

Philip V. Bohlman

Ernest Bloch's *America* (1926): Aesthetic Dimensions of a Swiss-American *Auswandererbericht*

Il fait bon, je vous assure, sentir que l'on est une petite partie d'un tout! Et ce qui me touche le plus, c'est la gentillesse et le sans façon de quelques-uns, dans la rue, mon épicier, mon cordonnier, le facteur, un conducteur de tram, qui parlent d'*America*, comme de "leur Symphonie" déjà. . . . Et c'est ce que j'ai voulu.

(Ernest Bloch to Romain Rolland, 17 November 1928)

Writing the Swiss-American Experience

A decade after his departure from Switzerland, the composer, Ernest Bloch, completed two large symphonic works, *America* and *Helvetia*, which, when interpreted together with his earlier *Israel Symphony* (1916), portray a complex set of identities for the most distinguished Swiss-American immigrant composer. Bloch wrote with a musical voice that might be understood variously as Swiss, Jewish, and American; it might, in fact, embody all three identities. Rarely did Bloch compose without intentionally calling attention to some aspect of identity; rarely did he fail to use his compositions to give aesthetic form to nationalism, national landscape, or simply the personality of a nation and its people.

This search for identity is hardly atypical in the history of Swiss-American immigration and settlement. Nor is it atypical that conflicting images and ideas should emerge in the way Swiss-American immigrants describe their experiences.¹ Indeed, Ernest Bloch, an almost obsessive chronicler of people and places, created some of the most revealing portraits of the Swiss-American experience. His compositions thus form a body of writing that are themselves *Auswandererberichte*, comparable to the letters and diaries of countless other Swiss-Americans, and yet unusually trenchant because of the aesthetic dimension that gives them added voice.

Bloch's *America* is a narrative work, a "story" of America that he calls an "epic rhapsody" in his subtitle. That story has both past and present,

which Bloch conjoins with an ideological program that he adapts largely from Walt Whitman. Bloch clearly locates himself in the epic of America, specifically in the third of the three movements, which symbolizes the "present" and the "future." *America*, thus is Bloch's America; its story is that of America as Bloch wishes it to reflect his ongoing immigrant experience. Clearly, he intends the work to be an *Auswandererbericht*, albeit one of a very special kind. He is reporting not just in a letter to his family; nor is he writing detailed descriptions in a journal. Rather, he is seeking to find a very special language with which to express the diversity of America and the unity he hopefully seeks to urge upon that diversity. The language of this *Auswandererbericht*, therefore, is an aesthetic language, laden with symbols and layered in such a way that many readings of this immigrant experience are possible.

I suggest in this essay that this use of an aesthetic language within Bloch's *Auswandererbericht* has certain qualities that reveal just how *America* lends itself to interpretation as Swiss-American and how it becomes one immigrant's personal way of framing his encounters with the New World. My analysis of what I call the aesthetic dimensions of this *Auswandererbericht*, though largely specific to Bloch's composition and, to a lesser extent, its counterpart, *Helvetia*, might also suggest ways to read other forms of documentation of the Swiss-American immigrant experience. I posit that there is no single way of reading and understanding *America*. In part, this results from the many layers of text that Bloch uses. In part, it results from some of the same reasons that *Auswandererberichte* of all kinds offer different portraits of the Swiss-American experience (Schelbert and Rappolt 1977, 21-25). The aesthetic dimensions, then, help us to understand that differences in experiences, both before and after immigration, play a significant role in shaping the immigrant's response to the new culture. By understanding the differences immanent in these aesthetic dimensions, we might find, perhaps, a few new ways to listen to the many voices of Swiss-Americans.

The stories that we find in *Auswandererberichte* are many and varied. Indeed, they are so varied that the notion of a Swiss-American "experience" becomes more and more elusive the more we read the stories written by immigrants.² But the immigrant narrative of any single immigrant has many stories and these are themselves remarkably varied when stretched over a lifetime. The stories told by immigrants may not complete the larger picture of the Swiss-American experience, but they do enable us to understand more intimately the ways in which each individual contributes something personal and indispensable to the larger whole. It is in the nature of language—especially the many voices that constitute the history of immigration—that such diverse and complex narratives are told. It is because of their aesthetic dimensions that these narratives come to have a meaning that potentially links the individual to the whole.

As composer, critic, teacher, and correspondent, Bloch ceaselessly chronicled his experiences as an immigrant. He has provided us with an abundance of texts filled with his observations of life in the United States and the path of a Swiss composer toward participation in that life.

Most important, Bloch found a multitude of ways to convey his immigrant observations and responses in his compositions. He makes it clear, for the most part, that he wishes his music to tell us something; few twentieth-century composers have been as adamant about the necessity of music to tell some story and about the duty of the composer to incorporate this narrative responsibility into the music itself. To say that Bloch distinguished himself in this way simply as a result of being a Swiss-American Jew would surely be simplistic. But being Swiss, American, and Jewish did heighten the difficulty of finding and creating identity in the immigrant culture. His music reflects these various identities in different ways, and each musical work revealed a new facet of his personal immigrant experience. These constantly changing aesthetic dimensions, then, serve as a reminder that no immigrant experience is simple, a shedding of one cloak for another. As we attempt to unravel and discover meaning in it, the music of Bloch vividly reminds us that the Swiss-American experience is recounted by voices that are as diverse as they are individual.

Ernest Bloch as Swiss-American

Bloch's American experience emerges from the pages of his biographies and musical scores as one that was extraordinarily positive. He quickly won rather widespread support among American audiences, and he had relatively little difficulty securing positions in American music academies and universities. Employment and commissions came to him, rather than his having to seek them out. In a nation whose support for the fine arts has historically been penurious, Bloch found sufficient, and at times, we can suppose, substantial financial support. The body of Bloch criticism is by and large very positive, verging often on outright hagiography. Even when one compares Bloch to other distinguished émigré composers, such as Arnold Schoenberg or Béla Bartók, one must be struck by the enormous amount of success Bloch enjoyed in his attempt to begin a new life. It is not surprising, therefore, that Bloch came increasingly to regard the United States as his home.

