

**THEODOR**  
**ADORNO**

**WALTER**  
**BENJAMIN**

**ERNST**  
**BLOCH**

**BERTOLT**  
**BRECHT**

**GEORG**  
**LUKÁCS**

**WITH AN AFTERWORD BY FREDRIC JAMESON**

**V** **AESTHETICS  
AND  
POLITICS**

RADICAL  
THINKERS

Ever since Baumgarten and Winckelmann, Germany has been the classical land of aesthetic thought in Europe. In the 20th century, Marxism itself has repeated the rule. No other country has produced a tradition of major aesthetic debate to compare with that which unfolded in German culture from the thirties to the fifties. The key texts of these great Marxist controversies over literature and art are now, for the first time anywhere outside Germany, assembled in a coherent order. They do not form a conventional collection of separate documents but a continuous debate between their *dramatis personae*. In exile before the war, Bloch and Lukács polemicized against each other over the nature of expressionism. Brecht attacked Lukács for literary formalism. Benjamin disputed over classical and modern works of art with Brecht. Adorno criticized Benjamin's hermeneutics, and challenged Brecht's poetics and Lukács's politics. The multilateral exchanges which resulted have a variety and eloquence without rival. Fredric Jameson, Professor of French at Yale University and author of *Marxism and Form* and *The Prison House of Language*, sums up their paradoxical lessons for art and criticism today, in an essay of theoretical conclusion. *Aesthetics and Politics* will provide a pole of reference and a source of illumination to students of literature throughout the English-speaking world.



Ernst Bloch  
Georg Lukács  
Bertolt Brecht  
Walter Benjamin  
Theodor Adorno

Verso

# Aesthetics and Politics

Afterword by Fredric Jameson

Translation Editor: Ronald Taylor

Ernst Bloch 'Discussing Expressionism', first published in *Das Wort* 1938, then in *Erbschaft dieser Zeit*, Frankfurt 1962, © Suhrkamp Verlag; Georg Lukács, 'Realism in the Balance', first published in *Das Wort* 1938, then in *Probleme des Realismus*, Neuwied 1971, © Artisjus; Bertolt Brecht, texts of 'Against Georg Lukács', first published in *Schriften zur Kunst und Literatur*, Frankfurt 1967, © Stefan Brecht, 1967. All rights reserved through Suhrkamp Verlag; Walter Benjamin 'Conversations with Brecht', first published in *Versuche über Brecht*, Frankfurt 1966, © Suhrkamp Verlag – this translation first published in Walter Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht*, London 1973, © NLB; Theodor Adorno, 'Letters to Walter Benjamin', published in *Über Walter Benjamin*, Frankfurt 1970, © Suhrkamp Verlag, and Walter Benjamin 'Reply', published in *Briefe II*, Frankfurt 1966, © Suhrkamp – these translations first published in *New Left Review*, September–October 1973, © New Left Review; Theodor Adorno, 'Reconciliation under Duress' and 'Engagement', published in *Noten zur Literatur II and III*, Frankfurt 1961 and 1965, © Suhrkamp Verlag; Fredric Jameson, 'Reflections in Conclusion', © NLB 1977.

*Aesthetics and Politics*, first published 1977

© NLB 1977

Verso edition first published 1980

Verso Editions, 7 Carlisle Street, London W.1.

Printed and bound in Great Britain by  
Whitstable Litho Ltd, Whitstable

ISBN 86091 722 3 (paper)

ISBN 902308 38 6 (cloth)

# Contents

<i>Presentation I</i>		9
Ernst Bloch	Discussing Expressionism	16
Georg Lukács	Realism in the Balance	28
<i>Presentation II</i>		60
Bertolt Brecht	Against Georg Lukács	68
Walter Benjamin	Conversations with Brecht	86
<i>Presentation III</i>		100
Theodor Adorno	Letters to Walter Benjamin	110
Walter Benjamin	Reply	134
<i>Presentation IV</i>		142
Theodor Adorno	Reconciliation under Duress	151
Theodor Adorno	Commitment	177
Fredric Jameson	Reflections in Conclusion	196
Index		214

# Ernst Bloch

## Discussing Expressionism

It is excellent that people should be starting to argue about this again. Not so long ago such a thing seemed unthinkable; the *Blue Rider*<sup>1</sup> was dead. Now we hear voices invoking its memory once more, and not only with reverence. It is almost more important that there are people who can get so worked up over a movement long since past, as if it still existed and were standing in their way. Expressionism assuredly does not belong to the present; yet can it be that it still shows signs of life?

