthetic ideology is extended from art to history itself - as occurs in the discourse of late romantic criticism - then history is likewise immobilized, reduced to an outcome of natural forces whose origin is thrown back into a mythical past. Bloch is implacable opposed to such ideas and for much the same reason that Walter Benjamin offers in his 'Theses on the Philosophy of History'. Benjamin rejects any notion of future time as continuous or homogeneous with our knowledge of past events. 'Historicism' and 'universal history' are the characteristic forms of this Hegelian drive to assimilate the future to a kind of organic temporality where nothing can possibly come as a shock to our settled beliefs and expectations. For Benjamin, on the contrary, 'history is the subject of a structure whose site is not empty, homogeneous time filled by the presence of the now'.³² And again: 'to articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it "the way it really was"'. It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger [which] affects both the content of the tradition and its receivers'.³³ Superficially there might seem little enough resemblance between Bloch's utopian outlook and Benjamin's dark-hued meditations. But in fact Bloch perceives quite as clearly as Benjamin the risk that any hope stored up in past meanings and memories will be repossessed by the forces of cultural inertia; that tradition will assert its hold once again as a weapon of those with the power to dictate what shall count as authentic history. And one major form in which this power stands

revealed is the notion of history as an organic process, a providence whose meaning unfolds through time in a series of exemplary figures, meanings or events.

In musical terms, this leads to the idea of Wagner as in some sense fulfilling the destiny prefigured in earlier composers like Bach, Mozart and Beethoven. Bloch very firmly rejects this idea, asserting that Beethoven 'is as superior to Wagner as Kant is to Hegel, and as the restless *a priori* in man is to any kind of prematurely fulfilled objectivism' (*PM*, p. 35). These analogies, though presented in cryptic form, will stand I think up to a good deal of conceptual unpacking. Wagner's music is Hegelian in the sense that it seeks to transcend all antinomies through an ultimate merging of mind and nature, subject and object in a realm where no such distinctions any longer obtain. In Beethoven, conversely, the will to transcendence is encountered in a restless, dynamic form which precludes such a false or premature sense that this state has actually been achieved. Again we can turn to de Man - especially his late essays on Kant - for a better grasp of how these issues in the province of philosophy connect with Bloch's understanding of music. De Man brings out the very clearly the ways in which Kant is forced back upon allegorical or figural modes of explanation at exactly those points where his argument is most concerned with questions of epistemological and ethical truth.⁸⁴ Kant's very desire not to be seduced into forms of premature identification - as between the realms of phenomenal and noumenal experience, or those of understanding and practical (ethical) reason - obliges him to resort to such figural strategies despite his repeated warnings elsewhere against what he sees as their seductive and misleading nature.³⁵

This is not the place to rehearse de Man's arguments detail. But their upshot can be summarized as follows: that allegory is the one authentic mode of reading in so far as it acknowledges the inevitable failure of all attempts to make meaning coincide with the realm of intuition or phenomenal self-evidence. To read allegorically is always to recognise that understanding is a temporal process, one that takes place not on the instant of punctual, self-present perception but through a constant anticipatory awareness what is lacking in the present. Thus 'allegory designates primarily a distance in relation to its own origin, and, renouncing the nostalgia and the desire to coincide, it establishes

its language in the void of this temporal difference', as For. de Man, as indeed for Bloch, it is only by accepting this condition of deferred interpretative grasp that thought can hold out against the delusive promise of fully achieved understanding. This is why notions of 'organic form', however refined or elaborate, always tend to seek their ultimate grounding in a principle of order which denies or suppresses the restless, utopian, forward-looking character of musical experience. Such ideas cannot account for the meaning of music, 'any more than logic and a theory of categories account for metaphysics'. They treat the formal element as something implicitly there from the outset, given as part of the work's thematic material, and subject to development only in so far as that material contains in *nuce* every detail of its own unfolding. Whereas for Bloch, 'the theme is not found at the start but overlies it like an *a priori* that is working from a distance' (*PM*, p. 108). And this means that any analysis of musical form based on notions of organic unity or self-contained thematic development will be closed to whatever potential the work may possess for renewing our perceptions through repeated acts of creative listening. What then takes hold is 'the same fatalism and occasionalism, the same transfer of "efficient cause" to the first principle alone as applies in all other reactionary Romantic systems' (p. 129). In its place Bloch proposes something more like an Aristotelian teleology, one that treats music in terms of its 'final cause', the end toward which everything strives in the effort to realise its full potential.