Bloch's American experience, however, did not result from a motivation that suggested any need to negate his Swiss experience. Bloch, in fact, returned to Switzerland for a period of nine years (1930-39), more or less in the middle of his American years. Among the many possible reasons that he left Europe twice (1916 and 1939), the nature of his life in Switzerland may have been less decisive than the conditions of war or its specter that afflicted the rest of the continent. Even against the background of war, Bloch was not compelled to leave, and he was surely aware of the refuge that his native Switzerland provided for many other Europeans. Indeed, he always remained in close contact with this cultural haven, which had become home to many intellectuals and more than a few close friends (see, e.g., Bloch and Rolland 1984).

Bloch's Jewishness also complicates attempts to discover the motivations behind his decisions to immigrate. Bloch received considerable encouragement to immigrate to the British Mandate of Palestine during

the 1930s and again to Israel after World War II. For a composer who had infused many of his works with a musical vocabulary and melos that were consciously Jewish, Palestine had considerable appeal. During the late 1930s, Bloch was in frequent contact with the World Centre for Jewish Music in Palestine, which had chosen Bloch as one of its honorary presidents (together with Darius Milhaud). This organization, largely consisting of Central European immigrants, sought to create a center in Palestine for the rebirth of a worldwide Jewish musical life, a goal that had particular appeal to Bloch. The impending war and Holocaust may have been one reason that prevented Bloch from making the decision to immigrate to Palestine, but his correspondence with the organization never claims that the political situation was a direct impediment (cf. Bohlman 1986). The World Centre for Jewish Music retained its hope that Bloch would come to Palestine to serve as its steward, and it performed Bloch's *Avodat hakodesh* ("Sacred Service") as its inaugural concert in Jerusalem, but Bloch himself never traveled to the country. Only Switzerland and the United States were to constitute his immigrant experience.

Although the larger image of Bloch's life shows him to have been constantly negotiating different identities, particular ideologies or musical approaches tended to dominate, or at least to come to the fore, during his residence in either Switzerland or the United States. The immigrant experience, then, is evident in the choices he made and the aesthetic that guided him during these periods. Bloch came to music in rather uncharacteristic fashion. Apparently, there was relatively little music in his home and certainly no family model that would have spurred him to pursue a career as a composer. His path to writing music followed earlier successes as a violinist, first study with the Belgian violinist, Eugène Ysaÿe (1896-99). A decision to concentrate on composition led him first to Frankfurt am Main (1899-1901) and then to Munich (1901-3). Upon returning to Geneva, Bloch first began to work in his father's business and then gradually achieved success in the musical life of Switzerland. His musical education had been eclectic, and so too was his musical voice from the beginning. His compositional style, nevertheless, fitted the diverse opportunities he found in Switzerland and then adapted well to a growing need to express some aspect of Jewishness.

Both his musical and national background, in other words, were ideally suited for the search for a new aesthetic that he most fully articulated in the early years of the second decade of the twentieth century. The years between 1912 and 1916 saw a prodigious output of works incorporating Jewish musical materials, producing what some scholars call Bloch's "Jewish cycle" (Kushner 1988, 7-8; Strassburg 1977, 26-42). Perhaps this period produced an ideological point of arrival, marked most notably by the magnificent *Schelomo* ("Solomon") for cello and orchestra (1916), but the successes of these years were most effective in establishing a musical vocabulary that lent itself to the larger patterns of juxtaposition that the first period of immigrant residence in the United States would anchor.

The true motivation behind Bloch's first trip to the United States is not clear, despite the usual accounts that have him accompanying the dancer, Maude Allan, as the director of the orchestra for her 1916 tour. Indeed, this may have been an opportunity to strengthen his finances, as Robert Strassburg suggests (1977, 42), but such risky endeavors in time of war can hardly have been overwhelmingly promising. Nor does it seem likely that the hagiographic accounts of Bloch enduring the submarine-laced Atlantic to arrive in New York like "millions of earlier immigrants who responded excitedly to their first sight of the Statue of Liberty" (Strassburg 1977, 43) really explain decisions that determined the path toward immigration. In fact, the dance tour was not successful, but Bloch found himself suddenly in an environment that was very supportive. It seems reasonable to suggest that Bloch's real motivation had more to do with finding a place to start his career as a composer anew, perhaps even free of the singular path that he had established with his "Jewish cycle." At the very least, Bloch worked toward these ends and in so doing discovered new directions for his career as a musician and a new voice for his compositional ideas. The United States, then, was a land of new beginnings with their concomitant new aesthetic dimensions.

Bloch's first period of residence in the United States (1916–30) coincided with a spirit of growing nationalism in the arts, and he adapted himself extremely well to the icons of musical Americanism that were proving most successful. The new Americanism was, on the one hand, a negative response to the period of mass immigration in the forty years prior to World War I and a lingering anti-Germanness in the arts.³ On the other hand, composers found themselves able to respond to a broader repertory of folk and vernacular styles of music, particularly the music of African-Americans during the 1920s. The new aesthetic, therefore, embraced differences and styles from the different groups constituting the American cultural landscape, all to empower a more universal ideology grounded in the soil of that landscape. Bloch was perfectly suited to respond to these changes.

The aura of Bloch as a universal figure—at once sensitive to the melos of Jewish music and able to project an ideology that had no ethnic or religious boundaries—grew rapidly in the United States. Interpreted from the perspective of immigrant historiography, this aura is perhaps the most important product of Bloch's Swiss-Americanness. For Bloch, the cultural differences and ideological openness that had historically characterized Switzerland were also to be found in the United States. He discovered these Swiss values both in the musical styles that provided him with new melodic ideas and in the philosophies of manifest destiny and political freedom that shaped the extra-musical programs of many American works. Musically, then, Switzerland and the United States offered striking similarities to Bloch. These, in turn, were not incongruous with the models of Americanism that American audiences in the 1920s most desired. His American musical voice, especially at the beginning, owed a great deal to his experiences as a composer in

Switzerland. Throughout his career, Bloch could take recourse to those experiences, again and again.