Ziegler has represented it as at most a haunting memory in the minds of a few elderly people.<sup>2</sup> Such people were once flushed with the zeal of youth; now they declare their allegiance to the classical heritage, but still suffer from the after-effects

striking exponent of Expressionism – ended up in Fascism. Ziegler observes his evolution and concludes: ‘Such a development was inevitable. The other Expressionists were simply too illogical to arrive at the same goal. Today we can clearly see what sort of a phenomenon Expressionism was and where it leads, if followed to its logical end; it leads to Fascism.’

The irritation recently provoked by the Expressionists is thus not simply private; it also has a cultural-political aspect, an anti-Fascist dimension. The *Dawn of Mankind*<sup>3</sup> turned out to be one of the pre-

<sup>1</sup> *Der blaue Reiter*, founded in Munich in 1911, was the second important school of German Expressionist painting, after *Die Brücke*. Its outstanding members were Wassily Kandinsky, Franz Marc and August Macke.

<sup>2</sup> Bernhard Ziegler was the pseudonym of Alfred Kurella, whose article ‘Nun ist dies Erbe zuende . . .’ had been published in *Das Wort*, 1937, vol. 9.

<sup>3</sup> *Menschheitsdämmerung*, edited by Kurt Pinthus and published in 1920, was the most influential anthology of Expressionist lyric poetry, containing samples of the work of Trakl, Benn, Werfel, Becher, Lasker-Schüler, Heym and Stadler. The *Dämmerung* in the title was ambiguous, suggesting at once the twilight of the human race that had failed in the World War and the birth of a new, redemptive mankind.

conditions of Hitler. Unfortunately for Ziegler, just a few weeks before his research into the antecedents of Fascism was published, Hitler completely failed to recognize them in his Munich speech and at the exhibition there.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, seldom has the absurdity of a false deduction, a hurried negative judgement been so swiftly and so strikingly demonstrated.

But was the absurdity demonstrated absolutely, in such a way to persuade us today? To concur with Hitler in his denunciation of Expressionism must have been a shock to Ziegler, for such a coincidence of views would be lethal to any man. Yet the charlatan in Munich might have had his reasons (though what it is hard to see) for covering the tracks of Fascism. So if we are to get to the heart of the matter, we should not focus on Ziegler's chronological misfortune, or even on his article itself, but instead direct our attention to the prelude to the whole discussion cited by Leschnitzer in his earlier contribution to the discussion of Expressionist lyrics. We refer to Lukács's essay *The Greatness and the Decline of Expressionism*, published four years ago in *Internationale Literatur*. It is that essay which furnishes the conceptual framework for the latest funeral oration on Expressionism. In what follows we shall concentrate our attention on it, since Lukács supplies the intellectual foundations of both Ziegler's and Leschnitzer's contributions. In his conclusions, Lukács was indeed significantly more circumspect than they; he insisted that the *conscious* tendencies of Expressionism were not Fascist, and that in the final analysis, Expressionism 'could only become a minor component of the Fascist "synthesis"'. But in his summing-up he also observed that 'the Fascists were not without justification in discerning in Expressionism a heritage they could use'. Goebbels had found the 'seeds of some sound ideas'<sup>5</sup> here, for 'as the literary mode corresponding to fully-developed imperialism (!), Expressionism is grounded in an irrationalist mythology. Its creative style tends towards that of an emotive, rhetorical, vacuous manifesto, a declamatory pseudo-activism. . . . What the Expressionists intended was undoubtedly the very opposite of atavistic. But since they were unable to free themselves intellectually from an imperialist parasitism, and since they colluded in the ideological decay of the imperialist bourgeoisie without offering

<sup>4</sup> In June 1937, the Nazis organized an Exhibition of Degenerate Art in Munich, in which leading modernist works, plundered from the museums of Germany, were ridiculed.

