The utopian function of film music

Johan Siebers

> Film collects the elements of the real in order to show another reality with them; the dimensions of space and time which are fixed in the theatre are completely changed in film. (Pudovkin, quoted in Bloch 1986: 411)

Ernst Bloch, the utopian Marxist thinker born in 1885, before cinema existed, wrote, on and off, about film from the early years of the 20th century until the end of his life in 1977. He was concerned with the meaning of film as a new medium, its capacity for social transformation and critique, its status as an art form and its role in the process of modernisation of society. As a Marxist, Bloch was critical of a cinema which was already by his time becoming a commercial vehicle, but arguably it is his ability to see the revolutionary and utopian potential of film that is most important and that can offer us insights regarding the nature of film that are relevant today. Supportive of Lenin's statement that film was the most important form of contemporary art because it could reach the people and directly engage with their consciousness, Bloch added, implicitly, an aesthetical understanding of cinema which emphasised the way in which cinema can take apart the integrated experience of reality and distort, fragment or transform it by virtue of its technical affordances – zooming in and out, panning, slow motion and fast forward, but also the use of music, which I will explore in this chapter. We know these ideas also from Benjamin's remarks on film as the art form commensurate to a fragmented, shattered modernity. But for Bloch they are part of a utopian aesthetic of cinema; the parameters of montage are different for Bloch than they are for Benjamin.

Montage for Benjamin expresses a shattered history in which the light of redemption reflects, as it were, between the shards of history. What Benjamin called the *dialectical image* is the estranged experience of the fact *that there is history* in the confrontation of realities belonging to different times, as when we find back an old object in a cupboard for which we no longer have any use. In those, essentially passive, apprehensive, moments we experience that there is time, and a time that is not moving towards an all-encompassing totality. The redemptive totality is, as it were, equally far removed from each point in time. That, in my view itself still, or again, theological interpretation of history, is reflected in Benjamin's understanding of montage. For Bloch montage also expresses modernity that had become a '*Hohlraum mit Funken*', a cavity with sparks as opposed to a world filled with the presence of the divine (Bloch 1998). But the relation of the sparks to the redemptive totality is a different one. The old object has an unredeemed future within it, for Bloch. Understanding Blochian montage will give us a better appreciation of the potential of Bloch's philosophy for film theory today. For Bloch, film critique can be seen to consist primarily in elucidating what he calls the Not-Yet-Conscious in this cultural form: how the medium channels and articulates human hopes, aspirations, longings and desires, how the fragmented world in which we live is not only the shattered ruin of a false, ideological, sense of unity and purpose, but the possibility for a truer relation to unity and identity as yet to come, as a self-realising, precarious but not yet thwarted possibility. A world without a recognition, schooling and

critique of the human potential for hope is a 'world without why' as Raymond Geuss once called it. The commoditisation of desire and the disappearance (or re-theologisation) of the big questions regarding the meaning of human existence go hand in hand and have dominated cultural theory for decades. Now that the climate is changing, looking again at Bloch, who had no doubts about the importance of asking the big questions of life, and did so from within historical materialism, can help us in the task of putting cultural theory once again in a position in which it can provide a critical voice and active resistance with respect to the nihilism of contemporary culture. This is not just an academic undertaking. It reflects and can reinforce the attempts to formulate positive alternatives to the socio-political realities created by neoliberalism, the increasing gap between rich and poor, the privatisation of all aspects of life, the lack of felt significance in the lives of many people, the exploitation of the social and natural environment, the still continuing totalisation of the subservience of the state to the economy, the withering away of freedom: we are experiencing more than before the devastation of the human and natural life-world that has been brought about and are more and more losing faith in the ability of existing systems to correct themselves.