It was during the 1930s that Bloch took recourse by returning to live in Switzerland. Just as it is difficult to pin down the precise motivations for his initial move to the United States, the reestablishment of residence in Switzerland, much of the time in Ticino, does not lend itself to simple explanations. In some respects, Bloch had been too successful during his first stint in the United States. He had become tired of teaching and administration, as well as the frequent demands on his time to lecture and travel. When the University of California at Berkeley established an endowment of \$100,000 for Bloch in 1930, he took this as an opportunity to return to Switzerland, where \$5,000 annually from the endowment supported him. Bloch would return to Berkeley in 1940, assuming an eponymous professorship with his own name, again a remarkable situation when compared to the difficulties faced by other Jewish composers at this moment in history.

Bloch spent the last two decades of his life in the United States, first fulfilling his duties at Berkeley and then retreating to his home on the Pacific Coast in Oregon, where he died in 1959. During this period, Bloch returned again to the universal voice of Swiss-Americanness that he discovered in the 1920s. The intervening decade in Switzerland had witnessed another return to Jewish works; at the very least, the Jewish works, such as the *Avodat hakodesh*, are the best from the period. The universal voice of the 1940s and 1950s at times became more abstract, as Bloch withdrew somewhat from the use of extra-musical ideas and employed any form of nationalism more tentatively. If we examine his Swiss-Americanness from the last two decades, it becomes increasingly more difficult to separate out elements that are Swiss and American. There are surely many ways of explaining this difficulty, but I think it correct to observe that the synthesis he had sought to effect throughout his life took its most mature form in these last two decades. Nothing that Bloch discovered in his Swiss and American experiences, moreover, prevented him from recognizing the processes of synthesis in his own life as a Swiss-American immigrant.

Multivocality and the Parallax Musical Text

Essential to this essay is a thesis that recognizes the aesthetic dimensions of a piece of music as metaphors for specific aspects of culture, in the case of Ernest Bloch, his experiences as a Swiss-American immigrant. This thesis, in turn, relies on a concept of musical text that can have many layers and that lends itself to many readings or interpretations. Accordingly, when we analyze a piece of music, such as Bloch's *America*, we can discover there a complex scaffolding of meanings, all related to the composer's response to his experiences, yet reformulated in ways specific to the musical language at his or her disposal. It may seem at first glance that the two essential attributes of this metaphoric relation, namely "musical text" and "immigrant experi-

ence," are somewhat ambiguous, if not slippery, but, in fact, I have fairly specific concepts in mind.

What, precisely, do I mean by "musical text?" The simplest answer to this question is everything that Bloch put on paper, or permitted his publisher, C. C. Birchard, to commit to print. In fact, I do regard everything that appears on the score of the first edition that I have analyzed for this essay as belonging to the musical text. In the case of *America*, the pragmatic admission of all this ink to the piece of music has some striking results. When one examines the score, one quickly realizes that no listener perceives everything on the page, much of which is not heard at all. For example, Bloch includes several texts as dedications, epigraphs, and anecdotes bracketed under the full score as guides to the meaning of the work (see Appendices A-C at the end of this essay). Bloch claims—in still other layers of text—that these are not necessary for a listener's understanding. But why include them? Are they any different in the meanings they clarify than tempo or dynamic markings in the score, again which the listener does not hear as such? There are no simple answers to these questions, only the implication—which I take as a challenge in trying to interpret *America*—that meanings are many and varied, indeed, in ways not so different from the *Auswandererberichte* of Swiss immigrants.

Because so many meanings are located in the physical product of the musical text, we cannot overlook its importance. Nor can we overlook its connection to cultural and historical context. The importance of the musical text is, moreover, a direct result of my assertion that it tells us a great deal about context—personal experience, cultural change, historical moment, etc.—many of the things that literary theorists, deconstructionists, for example, believe that concentrating on the text renders unnecessary. I look at the text of *America*, in contrast, to find what linguists call "parallax qualities," that is, a range of meanings and functions that change when the perspectives of observation, performance, and interpretation change (Friedrich 1986). Bloch's musical language is a marvelous example of parallax, the layering or scaffolding of meaning that I have described already. No single perspective reveals all of these layers. The texts of the first three appendices, for example, would not be apparent from listening to a performance of *America* by a symphony orchestra. Even the verbal text of the final anthem would probably resist the interpretation Bloch indicated in the bracketed instructions under the score; most listeners with only limited familiarity with the most standard orchestral literature are likely to think at the moment of the chorus's performance of the final anthem that Bloch is here imitating Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*, a reading that is surely in itself also correct.

Let me suggest some of the ways that we can structure our different readings of *America* and identify the qualities evident at different layers of meaning. We might begin with the activity of writing music itself, which we might call "musical ethnography," for Bloch was also engaged in "writing culture," specifically that which gave meaning to his Swiss-American immigrant experience. Musical ethnography cou-

ples both musical materials and the interaction with culture, that is, juxtaposing text and context.⁴ Writing music embodies both musical and ideological motivations, and, in fact, joins them together. It joins them through the necessity of making decisions, which may be of various kinds, but which I represent in Figure 1.

