

**'Venturing Beyond': Ernst Bloch, Bertolt Brecht, and the Utopian  
Literarization of Production**

By

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A THESIS

Presented to the Department of Comparative Literature  
and the Robert D. Clark Honors College  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Bachelor of Arts

March 2014

**An Abstract of the Thesis of**

**Olivia Awbrey for the degree of Bachelor of Arts  
in the Department of Comparative Literature to be taken March 2014**

**Title: 'VENTURING BEYOND' ERNST BLOCH,  
BERTOLT BRECHT AND THE UTOPIAN  
LITERARIZATION OF PRODUCTION**

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_

**Professor Michael Allan**

This thesis problematizes conceptions of a dialectic utopia and revolutionary literature by looking at two German authors of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: Ernst Bloch and Bertolt Brecht. I compare and contrast Bloch's and Brecht's theories of utopia and assess how each author attempts to create social change through their work. Common literary research suggests that Bloch and Brecht construct opposing strategies of social change through literature, but in my analysis of each author, I explain how their work compliments the other and resolutely come to agreeing theoretical outcomes.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank Professor Allan for guiding me through the thesis process, Professor Mathäs for equipping me with archival advice for literary research, and Professor Fracchia for helping me situate my project in the German Marxist debate of aesthetics and politics. I would especially like to thank the Clark Honors College for awarding me the Thesis Research Grant, which allowed me to conduct research in Berlin and Ludwigshafen, Germany. Many thanks to my family and friends for their limitless support throughout the entire process. Each one of you has made this project possible and is a part of its continuation.

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## Introduction

In 1934, addressing the Institute for the Study of Fascism in Paris, Walter Benjamin added to a growing debate about art's role in German politics with a question: “Also ehe ich frage: wie steht eine Dichtung zu den Produktionsverhältnissen der Epoche? möchte ich fragen: wie steht sie in ihnen?”<sup>1</sup> Within the matter of a decade two writers appeared to respond to Benjamin's question. Ernst Bloch published his theoretical magnum opus *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* and one of Bertolt Brecht's most known plays, *Die Dreigroschenoper*, was gaining international success in the United Kingdom and the United States despite the Third Reich's attempt to silence its performances. Bloch and Brecht, both authors emerging from the Expressionist era yet in exile from Hitler's reign, had Benjamin's pertinent and lasting question in mind: how do their works contribute to the transformation of relations of production [*Produktionverhältnisse*]? Are they making it new, infusing the system with alternative aesthetic concepts counter to the mentality of a capitalist labor economy? Or are they perpetuating the exploitation of the working class by presenting works of art that are passive in response to the social decay of fascism?

As Benjamin continued his address, he highlighted the poignancy of the “literary technique” in the age of mass-consumerism and warfare, which becomes central to his questions. Benjamin declares, “[Die 'operierenden' Schriftstellers]

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<sup>1</sup> Benjamin, Walter, and Rolf Tiedemann. 1966. *Versuche über Brecht*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp. 2 Benjamin, 88.

*Mission ist nicht zu berichten, sondern zu kämpfen; nicht den Zuschauer zu spielen, sondern aktiv einzugreifen.*"<sup>2</sup> He asserted the will to create a German Left literary tradition that, instead of keeping clean hands at the distanced sidelines of social debate, readily engaged with class struggle, worker's rights, and the ongoing process to socialize a society wrought with systemic malfunctions. That is to say, Benjamin's declaration of the "writer's mission" [*Mission der Schriftsteller*] signifies the adoption of "utopian thinking" among self-identified Leftist authors of his time.

It was no longer enough to regurgitate, through art, the social mechanisms of a broken system in order to gain an entertainment profit. Benjamin's address sought after an aesthetic style that, rather than criticizing societal organization through theory, actively transformed the means of cultural production of that society. The "*Literarisierung der Lebensverhältnisse*," Benjamin claims, "[wird] der Schauplatz der hemmungslosen Erniedrigung des Wortes - die Zeitung also - auf welchem seine Rettung sich vorbereitet."<sup>2</sup> This making-literary of living conditions, I argue, can be—indeed already has been— translated into the *literarization* of labor conditions. As Benjamin stated in his address, "Work itself puts in a word. And writing about work makes up the part of the skill necessary to perform it."<sup>3</sup> In other words, the literarization of labor conditions, that is the aesthetic yet critical documentation of labor through literature, makes possible the fundamental transformation [*Umfunktionierung*] of relations of production. Vice versa, the "laborization" of literature itself transforms the author from one who might simply and voyeuristically observe degrading working conditions into one who intervenes

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<sup>2</sup> Benjamin, 90.

<sup>3</sup> Benjamin, 90.

artistically within the contemporary social conditions. In doing so, the author helps to imagine the future direction of society.

Sifting through the literary sands of the undefined, political, economic and social territory of 20<sup>th</sup> century Germany are Ernst Bloch and Bertolt Brecht, two committed authors willing to forgo the “men of mind”<sup>4</sup> exclusivity that, Benjamin warns, only separates authors from their readers. Bloch and Brecht tally themselves among the other side of that divide; that is to say that, following in Marx's footsteps, they intend to be just as involved with the reinvention of the production process as the revolutionary proletariat.

Each author offers an aesthetic as well as a political dimension in their work, and it is through the trope of 'utopia' that these dimensions come to light. Bloch writes in *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature*, that “an economy comprehended as connected to the social system...means that we take into consideration the process of production and reproduction of a society as a totality,”<sup>5</sup> revealing Bloch's commitment to the reinvention of cultural production. In a similar manner, John Willet shows that, “as Brecht moved away from Expressionism he began learning about the social mechanism in a quite cold and *sachlich*, objective way...Brecht became one of the Nazi dramatist's [*Reichsschrifttumskammer*] enemies: that, in the most literal sense, is what we call

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<sup>4</sup> Benjamin, 90.

<sup>5</sup> Bloch, Ernst, Jack Zipes, and Frank Mecklenburg. 1988. *The utopian function of art and literature: selected essays*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press. 201.

poetic justice.”<sup>6</sup> That is to say that Brecht understood “social mechanisms” or social conditions as a set of standards that needed to be changed. Indeed, with their painfully candid works Bloch and Brecht both intend to *interrupt* that which has become the norm. Rather than merely deconstructing the social strata and recreating it through art, each author offers constructive criticism that analyzes the means of production and, in doing so, recalls the need for utopian thinking.

Bloch claims that hoping for a better tomorrow, or “venturing beyond”, is built into a complex of drives. Edging on messianic prescription, Bloch argues that conscious dreaming, “is not only a basic feature of human consciousness, but, concretely grasped, a basic determination within objective reality as a whole.”<sup>8</sup> Taking social dreaming out of a purely unconscious context, Bloch suggests that social dreaming does not exist in the unconscious but exists in “objective reality” and is waiting to be understood. Brecht, on the other hand, argues that the impermanence of social structures must be realized through the shock of a new theater, through the *Verfremdungs* effect, which is the aesthetic alienation Brecht employed to politicize his dramas. These points provoke questions that steer my project: what is distinctly utopian about Bloch and Brecht's approaches to the production of literature, and, as critical Marxist thinkers, what does that say about their views of capitalism? Furthermore, while their approaches to utopianism may superficially diverge, are their arguments for utopian thinking fundamentally different?

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<sup>6</sup> Willett, John. 1984. *Brecht in context: comparative approaches*. London: Methuen. 81. <sup>8</sup> Bloch, Ernst. *The Principles of Hope*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1986. Print.



The concept of utopia in Brecht and Bloch's work straddles the line of politics and aesthetics. While the political side may be evident in the socially critical nature of utopian thinking, the aesthetic side is subtly revealed in the praxis of their anti-fascist and anticapitalist arguments. In *Die Dreigroschenoper*, Brecht shows the crumbling layers of a superstructure, in which everyone exploits everyone for their own capital gain. In Bloch's *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* he discusses the inauthentic existence of the 'occluded subject' in both a fascist and capitalist setting. Indeed both authors break away from their guarded positions as writers in order to discuss social progression in the defense of utopian thinking and the praxis of aesthetics. A quote from Benjamin's *Illuminations* delineates and renders the divide between politics and aesthetics blurry:

[Fascism] is evidently the consummation of "*l'art pour l'art*." [Humanity's] self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order. This is the situation of politics which Fascism is rendering aesthetic. Communism responds by politicizing art.<sup>7</sup>

That is to say, though utopianism does not teleologically connote communism, Benjamin claims that communism provides the artistic critique necessary to re-envision culture.

While I do not lay claim to any specific ideological argument, the terms "fascism," "communism," and "socialism" are indeed the political frameworks in which these authors are situated. Benjamin claims that fascism facilitates art sans substance, that is, "destruction as an aesthetic pleasure," whereas communism un.masks aesthetics to the point that it cannot be anything other than political.

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<sup>7</sup> Benjamin, Walter, and Hannah Arendt. 2007. *Illuminations*. New York: Schocken Books. 242.

Utopia, in the context of my project, should be relativized to fit Brecht and Bloch respectively. This reason is twofold: firstly, many would argue that Brecht is far from being a utopian thinker. Brecht's work can be interpreted as utopian, but in order to do so, the term "utopia" needs to be reasserted as something within the realm of possibility, rather than impossibility, in order to align with Brecht's insistence on a logical approach to theater. Secondly, Bloch's conception of utopia embodies an emancipatory spirit rather than dictates instructions of how to create an equal society.

Utopia does not fall under Thomas More's category of a "no place," but rather falls within Herbert Marcuse's configuration of "utopian speculation," and that the reality of utopia is only "blocked from coming about by the power of the established societies."<sup>8</sup> With the binary of politics and aesthetics blurred by Benjamin's claim, Marcuse's utopianism is indeed a politicized rendering of aesthetics. Marcuse argues, in *An Essay on Liberation*, that, "by logical inference of the prevailing conditions and institutions, critical theory [and in this case, art, as well] may be able to determine the basic institutional changes which are the prerequisites for the transition to a higher stage of development,"<sup>9</sup> with the term "higher" referring to a better functioning, equitable society. That is to say, theory critiques society at large with an aim of foresight. Theory, in a sense, is indeed the politicized aesthetics that makes that judgment possible.