With Bloch's philosophy we can see that these realities have something to do with the absence of a vision, or if you prefer, a discourse, of the ultimate questions of human life: 'Who are we? Where do we come from? Where are we going? What are we waiting for? What awaits us?' (Bloch 1986: 3) Asking these questions, which means exposing ourselves to them, makes us human because it is the recognition of the fact that we are not known to ourselves, we are, in essence, incognito and therefore we create above ourselves, go out of ourselves, are underway. This is a central idea for critical theory, expressed by Adorno several years later: '(N)othing can be even experienced as living if it does not contain a promise of something transcending life. This transcendence therefore is, and at the same time is not – and beyond that contradiction it is no doubt very difficult, and probably impossible, for thought to go' (Adorno 2001: 145). It has been one of the motivations of western Marxism (at least up to Habermas) to insist on this need for transcendence; the analysis of the commoditisation or functionalisation of the life world and of reason acquires its significance in the light of this underlying idea. Adorno, in his aesthetics, sought not to go beyond the contradiction. He thought no more could be done than to perpetually seek reminders of it, reminders that 'there can be no true life in falseness'. Bloch does try to go beyond it. For him, the ontology of not-yet-being is the vehicle with which to move beyond the joint 'is' and 'is not' of the promise that animates all life, the vehicle with which to perceive that promise for what it is and what it asks of us in the first place. We must be careful not to misread Bloch on this point.

His marginal position owes much to the subtlety of his thought: it is easily mistaken as an attempt to put religion into historical materialism and Marxism, or vice versa. It has indeed been taken as such by Marxists, for whom Bloch often retained the atmosphere of bourgeois thought, but also for the theologians, for whom Bloch mostly seemed too much of a materialist. The ontology of the not-yet, however, gives us the means by which to understand what the religious interpretation of the transcendence of life really amounts to, just as it gives us the means by which to understand why mechanical, positivist materialism is itself an ideological formation and not a philosophical position. Both the religious and the positivist stance reify the transcending function of life into a transcendent realm, pre-given

destiny or pre-given normativity, which one then affirms, the other denies. Both lead to a worldview that ignores the constant movement beyond itself in which all that exists is enveloped, both, from Adorno's point of view as we just introduced it, miss what gives life meaning: process as the immament movement of life. With that we have reached the standpoint of cinema, or at least of a certain form of cinema.

Bloch's philosophy has been applied to film as a cultural phenomenon by Douglas Kellner and Frederic Jameson, but has not found any widespread application so far (Kellner 1997, Jameson 2007). Kellner and Jameson have, above all, referred to Bloch's understanding of ideology.[1] For Bloch ideology is effective because it has a utopian core. Ideological formations are forms of false consciousness, but they arise around a core human desire or truth from which they draw much of their life force. In what may appear to us as an irrational dialectic, the distortion of the utopian core does not diminish the efficacy of the ideology – on the contrary, the falseness of the ideology seems to always be known, in some sense, by those who subscribe to it – and yet they act in accordance with the ideology. This point has also been made by Žižek (Žižek 1989, 2009): an ideology works precisely because it distorts that from which it lives, because those who are under the sway of it do not really believe it. For, as Žižek argues in many places, someone who were to fully subscribe, let us say to limitless capitalism as the colonisation of all use value by exchange value, would soon lose all will to do anything at all. For Žižek it is only because the ideology of value is not accepted fully as belief – some value remains irreducible to exchange value - that the rule of exchange value can become total.

This negative belief that makes ideology possible shoves itself in between the 'official' ideological rationalisation and the – always ineffable – utopian core of human existence, the incognito that is in process of becoming. Thus ideology is a double colonisation: it encapsulates the potentially shattering, and at any rate, uncanny, experience of the incognito of existence in the form of a rationalising ideological neutralisation of it, which is then reinforced, paradoxically, by negating it, so by giving the subject a sense of a certain distance towards it. But the utopian core, the incognito, has become doubly invisible: first it is neutralised by rationalisation, then the rationalisation, by refusing its totalisation, strengthens its hold. If ideology would insist on being accepted as complete truth, it would quickly show its irrationality and would lose its grip on us. The ideological neutralisation is effective precisely because it is not fully believed, and so the experience of the incognito remains effective as well, but it is co-opted because it now only functions to sustain the ideology. Ideology is utopia's vampire. The operation of ideology distorts the incognito twice: first ideology neutralises it, secondly ideology can do this because it still takes its energy from the negative of the incognito. To our conscious lives, the result is an attitude of congratulating ourselves with the fact that we do not fully believe what we are told to believe or what we in fact, or better: in our actions, manifest as subscribing to. The good sense of reserving judgement is mobilised for the totalising rule of ideology as the enjoyment we get