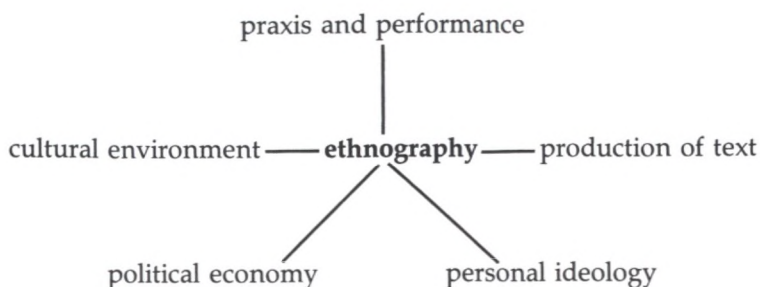


Figure 1

The word, musical, too, acquires a cluster of meanings because of its potential to connote many things in this setting. Music becomes more than just sound; it has the power to become "indeterminate," which I use following Paul Friedrich's notion of "poetic indeterminacy" (1986). This musical indeterminacy is important for our interpretations, because it allows us to recognize that the sounds of *America* (or any piece of music) have different meanings when encountered from different perspectives. Musical indeterminacy is important to the composer, especially a highly individualistic composer like Bloch, for it allows him or her to use musical materials in many different ways. I might suggest the following constellation of concepts surrounding this usage of "musical" (Figure 2).

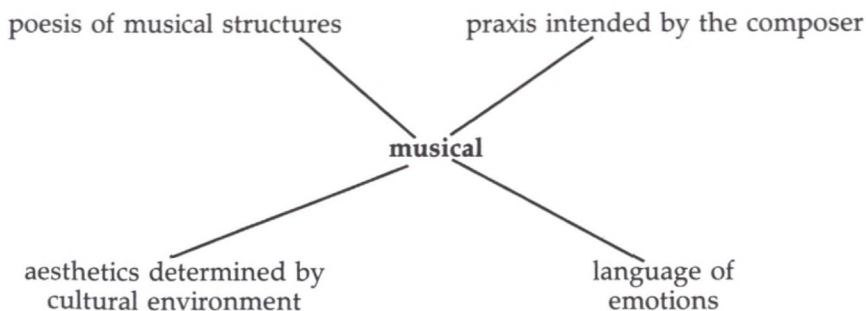


Figure 2

These figures are really only suggestions of the types of decision-making in which the composer intentionally and unintentionally engages when creating a musical text. Each text results from not just one decision, but from many, those I have suggested above and others. The reasons for making certain decisions and for scaffolding them in particular ways are cultural, personal, stylistic, and practical. The hierarchy governing their patterns of interaction, moreover, increasingly leads us to an understanding of what a composer chooses as motivations.

Bloch was particularly deliberate in making the wide range of decisions necessary for creating each musical text. He sought always to give his musical texts many parts—many voices, many melodic themes, many compositional techniques. In fact, he often expressed a belief that any mode of expression that was too straightforward, too obvious in its referents, might lead to facile explanations of what he intended. Thus, the use of folk songs in *America* and *Helvetia* appeared simple only on the surface, to which Bloch felt his critics were restricting their readings, and he felt, therefore, a certain compulsion to provide more and more texts. These clarified musical structures, just as they established new relationships with the cultural environment. He increasingly sought to impose his intentions on praxis and performance by deliberately explaining the different levels of meaning in the program notes he wrote for his works (cf. S. Bloch and Heskes 1976). The changing conditions of the political economy necessitated by his movement between the United States and Switzerland meant a constant renegotiation of the ideology he intended his compositions to project. Each musical text, then, was a product of its time and place, and the experiences with which Bloch was connecting it. For Bloch, the meaning of a piece of music could become at once more diversified and more specific as its layers of text and meaning proliferated. Each piece came increasingly to reflect his personal immigrant experiences.

Ernest Bloch's Ideological and Musical Visions

Bloch's musical texts—his compositions—are particularly resistant to facile unraveling. Most of all, they are resistant because Bloch intended them to be. He intended his musical texts to be multivocal, hence to create the vision of personal experiences that were complex and themselves resistant to unraveling. As a single corpus, Bloch's compositions are far more contradictory than most critics looking for a single "Jewish" voice are usually willing to admit. Whereas that Jewish voice is rarely absent, it only exists as that voice alone early in Bloch's career, during his years in Geneva. When he made the decision to immigrate to the United States at the end of World War I, there occurred simultaneously a sudden increase in the number of ideological and musical visions that came to shape his music. The immigrant experience, therefore, must be understood as a radical transformation of Bloch's musical voice, not simply a change of venue, cultural environment, and institutions and individuals willing to patronize his work. As with the immigrant

experiences revealed by the letters and other documents examined by Swiss-American historiographers, Bloch's immigration accounts must be understood as contradictory while at the same time revealing a multitude of responses to a new world. In no single musical text by Bloch is this clearer than his *America*.

Just why should Bloch choose a musical voice that consisted of so many seemingly contradictory parts? Biographical factors suggest a number of answers to this question. Surely, Bloch's youth and early career in Switzerland play a much more important role in determining his ideological vision than most biographers have admitted, although in stating this I do not mean to imply that Switzerland has been unfairly treated by Bloch critics. Rather, Switzerland has strangely disappeared from the larger aesthetic picture of Bloch's life. This disappearance seems even more inexplicable when we realize that Bloch did not even consider emigration until his late thirties and that he spent most of his fifties again in Switzerland. Nor is there anything in the usual biographical treatments that suggests that Bloch felt his native land deprived him of opportunity or created specific motivations to emigrate. Switzerland, too, provided Bloch with elements for his larger musical vocabulary. Those compositions that referred directly to Switzerland, for example, the symphonic work *Helvetia*, drew widely from Swiss folk melodies ("more than thirty" according to the composer)⁵ and included a program designed to evoke the panorama of Switzerland. Even with this major symphonic portrait, the third of Bloch's "nationalistic" tone poems, rather little attention focused on the composer's Swiss heritage: *Helvetia* did not receive its premiere until 1932, four years after its composition, and the work was seldom heard thereafter.