Marcuse's schema of liberation offers that theory is capable of creating thoughts and ambitions in opposition to the current system. In this sense, theory

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<sup>8</sup> Marcuse, 3.

<sup>9</sup> Marcuse, 3

and art analyze society as if it were a text in order to pinpoint to the schisms between the problematic reality at hand and the desired, realistic, improved future. It is the process of critically and rationally diagnosing what is dysfunctional in a contemporary society and creating a theoretical response that offers a solution.

Despite Marcuse's support for politically critical theory, he expands the idea of criticism beyond its mere diagnostic tact. Utopian thinking, or "speculation," must exceed theory, and it must exceed text. What needs to change, Marcuse insists, is not just policy or systematic procedure. A fundamental shift in the human relation to production must take place; that is, text must have the ability to uproot the behavior that has become instinctual and as such harmful to what Marcuse stresses is an inherently 'biological' solidarity within social life. Marcuse articulates this when he writes, "once a specific morality is firmly established as a norm of social behavior, it is not only introjected—it also operates as a norm of 'organic' behavior,"<sup>10</sup> in the sense that the behavior has been welded into social groups and is thus the standard, the norm, to which all (or most) citizens strive, perhaps blindly, to live by. Utopian "speculation", then, is the point at which the present can no longer provide answers, and, according to Marcuse, the imagining of a more socially oriented future society begins. The politicized imagining of the future is aesthetic in its own right, as it is the creative act of thinking beyond the present – creating art may just be the imagining of a better future.

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<sup>10</sup> Marcuse, 11.

In relation to Brecht and Bloch, Marcuse's theory opens up the possibility that their work – Brecht's theater and Bloch's philosophy – can be the instigators of change towards a utopian society through the aesthetic elements each author presents in his work. I argue that the two authors respond to Benjamin's question of the *Produktionverhältnissen*, yet do so through distinguishable means. In this sense, it is a question of praxis: through their construction of utopia – social progression – Bloch and Brecht's aesthetics align, yet their theoretical similarities are veiled. In what follows, I give a short historical explanation of what constitutes a utopia, drawing from Marx's *1844 Manuscripts* as well as contemporary historians. I assess Bloch's “hope” and Brecht's “estrangement” in terms of their intellectual conceptions of utopia. Using Brecht's play *Die Dreigroschenoper* as a dialectical meeting point, I demonstrate how each of these utopian concepts unfold in Bloch and Brecht's differing theories yet how each can be found in the framework of the other.

## **Section One: The Case for an (Im)Possible Utopia**

Two of the most common arguments of utopian debate offer a set distinction: either a utopia is possible or a utopia is impossible. What the writing of Bloch and Brecht offer is an alternative to this formulation, one that navigates the line between possible and impossible, optimistic and pessimistic, perfection and instability. Now, the significance of a utopia, or thinking “utopianly”, has broadened to the point that its perfection is forever nonexistent, and its attainability is not sitting in a distant “no-place” but waiting for us to act.

Of the necessities and parameters that might constitute a utopia, there are few key foundations that distinguish a utopian society from a non-utopian society: equality (this entails economical, political, societal, racial, and sexual equality), autonomy (in terms of limited governmental reign and religious independence), and satisfaction (with work and use of free time). It is a triad that, if attained, could create a world that is incredibly selfsustaining, non-detrimental to the environment; a place without alienation from each other and our work, and a world without poverty. Countless roads can lead to this kind of utopian goal, but the main factor that controls so much of people's lives and consciousnesses is work: the exploitative labor force. The daily routine of clocking in and clocking out shapes each day around its influence. Work in contemporary society has come to be one of the greatest forces pulling us away from solidarity and equality, simply because it is organized in a hierarchical manner, with high wages and low wages designating how worthy each job is. Moreover, the purpose of work has been taken

away from the actual employees and the focus has been set to none other than capitalist gain.

This idea is not a new one, as Marx wrote about the alienation of labor in 1844, and before that John Locke wrote in the *Second Treatise* that whatever work one decides to put one's effort into is thereby putting oneself into. However, when capitalism cloaked this notion of labor and transformed its appearance to be only the road to capitalistic gain, Marx argued, "How would the worker come to face the product of his activity as a stranger, were it not that in the very act of production he was estranging himself from himself."<sup>11</sup><sup>12</sup> This concept, which seems to be at the heart of all anti-capitalist argument, points out that originally labor was not a means of force (excluding enslavement) used by the upper tier of society to create a hierarchy, it was a means of survival. Labor was not an estranging activity for individuals, it was a way to connect them to society. Furthermore, the purpose of work was not to see it solely as a grueling task, but to use the act of laboring as an outlet of human creativity, expression, and thought.

When Marx wrote about the alienation of labor and the estrangement of humanity from itself, he highlighted the distinction that was made between labor and free time. "The worker therefore only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself. He is at home when he is not working, and when he is working he is not at home."<sup>13</sup> There is a significant barrier between what a worker considers labor and what a worker considers "free time", and it was this

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<sup>11</sup> Marx, Karl. *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, W.W. Norton & Company: New York.

<sup>12</sup> . 72.

<sup>13</sup> Marx, 74.

distinction that made labor so toilsome. Marx also made aware the fact that the perception of work as being separate from the self in turn made one's effort in labor an effort to isolate oneself from the rest of the world. Marx writes, "The worker becomes an ever cheaper commodity the more commodities he creates. With the increasing value of the world of things proceeds in direct proportion the devaluation of the world of men."<sup>14</sup> The ownership one was (and still is) supposed to feel about their work— that they created something with their hands or heads and thereby feel as if they have put themselves into a tangible object—was substituted with the belief that one's labor—in a factory, field, office or school— was disconnected from the greater workings of society.

Labor was reduced to an individualistic task only concentrated on the capitalist gain. The goal was: by the end of the day one would have a pay check, not that: by the end of the day, one would have contributed to the necessities of society and therefore was both the creator and the provider of a satisfied community. As stated before, the perception of work in the 21st century needs a fundamental change in order to take steps closer to living in a utopian reality.

Marcuse provides a possible framework for this shift in our perspective of work. He proposes "the ascent of the Aesthetic Principle as Form of the Reality Principle,"<sup>15</sup> which contrasts what he calls the "Profit and Performance Principle" otherwise known as our current capitalist model of society. With the 'Aesthetic Principle', rather than promoting the production of cheap commodities:

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<sup>14</sup> Marx, 71.

<sup>15</sup> Marcuse, 90.

production would be redirected in defiance of all the rationality of the Performance Principle; socially necessary labor would be diverted to the construction of an aesthetic rather than repressive environment... Such redistribution of socially necessary labor (time), incompatible with any society governed by the Profit and Performance Principle, would gradually alter society in all its dimensions.<sup>16</sup>

Marcuse's proposal, that all labor be directed to create aesthetic things, does not have to literally mean that each worker creates "parks and gardens rather than highways and parking lots" or things considered generally aesthetic - painting, music, writing - but that each person can treat his or her labor as an aesthetic act. From its Latin root *artem* "art" means "practical skill", which reaffirms the notion that practicality is a byproduct of the ability to be artful. As such, reverting our perception of work as an artistic (skillful) contribution to the greater society would not only put importance on socially degraded jobs, thus leveling all jobs to be of equal worthiness, but would also bring satisfaction to the individual in his or her daily activities. There would be an immediate connection with labor, and in accordance with Marx's materials-of-work philosophy, we would no longer be reifying our products of work —"congealing [our labor] in an object"<sup>17</sup>— but would be putting ourselves into the experience and the creation of useful and necessary materials. Labor could therefore be seen as an extension of our "free time" rather than separate from or alien to ourselves.

The benefit of the 'Aesthetic Principle as Form of the Reality Principle" is that each function in society would be done deliberately, without lethargy, and only the necessary amount of work would be enacted. So why is it that people—

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<sup>16</sup> Marcuse, 90.

<sup>17</sup> Marx, 71.



and citizens of most all countries—work overtime, and continue to think they are not quite working hard enough? This brings back the point made earlier: that one aspect of the 21st century dilemma is our ability and our *desire* to think utopically. According to Bloch, everyone has the ability to do so. He argues that utopian thinking, or social dreaming, is a latent force built into human psychology. This latent force is articulated and captured in his phrase “venturing beyond,”<sup>18</sup> which is fundamentally connected with Bloch's philosophy of history. “Venturing beyond” means thinking: thinking through the process of social conditions, thinking of the present as a dialectical moment in flux, or the continuous projection of an adaptable future. He writes that “real venturing beyond knows and activates the tendency which is inherent in history and which proceeds dialectically,”<sup>19</sup> suggesting that *thinking* is not the “visualizing abstractions” of a perfect, static future, but the tendency to strive for a better future. Social dreaming allows the future to be somewhat thought out, in the sense that the society as a whole agrees on the tentative forward direction.

It seems easy, then, to say that humans were made to think utopically, or “venture beyond,” but then why is it that capitalism—a systemic model that has caused and is causing major global inequality and degradation—has been the reigning system for more than a century? More so, why is the idea of a “utopia” taboo in a culture that supposedly encourages creativity and leadership? Due to our perception of division in labor, society, gender, race and class our apparent disparity has weakened communal strength as a unit of political power, therefore

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<sup>18</sup> Bloch, 3.

<sup>19</sup> Bloch, 4.

alienating people from the idea of a utopia. At the same time, Marcuse argues that the world's problems cannot be blamed on the “arrogance” of any single social and economic group, but perhaps the problem stems from a much more complex, defunct system.

In human history there has never been one definitive societal system that has remained unchanged. Furthermore, there has always been resistance to the dominating class. To say that capitalism is the end-all-be-all of human societal organization, which is argued by many in the ideology of “Thatcherism” and T.I.N.A., is to say that we are no longer able to adapt and evolve. It is to say that we have reached “the end of history”, and therefore can do nothing but regress. On the contrary, already possible solutions have been given to move past the capitalist era: Marcuse's 'Aesthetic Principle' that, if used as a framework for our perception of labor, would designate everyone has some kind of artist creating necessary and appreciated goods for society. As humans are some of the best adapters, capitalism can only be a stage we must work through in order to advance to the next phase in human history.