---

[1] In this essay I will use the term ideology as referring to dominant forms of normative and naturalised false consciousness, not in the more descriptive sense of any belief system not based on the nature of the material means of production and shared by a group, which serves to create and reproduce social structure and cohesion. See Geuss 1981, 9-13.)

from being allowed to transgress the ideological framework to which we yet subscribe. "I know all is said to be, and made to be, exchange value, but I also know that that is not really true, so I can go ahead and, with approval of the economic system, enjoy this particular product as being there just for myself" – and in this way I reinforce and help the totalisation of the rule of exchange value. This is the perversion inherent in all ideological formations, all forms of 'law' (in the Lacanian sense of law that Žižek uses) or patriarchy. The law says 'you shall not', but looks away knowingly as you transgress it, as long as you do so in its name and this experience is the experience of enjoyment. The small favour ideology extends to its subjects keeps them in its grip (hence Žižek can say that ideology today, in fact, orders us to 'enjoy!'; Žižek 2002). The outcome of this situation is that the critique of ideology can only be effective if it brings out the utopian core in the way the subject relates to ideology, and rescues that core from its perversion: false consciousness remains mostly unaffected, and is sometimes even strengthened, by its mere unmasking as such without something else, namely an experimental relation to its opposite, being put into action in the same gesture. At this point, we need to move beyond Žižek's perceptive analysis, and for that purpose we have to turn to Bloch. The critique of ideology requires a positive alternative, a creative and experimental relation to the incognito of existence. Bloch sometimes expresses this by saying that a utopia that remains abstract is itself ideological; a real utopia exists only as a concrete utopia.

In Žižek's thought, the incognito of existence is conceptualised as the Lacanian subject, which is always a lack. It cannot be encountered, formulated or be held in view unambiguously, but only as the incommensurability of different discourses and practices that all circle around it as a vanishing point – culture, politics, economics, psychoanalysis, ethics, love etcetera. Žižek's name for this state of affairs is the parallax view, the skewed position that appears to be there when we view an object from different positions. There is a large overlap between the Lacanian lack and the Blochian incognito, for which much of this holds true, too. But there is also a difference. Žižek sees philosophy (as a cultural construct) as the mistaken attempt to reach closure with respect to this subjectivity, to encapsulate it in a systematic, ordered totality. This is for him, as we can understand, an ideological operation. It is the ideological operation par excellence, we might say. Theory, as opposed to philosophy, does not fall into this trap but, in accepting the parallax view, and hence the incompleteness of anyting theory can do, is able to give space to subjectivity (Žižek 2006). However, as Frederic Jameson has noted, while there is in theory, as opposed to philosophy, 'no master code', 'the provisional terms in which it does its work inevitably over time (...) get reified (...) and eventually turn into systems in their own right (...), the anti-philosophy becomes a philosophy' (Jameson 2006).

So, precisely by treating incompleteness, the lack, as final, theory closes in on itself and achieves the opposite of what it sets out to do. It becomes ideology, following exactly the pattern of ideological colonisation that Žižek himself described so persuasively. It is only by keeping open the question of completeness that the practice of theory can prevent becoming ideological. But that means that there cannot be just a negative utopian element, the permanent non-place that theory circles; theory has to understand itself dialectically as standing in the movement towards something there is no guarantee of ever reaching. It can only remain true to itself if it gives up control in this ultimate dimension; stating the finality

of incompleteness is, as it were, its last temptation. This is what Bloch means by the 'principle of hope' and the 'spirit of utopia', and what, later, inspired Adorno to write that the 'only philosophy which can be responsibly practised in face of despair is the attempt to contemplate all things as they would present themselves from the standpoint of redemption' (Adorno 2005, 247). Philosophy, understood in this way, is a struggle with the impossible in the name of possibility. It is the difficult position between having and not-having that is, in the last instance, the incognito itself, the 'darkness of the lived moment' (Bloch 2000). At this point Bloch concludes that psychoanalysis is one-sided. There is not just the repressed unconscious (the 'night dream'), but also, on the other side of consciousness as it were, the not-yet-conscious, where we are in touch with the utopian in desires, wishes, inspiration and creativity (the 'day dream'; Bloch 1986, 86-88). For Bloch, philosophy as ideology critique deals with this not-yet-conscious dimension. A new language and a new conceptuality are necessary to express it.