It is in Beethoven especially that Bloch discovers this resistance to preconceived ideas of what does or should constitute musical form. He takes the first movement of the *Eroica* symphony as an instance of how such explanatory grasp. Thus

the question of sonata design is primarily focused ... on the problem of the new, unsuspected, productive element, the dissipating, mutually overriding and self-surmounting sequence of events in the development section -- He is under no binding obligation toward either an individual theme or even to all the initial themes. He can restrict himself to mere thematic fragments of motifs, can even depart from the guiding thread of tonality .. provided that after all his divagations he does reestablish the surrendered key, secret and, in the end, triumphantly emerging end-cause of the entire harmonization. (p. 108)

This passage gives a fair impression of Bloch's style, his use of open-ended syntactic patterns and phrase-structures which gather momentum from point to point, and thus prevent the reader from resting content with what has been said so far. It is a style, once again, that enacts *allegorically* the distance between musical meaning and verbal description, in this case by deferring the moment of ultimate grasp through a sequence of fragmentary hints and suggestions that cannot be reduced to any straightforward sense of thematic coherence. Thus Bloch rejects any appeal to 'programmatic' elements as such, even in a case like the *Eroica's* first movement, where the extra-musical associations are particularly hard to ignore. For 'the dictatorship of the programme' leads, as he argues to 'an almost entirely unmusical line of reasoning', one that produces essentially fixed, preconditioned habit of response, and thus ignores what is going on from moment to moment as the music reworks and transfigures its thematic material.

He is equally opposed to any kind of analytical criticism which seeks to articulate musical structure in terms of some quasi-mathematical ideal or rule-governed formal procedure. The fallacy here is the assumption, going back at least to Pythagoras, that music is the sensuous embodiment of laws, ratios and harmonic proportions which exist in nature - as witnessed by phenomena like the overtone series - but whose true character can be best be divined from their kinship with pure mathematics. Again, this may remind us of Schoenberg's attempt to deduce the predestined historical emergence of twelve-tone composition from its supposed grounding in the realm of phenomenal perception. Bloch's main objections to this whole way of thinking are to be found in his 1925 essay 'On the Mathematical and Dialectical Character in Music'. Here he rejects every version of the analogy between music and mathematics, pointing out that wherever such thinking has prevailed it has also tended to arrest musical history by laying down laws of harmonic proportion that supposedly reflect a natural, immutable order of things. One example is the Pythagorean ban on intervals of the third and sixth, felt to represent a destabilizing force within the quaternary system of harmonic-numerical consonance, and hence proscribed as a matter of ethical as well as musical decorum. 'Mathematics remains the key to Nature, but it can never be the key to history and to those self-informings by the non identical and the

asymmetrical which number was devised to counter, and for whose gradual objectification the human spirit ultimately produced great music.' (PM, p. 169) It is precisely where music takes a heretical turn, where it outruns all the laws of harmonic good form, of preconceived symmetry and structural proportion, that it becomes to this transformation by a process whose character is *historical* through, and through, and not subject to any such formal-transcendental laws. 'It was only the need of polyphonic song, which did not worry about mathematics, that resorted to the forbidden third, thereby attaining the major chord, that cornerstone of all harmonic development.' (p. 185). And such changes come about, not in answer to some principle of historical inevitability, but through music's responsiveness to new configurations of social hope.

IV

It should be clear by now that Bloch's utopian outlook is not to be confused with the kind of wishful thinking which treats every setback on the road to enlightenment as a mere local aberration. In fact it is more akin to Benjamin's sense of future time as momentarily prefigured in the present, as offering itself to a redemptive vision that must seize its opportunity on the instant if everything is not to fall back under the sway of cultural inertia and reaction. But it is Adorno, not Benjamin, who provides the most obvious point of departure for assessing how far Bloch's philosophy stands up to the rigours of negative critique. For Adorno, the very notion of affirmative culture - of art as an index to the liberating power of human creativity - had to be renounced in the light of such evidence as modern history afforded. Hence the relentlessly self-denying character of Adorno's thought, his insistence that the only kind of truth now available is that which unmasks the delusive truth-claims of all aesthetic ideologies and other such falsely positive systems of thought.²⁷ Since Schiller, philosophy had held out the notion of art as a healing or reconciling power, a realm of experience where the conflicts and antinomies of alienated consciousness could at last find an image of perfect fulfilment in the 'free play' of human creativity, of sensuous cognitions in a state of ideally harmonious reciprocal balance. This ideal had once possessed a genuine emancipatory force, as in works like *Fidelio* or the Ninth Symphony, music where the ethos of liberal humanism found expression not only in dynamic terms, but in every detail of the work's

dynamic tonality and structural form. But this moment had passed irrevocably, Adorno thought, with the advent of a modern 'culture-industry' which had taken over these musical resources, adapting them to the purposes of passive consumption and utterly negating their original redemptive character. Henceforth they could only be heard as hollow gestures, as a language whose apparent spontaneity, vigour and force were in fact mere symptoms of cultural regression, of a music that recycled past styles and forms in a mode of more or less unwitting self-parody. The best that philosophy could do in face of this massive reification was to denounce all forms of commodified culture, maintain intransigently negative attitude, and thus keep faith the critical spirit that had once found authentic expression in the works of an earlier, more hopeful epoch.