<sup>5</sup> In 1933 Goebbels had said: 'Expressionism contained the seeds of some sound ideas, for there was something Expressionistic about the whole age.'

on occasion as its vanguard, their creative method could without distortion be pressed into the service of that synthesis of decadence and atavism which is the demagogy of Fascism'. It can immediately be seen that the view that Expressionism and Fascism are cast in the same mould has its ultimate source here. The antithesis of Expressionism versus – let us say – the Classical Heritage, is just as rigid in Lukács as in Ziegler. However, in Lukács it acquires a conceptual foundation and is not just a matter of purple-patch journalism.

However, objectively the antithesis is not so readily demonstrable. Anyone who actually looks at Lukács's essay (a procedure highly to be recommended: the original is always the most instructive), will notice at the very outset that nowhere is there any mention of a single Expressionist painter. Marc, Klee, Kokoschka, Nolde, Kandinsky, Grosz, Dix, Chagall simply do not figure at all – to say nothing of musical parallels, such as the contemporary works of Schönberg. This is all the more surprising in that the links between painting and literature at that time were extremely close, and the paintings of Expressionism were far more characteristic of the movement than its literature. Reference to the painters, moreover, would have had the additional advantage of making it harder to dismiss Expressionism so categorically, for some of their pictures have a lasting importance and greatness. But even the literary works have not received the attention they merit, either qualitatively or quantitatively – their critics being content to make do with a very limited and highly untypical 'selection'. Trakl, Heym and Else Lasker-Schüler are tóttally absent; Werfel's early work is only mentioned because he wrote a few pacifist verses; the same is true of Ehrenstein and Hasenclever. The early and often important poems of Johannes Becher merely attract the comment that the author 'gradually succeeded in discarding' the Expressionist manner, while quotations from poetasters like Ludwig Rubiner abound, again only for the purpose of reinforcing the charge of abstract pacifism. Significantly, a quotation from René Schickele is also introduced in this context, even though Schickele was never an Expressionist but just an abstract pacifist (like many worthy men and poets, Hermann Hesse and Stefan Zweig among them).

What material does Lukács then use to expound his view of the Expressionists? He takes prefaces or postscripts to anthologies, 'introductions' by Pinthus, newspaper articles by Leonhard, Rubiner, Hiller, and other items of the same sort. So he does not get to the core of the matter, the imaginative works which make a concrete impression in time and space, a reality which the observer may re-experience for him-

self. His material is second-hand from the outset; it is literature on Expressionism, which he then proceeds to use as a basis for literary, theoretical and critical judgements. No doubt Lukács's purpose is to explore 'the social base of the movement and the ideological premisses arising from that base'. But it thereby suffers from the methodological limitation that it produces only a concept of concepts, an essay on essays and even lesser pieces. Hence the almost exclusive criticism merely of Expressionist tendencies and programmes, chiefly those formulated, if not foisted on the movement, by its own commentators.

In this connection Lukács makes many accurate and subtle observations. He draws attention to the 'abstract pacifism', the Bohemian concept of 'the bourgeois', the 'escapist quality', indeed the 'ideology of escapism' in Expressionism. Again, he uncovers the merely subjective nature of the Expressionist revolt, as well as the abstract mystification implicit in its attempt to reveal the 'essence' of objects by depicting them in the Expressionist manner. But even on this question of the subjective nature of the Expressionist revolt, he does not really do these poets justice, in berating them – on the evidence of Prefaces – for their 'pretentious showiness', their 'tinny monumentality'. The same can be said of his claim that all the content of their works reveal is 'the forlorn perplexity of the petty-bourgeois caught up in the wheels of capitalism', or 'the impotent protest of the petty-bourgeois against the kicks and blows of capitalism'. Even if they had done nothing else, even if the Expressionists had no other message to proclaim during the Great War than peace and the end of tyranny, this would not entitle Lukács to dismiss their struggles as shadow-boxing or to describe them as no more than 'a pseudo-critical, misleadingly abstract, mythicizing form of *imperialist* pseudo-opposition' (my italics).