Bloch analysed the rise of fascism as the double-bind of ideology in his *Heritage of our Times* (1935) and we can see how Hollywood cinema is open to a similar analysis. Bloch had, indeed, started this analysis himself in *The Principle of Hope* (1959). For Hollywood cinema the perversely enjoyed, distorted, utopian core can be summarised as 'happy end within a completely unchanged world' (Bloch 1986: 410). The medium of film created the technical possibility of an artistic expression of the immediacy of what Bloch called the 'darkness of the lived moment', our subjective existence in its moving, double, *claire-obscure* nature of partial illumination and partial incognito, as at once a spatio-temporal and a narrative reality: 'the technique of film shows actions through quite different bodies to those of painting, namely through moved, not stationary bodies; so that the borders between descriptive space-form, narrative time-form, disappear' (Bloch 1986: 411-12). Moreover, film affords possibilities neither theatre nor opera, the other movement- or time-based arts, provide, which in the time of 'cracking' capitalism bring close the ironical result of showing the possibility of another world through the cracks exposed by the technical affordances of the cinematographic medium:

> (N)o distance, no peep-show, rather the spectator walking alongside; chamber-music pantomime, not entirely lost even in the mass produced commodity, predominant in good films; opening up of the wide world, especially nearby, in the incidental, in pantomimic detail. In addition there is the maneuverability of detail, of groupings which have become fixed themselves, made possible by the techniques of film and so closely related to the waking dream. Now, given this so good, if also thwarted technical How, as far as the What of the film is concerned, namely the *subject-materials specific to it,* the period in which the development of film falls not only had a capitalistically devastating, but in a limited sense also - we may say: ironically usable effect. For as a period of bourgeois decay it is also a period of cracked surface, of the previous groupings and identities decaying; consequently it is, as in painting, so in film, the time of a not only subjectively, but objectively possible montage. Because this became objectively possible it is in no way necessarily arbitrary and completely unreal (with regard to the objective events); it is much rather in a position to correspond to changes in the external

> relation of appearance and essence itself. Here is the field of new hints and genuine authorities, the field of discovered-real separations between objects which previously appeared to be closely adjoining, of discovered-real attachment between apparently very remote ones in the bourgeois order of relations; good films correspondingly made constant use of such maneuverability which has become realistically possible even in terms of subject-materials. (Bloch 1986, 410-11)

Precisely because of its technical possibilities, even commercial film comes to tell the tale, *à contre coeur*, on the fragmenting world in which we live, exposing the nakedness of even the happy end without changing the world. As an example of the spatiotemporal montage Bloch speaks about, we could think of the scene in *City Lights* in which the tramp, on the run from the police, jumps into the car of the millionaire on one side, to step out of it on the other. That montage of rich and poor, which would be unconvincing if staged in a theatre or opera because it requires a hint at a rupture of the unity of action, time and place, sets off the action in which the blind girl mistakes the tramp for a millionaire. The tramp's jump through the car is the leap of the imagination which founds the theme of the film. Then the dialectic of rich and poor can unfold, the open question of the possibility of a happy end in an unchanged world of tramps and millionaires can be prepared, and the moment of recognition, which remains also a moment of incognito, can occur.

Chaplin's tramp is a fairy tale figure. Fairy tales have a utopian form because they typically express wishes and dreams in a magical way and the narratives develop by actions of 'ordinary' people without power who, by cleverness, perseverance and a dose of luck succeed in dethroning power. Bloch contrasts the fairy tale to the myth and the saga which, in contrast, serve to preserve power relations and dominant ideologies:

> To speak in a modern way, most fairy tales have something Chaplinesque about them. They are not 'mini-myths' as the reactionary interpretation would have it; nor are they crudely disenchanted myths. The fairy tale is a genre that has tried to avoid falling into the feudalism of the saga and the despotism of the myth, and has managed to save the mythical element in a different form - a form which suits its own proper spirit. (Bloch 2009: 25; translation amended.)