In the following chapters I consider two different approaches to utopian thinking and imagining: Bloch's “hope” and Brecht's “estrangement,” which, together, create an alternative future projection to capitalism. The lack of utopian thinking in the last 150 years can be attributed to the fact that capitalism has been the only reinforced economic structure in most of the Western world, and has resolutely come to define the social sphere as well. This does not mean that it is “just the way things are.” The stronger the procapitalist current becomes, the

more immediate the need for utopian thinking is. Suffering incited by capitalism is the impetus for an alternative future. In Brecht's conception of a new theater, and in Bloch's resistance to "darkness" through its antithesis, hope, both authors offer feasible ways of thinking about (and arriving at) a socially oriented millennium through the philosophical and theatrical aesthetics they present.

## Section Two: Innate Hope, the Period of Darkness, and the *Noch-Nicht*

Ernst Bloch published two formative works from two different decades: *Geist der Utopie* in 1918 and *Prinzip Hoffnung* in a three volume set between 1937 and 1945. These texts map out Bloch's development as a utopian thinker – how he repurposes the term “utopia” in 1918 and how this utopian idea evolves with Bloch's insistence for determined, unwavering hope throughout the 1940s. Wayne Hudson argues in *The Marxist Philosophy of Ernst Bloch* that Bloch developed, “a modernism directed against the 'occlusion of the subject' under capitalism.”<sup>20</sup> The 'occluded subject' exemplifies the reason for Bloch's utopian thinking – the state of being suppressed under a constraining system. Bloch's texts reveal a philosophy aimed at developing alternatives to a predetermined capitalist future. As Brecht creates a theoretical and theatrical plan with which to influence the public to work towards a more equalized society, Ernst Bloch problematizes the seemingly tangible path towards utopia by emphasizing that a utopia cannot be defined by an abstract concept of a perfected social situation in the undetermined future, but must be understood as an immanent interior and exterior process that expands the limits of logic in order to embody an emancipatory spirit.

Due to the density of both *Geist der Utopie* and *Prinzip Hoffnung*, I focus on just three aspects of his philosophy that are relevant to both texts: hope, the darkness of the lived moment and the *Noch-Nicht*, as the process of becoming [*werden*]. These three aspects are the pillars of Bloch's utopian thinking, which create the framework for the later analysis of Brecht's *Die Dreigroschenoper* in the

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<sup>20</sup> Hudson, Wayne. *The Marxist Philosophy of Ernst Bloch*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982. Print. 28.

fourth section. By addressing these three dimensions of Bloch's philosophy, it will also allow me to define the ambiguous terms Bloch employs. "Roots," "genesis," "origin," and "genuine" are all target words within Bloch's construction of hope and utopia that indeed give his philosophy an undertone of dogmatism. However, Bloch redefines these biblical words within a nonreligious context.

Rainer Zimmermann defines two other words that are central to Bloch's philosophy – "concrete" and "abstract,"-- which Bloch reappropriates throughout his texts. As Peter Thompson points out, Bloch is famous for describing his utopian thinking as concrete. Zimmermann explains that, "concrete," in the way Bloch uses it, describes "what can be approached by reflexion and action such that it would eventually come to reality, contrary to what is purely utopian and therefore impossible."<sup>21</sup> That is to say that "concrete" utopia does not subsume a predetermined map of a flawless future society, but denotes that something can be done to improve upon the existing reality at hand. Oppositely, the term "abstract," in this case does not mean an undefined concept of utopia, but the abstraction of "a moment of an ongoing process."<sup>22</sup> Ultimately, "abstract" denotes the abstraction of an isolated moment in history isolated from the constant process of the multidimensional historical sequence, while "concrete" denotes its Latin roots – to grow together – implying a cohesive, constant historical process; everything happens dialectically in many layers and cannot be extracted from one another. Bloch defines his utopian thinking as "concrete" because it denotes that history is

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<sup>21</sup> Zimmermann, Rainer E. Thompson, Žižek. "Transforming Utopian into Metopian Systems: Bloch's Principle of Hope Revisited," *The Privatization of Hope*. Duke University Press: 2013, Print. 248.

<sup>22</sup> Thompson, Peter and Žižek, Slavoj. *The Privatization of Hope*. Duke University Press: 2013, Print. 12.

in constant flux, and furthermore supports his idea that utopian thinking is a process rather than an undefinable image of the future.

However, while Bloch does relay the fundamentals of utopian thinking as concrete, he does not set societal expectations for what a utopian future should look like, nor did he make a detailed account of how utopianism can manifest itself in the physical world. Hudson points out that Bloch reappropriated the term “utopia”:

in a way which combined 1) the need to mobilize utopian images which remained powerful; with 2) the insight that the decision to affirm utopian perspectives when they are still utopian is basic to utopianism as a method.<sup>23</sup> While in most cases “concrete” connotes a tangible plan of action, in Bloch's case it refers to the absolute recognition of utopia as a system of practice. It is important to keep in mind the distinctions of abstract and concrete while considering Bloch's utopia as “concrete.”<sup>23</sup>

According to Bloch, everyone has the ability to think utopianly. Social dreaming allows the future to be somewhat thought out, in the sense that the society as a whole agrees on the tentative forward direction. The most important thing is that society wants a forward direction at all. So where exactly does this basic feature of social dreaming, this desire for a forward direction, begin?

The fundamental principle of Bloch's utopian thinking “venturing beyond”<sup>24</sup> is hope. As it stands, “hope” is a provocative element within any philosophy, as it might connote an air of ignorance for life's complexities. Furthermore, it is considered to be an emotion, and emotions are tumultuous and can be less reliable. To promote “hope” as the basis for creating a sound, structural

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<sup>23</sup> Hudson, 28.

<sup>24</sup> Bloch, 3.

alternative for the future seems as if Bloch is asking the reader to take an unmeasured leap into the future. And in a way, he is. However, for Bloch “hope” is not just a tangible human emotion but, more poignantly, a psychological drive that “makes people broad instead of confining them,” and it, “requires people who throw themselves actively into what is becoming.”<sup>25</sup> Contrasted with fear, which limits consciousness, hope expands consciousness. Peter Thompson aids in defining Bloch's uniquely constructed term:

Hope [in the Blochian sense] is not happiness and bland optimism. Hope is what gives us strength in the face of the knowledge of entropy and death, both of the individual – what Bloch calls the greatest of all antiutopias – and of the universe as a whole.<sup>26</sup>

As Thompson points out, “hope” is not the blind assurance that human society will revolutionize on a whim, but “hope,” as contrasted with the passive emotion of fear, makes real the possibility that things can improve, and will improve if humans reactivate their potential to influence the direction of the future in a non-alienated, non-detrimental way.

Thompson characterizes “hope” as, “not simply the daydream of how things could be better, but the underlying *principle* of how things could be better and how hope functions in the world as a real latent force.”<sup>27</sup> Indeed, as Thompson points out, Bloch was a “Jew, Marxist and atheist intellectual in exile from Nazi Germany,”<sup>28</sup> and despite the apparently indestructible forces against him, it was during this darkest period that Bloch conjured and wrote *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*.

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<sup>25</sup> Bloch, 3.

<sup>26</sup> Thompson and Žižek, 8

<sup>27</sup> Thompson and Žižek, 3

<sup>28</sup> Thompson and Žižek, 3.

With “hope” being the center of Bloch's utopian argument, his conception of utopia is not concerned with whether or not a utopia is possible – he is settled in his mind that it is – and furthermore it is not concerned necessarily with social criticism at a systemic level, but it is concerned with objective human emancipation at a universal level.

If hope is the first basic step towards utopian thinking, then how is it that humans (or even a single, isolated society for that matter) agree on a direction – what if everyone has a different hope or desire for the future? “What is *most inward* in us,” he writes, “simply lies in deep shadow...incognito to itself.”<sup>29</sup> That is to say that what is “most inward” or, in less ambiguous terms, our most basic human drive to dream is, according to Bloch, universal yet hidden in confusion and dense fog. This “fog” is understood among Blochian scholars to be capitalism as a “system of labor exploitation and generalized commodity production.”<sup>31</sup> That is to say that, by becoming passive within a capitalist economic and social structure, we have subconsciously subsumed what Bloch would call an inauthentic [*Innen*] or that which is “most inward” in us has deadened. The “moralmetaphysical incognito” Bloch speaks of can be understood as an ethical reference point that, he elucidates, “socially causes every attention or inattention to be expressed only as ultimately revocable,”<sup>30</sup> insinuating that this “fog,” muddles our possible ethical

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<sup>29</sup> Bloch, Ernst. *The Spirit of Utopia*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2000. Print. 172. <sup>31</sup> Thompson and Žižek, 2.

<sup>30</sup> Bloch, Geist der Utopie, 172. 33 Hudson, 33.



reference points to the extent that they seem tenuous and unstable. Hudson explains it best when he writes:

Bloch was convinced that the problem of human subjectivity had not been correctly resolved, and that a premature disillusionment had led to a crude realism which left fundamental alienations untouched. He was conscious that the capitalist occlusion of the subject tended to result in a subject conformed to a false reality, who was then unable to rise to the self encounter, will and decision needed for change...<sup>33</sup>

Though Bloch was a Marxist and much of his philosophy draws from Marx's theory of labor division and species-being, Bloch set out to infuse Marxism with social aspects he believed had been disregarded and therefore necessary to reinstate: a Marxist philosophy with a focus on the invisible, meta-physical tendencies of social structure, rather than the economic structure. Hudson emphasizes that Bloch's awareness of the "occlusion of the subject" within a capitalist system is what sparked the need for this "hope" and, ultimately, utopian thinking. It is in this period of darkness, as Bloch argues, that we have lost "wakefulness, substantiveness, existence..."<sup>31</sup>

This brings us to the next point for Bloch: the contradiction of sustained hope within an unstable, uncertain and ambivalent social environment. Modernity, for Bloch, has reached a point of social decay that Bloch calls the "darkness of the [historical] moment."<sup>32</sup> As Brecht maintains a distanced perspective of the present through the objectification of life on stage, Bloch theorizes, "only what is just coming up or what has just passed has the distance which the beam of growing consciousness needs to illuminate.

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<sup>31</sup> Bloch, *Geist der Utopia*, 167.

<sup>32</sup> Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, 287.