It is true that *after* the War Werfel and others of his kind transformed their abstract pacifism into a toy trumpet; in the context of revolution, the slogan of 'non-violence' became a palpably counter-revolutionary maxim. But this does not invalidate the fundamentally revolutionary character of that slogan *during the War itself*, prior to the point where the War might have developed into a civil war; and it was understood precisely in this way by the politicians who were intent on fighting on to the bitter end. Moreover, there was no lack of Expressionists prepared to come out in favour of 'virtue in arms', Christ's scourge driving the money-changers from the Temple. These ideals of brotherly love were not as naive as all that. Indeed the assertion that Expressionism never abandoned 'the general ideological assumptions of German imperialism',

and that its 'apologetic critique' ultimately furthered imperialism, is not merely one-sided and distorted: it is so warped that it provides a textbook example of that schematic brand of sociology which Lukács himself has always opposed. But as we have remarked, none of this even touches the actual *creative* works of Expressionism, which alone are of interest to us. It belongs essentially to the *Ziel-Jahrbuch*<sup>6</sup> and similar diatribes, now justifiably forgotten (even though under the leadership of Heinrich Mann there were at least no imperialist war cries). But there is surely no need to labour the point that in the emotional outbursts of the art of the period, with their semi-archaic, semi-utopian hypostases, which remain today as enigmatic as they were then, there is to be found far more than the 'USPD ideology'<sup>7</sup> to which Lukács would like to reduce Expressionism. No doubt these emotional outbursts were even more dubious than enigmatic when they had no object outside themselves. But to describe them as the expression of 'the forlorn perplexity of the petty-bourgeois' is scarcely adequate. Their substance was different; it was composed partly of archaic images, but partly too of revolutionary fantasies which were critical and often quite specific. Anyone who had ears to hear could hardly have missed the revolutionary element their cries contained, even if it was undisciplined and uncontrolled, and 'dissipated' a considerable amount of the 'classical heritage' – or what was then more accurately 'classical lumber'. Permanent Neo-classicism, or the conviction that anything produced since Homer and Goethe is not worth considering unless it is produced in their image or as an abstraction from them, is no vantage-point from which to keep one's eye on the last avant-garde movement but one, or to pass judgement on it.

Given such an attitude, what recent artistic experiments can possibly avoid being censured? They must all be summarily condemned as aspects of the decay of capitalism – not just in part, which might not be unreasonable, but wholesale, one hundred per cent. The result is that there can be no such thing as an avant-garde within late capitalist society; anticipatory movements in the superstructure are disqualified from possessing any truth. That is the logic of an approach which paints everything in

<sup>6</sup> Edited by Kurt Hiller, the *Ziel-Jahrbücher* appeared from 1915–20 (though they were banned in 1916 because of their pacifist opinions). They were the vehicle of Hiller's own utopian activism which sought to establish the hegemony of an intellectual aristocracy.

<sup>7</sup> The USPD (Independent Social-Democratic Party of Germany) was formed as a scission from the SPD (Social Democratic Party) in 1916, in protest against the pursuit of the War. From 1919 to 1920, it occupied a position between the Social-Democratic and Communist Parties. In 1920, its Party Congress voted to merge with the latter, but in practice most of its leaders and many of its members reverted to the former.

black and white – one hardly likely to do justice to reality, indeed even to answer the needs of propaganda. Almost all forms of opposition to the ruling class which are not communist from the outset are lumped together with the ruling class itself. This holds good even when, as Lukács illogically concedes in the case of Expressionism, the opposition was subjectively well-intentioned and its adherents felt, painted and wrote as adversaries of the Fascism that was to come. In the age of the Popular Front, to cling to such a black-and-white approach seems less appropriate than ever; it is mechanical, not dialectical. All these recriminations and condemnations have their source in the idea that ever since the philosophical line that descends from Hegel through Feuerbach to Marx came to an end, the bourgeoisie has nothing more to teach us, except in technology and perhaps the natural sciences; everything else is at best of ‘sociological’ interest. It is this conception which convicts such a singular and unprecedented phenomenon as Expressionism of being pseudo-revolutionary from the very beginning. It allows, indeed forces, the Expressionists to figure as forerunners of the Nazis. Streicher’s family-tree now finds itself improbably and utterly confusingly upgraded. Ziegler indeed fashions a crescendo out of names which are worlds apart – separating them only by commas, and listing them in sequence as brothers, in the same ‘carping’ fellowship: ‘Bachofen, Rhode, Burckhardt, Nietzsche, Chamberlain, Baumler, Rosenberg.’ On the same grounds, Lukács even doubts whether Cézanne is of any substance as a painter, and talks of the great Impressionists *in toto* (not just of the Expressionists) as he speaks of the decline of the West. In his essay nothing is left of them but a ‘vacuity of content . . . which manifests itself artistically in the accumulation of insubstantial, merely subjectively significant surface details’.