In a short essay from 1932, *Significant Change in Cinematic Fables* (Bloch 1998: 59-62), Bloch writes about the changes film makes to traditional narratives. He emphasises that motifs of failure, of passing-by, of missing each other are often foregrounded in movie adaptations of traditional tales and fairy tales. He sees in this a feature of modernity. In this context he again mentions Chaplin, in a remark that addresses the incognito in film directly:

> (T)he gentle tale of missed opportunity, resurfacing on occasion in the work of Chaplin, (...) offers an insight into the nature of things. Into the nature of time, where the old vanishes away while the new has not yet become clearly evident; and where that which is best is not a tale, but is likewise traveling, passing us by, unrecognised. (Bloch 1998: 62)

Art, for Bloch, expresses what is yet to come. It creates premonitions, pre-figurations, pre-appearances of what might be; art has a utopian core. This view of the function of the work of art has its roots in Schopenhauer's aesthetics and its distinction between will and representation, but Bloch turns Schopenhauer's philosophy inside-out. In art we come to know and come to be part of the creative process that is reality itself; Bloch sees the artist as the avant-gardist who lives at the front of realisation. Of all art forms, music is for Bloch the most utopian one. It comes closest to expressing the deepest strivings and hopes, the tendency that is latent in being, just as, for Schopenhauer, music was the art form which most directly makes the life-will itself accessible to experience. For Bloch the reasons for the special place of music have to do, on one hand, with the pre-semantic nature of music, on the other it is because of the fact that music is a temporalising, moving art form. This makes the relation between cinema and music particularly interesting. Indeed, some of Bloch's earliest writings (from 1913) on film deal with the question of music in film. In the silent movie, Bloch argues, the isolated visual image opens up a pantomimic space and the music, which runs like a tapestry underneath the moving image, has the task of compensating for all the other senses, establishing the connection between the image on the screen and lived reality. Music creates the whole sensorium within the art form, without which the moving image cannot become expressive. In the silent movie, *the material world becomes music*, and so we experience the utopian tone of reality itself in film. The fact that film puts all weight on the optical and renders the rest of the sensorium peripheral heightens this utopian potential even more, because the utopian, the absolute, is given to us only in the indirect experience, at the periphery of our field of experience and in the gaps in the field of experience, in the irreducible gap between foreground and background.

The material world becoming music – that had happened before, Bloch suggests, in the 'musical drama' of Wagner. In *Spirit of Utopia* (1918) Bloch had devoted a long section to a discussion of Wagner's musicological innovations, and had stated that Wagner breaks with the closed form of the symphony in retrieving the 'endless melody' of song. In a similar way, Bloch argues, film music uses essentially open, often improvised, compositional (melodic and rhythmic) patterns. Like the Wagnerian motif, film music uses scores that can easily be recognised and that allow for easy variation. Thus a contrast emerges between the open, improvised form of music in film, and the closed form of music in symphony and opera before Wagner. It will be clear that this way of approaching the role of music, not just in film, but also in opera, sets us off on quite a different footing than the perspective Adorno elaborates from the viewpoint that the Wagnerian *Leitmotif* prefigures the jingle as commoditised form of identity or a manifestation of the repetitiveness of the death drive (Adorno 1952). Yet, one does not exclude the other – just as the technique of film can be corrupted, but even within its corruption give a voice to the 'not-yet'.

In his earliest texts on music in silent cinema (Bloch 1998, 156-162) it is precisely the fact that film is 'silent' that makes it a truly utopian art form. Not just subjective emotion, but the whole of reality becomes music, is expressed from its musical, read utopian, core as a longing and a hope for an identity between subject and object, the human and the world; a longing for the world at home. Music points in the direction of what is not yet in this ultimate sense. The

particular mediality that results from the combination of music and the silent movie gives cinema, this type of cinema, an unchartered potential for expressing the immanent utopianism, the hope that is central to Bloch's understanding of Marxism. As an avant-garde medium, film becomes itself an instance of the front of realisation. Between the silent image and the sounding music a pre-appearance can open up, fleeting and ungraspable, of a utopian world. Not a utopian world with a specific form, not a programmatic utopia, but as the symbolic intention that captures an always identical if inexpressible expectation: this is what it would have to sound like and look like. I am not thinking here only of a lyrical moment in the silent movie, but about the gap that opens up between the possibilities intimated by music, even by a comical fanfare, certainly by a swing beat or blues, and the pantomimic act on the screen, whether it is comical or tragic, epical or lyrical. Utopian sensibility lives in the gaze askance or awry. The utopian is encountered in the gap between image and sound, or in the fragment, in the surplus, in that which escapes order.