Switzerland, however, was surely important in the forging of Bloch's musical parallax. In his musical works referring to Switzerland he is most comfortable with the use of folk music, a critical judgment I base on my reading of several different ways of setting folk music in his Swiss, American, and Jewish works. When setting an American source, Bloch relies on standard collections and prevailing ideas of what approaches comprise musical Americanisms. His American melos is synthetic and at moments pedantically stereotyped. The Jewish works demonstrate an urge to treat particular melodies creatively, to penetrate between the sound in its usual presentation to an ideological background, more often than not, one of Bloch's own construction. In this sense, Bloch's sense of a Jewish melos served his personal visions particularly well. The Swiss works, however, treat Swiss folk music more literally and more specifically. They show an awareness not only of a considerable body of folk songs, but of their social functions and their geographic associations. One gains the feeling that Bloch understood the folk music in his Swiss works as folk music, not simply as a way of labeling a work's nationalistic or ideological character.

The treatment of musical materials and ideals in the Swiss, Jewish, and American works differs. In the Swiss works, Bloch seems more concerned—and, at the very least, more fluent—with musical materials. His aesthetic intent is more musical; his ideological vision less artificial.

In the Jewish works, there can be no question that Bloch privileges ideological intent; his choice and use of musical materials are more artificial. In his American works, he negotiates between these two contrasting approaches. He uses musical materials much as he would in the Swiss works, in other words, choosing folk melodies not so much because of their social function and meaning as because of the musical color they offer at a particular moment. At the same time, Bloch wraps his American message in several layers of ideology, for example, the repeated recourse to the poetry and aphoristic icons of Walt Whitman in *America*. The use of Native American themes at the beginning of the first movement of *America* is musically coloristic, particularly so because of the stereotyped Native American sound exploited by the pentatonic scale (five-note with gaps, as in the five black notes of the piano). The effect on the listener is musical, but at this point in the work it is ideologically flat, the Native American themes having no meaning in the musical text of the notes. It is only the presence of the verbal text that restores meaning, that makes the ideology palpable as directly as in the Jewish works.

Bloch's musical and ideological vision, however complex, inevitably comes through clearly in his compositions. He represents it musically in the compositional techniques that he employs. It is precisely these techniques that remain constant in the Swiss, Jewish, and American works, thereby showing them to be a part of a larger whole. By combining these techniques and balancing them in different ways, Bloch achieves the multivocality that is so characteristic of a composer who sought to create such different identities. The first of the compositional techniques employed by Bloch is the use of melodic themes with specific meanings. This technique was common in the works of nineteenth-century nationalist composers. So, too, was Bloch's second technique, the creation of a "program"—an extra-musical idea that the music conveyed, a favored device in the composition of symphonic "tone poems" in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Bloch's compositions include an inordinate number of programs, an indication that Bloch needed to tie the musical sound to something outside the music in order to provide meaning. *America*, in fact, uses several programs, for example, the two texts of Appendices A and B, and the programmatic construction of the movements themselves to tell the story of America in narrative fashion. Seen from one perspective, Bloch clubs the listener/reader of *America* over the head with his surfeit of programs, so much so that he has to warn the listener/reader that the "Symphony is not dependant [sic] on a program" (see Appendix A) before writing out the program in detail. Indeed, *America* is not dependent on just a program; it is dependent on Bloch's program, his personal ideological and musical vision.

The use of themes and programs as compositional techniques provided for Bloch the musical materials from which he could choose, at both the micro-level (thematic) and macro-level (program). His ideological intent also depended on specific techniques. The most basic of these was the restatement of musical materials in such ways that they

expressed Bloch's idea rather than their usual function. In the final movement of one of his Geneva works, *Three Jewish Poems* (1913), for example, he uses the "Kaddish," a usually joyful lifting of the voice in song to God, as a lamentation, specifically as a personal form of mourning the death of his father. Clearly, Bloch juxtaposes two opposing functions, one widely recognized by all Jews, and the other both artificial and personal. Throughout Bloch's works, therefore, one symbol comes to give meaning to another, a compositional technique to which we might give the literary name, metonymy. For Bloch, especially in his American works, metonymy is extremely important as a means to achieve juxtaposition. Also important are the more traditional musical devices known as "tutti" and "stretto." These devices enable a composer to bring many or all (Italian, "tutti") individual parts or voices together at a given moment, usually for climactic effect. In *America* we witness the metonymic potential of this technique when Bloch juxtaposes the "Civil War Songs" (see Appendix B), thus reifying the war itself musically.

Ultimately, Bloch believed that he could represent any philosophical idea with the music itself. It is hardly uncommon for a post-Romantic composer to insist that the music speaks for itself and the ideas it embodies, but Bloch set for himself a larger task, namely that music should achieve some sort of universal meaning in its representation of an idea. He endeavored to represent this whole only through the sum of many parts. *America* is a striking example of just this technique, for Bloch clearly sees America, the country itself, as an ideal, which becomes transcendent in the composition as it culminates in the final anthem. The nationalism of *America*, therefore, becomes in effect a supranationalism, one which somehow held meaning for all immigrants.

Reading Ernest Bloch's *Auswandererberichte* as Swiss-American

Some claim that, both in *America* and *Helvetia*, they fail to find *me*. The fact is that they have never really known *me*. . . . It is evident that *Helvetia* and *America* required a style quite different from that of *Israel* and *Schelomo*.
(Ernest Bloch's program notes for *Helvetia*)

Bloch clearly intended to employ a distinctive and different voice in his large orchestral works devoted to Switzerland and the United States. It was a voice for which he had been searching for many years prior to the composition of these two works in 1926 and 1929, and it was a voice that he would never use again in quite the same way in subsequent years. Both audiences and critics recognized the distinctiveness of these works, and Bloch found himself compelled to defend just what it was he was trying to say about the United States and Switzerland by writing them. In size, subject matter, and musical vocabulary, *America* and *Helvetia* stand apart from the rest of Bloch's oeuvre. Together, the two works epitomize Bloch's Swiss-American experience.