The That and Now, the moment we are in, burrows in itself and cannot feel itself.”<sup>33</sup> The basis of the “That” and the “Now” lies in the fact that, as Bloch claims, we are not able to fully perceive the present – which is the static loitering of indecision in modern times – because we are busy experiencing it. However, that does not mean that the experience is wholly authentic. As Slavoj Žižek writes, “every ideology, even the most horrifying Nazism, exploits and relies on authentic dreams, and to combat false liberation one should learn to discern in it the authentic utopian core.”<sup>34</sup> On the contrary, Bloch makes clear that experience of the present is inauthentic insofar as we do not command our daily lives, but rather we are driven by an external entity. Bloch asks, “But who drives on within us? Someone who does not occupy himself, does not yet emerge,” imploring that there is a disconnect between the “genuine” present and the desire of the “occluded subjects.”<sup>35</sup> The “Now” is therefore in and of itself a hollowed-out illusion of the every day, which further illuminates the idea that humanity is ambivalent in its current historical crisis and therefore hesitant to make the next move.

Frances Daly's essay on Bloch, titled “Dark Emptiness of Nothingness,” deconstructs this notion of ambivalence within the context of capitalism, arguing that it is not a new idea, but one that has fallen by the wayside in contemporary thought simply because a quality of indecision is embedded yet not detected within the context of modernity. Daly writes, as “capitalist accumulation is fraying not at the edges but at its very core...a disconcerting wavering with a rapidly

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<sup>33</sup> Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, 287.

<sup>34</sup> Thompson and Žizek, xix.

<sup>35</sup> Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, 287.

shifting, fragile landscape of near catastrophe, duplicity, and fragmentation,”<sup>36</sup> is established as the veiled norm of a capitalist society.<sup>40</sup> However, as Daly claims this uncertainty exists in the face of the twenty-first century – as well as the twentieth century – Bloch sees this point of ambiguity as the catalyst to utopian thinking. The darkness, for Bloch, is the impetus for change.

Recalling my introduction, I claimed that Bloch and Brecht respectively embody a utopian spirit, or a tangible dream of emancipation. However, I cannot describe Bloch as someone who embodies anything, when he distinguishes his theory of hope through the *unembodying* of the present. If we all unconsciously live in the “darkness of the lived moment,” then our very sublimation within reality is problematic because we subsume an existence without awareness of the nearness of disaster. Therefore the only way to find the embers of hope that exist within these “moments of darkness” is to *unembody* the present; that is, to embrace the “realization of possibility” by accepting uncertainty as the starting point of a momentous revolution in which humanity must toggle between “creative possibility and conformity.”<sup>37</sup>

“Fog,” “darkness,” “indecision”: these terms describe Bloch's perception of capitalism as the ruling system of modernity. However, because a “utopia” in Bloch's mind is constructed as concrete – an ever-changing process of becoming – the “darkness of the lived moment” is indeed a historical moment, an interruption of the process of becoming, that we have the ability to succeed. These historical

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<sup>36</sup> Daly, Francis. Thompson, Žižek. “Dark Emptiness of Nothingness,” *The Privatization of Hope*. Duke University Press: 2013, Print. 40 Daly, 165.

<sup>37</sup> Daly, 165.

moments are, for example, “destruction of social democracy, violent state of suppression, mass murder, war, and the rise and perpetuation of forms of fascism, as well as the unending bankruptcy of economic inequality and instability,”<sup>38</sup> which, to Bloch, are social situations that, if viewed as abstracted from the process of an evolving utopia, are indefinitely unchallengeable and unchangeable.

However, if these historical moments are viewed as only the moving parts of a situation in flux, then the possibility of utopian revolution continues to be more tangible in the future. Bloch writes, relating the process of becoming to the distinction between abstract and concrete stream-of-consciousness, that the, “concrete concept of the stream [that of process]...does decidedly consist of interruptions, namely of dialectical moments of the dialectical context.”<sup>39</sup> That is to say that these tenuous social conditions, though evidently instigate doubt towards social revolution and political progression, must be viewed as temporary rather than fixed. When financial crises and exploitative labor are seen as “dialectical moments of the dialectical context,” as in simultaneously affecting a society that is simultaneously changing, arises the thought that something else – something better – exists in the uncertainty of becoming. In this sense, the path out of the “darkness of the lived moment” is in no way straightforward, but it is viable and necessary.

Like Marcuse, the purpose in Bloch's imaginative thinking extends beyond critical reason, in the sense that the theory is itself limited by its need to be logical, building off past laws and intellectual experiments that have been tested. This is

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<sup>38</sup> Daly, 166.

<sup>39</sup> Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, 291.

where the unavoidable contradiction appears: theory limits utopian thinking, but the way to begin to understand how the system can change is sparked by theory. Furthermore, the utopian thinking Bloch describes expands the depths of logic because one is supposed to break the lethargy of our “quasiphenominal form of existence” that is based on outdated preconceptions of our “logical” condition in order for our “genuine self” to outshine the masked silhouettes Bloch calls our “intelligible characters.”<sup>40</sup>

Bloch writes, “True genesis is not at the beginning but at the end, and it starts to begin only when society and existence become radical, i.e. grasp their roots. But the root of history is the working, creating human being who reshapes and overhauls the given facts.”<sup>41</sup> That is to say that, the “overhauling of the given facts” is indeed the succeeding of logic through imaginative utopian thinking. This quote leads one to think that the “root” of utopia grows from the working class, from those who produce the necessary items to sustain human culture and consumerism. While the “working, creating human” are indeed those who materialistically produce goods and action, the proletariat, they are also those who materialistically produce thought. As Catherine Moir points out, “Bloch leaves open the possibility of overcoming the gap [the process of “becoming”] as speculative possibility which he describes as immanent in the material world.”<sup>42</sup> In other words, though one must look past logic in order to begin thinking utopianly, the thought itself can be capably manifested in the physical world as action, but the

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<sup>40</sup> Bloch, *The Spirit of Utopia*, 176.

<sup>41</sup> Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, 1376.

<sup>42</sup> Moir, Catherine. Thompson, Žižek. “The Education of Hope: On the Dialectical Potential of Speculative Materialism,” *The Privatization of Hope*. Duke University Press: 2013, Print. 123.

thought must embrace the uncertainty, the unknown and the nothingness of that which is potential in the present.

This brings us to his theory of the *Noch-Nicht*. As Bloch states early on in Volume 1 of *Prinzip Hoffnung*, and off of which the title of my thesis is based, “thinking means venturing beyond.”<sup>43</sup> It is here that Bloch’s thinking truly becomes “utopian,” as it insists on a psychological process that never settles for abstractions – in the Blochian sense – but continually pushes for the concrete accumulation of experience in order to project thought, hope, into the still-becoming future. “Venturing beyond,” however, is not, as Bloch argues, “the mere vacuum of an In-Front-of-Us,” the immediateness of tomorrow, but instead reaches toward the openness of “New...that is mediated in what exists and is in motion.”<sup>44</sup> That is to say, that this “venturing beyond” does not fixate on short-term goals, indeed defies the trap of instant gratification, but rather explores the potentiality of the *NochNicht*, the not-yet.

Bloch further distinguishes “venturing beyond,” in conjunction with hope and the *Noch-Nicht*, from the “empty promises of the other world,” which he writes, is just another failure of the “futility of bourgeois existence.”<sup>49</sup> Equating this mental venturing with the dawning of morning, the newness of the undetermined and therefore completely open day, Bloch writes that the “Not-Yet-Conscious is admittedly just as much a preconscious as is the unconscious of repressedness and

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<sup>43</sup> Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, 4.

<sup>44</sup> Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, 4. <sup>49</sup> Bloch, 4.

forgottenness [sic].”<sup>45</sup> In other words, the “not-yet” is at the precipice of consciousness, and as such, only accessed through daydreams – utopian thinking. It exists already within mental capacity, but is so often outside of the limit of conscious thinking, that this “not-yet” goes unnoticed, undetected due to the “repressedness and forgottenness” of the unconscious. To put it more simply, the utopian thinking that Bloch advocates for is necessary in modern life exists in the “not-yet,” but the “not-yet” can rarely be accessed in the slumber of psychological repression enforced by capitalist labor exploitation and class divide. Furthermore, in congruence with Benjamin's 1934 address, Bloch insists that the *Noch-Nicht* is the:

psychological birthplace of the New. And it keeps itself preconscious above all because in fact there is within it a content of consciousness which has not yet become wholly manifest...in all productive states which are giving birth to what has never been there.<sup>46</sup>

The productive force of Bloch's preconscious not-yet signifies his revolutionary tactic as an author, philosopher and producer. Bloch is not interested in reaffirming false hopes with the intention of leading on a public, the working force as well as the intellectuals. Just as Benjamin argues for the producer to change the means of production in order to transform the industrial apparatus of culture, Bloch reconceptualizes hope, revolution, and the “New” through the justification of dreaming, day or night.

What distinguishes Bloch's philosophy of utopian hope from an “empty promise” is indeed that his philosophy makes no promise of future success.

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<sup>45</sup> Bloch, 116.

<sup>46</sup> Bloch, 116.

Instead, the *principle* of hope suggests that utopian promises are not necessarily made in theoretical political situations or speeches, but enacted in the aesthetics of theory. That is to say that the utopian promise of happiness, or the [*promesse du bonheur*] which was originally coined by Stendhal and later repurposed by Adorno, is in itself the aesthetic promise that change is not an inexplicable phenomenon, but theory – Bloch's theory – can create the perspective that leads to change. Bloch's idea of utopia is not a promise, but rather a reevaluation of what it means to dream socially. It argues that utopia could never be a promise, because a promise exists as an exterior motive of improvement, and because, for Bloch, utopia is not a question of possibility but a matter of fulfillment in the “Now.”

Reinforcing Bloch's utopian thinking as a concrete conceptual process of becoming, as suggested with the contingency of the “not-yet,” I turn back to Thompson, who explains Bloch's utopianism as an autopoietic system that is always already in motion. He claims that Bloch's daydreaming, “contains within it shards of past and present utopian images – abstractions – that we carry forward with us on our journey but that also carry us forward...to become what we might be...the process that will fulfill our desires is one that remains by necessity entirely invisible to us.”<sup>47</sup> That is to argue, that though Bloch's utopianism is defined as “concrete” and therefore steadfast, it needs the realistic visions from imaginable abstractions to sustain its uncharted course.

### **Section Three, Mastering the Flood: Epic Theater and the *Verfremdungseffekt***

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<sup>47</sup> Thompson and Zizek, 13.