In Marxist terms we could say that this gap is a factor of the 'use value' of art that is resistant to being reduced to exchange value. It is, as Bloch insists throughout his writing, encountered in a movement of transgression. In the silent movie, Chaplin's figure of the tramp, which stands for the one who is 'too much in any situation', the one who 'should not be there' (Žižek and Fiennes 2006), is such a transgressive, and hence *latently utopian* image. Chaplin uses this figure to mutely point to a goal that can only be raised into consciousness negatively, via the act of failure, slapstick, and its concomitant affect, laughter: something was attempted, against the odds, and it fails. In this way the missing something becomes conscious. Positively speaking, as Žižek formulates the position of the tramp, the subject desires recognition, but for the situation where recognition could occur, he is always too much, 'an obscene and excessive surplus' (Žižek, Fiennes 2006). In his analysis of the ending of Chaplin's *City Lights*, Žižek points out that the moment of recognition between the tramp and the girl, the moment the girl realises the person who helped her to cure her blindness, is the moment where false love, treating the loved person as having to conform to your own ideal, can turn into true love, which is a recognition of the real other: 'here I am as what I really am'. But the happy end is not guaranteed. The music, Žižek says, goes on while the screen fades to black, the words 'The End' appear, and disappear again, leaving only the imageless movement of the music behind. What has opened up is too strong for anything but music, the music (Žižek says 'singing', although the score is entirely instrumental) exceeds the frame.

This moment of recognition is a classical example of anagnorisis, the plot-turning moment in which the true nature of the situation is recognised – one of the most centrally utopian moments to which Bloch returns time and again. Oedipus, Joseph, Saul's experience on the road to Damascus – these are all examples where the truth comes to light and creates a transgression, as much as the awareness of a previous transgression: a retroactive light thrown upon a crime. In *City Lights* the psychological complexity of erotic desire, as Plato says the son of poverty and riches, is personified in the tramp who becomes a millionaire in the eyes of the blind girl. He suffers for it, and we are left to wonder what his own blindness was or if the girl will be blinded once again by the truth that she discovers at the end. Žižek

reads the tramp's poverty as his nakedness, that for which he must be ashamed, once his love can see who he really is, while at the same time the only thing he wants is to be seen for who he is. We can contrast Žižek's psychoanalytical reading with a Blochian one, which is not so much in contradiction with it, but which emphasises another aspect, the one that is implied in the music which goes on and which puts the whole world in the light of the love between the two protagonists, without identifying what that love is, can or will be. It is as if the film follows the prohibition, or better the impossibility, of making an image of what happens when we 'behold face to face', when the darkness at the heart of subjectivity is illuminated by adequate objectivity. This limit-moment of recognition comes after the thunder of anagnorisis has died away. We can, as yet, only be taken there by a return to a form of darkness, to a mere, but nevertheless real, pre-appearance of identity. That is why the screen goes black and the music remains. The music pulls us along as it migrates into the other world – 'der schwingende Ton zieht fort'. "The vibration of sound fades away" is the translation used in the English edition of *Literary Essays* (Bloch 1998: 290) It fails to capture the deliberate ambiguity of 'fortziehen': to move away, to disappear, but also to migrate, to go elsewhere, or even, transitively, to pull something away or along: the vibrating tone also pulls us away, goads us on towards the new, to what was not yet.