Schoenberg's music served Adorno as a measure of what art might yet achieve in this implacably critical or deconstructive mode. That is to say, it expressed the alien reality of modern social conditions by refusing all forms of aesthetic transcendence, by extending a tight compositional control over every aspect of structure and style, and thus giving the lie to notions of art as a source of compensatory freedoms untouched by the grim truth of historical events. In Adorno's words,

The total rationality of music is its total organization. By means of organization, liberated music seeks to reconstitute the lost totality - the lost power and the responsible binding force of Beethoven. Music succeeds in so doing only at the cost of its freedom, and thereby it fails. Beethoven reproduced the meaning of tonality out of subjective freedom. The new ordering of twelve-note technique virtually extinguishes the subject. 38

Thus Schoenberg's very 'failure', the fact that his music cannot make good the Beethovenian promise, is also, paradoxically - the source of its ultimate value and truth. Max Weber had described the process of increasing 'rationalization' that marked the development of music in a culture long subjected to the order of bourgeois social relations, to the work ethic and its forms of instrumental or means-end reasoning.³⁹ For Adorno, this process arrives at its most advanced point in the serialist

claim to derive all the parameters of a musical work from some single generative source (the tone-row) whose permutations would then account for every aspect of its style and form. Such music 'falls' in so far as it defeats own object, negates the very impulse of 'subjective freedom', and thus falls prey to an extreme form of reification which reflects the worst, the most inhuman aspects of present-day rationalized existence. But it also succeeds - and for just that reason - in exposing those conditions, forcing them to the point of manifest self-defeat, and thus closing off the various seductive escape-routes provided by music in its other, less taxing contemporary forms.

For Adorno, philosophical thinking is subject to the same necessity, compelled to keep faith with the values of enlightened reason but always in the knowledge that those values have been falsified, turned to inhuman or destructive ends, by the advent of a social order founded on eminently 'rational' means of surveillance and control. Hence Adorno's 'negative dialectics', a relentlessly self-critical habit of thought which interrogates its own procedures at every stage, resisting any kind of residual attachment to method or system. 'The life of the mind only attains its truth when discovering itself in desolation. The mind is not this power as a positive which turns away from a negative ... it is this power only when looking the negative in face, dwelling upon it.' ⁴⁰ This is not Adorno but Hegel, or rather it is Adorno quoting Hegel very pointedly against himself, against that version of Hegelian dialectic that identifies the present (for Hegel, Christianity and the Prussian nation-state) with a final overcoming of all antinomies. For Adorno, on the contrary, any suggestion that thinking might *presently* achieve such a state is at best mere utopian reverie, and at worst a delusion complicit with the forces that work to produce this predicament of chronic bad faith. As Fredric Jameson writes in his commentary on Adorno: 'the very mark of the modern experience of the world is that precisely such identity is impossible, and that the primacy of the subject is an illusion, that subject and outside world can never find such ultimate identity or attachment under present historical circumstances'. ¹ Philosophy, like music, is confronted with this ultimate choice: *either* the pleasure that comes of regressing to an earlier, more 'positive' phase of cultural history, *or* the sad wisdom (Adorno's 'melancholy science') that results from perceiving how impossible it is for thought to maintain this deluded stance.

It might seem from all this that Adorno and Bloch are worlds apart in their attitude to music and music's role in the critique of existing social realities. And indeed their personal dealings were marked by a persistent habit of reserve, on Adorno's side at least, which suggests a deep measure of intellectual difference. But there is also a sense in which Bloch and Adorno were complementary thinkers, coming at the same basic problems and conflicts from opposed but not wholly incompatible points of view. In David Drew's words 'the disillusionment Adorno pursues and cherishes so ardently belongs within the dark circle at the foot of Bloch's lighthouse, and is far removed from any modish cynicism.'⁴² Indeed one can pick out many passages from Adorno that explicitly require some utopian dimension to complete and give purpose to the labours of negative thought. 'Without hope', Adorno writes, 'the idea of truth would be scarcely even thinkable, and it is the cardinal untruth, having recognised existence to be bad, to present it as truth simply because it has been recognised.'⁴³ This sentence could well have been taken from one of Bloch's meditations on the false positivity of present, self-evident fact, the way that our perceptions are hemmed in and distorted by the belief that what exists is the sole reality available to thought.