To contrast Bloch's formation of hope in the process of becoming, I turn to Brecht who, rather than explicitly announcing his theory as utopian, renders his plays "utopian" through the concept of audience estrangement [*Verfremdung*]. Brecht can be considered a "utopian thinker," in the interpretation of his *Verfremdung* theory, and this comes to light in his 1947 manifesto on epic theater, titled *Kleines Organun für das Theater*. Keeping Marcuse's unique definition of "utopian speculation" in mind, Brecht's construction of a new theatrical aesthetic, "fit for the scientific age," is indeed a form of utopian thinking, and how that thinking is a critique of capitalist production. The text provides a step-by-step explanation of this *Verfremdungseffekt*, which is a crucial point of his conception of epic theater.

In the short yet direct manifesto, Brecht calls for a reexamination of social relations that, he claims, have contributed to the stagnation of social movements through diluted entertainment and exploitative labor of the working class. He articulates his views on industrial technology, the division of labor in a capitalist production economy, and the purpose of socialist theater in the ever-looming shadow of Hitler's reign. Having lived in transitory exile for the majority of the 30s and 40s, beginning in Prague in 1933 and ending in the U.S. in 1947, Brecht gained perspective as an outsider of Germany in the midst of Hitler's siege. From afar he experienced the transition from the Weimar Republic to the Third Reich. He used distance as a tool, through which he came to understand the aesthetic and political predicament in Germany as impermanent, which is to say, that the period of darkness and delusion could be overcome.

Distance, due to his exile and his belief in the possibility of changing society, gave Brecht's approach to theater – and his utopian thinking as well – a [*Wissenschaftlich*<sup>48</sup>] or scientific character, which distinguishes him from Bloch. In his comparative study “Brecht in Context,” John Willett explains why Brecht is always paired up with science. He writes, “as [Brecht] moved away from Expressionism he began learning about the social mechanism in a quite cold and [*sachlich*] objective way,”<sup>54</sup> connoting that the word “scientific” applies to Brecht not in the traditional sense of studying the natural world, but in the sense that objective scrutiny in art certainly outweighed embellishment and popularized exaggeration in his mind. Willett's use of “*sachlich*,” which if literally translated means “thing-like,” refines the word “scientific” to mean that Brecht was plainly focused on the objectification, the manifestation, of his ideals on the stage. Brecht's theater must be referred to as “scientific,” in this context, because its aim is to reveal the suffering of society's working class with detached distance.

Willett demystifies Brecht as a revolutionary participant in the movement against capitalism, demarcating his involvement in the Communist Party and the Left Socialist Party in the 1920s. Willett also sets Brecht, in his days before *Die Dreigroschenoper*, apart from the revolutionary storm of the Expressionist movement. Instead he casts Brecht in a fairly demure light, claiming that Brecht “was not so traumatically disillusioned when the new republic left [revolutionary hopes] unfulfilled.”<sup>55</sup> Willett further indicates through his perception of Brecht's artistry that Brecht was deceptively political – his plays and poetry spouted chants

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<sup>48</sup> I should note that the German word term for scientific, *Wissenschaftlich*, does not connote the same as it does in

of aggressive change in bourgeoisie culture, but Brecht himself was a part of that societal tier, and thus his literature did not express a “serious political or economic analysis” of the Weimar Republic.<sup>56</sup> Willett continues to doubt Brecht's revolutionary involvement in the movement against Capitalism, arguing that Brecht never “romanticized his fellow Germans” in a way that would influence him to create these dramatic characters infused only with the will to topple a suppressive, capital-oriented system. Willett insists that Brecht's political agency came in 1929, after the first performance of *Die Dreigroschenoper* and the Wall Street crash. However, Willett argues that Brecht's politics ventured in the direction of anti-party and anti-movement. He writes, “as [Brecht] moved away from Expressionism he began learning about the social mechanism in a quite cold and *sachlich*, objective way.”<sup>49</sup>

Willett portrays Brecht always as an outlier of the extreme core of leftist ideology in the Weimar Republic. When his contemporaries created an all-inclusive political standpoint based in Expressionism, Brecht was quick to oppose their foundation through strict critical reasoning. Brecht is wholly an individual in his attempts to bring what Willett calls “poetic justice,” in that he disassociates himself from the umbrella of a collective. Despite the fact that he agrees with *Der politische Dichter* who are the engineers of Expressionism, he becomes just as, if

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Breaking the word into its constituent parts, *wissen* is the verb “to know,” so adding the suffixes *schaftlich* to the end connotes both academic and “scientific.”

54 Willett, 80.

55 Willett, 73.

56 Willett, 78.

<sup>49</sup> Willett, 81.

not more, political as his contemporaries. Through his extremism Brecht again sets himself apart from the collective movement.

“Poetic justice” is indeed the side-effect of Brecht's work, even though for him, the most important thing is for the audience to realize their oppressed social conditions and subsequently see them as a necessarily modifiable part of human history. Brecht writes, “if we play works dealing with our own time as though they were historical, then perhaps the circumstances under which [the viewer] himself acts will strike him equally as odd; and this is where the critical attitude begins.”<sup>50</sup> It is from this historical vantage point that Brecht envisions the possibility of massive change among popular art and politics. The *Verfremdungseffekt* shakes the viewer – or reader – into the consideration of transformation. This is seen in *Die Dreigroschenoper* with ballads such as “Über die Unsicherheit menschlicher Verhältnisse,” and “Seeräuber-Jenny,” when the Polly, one of the main female leads, and the Peachums outwardly sing about humanity's failures. These ballads, which reveal the sheer hopelessness of the upper class Brecht satirized in the play, will be discussed in more detail in the following section.

However, it is not an easy step from 'A' to 'B', from one constrained perception of society to a fully formed vision through which conditions are changed. There are steps and processes with strict guidelines that, if followed, will create the kind of theater that will subsequently, as Brecht writes, “employ and

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<sup>50</sup> Brecht, Bertolt, and John Willett. *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1978. Print. 190.

encourage those thoughts and feelings which help transform [human relations].”<sup>51</sup>  
But what is it that Brecht believes should be changed?

Brecht claims that aesthetics are at stake of being lost to a “depraved and parasitic class,”<sup>52</sup> which can be interpreted as well-off citizens. He argues that the traditional role of theater in the superstructure has been abused and diluted by the upper tier of society, insofar as theater has been a passive pleasure that was “universally accepted” yet not challenged by viewers, or even critics.<sup>53</sup> He writes that a play’s “lack of any worthwhile content was a sign of decadence,” inasmuch as the less the story told the more enjoyment it would provide. It is not just a simple claim that this lost theater was boring, but that it out-rightly disregarded the problems of real life: separation of rich and poor, replacement of livelihoods with the ease of technology, and the exploitation of the worker. Brecht calls this dying theater, “the tasteless rehashing of empty visual or spiritual palliatives, for the noble logic of the multiplication table,”<sup>54</sup> which is to say that theater, in his eyes, had become a meaningless regurgitation of social life that left no room for interpretation, no room for social critique, when it was most necessary.

Nonetheless, Brecht insists that, despite the numbing of the public through exploitative working conditions and pleasing plays, theater is for pleasure. Brecht sees a disconnect between human interrelationships and the relationship humans, specifically humans living in strained capitalist working conditions, have to theater. He argues that, though the new sciences of the early to mid-twentieth

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<sup>51</sup> Brecht and Willett, 190.

<sup>52</sup> Brecht and Willett, 179.

<sup>53</sup> Brecht and Willett, 179.

<sup>54</sup> Brecht and Willett, 179.

century opened up the possibility to enhance the comfort of human lives, “it cannot be said that their [new sciences'] spirit determines everything we do.”<sup>55</sup> That is to say that theater must pave its own path in the wake of scientific discoveries and social adjustments, so that it is not a reflection of technological progression, but an avenue for social critique.

Brecht asks the question, “What is that productive attitude in the face of nature and of society which we children of a scientific age would like to take up pleasurably in our theatre?”<sup>56</sup> This goes back to Marcuse's speculative question as well: how does one satisfy one's needs without perpetuating one's “dependence on an exploitative apparatus”?<sup>65</sup> That is to say: how can a playwright create a drama that pleases the masses in need of entertainment, but also encourages them to realize their unacceptable and transformable living conditions imposed by the capitalist system?

The German word *Verfremdung* comes from the root “*fremd*,” which means strange. Adding the prefix “*ver*” onto the root means the estrangement of something. As stated above, Brecht approaches epic theater with a retrospective attitude. However, while having a retrospective attitude creates wise foresight, it is not enough to bring out the raw impulses Brecht says are necessary to influence the movement of masses. Brecht aims for a style of theater that socially and psychologically isolates the audiences to the point of discomfort, otherwise known as theatrical alienation. He explains the *Verfremdungseffekt* as a theater

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<sup>55</sup> Brecht and Willett, 184.

<sup>56</sup> Brecht and Willett, 185. 65  
Marcuse, 4.

which allows us to recognize its subject, but at the same time make it seem unfamiliar...The new alienations are only designed to free socially conditioned phenomena from that stamp of familiarity which protects them against our grasp today...This technique allows the theater to make use in its representations of the new social scientific method known as dialectical materialism. In order to unearth society's laws of motion this method treats social situations as processes, and traces out all their inconsistencies.<sup>57</sup>

Recalling Brecht's "scientific" characteristic, he uses theater to aid in a dialectically materialistic critique of social "processes," that, similar to Marcuse, diagnoses the social situation as detrimental to the mental, physical and spiritual health of mankind. Brecht thinks in terms of dialectical materialism, in this sense that social institutions and historical sequences can be broken down into constituent parts and closely analyzed in terms of beneficial or non-beneficial function. In other words, this school of thought helps to "alienate the familiar"<sup>58</sup> and to make clear what is *wrong* in the social system. The audience witnesses a model of their world on stage that is both familiar enough for them to remain interested in, yet *fremd* enough to create an estranging atmosphere. Similar to Freud's *Unheimlich*, the *Verfremdungseffekt* reminds the viewer of home, but it is an othered home that is distanced from the audience, alienating them to a point from which they cannot find cathartic relief in the play itself.