Bloch hagiography inevitably links the composition of *America* to the composer's initial encounters with his immigrant home, as if inspiration

were spontaneous and oracular. "From the moment in 1916 when he landed in New York, watching its spectacular skyline, Bloch had the idea of writing a composition about his new country. Later living in New England, then discovering the West, the Indian country and finally the Pacific Coast, he stored all his impressions until they culminated in this work" (S. Bloch and Heskes 1976, 68). Such accounts may impose a somewhat speculative cause and effect on the relation between experience and musical text, but they are certainly correct in underscoring the importance of ideology in determining Bloch's approach to the composition.

Upon first hearing, one is tempted to regard *America* as a "folk music work," that is, as a composition synthesized from the composer's familiarity with folk songs and a concomitant belief that a national musical voice might emerge from a concerted presentation of them. Most critics, in fact, have assumed that it was Bloch's intent to use musical Americanisms in this way, further portraying Bloch almost as having a Bartókian connection to folk song; Bloch was said to have a "multitude of American folk material he had gathered as a preliminary to writing the work" (S. Bloch and Heskes 1976, 68). The melodic idea that most completely unified *America*, however, was of Bloch's own manufacture. The "Anthem" that concludes the work serves as a focal point, both musically and ideologically (see Appendix D). Musically, Bloch foreshadows this final theme by using fragments of it earlier in the work. Ideologically, the "Anthem" presents Bloch's own personal view of America, his ideal for a nation that could derive unity from diversity. The America Bloch describes in this closing moment is the one in which he wished to find himself.

America is a musical text that projects optimism, indeed, the optimism of Bloch's immigrant encounter with the United States. Just as his experiences in the new land had been fortuitous, so too does Bloch treat the past, present, and future of the new land as fortuitous, which is to say, as a narrative in which even tragedy and turbulence eventually work out for the best. The first movement of *America* depicts the prehistory and early colonial period of North America. The opening of the movement should evoke something "primitive," not yet formed from "The Soil," utilizing a somewhat obfuscating treatment of melodic and harmonic use, a technique employed by earlier composers wishing to give a sense of a primordial state (e.g., Haydn in the opening of his oratorio, *The Creation*). This treatment has strong ideological overtones, for it is the first of many metaphors for the cultural independence of the United States: this is a country which was received, as from a higher power, in a primitive stage, and its inhabitants can make of it what they wish. Americans, thus, will create what America and *America* will be.

A bricolage of thematic materials fills the first movement. In the first part, we encounter a sprinkling of Native American materials, rather disembodied, but cited according to sources in the early ethnomusicological literature (largely from Frances Densmore's studies of various Native American peoples, which were published by the Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology). In the second half, "Eng-

lish" fragments take over, but still resulting in a bricolage whose parts do not quite hang together. By the end of the movement, it is Bloch himself who pulls everything together, by stating for the first time some of the melodic ideas that he will use in the "Anthem," which is in turn juxtaposed on "Old One Hundred," perhaps the best known of all chorale tunes from English Protestantism. Already in the first movement, Bloch makes it clear that he intends that we have "read" many of these texts already, that the listener knows whence the music comes and where it will go, namely toward the "Anthem" and the future. In essence, Bloch reveals from the first musical experiences that reading the work requires one to look at all the layers separately and together.

The temporal moment of the second movement, "1861-1865," is the most precise of all the movements in the composition. It is this period, that of the Civil War, moreover, that lies in greatest proximity to the political and aesthetic milieu within which Walt Whitman wrote. The program of the second movement is also the most specific, describing three events. At the beginning of the movement, Bloch combines a potpourri of African-American songs, most of them drawn from collections published early in the twentieth century. To some extent, the "folk culture" of African-Americans is comparable to the "primeval nature" in which Native Americans lived at the opening of the first movement. This ideological similarity links the two movements and clarifies the diversity that Bloch admitted to his vision of the United States. The depiction of the Civil War itself at the center of the movement demonstrates how cleverly Bloch was able to control the many different texts in the work, for it is at this point that he mixes "Songs of the Civil War" together in order to represent the dissonance and futility of war. Ideology and musical materials conjoin here with striking creativity. The movement closes with narrative depiction of the assassination of Abraham Lincoln and a different dissonance, one harmonically constructed, yet one that we read as linked to the jumble of folk tunes in the previous section.

The third movement, "The Present" and "The Future," proves to be the America with whose music Bloch is most familiar. The Dixieland, jazz, and popular tunes that form the melodic material for this movement seem somehow closer to Bloch. In fact, Bloch is really one of the first composers in the United States to turn extensively to materials of such truly popular character. This was not a nationalistic artifice built from folk tunes ripped from their function, rather a din that reminded many of the barrage of sounds in the city or broadcast on the radio. Ideologically, then, Bloch was most at home in this America; musically, too, he seems to know what to do with these materials, for the movement truly swings in parts.

It is also clear that the movement gave Bloch a certain freedom, perhaps to experiment, but surely to locate himself in the American landscape. Metric and rhythmic patterns constantly shift, and Bloch is not afraid to urge on the performers with markings such as "frenetico." The movement also includes sounds of the mechanical age, for example, plates of steel and anvils transformed into the orchestra's percussion.

The movement closes first by returning to the music of the Native American section of the first movement, symbolizing the ability of the nation to reconstruct itself according to its own designs and at the hands of its own people, here in the final movement the "new immigrants" among whom Bloch counted himself. Diversity, then, continues to characterize this America, and in the end it is only from this diversity that the "Anthem" can grow. Bloch seems always to want his audiences, wherever they are, to rise and sing the "Anthem," which they have previously imbibed from the multitude of fragments provided them in the course of the performance. These many voices at the end of the work become the single voice of *America*.