This underlying kinship is yet more evident when Adorno appeals to Kant's articulation of the faculties - of reason in its in pure and practical forms with aesthetic judgment - to bring out their reciprocal involvement one with another. The passage needs quoting at length, since it is couched in that highly aphoristic but rigorously consequent style that Adorno adopted in order to head off the temptation of premature systematizing thought.

Is not indeed the simplest perception shaped by fear of the thing perceived, or desire for it? It is true that the objective meaning of knowledge has, with the objectification of the world, become progressively detached from the underlying impulses; it is equally true that knowledge breaks down where its effort of objectification remains under the sway of desire. But if the impulses are not at once preserved and surpassed in the thought which has escaped their sway, then there will be no knowledge at all, and the thought that murders the wish that fathered it will be overtaken by the revenge of stupidity ... [This] leads directly to a depreciation of the synthetic apperception

which, according to Kant, cannot be divorced from 'reproduction in imagination', from recollection.⁴⁴

This is why aesthetic judgement plays such crucial role in the Kantian theory of knowledge and perception. For it is, as we have seen, by way of the aesthetic that concepts join up with sensuous intuitions, thus providing a bridge between *a priori* knowledge and experience of the phenomenal world. And Adorno, like de Man, finds this union achieved not in a moment of self-present punctual grasp, but through a sequence of unstable and shifting relations where subject and object can never perfectly coincide. Thus when Kant speaks of the 'productive imagination', he connects it always with this temporal dimension where thought comes up against the limits of its static concepts and categories. This is the point, in de Man's reading, where Kantian critique takes on a distinctly allegorical aspect, a meaning that is deferred through the various, figures tropes and analogical examples to which Kant resorts in the course of his argument. And for Adorno likewise, there can be no moment of 'synthetic apperception' - no means of reconciling concepts with sensuous intuitions - that doesn't involve some appeal to desire, imagination and the future as a realm of as-yet unrealised possibility.

So it is wrong to assume that Bloch and Adorno are straightforwardly antagonistic thinkers, the one espousing a redemptive metaphysics of hope and secular salvation, the other renouncing all such beliefs in a grim determination not to be deceived by tokens of false promise. Among the many passages of Adorno that belie this reading, one in particular - from the closing paragraph of *Minima Moralia* - stands out for its clear statement of the need for negative thinking not lose sight of its positive, utopian counterpart. 'The only philosophy which can be responsibly practised in the face of despair is the attempt to contemplate all things as they would appear from the standpoint of redemption ... Perspectives must be fashioned that displace and estrange the world, reveal it to be, with its rifts and crevices, as indigent and distorted as it will appear one day in the messianic light.'⁴⁵ While the passage alludes more overtly to Benjamin, it also opens the way - as David Drew remarks - to a reading of Adorno's and Bloch's work that would treat them as paradoxically kindred thinkers, engaged in the same redemptive enterprise, though

starting out from very different premisses. For on Bloch's side also, any hope of attaining an authentically utopian perspective is dependent on thought's having first made the passage through a 'labour of the negative', an undeceiving process that leaves us the more acutely aware of our present, limited powers of perception. Thus 'nobody has as yet heard Mozart, Beethoven or Bach as they are really calling, designating and teaching -- this objective-indeterminate element in music is the (temporary) defect of its qualities' (*PM* pp. 207-8). If Adorno's negativity cannot in the end do without a countervailing impulse of hope, then equally it is the case that Bloch's utopian outlook would collapse into mere facile optimism were it not for this chastening awariness of the obstacles - the pressures of social and historical circumstance - that stand in its path.

The same applies to de Man's practice of deconstructive reading, on the face of it a wholly negative practice, in so far as it works to undo or to problematize everything we commonly take for granted about language, experience and the nature of human understanding. Music is important for de Man because it has served as a source of that potent aesthetic ideology which locates the redemptive capacity of art in its promise of transcending the conflict between sensuous and intellectual realms of experience. But in fact, de Man argues, this promise has always turned out to be delusory, not least in those thinkers (like Rousseau) who have expressly treated music as a 'natural' language of emotions, a language that is (or that ought to be) untouched by the decadent, corrupting influence of latter-day civilized life.⁴⁶ Thus Rousseau praises the Italian music of his time for its unforced, spontaneous character, the fact that it remains close to those sources of vitality and warmth that issue directly in melody and the singing line. And he attacks contemporary French composers like Rameau for their practice of elaborate harmonization and their use of an 'advanced' contrapuntal style which leads them to lose touch with those same elemental passions and desires. Melody is good because it belongs to that stage of human existence when the passions can still find authentic voice and there is no need, as yet, for the resort to mere artifice and stylized convention. Harmony is bad because it goes along with all those other concomitants of modern 'civilized' life - social inequality, delegated power, civil and political institutions, distinctions of class or rank on an unjust, arbitrary basis - which Rousseau denounces in the 'advanced' democracies of his day.