The *Verfremdungseffekt* is not an attempt to scare the viewers by showing them the harsh injustices in *Wahrheit*. Rather, the audience should be moved in such a way that incites action; the need for change and the need for movement. Bloch notes that "Brecht makes the decision sharp and deliberate in his directing

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<sup>57</sup> Brecht and Willett, 192-193.

<sup>58</sup> Brecht and Willett, 192.

and in the course of action, with the result that it always had to extend beyond the evening at the theater.”<sup>59</sup> Brecht is not so self-indulgent to believe that the work itself is the agent of social change, but that each work influences readers and spectators to physically manifest revolutionary passions outside of the theater. Theoretically, the spectator transforms that fervor into political action. At this point, the work of “theory” is, in a sense, done, and the reception of change towards a utopian future rests in the hands of the audience and the playwright; the working class and the bourgeoisie.

With Brecht’s theatrical schema laid out in all its designs, one could go as far as to say that Brecht is beyond utopian thinking, and already taking action towards the need of an improved social and economic system. It would be difficult to say that Brecht is not thinking utopically, if utopian thinking consists of imagining the structure of society in a way that is mutually beneficial for all. The basis of epic theater and the *Verfremdungseffekt* is to realize the dehumanizing effects of a capitalist production economy as well as the subdued nature of a society under a dictator. It is not that Brecht is only for the revolution of social organization – in fact, rebellion and revolution is not all that Brecht is concerned about – but he, like Marcuse – and Bloch, as we will see – is concerned with the stagnation of the human life-process and experience. He writes, “[One] does not have to stay the way he is now, nor does he have to be seen only as he is now, but also as he might become.”<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Bloch, Mecklenburg, Zipes, 225.

<sup>60</sup> Brecht and Willett, 193.



This quote reveals Brecht's belief in the latent potentiality of an individual as well as society at large. No one or thing is ever done "becoming." Drawing from Brecht's historical perspective once more, he indeed emphasizes the impermanence of social conditions. He dwells on the fact that conditions can be transformed into whatever the society elects, which may provide both pleasure and a means to critique that pleasure. Brecht's epic theater is meant to isolate the humanistic problem at hand, that which is contemporary to him, "that is why the theater must alienate what it shows."<sup>61</sup> The difference between Brecht's approach to moving towards a social utopia and Bloch's approach to utopian dreaming is marked, yet Brecht edges closer to Bloch's conception of utopian thinking through this idea of always "becoming."

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<sup>61</sup> Brecht and Willett, 193.

#### Section Four: Human Exploitation in *Die Dreigroschenoper*

*Doch leider hat man bisher nicht vernommen, Dass etwas recht war und dann war's auch so. Wer hätte nicht gern einmal Recht bekommen, Doch die Verhältnisse, sie sind nicht so.*

*-Die Dreigroschenoper, Act I, Scene III*

As we have seen, Brecht and Bloch converge in their interpretation of the present, the “Now,” as a dialectic condition in flux. Both authors posit a historical perspective that plays a role in the way they argue for the impermanence of the capitalist social and economic structure. With these foundations in mind, I explore the utopian tendencies, formally a capitalist critique, of Brecht's 1928 play *Die Dreigroschenoper*, with the following question still in mind: is Brecht's play following in the footsteps of Benjamin's *Produktionverhältnisse* address? As Benjamin writes, does Brecht's work turn him and his audience into “collaborators” engaged in transforming the production process of art?<sup>62</sup> Through the philosophical and theoretical lens of Brecht's epic theater and Bloch's utopian thinking, I consider these questions in the analysis of *Die Dreigroschenoper*.

In a public letter published in *Anbruch*, Vienna, January 1929, Kurt Weill, the opera's composer, admitted matter-of-factly that the artistic aim of *Die Dreigroschenoper* was, “the abandonment of 'art for art's sake', the reaction against individualism in art...and the simplification of musical means of expression,”<sup>63</sup> exposing his and Brecht's adoption of a *Neue Sachlichkeit* aesthetic approach to theater, with a will to stage a play with strong political motives. According to

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<sup>62</sup> Benjamin, 98.

<sup>63</sup> Weill, Kurt. ed. Drew, David. “Über die Dreigroschenoper,” *Ausgewählte Schriften*, Suhrkamp: Frankfurt 1975. 54.

Weill's quote, *Die Dreigroschenoper* has a political agenda to reveal the censure of a society in a Fascist nation. However, the central influence in the play is capital gain. Brecht's play captures the "apparatus" which, as Benjamin claimed, is the duty of left authors who wish to collaborate with the working class against capitalism.

*Die Dreigroschenoper*, read through the lens of Bloch's principle of hope and Brecht's dramatic techniques, poses a world that is subconsciously consumed by a capitalist system to the point that the characters can no longer have "genuine" human interactions, but have reverted to economizing their deceptive relationships with one another. Polly is a prized "*Segelschiff*" in which both her parents and Macheath have invested time and money. Macheath abuses his close friendship with Officer Brown by using their bond to keep himself and his bandits out of jail. Peachum's business venture is based on the literal exploitation of human misery, that is, the poor and homeless. Furthermore, the opera exudes a sense of what Bloch would call hopelessness, which is seen in the jaded songs "*Über die Unsicherheit menschlicher Verhältnisse*," and "*Seeräuber-Jenny*." The only saving grace of the play is the stark and necessary interruption of Mac's execution. From the start the play connotes an air of deception, beginning with the renowned ballad of Macheath, „*Und der Haifisch, der hat Zähne,/ Und die trägt er im Gesicht,/ Und der Macheath, der hat ein Messer,/ Doch das Messer sieht man nicht.*“<sup>64</sup> The song sets the two-faced tone, reinforcing throughout the play that things are not what they seem. When the audience can clearly and unsurprisingly see "*der Haifisch, der hat Zähne*," the shark, who has teeth, they do not notice the more

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<sup>64</sup> Brecht, Bertolt. *Die Dreigroschenoper*. Suhrkamp Basisbibliothek: Frankfurt am Main, 1963, Print. 10.

dangerous “*der Macheath, der hat ein Messer,*” Macheath, who has a knife. The lyric implies that Macheath, the beloved bourgeois bandit and somewhat of a Don Juan, may seem superficially dapper and well-intentioned among those who dote on him, yet is ready to metaphorically pull a knife on anyone close to him to benefit himself economically. As Brecht writes of Macheath's character, he dislikes, “the shedding of blood except where strictly necessary – for the sake of business. This reduction of bloodshed to a minimum, this economising, is a business principle.”<sup>65</sup> Indeed Macheath is a businessman who, though is a self-pronounced bandit and fights against the rich by stealing from them, survives off his bourgeois habits, which includes being a wellknown customer at the “Turnbridge” brothel.

Macheath's criminalized behavior, though significant in the play's overall context, distracts from the character who is most representative of Bloch's “occluded subject” and has “conformed to a false reality”: Jonathan Peachum. Peachum's occlusion comes from not the fact that he is a classic miser, in fact he disregards money as much as anything else in his life, but that he is distinctly unaware of his powerlessness and further tries to exploit human sympathy under the illusion that no one notices. Peachum explains his business tactic to Filch, the first beggar to appear in his shop, *„Das sind die fünf Grundtypen des Elends, die geeignet sind, das menschliche Herz zu rühren. Der Anblick solcher Typen versetzt den Menschen in jenen unnatürlichen Zustand, in welchem er bereit ist, Geld herzugeben.“*<sup>66</sup> Peachum casually describes the “five types of Misery” which puts a

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<sup>65</sup> Brecht, Bertolt. Trans. Mannheim, Ralph; Willett, John. *The Threepenny Opera*, Arcade Publishing: New York, 1994, Print. 92.

<sup>66</sup> Brecht, *Die Dreigroschenoper*, 15.

man “into the unnatural state where he is willing to part with money.”<sup>67</sup> Again it is not that Peachum is necessarily financially covetous, but in a strictly business-like manner recognizes the opportunity to capitalize on the emotions of a money-centric public. As Brecht writes of Peachum's character, “his crime lies in his conception of the world,” and he mistrusts, “anything that might inspire hope.”<sup>68</sup> Peachum is a painstakingly candid representation of Bloch's “occluded subject,” who, according to Bloch, is both the antithesis of Bloch's conception of “hope” and is unaware of the fact that, as he makes a commodity of human suffering, he is at the same time unknowingly consumed by the system at hand. In other words, Peachum believes he is doing mankind a good deed by putting the poor to beg at his expense, living by the guidelines of the bible, but he is indeed a mere cog perpetuating the distinct class divide. Just before he lines up his army of beggars to parade through the Queen's coronation to “demonstrate human misery,” Peachum says:

*Aber ich habe herausgebracht, dass die Besitzenden der Erde das Elend zwar anstiften können, aber sehen können sie das Elend nicht. Denn es sind Schwächlinge und Dummköpfe, genau wie ihr, wenn sie gleich zu fressen haben, bis zum Ende ihrer Tage, und ihren Fußboden mit Butter einschmieren können, dass auch die Brosamen, die von Tischen fallen, noch fett werden, so können sie doch nicht mit Gleichmut einen Mann sehen, der vor Hunger umfällt, freilich muss es vor ihrem Haus sein, dass er umfällt. (Act III, Scene VII)<sup>69</sup>*

Peachum's blunt criticism of the 'ruling' class signifies both his protest against class divide as well as his participation in that process. In the text as well as the actual performance of *Die Dreigroschenoper*, Peachum's character presents the

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<sup>67</sup> Brecht, Mannheim, Willett.

<sup>68</sup> Brecht, Mannheim, Willett, 91.

<sup>69</sup> Brecht, *Die Dreigroschenoper*, 70.

corporeal contradiction, the indecision of modern times according to Bloch, as he is under the illusion that he is doing the right thing, yet couldn't be more passive and wavering in his position towards labor exploitation and class divide. This capturing of realistic ambivalence is directly in line with Brecht's approach to theater and the *Verfremdungseffekt*. In *Kleines Organon für das Theater* Brecht writes, "for character and all must not grow on the audience so much as strike it."<sup>70</sup> Brecht's strategy to "alienate the familiar" indeed comes into play here, as it abstracts a situational Blochian "darkness" and "traces out [its] inconsistencies,"<sup>71</sup> which hinge on shock rather than catharsis. Peachum's presumptuous attitude mirrors the certain uncertainty of the everyday, making audiences aware of their own inconsistencies as voyeurs of his weak character.