By contrast, the Neoclassicists emerge as true giants. Theirs alone is the heritage. For Ziegler this includes even Winckelmann’s conception of antiquity, with its noble simplicity and serene grandeur, the culture of a bourgeoisie which had not yet disintegrated, the world of a century ago and more. In the face of such a simplification we need to remind ourselves that the age of Neo-classicism witnessed the rise not only of the German bourgeoisie but also of the Holy Alliance; that the Neo-classical columns and the ‘austere’ manorial style take account of this reaction; that Winckelmann’s Antiquity itself is by no means without feudal passivity. True enough, the *laudatores temporis acta* do not confine themselves to Homer and Goethe. Lukács holds Balzac in the highest esteem, makes a case for Heine as a poet of national stature, and is on

occasion so out of touch with Classicism that in his essay on Heine he can describe Mörike, who has always been regarded by lovers of earlier poetry as one of the most authentic of German lyricists, as a 'charming nonentity'. But in general, the Classical is seen as healthy, the Romantic as sick, and Expressionism as sickest of all, and this is not simply by contrast with the undiluted objective realism which characterized Classicism.

This is not the occasion for a detailed discussion of an issue so crucial that only the most thorough analysis can do it justice: for it involves all the problems of the dialectical-materialist theory of reflection (*Abbildlehre*). I will make only one point. Lukács's thought takes for granted a closed and integrated reality that does indeed exclude the subjectivity of idealism, but not the seamless 'totality' which has always thriven best in idealist systems, including those of classical German philosophy. Whether such a totality in fact constitutes reality, is open to question. If it does, then Expressionist experiments with disruptive and interpolative techniques are but an empty *jeu d'esprit*, as are the more recent experiments with montage and other devices of discontinuity. But what if Lukács's reality – a coherent, infinitely mediated totality – is not so objective after all? What if his conception of reality has failed to liberate itself completely from Classical systems? What if authentic reality is also discontinuity? Since Lukács operates with a closed, objectivistic conception of reality, when he comes to examine Expressionism he resolutely rejects any attempt on the part of artists to shatter any image of the world, even that of capitalism. Any art which strives to exploit the *real* fissures in surface inter-relations and to discover the new in their crevices, appears in his eyes merely as a wilful act of destruction. He thereby equates experiment in demolition with a condition of decadence.

At this point, even his ingenuity finally flags. It is undoubtedly the case that the Expressionists utilized, and even exacerbated, the decadence of late bourgeois civilization. Lukács resents their 'collusion in the ideological decay of the imperialist bourgeoisie, without offering either criticism or resistance, acting indeed on occasion as its vanguard'. But in the first place there is very little truth in the crude idea of 'collusion'; Lukács himself acknowledges that Expressionism 'was ideologically a not insignificant component of the anti-war movement'. Secondly, so far as 'collusion' in an active sense goes, the actual furtherance of cultural decline, one must ask: are there not dialectical links between growth and decay? Are confusion, immaturity and incomprehensibility always and in every case to be categorized as bourgeois decadence? Might they not

equally – in contrast with this simplistic and surely unrevolutionary view – be part of the transition from the old world to the new? Or at least be part of the struggle leading to that transition? This is an issue which can only be resolved by concrete examination of the works themselves; it cannot be settled by omniscient *parti-pris* judgements. So the Expressionists were the ‘vanguard’ of decadence. Should they instead have aspired to play doctor at the sick-bed of capitalism? Should they have tried to plaster over the surface of reality, in the spirit, say, of the Neo-classicists or the representatives of Neo-objectivity,<sup>8</sup> instead of persisting in their efforts of demolition? Ziegler even reproaches the Expressionists with ‘subversion of subversion’, without realizing in his detestation that two minuses produce a plus. He is quite incapable of appreciating the significance of the demise of Neo-classicism. He is even less able to comprehend the strange phenomena which emerged just at the moment when the old surface reality collapsed, to say nothing of the problems of montage. In his eyes all this is just ‘junk clumsily glued together’, rubbish for which he cannot forgive the Fascists, even though they will have none of it either – in fact entirely share his opinion.