So his treatment of music is precisely analogous to Rousseau's thinking on matters of ethical, social and political concern. 'Man was born free, but is everywhere in chains', the freedom identified with a lost state of natural grace which has long since been overtaken by these melancholy symptoms of latter-day decline. And this also applies to language, since speech had its origin (so Rousseau asserts) in the same elemental passions and desires which produced spontaneous melody. In this original condition, language was a kind of primitive speech-song which expressed human sentiments simply and directly without any detour through arbitrary signs and conventions. For there was, as yet, no need for people to disguise and dissimulate their meaning, to adopt such forms of linguistic subterfuge by way of exerting power over others. To speak was necessarily to mean what one said, since language gave access to the speaker's innermost thoughts and sentiments, in a context of ideally reciprocal exchange where no advantage could accrue from lies, hypocrisy or pretence. But here again progress has taken its toll by requiring a different, more sophisticated kind of language, one that is able to articulate abstract ideas, and to convey them not, as was once the case, through an intimate face-to face communion of souls, but through forms of elaborated social code devoid of authentic meaning. Thus language, like music, registers the impact of a civilizing process which in truth is nothing of the kind; a process that alienates man from nature, language from the expression of genuine feeling, and society from those ties of communal trust and understanding which alone provide the basis - so Rousseau believes - for a state of harmonious coexistence.

De Man's argument is that Rousseau is too canny, too rhetorically self-aware to be wholly taken in by this seductive myth of origins. That is, he may *declare* quite explicitly that language is authentic only where it approximates to a kind of pre-articulate speech-song; that culture supervenes upon nature as a kind of progressive catastrophe, a history of absolute loss and decline; and that only by returning to a pure state of nature can mankind escape from this sorry predicament. But what emerges in the course of de Man's reading is a subtext of unsettling rhetorical implications, passages where Rousseau is constrained to state just the opposite of his overt or express intentions. Thus language turns out to be strictly inconceivable except on the basis of arbitrary signs, codes and socialized conventions which cannot have existed in that first, happy state. And Rousseau's argument again comes

up against the limits of intelligibility when he tries to give substance to the claim that mankind once enjoyed a 'natural' form of organic communal life, at a time when culture had not yet obtruded its alien codes and customs. For there is simply no conceiving of society except in terms of a differential system that must always to some extent even in 'primitive' cultures rest upon distinctions of class, gender, kinship and other such socially imposed categories. Rousseau is in this sense a proto-structuralist *malgré lui*, obliged to acknowledge - implicitly at least - that language and society can only exist in separation from the state of nature, or only in so far as they exhibit all the signs of cultural organization. Any 'language' that lacked the identifying marks of structural relationship and difference would in fact not be language at all, but merely a string of inarticulate sounds with some possible emotive significance. And likewise, any 'culture' or 'society' that hadn't yet developed to the stage of hierarchical structures, kinship systems and so forth, would for that very reason elude all possible terms of description or analysis.

Now de Man's point is that Rousseau himself deconstructs the Rousseauist myth of origins, or - more precisely - that his text provides all the requisite materials for its own deconstructive reading. It is the mainstream *interpreters* who, with their confident knowledge of his meaning and intentions, read with an eye only to those passages or levels of explicit statement that serve to confirm their stubborn preconceptions. In so doing, they are blinded to rhetorical complexities which in fact - so de Man argues - can be seen to undo that naive mystique of origins, presence and naturalized meaning that supposedly lies at the heart of Rousseau's philosophy. And it is here that the instance of music plays a crucial role in de Man's argument. For it is usually taken as read by the commentators that Rousseau's thinking on this topic follows the familiar pattern; that he associates authentic musical expression with a language of strongly emotive and sensuous appeal that speaks directly to the heart by virtue of precisely those qualities. From which it follows that music must enter upon the road to decadence as soon as it acquires the 'civilized' graces of harmony, counterpoint, elaborated structure and all the other signs of its present, unnatural condition. And indeed Rousseau says just that in a number of passages that leave little room for a contrary or deconstructive reading. But he also says the following (as cited by de Man):