While Peachum is arguably the most representative of the "occluded subject" through his economizing of human emotion and agony, Frau Peachum and Macheath too exploit what would be their personal relationships, but rather are opportunities to create wealth. The less extreme example is Frau Peachum's disapproval of her daughter, Polly, marrying Macheath. Rather than being concerned that her daughter married the most wanted criminal in the city, Frau Peachum exclaims:

*Geheiratet? Erst behängt man sie hinten und vorn mit Kleidern und Hüten und Handschuhen und Sonnenschirmen, und wenn sie soviel gekostet hat wie ein Segelschiff, dann wirft sie sich selber auf den Mist wie eine faule Gurke. Hast du wirklich geheiratet?*<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Brecht, 197.

<sup>71</sup> Brecht, 193.

<sup>72</sup> Brecht, *Die Dreigroschenoper*, 38.

Equating Polly to the expense of a sailboat, "*ein Segelschiff*," Frau Peachum feels remorse not in the fact that she has lost her daughter to a notorious bandit, but the fact that the "*Kleidern und Hüten und Handschuhen und Sonnenschirmen*," which she has invested in her daughter have gone to waste. The institution of marriage itself has in effect stolen these goods from Frau Peachum, making the dresses and hats property of Macheath rather than the family, and Frau Peachum now feels it as an economic loss. Polly has thrown herself into a marriage like "*eine faule Gurke*," like a lazy cucumber.

In the same vein, recalling Macheath's tendency to take advantage of his personal relations, he views his marriage to Polly as a tactful business move. As Peachum turns Mac into the police for both the marriage of his daughter as well as his organized crimes, Mac entrusts his "business" to Polly, which indeed is not just "business" but the responsibility of organizing robberies. Before Mac flees town, he instructs Polly how to manage his gang, who she should fire, who she should keep on, and he also includes a detailed account of how Polly should carry out her days. He commands to Polly, "*Stehst um sieben Uhr auf, wäscht dich, badest einmal und so weiter*,"<sup>73</sup> giving her a complete schedule of her duties as a wife of a fugitive. Despite the fact that he is leaving his behind beloved crime organization to evade imprisonment, he does not forget to instruct his newlywed wife how to live without him. As Brecht writes of Mac's character, "he sees his marriages as insurance for his business,"<sup>74</sup> because he often needs to flee town. He indeed views

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<sup>73</sup> Brecht, *Die Dreigroschenoper*, 49.

<sup>74</sup> Brecht, Mannheim, Willett, 93.

Polly as an asset, a collection among his many other women yet to be revealed, that will continue to benefit him economically and domestically.

The exploitation of human relations depicted throughout the play accumulates into a rather apocalyptic picture, which is further revealed in the ballad "*Über die Unsicherheit menschlicher Verhältnisse*," in which Jonathan Peachum, Frau Peachum and Polly sing, "*Da hat er eben leider recht./ Die Welt ist arm, der Mensch ist schlecht./ Wer wollt auf Erden nicht ein Paradies?/ Doch die Verhältnisse, gestatten sie's?*"<sup>75</sup> Each character unabashedly has an idea of what constitutes a paradise: Polly simply wants her romantic, faithful marriage; Peachum sings for bread on the table and happiness for all; Frau Peachum wants what is best for her daughter and for herself to be a good mother. Nonetheless, despite all their idealistic yet absolutely attainable wishes, everything seems to be failing in their eyes. "The world is poor, and man's a shit,"<sup>85</sup> translate Ralph Mannheim and John Willett in the 1994 English edition. The sweet life is gone and the world is worsening, plays the ballad.

It is arguably the most glaringly cynical ballad of the opera, yet for good reason, as it directly shows how Brecht situates the idea of utopia within the play – or rather, does the opposite by depicting a downward-spiraling apocalypse of modernity. Rather than explicitly preaching how the world might be a better place, Brecht uncovers the contradictions and failures of modern institutions through the dissatisfaction of these disillusioned characters: the law, marriage, business, as

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<sup>75</sup> Brecht, *Die Dreigroschenoper*, 47. 85  
Brecht, Mannheim,  
Willett, 33.



well as the falsely promised *Zufriedenheit*. Peachum sings, “*Das Recht des Menschen ist auf dieser Erden,/ Da er doch nur kurz lebt, glücklich zu sein,*”<sup>76</sup> subtly revealing that, though the right of all humans is to be paradisiacally happy, clearly something blocks them from that state of being. No one, not even the fictionalized bourgeoisie, is content with the state of things, as the Peachum family continues to sing until the close of the first act, “*Und das ist eben schade,/ Das ist das riesig Fade./ Und darum ist es nichts damit,/ Und darum ist das alles Kitt.*”<sup>77</sup> Without hesitation, the family nearly shouts into the faces of the audience that everything is, essentially, “a load of crap,”<sup>78</sup> leaving any kind of resolve in the first half of the play unimaginable.

While the world-deprecating tone in “*Über die Unsicherheit menschlicher Verhältnisse*” infuses the play with cynicism, it is exactly this kind of attitude Bloch and Brecht work against. The strong-willed doubt present in *Die Dreigroschenoper* leaves the staged world a dark and bare place to be a part of, yet the extremity of its hopelessness is necessary. Bloch would argue that in these aesthetic moments of doubt, or fictionalized “periods of darkness,” the beauty of utopia becomes all the more real. Similarly, Brecht functions this ballad such that it shocks the audience in the song’s and the singer’s ability to tell the truth without subduing the spectators to the whim of identifiable emotion.

Brecht explains the intent of the *Verfremdungseffekt* in contradistinction to dramatic theater in “Theater for Pleasure or Theater for Instruction.” He claims

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<sup>76</sup> Brecht *Die Dreigroschenoper*, 45

<sup>77</sup> Brecht, *Die Dreigroschenoper*, 46

<sup>78</sup> Brecht, Willett, Mannheim 34

when a spectator reacts to dramatic theater they think “Yes, I have felt like that too – Just like me – It's only natural – It'll never change,” while when a spectator reacts to epic theater under influence from the *Verfremdungseffekt*, they might think, “I'd never have thought that – That's not the way – It's got to stop – The sufferings of this man appal [sic] me, because they are so unnecessary.”<sup>79</sup> “*Über die Unsicherheit menschlicher Verhältnisse*” makes a profound statement about Brecht's contemporary society: that people eat stones rather than bread, that “means are meagre and the morals low,” and that people should “aim high instead of low,/ But [their] condition's such this can't be so.” The ballad reveals the listless state of static social conditions.

In Willett's and Mannheim's translation of “*Über die Unsicherheit menschlicher Verhältnisse*,” it seems as if the *schlecht* conditions create the “low morale,” but Brecht's original 1955 edition reads differently: “*Wir wären gut - anstatt so roh,/ Doch die Verhältnisse, sie sind nicht so.*” The original reveals, in a word, the shift from *gut* to *roh* is changeable because it points out that *die Verhältnisse* are not just not there yet. Rather than “this can't be so,” the original says [*sie sind nicht so*] it is not so currently. Therefore, the original lyric can be interpreted so that, rather than the conditions holding back one from “aiming high” as in the translation, it is indeed the opposite. “Low morale” holds the Peachums back from “aiming high.” That is to say, that this depressive state of extreme human exploitation is due to the inactive optimism.

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<sup>79</sup> Brecht, Bertolt. ed. Willett, John. “Theater for Pleasure or Theater for Instruction,” *Brecht on Theater: The Development of an Aesthetic*. Suhrkamp Verlag: Frankfurt am Main, 1964, Print. 71.

While Mac exploits the labors of Polly, and Polly exploits the labors of his gang, and the gang exploits the riches of the wealthy, and the wealthy—including Peachum—exploit the sufferings of the poor, not surprisingly “morale” is deeply sunken in the foggy “abyss” in which no one will take responsibility for their actions or their ability to think beyond their current state of affairs.

## Section Five, Aesthetics of Utopia: A Meeting Point at *Seeräuber Jenny*

Returning to Benjamin's question posed in the introduction, which challenged literature's position within the conditions of production of his time, it can be argued that one author answered it more directly than the other. The discrepancies between Brecht's *sachlich* approach to theater and Bloch's theory of utopia are salient: Brecht tested for discernible results by staging social experiments that pushed the norms of theater production; Bloch searched for the intangible authenticity of human existence, which he feels is attainable yet hidden, but blocked by cultural suppression. This leaves the impression that Brecht's politicized aesthetics were created in response to Benjamin's question, while Bloch's overtly utopian aesthetics left the question of praxis unaddressed.

This is admittedly a strong argument, one which Christina Ujma advocates in her article "*Der strenge und der schwärmende Ton*" in which she juxtaposes Brecht's and Bloch's political and aesthetic involvement in [*die Gruppe 1925*] as well as other anticapitalist, anti-fascist organizations during the Weimar Republic through the Third Reich.

Ujma quotes Dolf Sternbeger when she observantly writes, „*Bloch hofft auf Erlösung. Brecht pocht auf Bewährung.*”<sup>80</sup> Sternbeger's poignant classification of the two reveals both Bloch and Brecht to have a fraction of uncertainty mixed in with their solidly defined praxis of aesthetic revolution and social improvement.

Ujma notes both author's inconsistencies as well as their genius as a collaborating duo. Nonetheless, she also sets Bloch and Brecht apart when she describes an

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<sup>80</sup> Ujma, Christina. Trans. Long, Jonathan. “Der strenge und der schwärmende Ton,” *The German Monitor*, Vol. 41, 1998. 33-48. 41.

interaction they had at the Writers' Conference in the Defense of Culture in Paris in 1935, just two years before Benjamin's speech:

Bloch, who was so concerned with modern culture and Popular Front, could hardly have sympathised with Brecht's conference paper with its peremptory demand that the discussion be about not culture or barbarism but the property relations [conditions of production], since fascism could otherwise be neither combatted nor analysed.<sup>81</sup>

Ujma shows, though Bloch and Brecht concur that something must change, the two radical writers have different priorities, and would decidedly choose different roads to reach their artistic, cultural and political goals.