The importance of Expressionism is to be found exactly where Ziegler condemns it: it undermined the schematic routines and academicism to which the ‘values of art’ had been reduced. Instead of eternal ‘formal analyses’ of the work of art, it directed attention to human beings and their substance, in their quest for the most authentic expression possible. There is no doubt that there were frauds who took over its uncertain and easily-imitable directness of tone, and that its unduly subjectivist breakthroughs and vague presentiments were not always, or indeed hardly ever, to achieve a lasting authority. But a just and dispassionate evaluation must be based on the work of the real Expressionists and not – to make criticism simpler – on distortions, let alone on mere misrecollections. As a phenomenon, Expressionism was unprecedented, but it did not by any means think of itself as lacking in tradition. Quite the reverse. As the *Blue Rider* proves, it ransacked the past for like-minded witnesses, thought it could discern correspondences in Grünewald, in primitive art and even in Baroque. If anything, it unearthed too many parallels rather than too few. It found literary predecessors in the *Storm and Stress* movement of the 1770s, it discovered revered models in the visionary

<sup>8</sup> *Neue Sachlichkeit*, or Neo-Objectivity, represented a non-political recoil from the emotional effusions of expressionism. Typical exponents ranged from Erich Kästner to writers like Ernst Jünger. The accent on cool detachment also left its mark on Brecht.

works of the youthful and the aged Goethe – in *Wanderers Sturmlied*, in *Harzreise im Winter*, in *Pandora* and in the Second Part of *Faust*. Moreover, it is untrue that the Expressionists were estranged from ordinary people by their overwhelming arrogance. Again, the opposite is the case. The *Blue Rider* imitated the glass paintings at Murnau;<sup>9</sup> in fact they were the first to open people's eyes to this moving and uncanny folk-art. In the same way, they focused attention on the drawings of children and prisoners, on the disturbing works of the mentally sick and on primitive art. They rediscovered 'Nordic decorative art', the fantastically complex carvings to be found on peasant chairs and chests down to the 18th century, interpreting it as the first 'organic-psychic style' and defining it as a sort of secret Gothic tradition, of greater worth than the inhumanly crystalline, aristocratic style of Egypt, and even than Neo-classicism. We need hardly add that 'Nordic decorative art' is a technical term from art-history, and that neither the genre nor the solemn fervour with which the Expressionists welcomed it has anything in common with Rosenberg's fraudulent cult of the Nordic, of which it is certainly not an 'origin'. Indeed his Nordic carving is full of Oriental influences; tapestries and 'linear ornamentation' in general were a further element in Expressionism. There is one further point that is the most important of all. For all the pleasure the Expressionists took in 'barbaric art', their ultimate goal was humane; their themes were almost exclusively human expressions of the incognito, the mystery of man. Quite apart from their pacifism, this is borne out even by their caricatures and their use of industrial motifs; the word 'man' was as common a feature of Expressionist parlance in those days as its opposite, the 'beautiful beast', is today among the Nazis. It was also subject to abuse. 'Resolute humanity' turned up all over the place; anthologies had titles like *Menschheitsdämmerung* (*The Dawn of Mankind*) or *Kameraden der Menschheit* (*Friends of Mankind*) – lifeless categories, no doubt, but a far cry from pre-Fascist ones. An authentically revolutionary, lucid humanist materialism has every reason to repudiate such vapid rhetoric; no-one maintains that Expressionism should be taken as a model or regarded as a 'precursor'. But neither is there any justification for refurbishing interest in Neo-classicism by renewing outmoded battles with an Expressionism long since devalued. Even if an artistic movement is not a 'precursor' of

<sup>9</sup> A village in Bavaria where Kandinsky, one of the leading members of the *Blauer Reiter*, had a house where he spent the summers from 1908 until the outbreak of the war.

anything, it may for that very reason seem closer to young artists than \* [a third-hand classicism which calls itself 'socialist realism' and is administered as such. Superimposed on the architecture, painting and writing of the Revolution, it is stifling them. The end-product is not a painted Greek vase but the later Becher as a sort of Wildenbruch.<sup>10</sup>] Even a more authentic classicism is doubtless culture, but distilled, abstracted, schematized. It is culture seen without temperament.<sup>11</sup>