In a harmonic system, a given sound is nothing by natural right. It is neither tonic, nor dominant, harmonic or fundamental. All these properties exist as relationships only and since the entire system can vary from bass to treble, each sound changes in rank and place as the system changes in degree.⁴⁷

Nor does this apply to one system only - the 'harmonic' - as opposed to some other, more natural language of music that would operate in terms of melody alone, and thus escape the bad necessity imposed by the decadent turn toward harmony. For Rousseau is equally clear on the point that melody without harmony is unthinkable; that there is always an implicit harmonic dimension to even the simplest melodic idea, since otherwise we would hear it as simply a series of disconnected notes, lacking any sense of cadence or musical shape. Thus Rousseau is brought round *by the logic of his own argument* to concede that music is not, after all, a natural language of the emotions, a language whose meaning coincides at every point with the nature of its humanly-expressive sound material. Rather, it is a 'system' of tonal relationships that belongs entirely to the history of musical styles, genres, forms and conventions, and which cannot be grasped except in terms of the structural properties that make such a system possible. Rousseau very often states just the opposite, but his statements are just as often undone by the clear implications of his own more consequent thinking.

For de Man, this ambivalence in Rousseau's philosophy of music is an index to the tensions that emerge everywhere in his writing. In each case there is a conflict between Rousseau's desire to discover some authentic, natural point of origin beyond the bad effects of civilized life, and his forced recognition that no such discovery is possible; that language, art and society were *always already* caught up in that process of decline, no matter how far one tries to push back toward a lost age of communal innocence and grace. And this conflict is nowhere more evident (so de Man argues) than in Rousseau's reflections on the phenomenology of musical perception.

On the one hand, music is condemned to exist always as a moment, as a persistently frustrated intent toward meaning; on the other hand, this very frustration prevents it from remaining within the moment. Musical signs are unable to coincide: their dynamics are always oriented toward the future of their repetition, never toward the

consonance of their simultaneity. Even the potential harmony of the single sound, a *l' unisson*, has to spread itself out into a pattern of successive repetition: considered as a musical sign, the sound is in fact the melody of its potential repetition.⁴⁸

Music thus as the single most striking instance of de Man's general thesis: that whenever Rousseau seeks to articulate his philosophy of nature and origins, he must always have recourse to a language that implicitly calls such thinking into question. 'Music is the diachronic version of the pattern of non coincidence within the moment.'⁴⁹ For this pattern is repeated in language itself, where meaning can never be consistently reduced to an order of pure, self-present, phenomenal sense.

What then emerges in the reading of Rousseau's texts is an *allegory* of music's failure to achieve that wished-for natural state, since neither in music itself nor in the language that purportedly emulates music can any such condition be realised. As we have seen, de Man thinks of allegory primarily in terms of its demystifying power, its capacity to keep us always in mind of the gap that opens up between nature and language, phenomenal cognition and linguistic meaning. Music has very often served the purposes of aesthetic ideology by maintaining the delusory promise of a language that would finally transcend this condition, overcoming the ontological gulf between signs and sensuous intuitions. But this promise has just as often gone along with a deeply conservative mystique that assimilates music to the world of natural processes and forms, and which thus cuts it off from any intelligible relationship to history, politics and cultural change. And indeed, this argument finds ample confirmation in subsequent versions of the Rousseauist myth, where often the theme of a return to nature takes on a decidedly conservative toning. It is then used - by ideologues like Burke - not to criticise some existing state of society, but to argue that such criticism is pointless and misguided, since national cultures evolve through a process of 'organic' growth and development which cannot be influenced (except far the worse) by any mere spirit of reformist zeal. This shift in the political currency of Rousseauist ideas is very evident in the later writings of Coleridge, and thereafter in a line of conservative culture-critics whose chief modern spokesman is T. S. Eliot.⁵⁰ And one major source of such thinking - as de Man makes clear - is that mode of aesthetic ideology which identifies language in its highest, most

expressive forms with a principle of nature that can then be extended to organicist metaphors of history and social evolution. 'What we call ideology is precisely the confusion of linguistic with natural reality, of reference with 'phenomenalism.' From which it follows, according to de Man, that 'more than any other mode of enquiry, ... the linguistics of literariness is a powerful and indispensable tool in the unmasking of ideological aberrations, as well as a determining factor in accounting for their occurrence'.⁵¹