But let us be clear: film persists predominantly as a site of reproduction of ideology. Why? Is all that is left for film criticism ideology critique? Is there anything more utopian to be discerned? Can we discern a utopian, subversive 'not-yet' in film today by which this medium can escape its function of enacting the double colonisation of ideology? Can film music still be 'the swinging tone that pulls us away and along'? Is the temporal nature of the medium still able to embody the exodus of utopian, transgressive thinking, feeling and acting, or has the time of cinema become the time of the succession of now-moments, unrelated or only related in an a-historical messianic longing for redemption that is equally strong, or weak, at each moment? Film has to seek the limits of narrativity and, because of the fragmenting and re-combining nature of the medium, it has always done that. But how are exodus and narrativity related, how can one become the salvaging of the other, giving hope back to film, and vice versa? Can that connection be a credible principle for a cinematographic aesthetic? Such are the challenges a Marxist film aesthetic faces today.

Kellner and Jameson both used Bloch's utopian analysis of ideology to show up the utopian elements in Hollywood cinema (e.g. in *Jaws* (1975), as it were despite the ideology. With a more accurate understanding of Bloch, we can now say that at the heart of the ideological formation lies a utopian motivation, which is expressed and distorted, often beyond recognition, by its ideological articulation. Moments where film is not (just) the articulation of ideology, but becomes aware of the utopian silent core in all expression as the source and goal of artistic expression, as well as of the necessity to use forms that are liable to ideological distortion to bring the utopian into the world, are not plentiful. But they are there and they resist all forms of sentimental reading. A Blochian-Marxist film criticism would look for the point at which all films are yet silent movies, manifestations of the not-yet conscious and even the not-yet-real.

Wagnerian reprisals abound: the shark theme in *Jaws*, Darth Vader's motif, the unbearable tremolos and violins in blockbuster cinema (*Titanic* (1997), *Lord of the Rings* (2001-2003). Iconic moments in which film music, also in spoken film, is utopian, not-yet, exodus can be seen in the opening sequence of *Once upon a Time in the West* (1968), where the music enters the action of the film and in the same vein the sounds of the image, the beating of the locomotive engine, the whistle and the rhythm of the train on the tracks, become musical. We can see utopia also in the theme, now comical, of *The Pink Panther* (1963), which crosses out the Wagnerian *Leitmotif* in the self-ironisation of the expectation-laden melody. The self-assured crescendo of the theme builds up an anticipation which is subverted, almost in slapstick fashion, by the sudden decrescendo. This is the comical element. But it opens up onto a surplus in the theme, the lightly syncopic, rhythmically fading coda of swing that, much in Bloch's sense, is the swinging tone that moves on and that pulls us along with it, into an open possibility, having overcoming the earlier lapse. The panther, like the tramp, is a fairy tale figure.

Far from being usurped by the logic of capital, the exodus motif still abounds in film. In its commoditised, less commoditised and authentic forms, film is the art form of exodus. At all levels of its materialisation it is a transformative and transforming medium: technology, reception, the way it has transformed the art world itself and other art forms such as painting, theatre and literature (the novel), the development of narrative, the change to the sensorium itself such that we now live in an image culture, but also one in which music, equally double-faced, is ubiquitous and endless. As Lars von Trier showed in *Melancholia*, frankly in a reactionary fashion (in other words from a depressive position): we will go down to the sound of Wagner's strings and their endless melody – a metonym of music's ubiquitous presence in contemporary culture. Here, the preciousness of life can only be experienced under the threat of its imminent and total negation. This is the situation Adorno called the administered world (*Die verwaltete Welt*, Adorno 1970), and it is what Žižek means by ideology (Žižek and Fiennes 2013).

The utopian, whether in music or in other aspects of film, remains, and this is the great advance brought by Bloch's philosophy, a matter of the askance and awry, of what does not fit and transgresses, what transports us. No direct, literal utopian aesthetic can be anything but inadequate. The fragmentation, isolation, micrological gaze that film has allowed with respect to our sensory consciousness has opened up the possibility of a creative culture after the death of God, after the deconstruction of the grand narrative – a process already in full swing when Bloch started to write about film. But – and this is important – the montage that becomes possible now and that shows the utopian as it lights up and dies away and yet retains its validity, like the music in the silent movie (and, the same thing, the dialectical image in Benjamin's work), is no less committed to an idea of the necessary, universal nature of that which cannot be expressed in any single way but always needs juxtaposition and movement from one to another to appear: the promise of fulfilment. Film still has the capacity to give a form to this promise of something transcending life, and is exposed to doing just that all the time, even if only in the commoditised expectations of the movie-going audience, as in Woody Allen's *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (1985) where these expectations unsettle the