It is remarkable how similar the Switzerland of *Helvetia* is to the United States of *America*. Bloch describes the theme of his portrait of Switzerland as "the Mountain—Man—and the Union of Man and his native soil" (S. Bloch and Heskes 1976, 70). Again, the images of soil and the people uniting through song to express this connection to the cultural environment are juxtaposed. *Helvetia*, too, has an anthem, one which wends its way in fragments throughout the five sections with its melody closing the work "like the national banner, the symbol of the Country" (S. Bloch and Heskes 1976, 71). The "people" animate *Helvetia*, not unlike *America*, although it is clear that the representatives of the cantons in the Swiss Federation who gather in a town square (third movement) are considerably less abstract than the African-Americans or Native Americans so rooted to the soil in *America*. Again in *Helvetia*, Bloch uses a battle to show that the nation's fate lies in the hands of the people.

The voices of *America* and *Helvetia* are clearly related in a reflexive manner. In creating his musical representation of the United States, Bloch drew on a cultural geography that he knew from Switzerland, populating it, so to speak, with the melodies of Americanism that he could find in books or that he heard on the radio or on records. It is significant that Bloch composed *America* first, for he needed it as a model for treating his country of birth. The folk melodies of *Helvetia* may have been more intimately associated with his own youth, but the historical narrative, its details notwithstanding, comes from Bloch's notion of the "epic" formed by American history. This was a history that arose from the soil and returned to it, whether in America or Switzerland. That this metaphor resonates considerably with Biblical notions of life and death could not have escaped Bloch. Indeed, it provided him precisely with the image that he needed to draw both Switzerland and America closer to his own life and his Swiss-American experience.

Is the image of America that Bloch sought in his "epic rhapsody" distinctively Swiss? Upon closer scrutiny of the musical materials, does something Swiss capture our attention? I cannot myself answer these questions, at least not with the directness they demand; in fact, the form of textual and musical analysis that I have employed here are inadequate if these are the only questions we choose to ask. But, in fact, are these the questions that we should properly ask about any *Auswandererbericht* or moment in Swiss-American history? It goes without saying that there are immigrant letters in which traces of Bernese or Glarnese dialect

confirm some presence of Swissness; similarly, I could pursue the use of folk song in *America* or *Helvetia* that would confirm that only a Swiss-American could have written them, and, for that matter, a Genevan. Assembling a historical picture from these, however, that relied only on the occasional brush strokes that could be confirmed as Swiss-American would yield a history that was a rather sparse sketch.

It makes no sense to conclude, then, that the music of Ernest Bloch—*America* or *Helvetia*—is quintessentially Swiss-American. It is music that gives voice to the experiences of a Swiss-American; it is part of a whole that probably only a Swiss-American would endeavor to create. The ultimate value of its aesthetic dimensions, however, lies in their resistance to any attempt to reduce the Swiss-American experience to simple connections between one country and another. Many and varied, these aesthetic dimensions reveal an extraordinary amount about the many voices of the immigrant experience, and this would seem to be a compelling reason to listen closely to them all.

University of Chicago
Chicago, Illinois

Appendix A

Opening Epigraph and Dedication

[Spelling and punctuation follow Bloch's score.]

America

An epic Rhapsody in three parts
for orchestra

This Symphony has been written in love for this country
In reverence to its Past—In faith in its Future

It is dedicated
to the memory of Abraham Lincoln
and
Walt Whitman
whose vision has upheld its inspiration

The Ideals of America are imperishable. They embody the future credo of all mankind: a Union, in common purpose and under willingly accepted guidance, of widely diversified races, ultimately to become one race, strong and great. But, as Walt Whitman has said: "To hold men together by paper and seal or by compulsion, is of no account. That only holds men together which aggregates all in a living principle, as the hold of the limbs of the body or the fibres of plants."

Though this Symphony is not dependant [sic] on a program, the composer wants to emphasize that he has been inspired by this very Ideal.

The *Anthem* which concludes the work, as its apotheosis, symbolizes the Destiny, the Mission of America. The Symphony is entirely built upon it. From the first bars it appears, in root, dimly, slowly taking shape; rising, falling, developing, and finally asserting itself victoriously in its complete and decisive form.

It is the hope of the composer that this Anthem will become known and beloved, that the audience will rise to sing it, becoming thus an active and enthusiastic part of the work and its message of faith and hope.

Appendix B

The Verbal Text of *America*

[Each bracketed remark is complete.]

First Movement

. . . . 1620

The Soil—The Indians—(England)— The Mayflower—The Landing of the Pilgrims

The Soil . . .

Primeval Nature . . . Indian life (Indian pueblo songs—New Mexico)

Indian songs—Mandan and Hidatsa music.

“Organizing a war party.”

Chippewa songs—“War song” (p. 8-22)

“Song of Departure” (Trombones)

“Death song”

“Do not weep - I am not going to die” (C[ontra]bassi—Corno ingl.—Arpa I)

“Weeping for my love” (Viola sola—then Clarinet)

Transition to the “English episode”

. . . Old English march

Old English march

“The Call of America”

The sea . . .

“Struggles and Hardships”

Old chanty

. . . at sea

. . . land in sight

“America! America!” . . .

Loneliness

Memories of the past “England.”

Struggles, hardships, ahead . . .

Building up a Nation . . .

The love of the Soil comes into the hearts of the Pilgrims . . .

“In God we trust” (“Old Hundred”) (Corni, Trombe, Virole)

Faint hopes in the future . . .

Second Movement

. . . . 1861-1865

Hours of Joy—Hours of Sorrow

I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear . . .

Each singing what belongs to him or her and to none else.
Singing with open mouths their strong melodious songs . . .
(Walt Whitman)

The South . . . Old ballad (Corno inglese)
Negro folk-songs ("Row after row")
Lullaby
"Old folks at home"
. . . Virginia reels
"Hail Columbia" (trombe)
America! America! (Violin—Viola—Oboe)
Creole folk-song
The battle-call
Songs of the Civil war (Dixie)
"John Brown's." "Battle Cry of Freedom." "Dixie." "Tramp, tramp, tramp."
(Strings) (Corne, Tbe.) (W. Winds) (Trboni; Tuba.)
After the battle . . .
"And in the blood of its own children, the Unity of a Great Nation was sealed."
"For my enemy is dead, a man divine as myself is dead . . ." (Walt Whitman)
"O captain! My captain!" (W.W.)
O! bleeding America!