We can now begin to see why Bloch insists so strongly that music is not a 'natural' artform, at least in any sense that could justify the notion that its meaning derives from its phenomenal or sensory-acoustic nature. Hence his opposition to Schopenhauer's aesthetic, where music takes precedence over the other arts only on account of its supposedly inhabiting a realm of primeval, undifferentiated Will, a realm where mere intellect has no place and we experience nature as a flux of inchoate desires, instincts and sensations. Hence also his rejection of the opposite fallacy, that which equates the expressive power of music with the laws of mathematical proportion and harmony. 'Whereas music as a mood remains buried within the soul and seems the most chthonian of the arts, so-called *musica mathematica* becomes wholly Uranian and steps off into heaven .' (PM, p. 210) For Bloch, as indeed for de Man, music is allegorical through and through, since its significance can never be grasped once and for all in an act of fulfilled, self-present perception. Otherwise, as he remarks, 'music would never have gone beyond descending fifths'. Just as melody unfolds through a temporal process, a sequence of intervals whose character is essentially mobile or propulsive, so musical works take on their significance through time, in a history of successive reencounters whose meaning can never be exhausted 'Any number of human tensions are added to the tension of the fifth to create a more complicated cadence and thus the history of music'. (p. 200) Bloch goes on to elaborate this point in a passage that resembles some of de Man's formulations, transposed into a language of explicitly utopian character. 'Melody's most remarkable attribute - the fact that in each of its notes, the immediate following one is latently audible - lies in human anticipation and hence in expression, which is now above all a humanized expression.' (p. 200) And this can only come about, Bloch argues, in so far as music (or our

thinking about music) breaks with the kind of regressive appeal exerted by the spell of nature.

These beliefs were put to the test in Bloch's collaboration with Otto Klemperer on a 1929 Vienna production of *The Flying Dutchman*. This caused a great scandal at the time and was later to mark them both down as cultural bolsheviks and enemies of National Socialism.⁵² The production followed closely on performances of *Mahagonny* and *The Threepenny Opera*, and it made extensive use of Brechtian techniques to undermine the sanctified aura of Wagnerian music-drama. Bloch's contribution was a programmatic essay - 'The Rescue of Wagner through Surrealistic Penny Dreadfuls' - which argued for the vitalizing popular culture, the intimations of a better world that could be glimpsed even in 'debased' modern forms like the comic strip, sentimental romance, advertisements and adventure stories.⁵³ The reactions were predictable: it seemed, as David Drew nicely comments, that 'Bayreuth was about to be stormed by *Puck* and his beggars'. But what lay behind this staging of the *Dutchman* was a practical experiment in redemptive hermeneutics, a version of Bloch's own ambivalent responses to Wagner. The hold of tradition could only be broken through a new kind of listening, one that denied itself the pleasures of a passive abandonment to nature's spell, and which understood music as the active prefiguring of forces and tensions beyond the grasp of any merely 'authentic' performing style. It is a theme that Bloch takes up in his essay 'Paradoxes and the Pastoral in Wagner's Music'. Where Wagner transcends the Schopenhauerian ethos, it is by virtue of his momentarily escaping the realm of blind passion or instinctual Will, and transforming this atavistic impulse into a music pregnant with future possibilities. At such moments 'Wagner gives resonance its full due, like a vibration *ante rem* which continues to give out figured sound *in re*, not to say *post re datam*; a sound-figure through which it takes up objects of nature and seeks through art to raise them to a higher power' (PM, p. 181).

This might seem utterly remote from what we learn of the Klemperer production, with its aim of 'rescuing' Wagner from the Wagner-cult by exposing his music to all manner of parody and down-market pastiche. But in fact there is a similar principle at work: namely, the belief that present conditions block and distort our ways of perceiving, so that for now at least the only way forward is to deconstruct the values, mythologies and

forms of sanctified false consciousness that pass themselves off as 'natural' habits of response. It is here that Bloch's philosophy makes common cause with that strain of rigorously negative thinking espoused by theorists like Adorno and de Man. To keep faith with music's utopian potential may require an effort of demystification that appears superficially far removed from any hopeful or affirmative standpoint. But it is precisely this undeceiving 'labour of the negative' - this testing of hope through a hard-won knowledge of everything that presently conspires against it - which marks the difference between Bloch's way of thinking and other, more naive utopian creeds. Again, it is Adorno who provides the most fitting commentary when he writes that 'in the end hope wrested from reality by negating it, is the only form in which truth appears'⁵⁴

NOTES AND REFERENCES

The first three paragraphs of this essay are based on ideas and formulations from an earlier article: Norris, 'Marxist Or Utopian?: the philosophy of Ernst Bloch', *Literature And History*, Vol IX No. 2 (1983), pp.240-45.