For all that, the passions of an earlier period still stir controversy. So perhaps Expressionism is not outmoded after all; might it still have some life left in it? Almost involuntarily, the question brings us back to the starting point of our reflections. The vexatious voices to be heard today certainly do not in themselves warrant an answer in the affirmative. Nor do the three problems posed by Ziegler in the conclusion of his article shed any new light. Ziegler asks, to test his own hostility to the movement, the questions 'Antiquity: "Noble simplicity and serene grandeur" – do we still see it in that light?' 'Formalism: enemy number one of any literature that aspires to great heights – do we agree with this?' 'Closeness to the people, popular character: the fundamental criteria of any truly great art – do we accept this without reservation?' It is quite clear that even if one answers these questions in the negative, or rejects them as improperly formulated, it does not necessarily mean that one still harbours 'vestiges of Expressionism' within one. Hitler – and unfortunately, when faced by questions so bluntly put, one cannot avoid thinking of him – Hitler has already unreservedly answered the first and third questions in the affirmative, but that does not put him on our side.

Let us leave aside 'noble simplicity and serene grandeur', which involves a purely historical, contemplative question, and a contemplative attitude towards history. Let us confine ourselves to the questions of 'formalism' and 'closeness to the people', however ambiguously they may have been formulated in the present context. There is surely no denying that formalism was the least of the defects of Expressionist art (which must not be confused with Cubism). On the contrary, it suffered far more from a neglect of form, from a plethora of expressions crudely,

<sup>10</sup> A minor nationalist writer of the Wilhelmine epoch who specialized in monumental historical dramas.

<sup>11</sup> An allusion to Zola's definition of Naturalist art as 'nature seen with a temperament'.

\* The passage contained between [ ] was written into the text by Bloch when it was republished in 1962.

wildly or chaotically ejaculated; its stigma was amorphousness. It more than made up for this, however, by its closeness to the people, its use of folklore. That disproves the opinion of it held by Ziegler, who conceives of Winckelmann's view of Antiquity and the academicism derived from it as a sort of artistic equivalent of Natural Law. It is enough, of course, that fake art [*kitsch*] is itself popular, in the bad sense. The countryman in the 19th century exchanged his painted wardrobe for a factory-made display cabinet, his old, brightly-painted glass for a coloured print and thought himself at the height of fashion. But it is unlikely that anyone will be misled into confusing these poisoned fruits of capitalism with genuine expressions of the people; they can be shown to have flowered in a very different

Neo-classicism is, however, by no means such a sure antidote to kitsch; nor does it contain an authentically popular element. It is itself much too 'highbrow' and the pedestal on which it stands renders it far too artificial. By contrast, as we have already noted, the Expressionists really did go back to popular art, loved and respected folklore – indeed, so far as painting was concerned, were the first to discover it. In particular, painters from nations which had only recently acquired their independence, Czech, Latvian and Yugoslav artists about 1918, all found in Expressionism an approach that was infinitely closer to their own popular traditions than the majority of other artistic styles, to say nothing of academicism. If Expressionist art often remains incomprehensible to the observer (not always; think of Grosz, Dix or the young Brecht†), this may indicate a failure to fulfil its intentions, but it may also mean that the observer possesses neither the intuitive grasp typical of people undeformed by education, nor the open-mindedness which is indispensable for the appreciation of any new art. If, as Ziegler thinks, the artist's intention is decisive, then Expressionism was a real breakthrough to popular art. If it is the achievement that counts, then it is wrong to insist that every single phase of the process be equally intelligible: Picasso was the first to paint 'junk clumsily glued together', to the horror even of cultivated people. At a far lower level, Heartfield's satirical photography was so close to the people that many who were intellectuals thereafter refused to have anything to do with montage. If Expressionism can still provoke debate today, or is at any rate not beyond discussing, then it follows that there must have been more to it than the 'ideology of the USPD', which has now lost any sub-structure it ever had. The

† The 1937 text refers to Becher, not Brecht.

problems of Expressionism will continue to be worth pondering until they have been superseded by better solutions than those put forward by its exponents. But abstract methods of thought which seek to skim over recent decades of our cultural history, ignoring everything which is not purely proletarian, are hardly likely to provide these solutions. The heritage of Expressionism has not yet ceased to exist, because we have not yet even started to consider it.

*Translated by Rodney Livingstone*