Third Movement

1926

The Present—

The Future

" . . . As he sees the farthest he has the most faith."
(Walt Whitman)

Present time

Negro folk song: "I went to the hop joint"

Negro folk song: "The coon-can game"

Turmoil of present time—Speed—Noise—"Man slave of the *Machines*"
(p. 126-148)

America's call of Distress

The inevitable Collapse . . .

"Give me solitude, give me Nature, give me again, O nature, your primal
sanities!" (Walt Whitman)

The call of America

"Then turn, and be not alarm'd O Libertad—turn your *unifying face*, To where
the future, greater than all the past, Is swiftly, surely preparing for you." (W.W.)

Man's introspection . . .

The mastery of *Man* over the *Machines*, his environment, and . . . himself.

"I have charged myself, heeded or unheeded, to compose a march for these
States." (W.W.)

"Over the Carnage rose prophetic a voice:

Be not dishearten'd, affection shall solve the problems of Freedom yet;

Those who love each other shall become invincible,

They shall yet make Columbia victorious,

Sons of the Mother of All, you shall yet be victorious,

You shall yet laugh to scorn the attacks of all the remainder
of the earth!" (Walt Whitman)
The Call of America to the Nations of the World.
"See . . . immigrants continually coming and landing . . ." W.W.
. . . The Fulfillment . . . (till the End)
Through Love . . .
". . . Till they strike up marches henceforth triumphant and onward
To cheer O Mother your boundless expectant soul!" (Walt Whitman)
Here the *People* rise—to sing the Anthem.

Appendix C

[Instructions regarding the text of Appendix B
in the "Notes for the Performance,"
which generally only the performers read.]

The explanatory references (as well as the quotations from Walt Whitman) at the bottom of the pages, are not meant for reproduction in the programs. They are not needed for the understanding of a work which does not attempt to describe nor [sic] imitate. But, as its inspiration was sustained by a poetical idea, these notes may, in the same way, stimulate the performers and facilitate their task, in making clearer to them the intentions of the Composer.

Appendix D

The Concluding "Anthem" of America

3rd movement
measures 185 *ff*

A- mer- i- ca! A- mer- i- ca! Thy name is in my
heart,-- My love for thee a- rous- es me to no- bler thoughts and
deeds. Our fa- thers build- ed a na- tion To give us Jus- tice and
Peace-- Toward high- er aims, toward bright- er goals, Toward Free- dom of all
man- kind-- Our hearts we pledge, A- mer- i- ca. To stand by thee, to
give to thee Our strength, Our faith and our lives!

Notes

¹ Leo Schelbert argues that the reports from Swiss-American immigrants are, in fact, most meaningful from an historiographic perspective because they reflect the true diversity of immigrant experiences and responses. See his introduction to Schelbert and Rappolt, *Alles ist ganz anders hier* (1977, 19-30).

² Although I use the concept of "experience" somewhat more broadly than Schelbert uses "Erlebnis," I mean it to have precisely the catalytic, formative role that he ascribes to it. In short, an *Auswandererbericht* is inevitably the product of and shaped by the experiences of the individual, which serve as a context to shape the text we eventually interpret (Schelbert and Rappolt 1977, 21-25).

³ Many orchestras, major and minor, struck works by German composers from their repertoires during the years of American involvement in the war. Such actions must be understood against the backdrop of dominance by German-immigrant and German-American musicians in American artistic life (see Bohlman 1986).

⁴ For recent anthropological uses of this concept of ethnography, see Clifford and Marcus 1986, the subtitle of which is *The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*.

⁵ From the *Program Notes* for the Boston Symphony Orchestra, 1938-39, pp. 28-31 (quoted in Strassburg 1977, 64).

Works Cited

- Bloch, Ernest, and Romain Rolland. 1984. *Lettres (1911-1933)*. Ed. José-Flore Tappy. Lausanne: Payot.
- Bloch, Suzanne, and Irene Heskes. 1976. *Ernest Bloch: Creative Spirit*. New York: Jewish Music Council of the National Jewish Welfare Board.
- Bohlman, Philip V. 1985. "The Archives of the World Centre for Jewish Music in Palestine, 1936-1940, at the Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem." *Yuval* 5: 238-64.
- . 1986. "German," in "European-American Music." In *The New Grove Dictionary of American Music*, ed. H. Wiley Hitchcock and Stanley Sadie, 2:70-72. New York: Macmillan.
- Clifford, James, and George E. Marcus, eds. 1986. *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Friedrich, Paul. 1986. *The Language Parallax: Linguistic Relativism and Poetic Indeterminacy*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- . 1989. "Language, Ideology, and Political Economy." *American Anthropologist* 91.2: 295-312.
- Kushner, David Z. 1988. *Ernest Bloch: A Guide to the Research*. New York: Garland.
- Schelbert, Leo. 1976. *Einführung in die schweizerische Auswanderungsgeschichte der Neuzeit*. Zurich: Stäubli.
- Schelbert, Leo, and Hedwig Rappolt. 1977. *Alles ist ganz anders hier: Auswandererschicksale in Briefen aus zwei Jahrhunderten*. Olten: Walter.
- Strassburg, Robert. 1977. *Ernest Bloch: A Voice in the Wilderness*. Los Angeles: The Trident Shop.

Compositions by Ernest Bloch Cited

- America: An Epic Rhapsody in Three Parts for Orchestra*. 1928. Boston: C. C. Birchard.
- Avodat hakodesh*. 1934. Boston: C. C. Birchard.
- Helvetia*. 1931. Boston: C. C. Birchard.
- Israel*. 1925. New York: G. Schirmer.
- Three Jewish Poems*. 1918. New York: G. Schirmer.
- Schelomo: Hebraic Rhapsody*. 1918. New York: G. Schirmer.