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4. Fredric Jameson, *Marxism And Form* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1971), pp 116-59.
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 21. Ibid, p. 188.
 22. Ibid, 206.
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 26. Sprinker, *Imaginary Relations* (op. cit.).
 27. Ibid, p. 62.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 68.

29. See Arnold Schoenberg, 'Brahms the Progressive', in *Style And Idea*, trans. Dika Newlin (London: Faber, 1975).

30. Thus Schoenberg: 'even those who have so far believed in me will not want to acknowledge the necessary nature of this development. I am being forced in this direction. I am obeying an inner compulsion which is stronger than any upbringing' (cited by Charles Rosen, *Schoenberg*, London: Fontana, 1975, p. 15). Rosen's comments on this passage are worth quoting at length in the present context of argument. 'In his justification, Schoenberg brings forward the classic dichotomy of nature and civilization. In this notorious pair, the rights are traditionally on the side of nature - and, indeed, Schoenberg's critics were to accuse him of violating the natural laws of music, of substituting a purely artificial system for one that [accorded with] the laws of physics. If the dichotomy can so easily be stood on its head, it should lead us to be suspicious of the opposition. A great deal of nonsense has been written about relation of music to the laws of acoustics - but the irresistible

force of history - Schoenberg's "inner compulsion" - ought not to inspire any greater confidence' (Rosen, p. 15). These remarks have an obvious bearing on music's role as a privileged source of those organicist models and metaphors that characterize aesthetic ideology.

31. On this and related question, see Jacques Attali, *Noise: the political economy of music*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985). Alan Durant, *Conditions Of Music* (London: Macmillan, 1984); Joseph Kerman, *Musicality* (London: Fontana, 1985); Richard Leppert & Susan McClary (eds.), *Music And Society: the politics of composition, performance and reception* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Susan McClary, 'Pitches, Expression, Ideology: an exercise in mediation', *Enclitic*, Vol. VII (1983), pp. 76-85; Richard Norton, *Tenacity In Western Culture* (Pennsylvania & London: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984); Kimmey Price (ed.), *On Criticizing Music: five philosophical perspectives* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981); John Sheppard et al (eds.), *Whose Music?: a sociology of musical languages* (London: Latimer, 1978) and Rose Rosengard Subotnik, 'The Role

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32. Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Fontana, 1970), pp. 255-66; p. 263.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 257.
34. See de Man 'Phenomenality and Materiality in Kant' (op. cit.) and 'The Epistemology of Metaphor', in *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. V (1978), pp. 13-30.
35. For Kant's warning against the confusions created by uncontrolled figural language, see especially Section 59 of the *Critique Of Judgement*, trans. J.C. Meredith (London: Oxford University Press, 1978). As de Man points out, Kant's language here is itself replete with metaphors, analogies and question-begging terms which must at least throw doubt on philosophy's power to regulate its own discourse.
36. de Man, 'The Rhetoric of Temporality' (op. cit.), p. 207.
37. See especially T.W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973); *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. C. Lenhardt (London: Routledge, 1984) and *Philosophy Of Modern Music*, trans. Anne G. Mitchell & Wesley V. Blomster (London: Sneed & Ward, 1973).
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39. Max Weber, *The Rational And Social Foundations Of Music*, trans. Don Martindale, Johannes Riedel & Gertrude Newmieth (Carbondale: University of Illinois Press, 1953).
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41. Jameson, *Marxism And Form* (op. cit.), p. 42.
42. David Drew, Introduction to Bloch, *Essays On The Philosophy Of Music* (op. cit.), p. xlii.
43. Adorno, *Minima Moralia* (op. cit.) p. 98.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 122.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 247.
- 46) See de Man, 'The Rhetoric of Blindness', in *Blindness And Insight* (op. cit.) pp. 102-41. De Man provides his own translation of passages from Rousseau, *Essai sur l'origine des langues* (Paris: Bibliothèque du Graphe, 1817),
47. Rousseau, op. cit., p. 536; cited by de Man in 'The Rhetoric of Blindness', p. 128.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 129.
- 49, *Ibid.*, p. 129.
50. See especially T.S. Eliot. *Notes Towards The Definition Of Culture* (London: Faber, 1948).

51. de Man, *The Resistance To Theory* (op. cit.), p. 11.

52. On the background to this event and on Bloch's association with Klemperer, see Peter Hayworth, *Otto Klemperer: his life and times*, Vol I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

53. These themes are also taken up in Bloch, *The Principle Of Hope* (op. cit.), especially the section of Vol. I entitled 'Wishful Images in the Mirror: display, fairytale, travel, film, theatre' (pp. 337-447).

54. Adorno, *Minima Moralia* (op. cit.), p. 98.

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