medium, and its place in transforming life, itself. In the montage of music's transformative efficacy and narratives of personal or collective liberation, the utopian, the no-place of longing can shine up dramatically as being all around us – ungraspable, uncolonisable, but there. We can see this for example in the montage of the Ulysses motif, the exodus motif of the escape from Egypt and the dialectical sound-image of the American folk and rock tradition in *O Brother Where Art Thou?* (2000), or in the hopeful and yet disillusioned exploration of the light that 'shines into the childhood of all and in which no one has yet been' (Bloch 1986: 1376) of Bergman's *Fanny and Alexander* (1982). These films are not only social or ideology critiques, they also activate a utopian image, a hope for a better world and the direction in which it may lie.

Bloch's no less existential than Marxist film aesthetic allows us to enrich the sometimes worn schematism of Marxist ideology critique, and its sighing under the image prohibition regarding the communist society which it inherited from its religious roots.   It allows us to enrich utopian consciousness with the open creativity, the montage, the fractal and moving imagery of the cinematographic experience; it allows us to salvage the fairy tale and make it meaningful for social and cultural transformation. Conversely, cinema can come to play a vital role in the renewal of Marxist thought itself, so that, as Bloch already wrote in the 1940s: 'Marxism therefore is not a non-utopia, but the genuine, concretely-mediated and processually open one'. We can say that cinema, correctly understood, by coordinating the utopian not-yet of imagination, the field of sensory perception and the ideational space, has the ability to open up radical futurity for us. But radical futurity is not the pure contingency of the absolute ability to be surprised – a notion that flips over into its opposite, the ever-sameness of mere nextness. No, the radical futurity that cinema can teach us to see and take hold of, is one in which we learn to understand our night-dreams, the realm of the unconscious, and learn to take hold of our day-dreams, the realm of the not-yet conscious. Film can be, as Bloch calls it, a medium for concrete utopia. Film is often a dream factory, the denial of the very thing that makes the dream what it is, but it can be a critique, in the Benjaminian sense of a reflective consideration of the truth content of a work of art, a schooling and a material realisation of our capacity to dream beyond our expectations, to actively hope for a different world. To reclaim the radical purport and potential of the (day)dream work of film today is the task of a cinematographic aesthetics that takes its cues from Marxism. In ways that have not been made explicit up until now, Bloch's thought can provide a starting point for that work.

References

Adorno, Theodor W. (1952). *Versuch über Wagner* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp).
Adorno, Theodor W. (1970). *Negative Dialektik* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp).
Adorno, Theodor W. (2001) [1998]. *Metaphysics. Concept and Problems* (Cambridge: Polity Press)
Adorno, Theodor W. (2005) [1951]. *Minima Moralia. Reflections on a Damaged Life* (London: Verso).

Bloch, Ernst (1986) [1959]. *The Principle of Hope*, 3 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press).

Bloch, Ernst (1998) [1965]. *Literary Essays* (Stanford: Stanford University Press).

Bloch, Ernst (2000) [1918]. *The Spirit of Utopia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press).

Bloch, Ernst (2009) [1935]. *The Heritage of our Times* (Cambridge: Polity Press)

Geuss, Raymond (1981). *The Idea of a Critical Theory: Habermas and the Frankfurt School* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

Jameson, Frederic (2006). "First Impressions" (Review of S. Žižek, *The Parallax View*), in: *London Review of Books*, 28 (17), pp. 7-8.

Jameson, Frederic (2007). *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science-Fictions* (London: Verso).

Kellner, Douglas (1997). "Ernst Bloch, Utopia, and Ideology Critique", in J. Owen and T. Moyland (eds.), *Not Yet: Reconsidering Ernst Bloch* (London: Verso), pp. 80-95.

Žižek, Slavoj (2009) [1989]. *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso).

Žižek, Slavoj (2006). *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press).

Žižek, Slavoj (2002). *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor* (London: Verso).

Žižek, Slavoj and Sophie Fiennes (2006). *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema* (ICA Projects).

Žižek, Slavoj and Sophie Fiennes (2013). *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology* (Film 4).