Wayne Hudson pinpoints Bloch's aversion to realism, something that Brecht insisted to include, when he writes that Bloch, “argued for a greater representation of the world in philosophy, and emphasised [sic] the limits of all human rationalisms.”<sup>82</sup> Bloch was an advocate of abandoning logic in order to let the “not-yet” of the future fulfill itself in the present consciousness. Hudson explains the theoretical steps Bloch took to arrive at this conclusion when he writes that Bloch, “combined a hermeneutical analysis of the apparently 'irrational' experiences of the subject with a utopian realism.”<sup>83</sup> Unlike Brecht, who used the candidness of reality to push his plays into a more visceral realm of experience to shock his audience into political action, Bloch shies away from the real only to let his utopian 'not-yet' consciousness drive his present.

I reiterate the point that Bloch and Brecht are two provocative and radically different writers. Brecht was concerned for a literary work in relation to the

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<sup>81</sup> Ujma, 41.

<sup>82</sup> Hudson, 22.

<sup>83</sup> Hudson, 23.

<sup>84</sup> Ujma, 41.

exploitative conditions of production, making his ideological point of contention with capitalism. As a self-identified writer of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* movement, Brecht used that artistic tradition to expose his audience to a subversive class-conscience. Bloch is an anti-capitalist as well, but had a concern for the cultural decay and “barbarism”<sup>94</sup> he witnessed under a fascist regime. Bloch is known for his Expressionistic style, making even his philosophical text a work of aesthetic notability. At first glance it seems that Brecht and Benjamin are working on the same problem, which is to undermine the means of artistic production and in doing so challenge intelligentsia, while Bloch is writing to subvert not just production and economic forces, but the basis of human ethics as well.

I argue, however, that Bloch and Brecht are not so different, though they may be attempting to solve the same problem through distinguishable means. Ujma points out their irremovable differences, yet fails to note how their aesthetic approaches can be interpreted in their likeness just as well as their distinctions from one another. Through the lens of Marcuse's “utopian speculation,” utopian thinking, Bloch's and Brecht's differing aesthetic conceptions of social progression meet. To justify Marcuse's utopian thinking, and especially Bloch's, Theodor Adorno's configuration of the *promesse du bonheur*, which was mentioned earlier, becomes useful in explaining the promise of utopia.

The *promesse du bonheur*, which Adorno originally adapted from Stendhal, says that “art thanks existence by accentuating what in existence prefigures

utopia,”<sup>84</sup> implying that art presupposes notions of utopia that already exist in reality. Adorno argues that art is primarily made to evoke pleasure, which is its promise of happiness, however, at the moment “the pleasures that lie nearest to hand are not authentic or natural; they are contaminated by capitalist and consumerist ideology.”<sup>85</sup> Art cannot evoke true pleasure, because art depends on an authentic reality to inspire creation, and cyclically art should inspire the viewer or subject who experiences it with the same grade of authenticity. However, when reality becomes polluted by inauthentic, exploitative production – as Brecht, Benjamin, Bloch and Adorno all argue it has within the systems of fascism and capitalism – then art can no longer reflect happiness and give that pleasure.

The *promesse du bonheur* is aesthetic, beautiful, in its definition of happiness not just as a feeling of *Glück*, but rather happiness in terms of organization, which is where Bloch's and Brecht's aesthetic conceptions of utopia align. Beauty in the context of the *promesse du bonheur* is, “a harmonious arrangement of the whole, and deems this is an appropriate analogy for a less obvious claim that the good or happiness consists in the harmonious arrangement of the whole polis.”<sup>86</sup> That is to say, in Brecht's utopian motives as a reactionary playwright, he hopes that the outcome of epic theater is indeed a better organized, more equally structured polity. Bloch falls into this category of utopian thinking as well. Because Bloch's theory is both Expressionistic and purely utopian, his concern for cultural survival – revival – in opposition to the fascist regime must

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<sup>84</sup> Finlayson, James Gordon. “The Artwork and the Promesse du Bonheur in Adorno,” last updated 2012. <http://jamesgordonfinlayson.net/the-artwork-and-the-promesse-du-bonheur-in-adorno/>.

<sup>85</sup> Finlayson

<sup>86</sup> Finlayson

extend all the way to production. In the same vein as Adorno, Bloch believes that pleasure has become inauthentic in the fog of capitalism and fascism, therefore the *production* of that culture must change, and that begins with the systems that drive cultural production.

If art can no longer offer the *promesse du bonheur* through the reflection of utopian tendencies in existence, then how can Brecht's *Die Dreigroschenoper* and Bloch's *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* inspire reaction against suppression and fundamental revolution? That is, to challenge Benjamin's question, what *promesse* does a text have to offer when it cannot offer authentic happiness? Adorno offers an answer that is further displayed in Brecht's epic theater. Adorno reveals that, "Because any happiness that one might take from or find in what exists is false, a mere substitute, *art has to break its promise in order to keep it.*"<sup>87</sup> This means that, if life inspires art, which is supposed to be the aesthetic promise of happiness, yet art must also reflect the utopian trends present in existence; when society is not happy, or not authentically happy, art itself cannot promise happiness through the mirroring of society because there are no utopian impulses to be found. Art must improve upon that reflection by showing the viewer that reality is inauthentic by being inauthentic itself. Brecht's epic theater does not inspire hope the same way Bloch's philosophy might, but it does promise an unhappy [*unglücklich*] society, unless viewers take responsibility of those conditions – the conditions of production – and willingly, forcefully decide to act.

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<sup>87</sup> Finlayson



In many scenes of the *Die Dreigroschenoper* the inverse logic of the *promesse du bonheur* is reflected. One such scene takes place after Polly finishes her infamous *Seeräuber Jenny* song, which ends in a massacre helmed by Jenny, who is not an actual character in the play. Polly concludes the unforgiving song and one of Mac's gang member's shouts, "Very nice. Cute, eh?" to which Mac replies, "What do you mean nice? It's not nice, you idiot! It's art, it's not nice."<sup>88</sup> This line depicts the breaking of the *promesse du bonheur* by self-referencing the *Verfremdungseffekt*. The effect is not to numb the viewer with false pleasure, but to wake the viewer in order to reveal that art cannot be "nice" when that "niceness" or that happiness is not reflected in real life, in a life "contaminated by capitalist and consumerist ideology."<sup>89</sup>

Indeed, the song of *Seeräuber Jenny* pushes the boundaries of what Bloch called an "anarchic" utopia. Polly sings, "But one of these evenings there will be explosions from the harbour,/ And they'll ask: what kind of bang was that?/ And they'll see me as I stand beside the window/ And they'll say: what has she got to smile at?"<sup>90</sup> With no small measure of revenge and rebellion, Polly imitates the poor dishwasher she saw singing this song. Ironically Polly, with her new spouse and higher social status, sings the ballad out of pure wit and want of attention, which takes the song out of its original context – a plea for help – and puts it into a more perfunctory performance: Polly's plea for false laughter. Ujma writes that, in Bloch's critique of the play, he, "sees the appearance of an image of the Redeemer,

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<sup>88</sup> Brecht, *The Threepenny Opera*, 21.

<sup>89</sup> Finalyson

<sup>90</sup> Brecht, *Die Dreigroschenoper*, 21. 102Ujma, 35.

the Messiah, and finds a mixture of religious and messianic motifs...enriched with a good measure of blasphemy.”<sup>102</sup>

In keeping with Adorno's “art must break its promise,” *Seeräuber Jenny* does in a sense break this promise by reappropriating what was once an honest song of social critic (i.e. a song sung by an oppressed dishwasher) into a hollow vessel for pure bourgeois entertainment. In his critical essay *Das Lied des Seeräuber Jenny*, Bloch argues that the play could have redeemed more “revolutionary logic”<sup>91</sup> if Polly's song had made a comeback in saving Mackie Messer's life. Mac, however, was saved by a break in the fourth wall, rather than a “*Schiff mit acht Segeln, und fünfzig Kanonen.*” Despite Bloch's critique of the messianic ballad, it can be interpreted that Brecht intentionally had Polly, an upper class character, sing what was once a protest song of the working class, in order to reinforce the inverse logic of the *promesse du bonheur*.

This leads into Bloch's promise of happiness byway of utopian thinking. Again, the reoccurring problem is that of authenticity. Bloch's *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* is solely utopian because it encompasses not just the present conditions, but the enigma of future conditions as well. The future, for Bloch, is indeed *noch-nicht*, yet that does not mean that art should not begin to make the *noch-nicht* happen. Art “provokes the expectation of happiness, an expectation grounded in the present, but whose fulfillment lies in the future. The expectation is not just a wish, projected onto the work. It is more like a hope raised by the work itself.”<sup>92</sup> In that sense, if hope is raised by the text itself with its utopian conception, then the text

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<sup>91</sup> Ujma, 35.

<sup>92</sup> Finlayson

combats that which opposes utopian thoughts. Bloch and Brecht both aesthetically raise the question of hope: what is it? And what does it mean to be a utopian thinker? As Brecht's utopianism stems out of the aesthetic displacement of what seems normal – estranging Peachum's inauthentic humanity – Bloch's utopianism raises the standard of what should be considered a norm: happiness, self-location, and home.

## Conclusion

The case for Bloch's and Brecht's meeting point in utopian aesthetics is made in the fact they both clearly attempt to create change by revolutionizing their respective practices: theatrics and philosophy. As seen in *Die Dreigroschenoper*, Bloch's "occluded subject" and Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* surfaced as two anti-capitalist concepts motivated by the desire to oppose human exploitation. Despite the fact that they come from differing aesthetic viewpoints, one from Expressionism and the other from *Neue Sachlichkeit*, Bloch and Brecht respond to Benjamin's question of literature's position in the *Produktionverhältnisse* of their time. How do their works exercise their ability to change the relations of production? By creating works that intervene directly with their audiences; by taking the leap out of the "fog" to insist on the impermanence of social conditions; by taking the responsibility of political action into their own hands as well as sharing it with their readers; by stepping out of the contemporary norm to create art that merely satisfies rather than provokes.

*Das Prinzip Hoffnung* does not promise happiness, but evokes the desire to think about happiness and beauty as the as a "harmonious arrangement of the whole."<sup>93</sup> In the same way that Brecht makes viewers realize the terrible inconsistencies through the shocking and distancing *Verfremdungseffekt*, Bloch makes apparent the immediate "period of darkness" that is too close to notice. Both authors, through their utopian yearnings, wake up their readers in hopes that one might realize *something needs to change*. (Bibliography missing)

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<sup>93</sup> Finlayson