ERNST BLOCH

# Heritage of Our Times

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*To my dear Karola Piotrkowska*

# HERITAGE OF OUR TIMES

Ernst Bloch

*Translated by Neville and Stephen Plaice*

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# CONTENTS

# TRANSLATORS' INTRODUCTION

The first edition of *Erbschaft dieser Zeit* was published in Zurich in 1935, during Ernst Bloch's five-year period of emigration from Nazi Germany in various European capitals before his final emigration to America for ten years in 1938. The book thus appeared roughly halfway between the publication of the first edition of Bloch's major literary work *Spuren* ('Traces') in 1930 and the beginning of his herculean labours, covering almost the whole of his period of American exile (1938–49), on the vast three-volume work that was to form the keystone of his philosophy, *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* (the English version of which – by the present translators with Paul Knight – was published as *The Principle of Hope* by Basil Blackwell in 1986). The structure of the book reflects a further development of the open pattern of short, often challengingly cryptic and intensely poetic texts employed in *Spuren*, while also prefiguring in the brief preliminary section 'Der Staub' ('Dust') and each of the subsequent three major parts the structural progression used in *The Principle of Hope* from these densely evocative introductory passages towards longer stretches of direct cultural, social and political analysis. *Erbschaft dieser Zeit*, which sets out to explore the true legacies of our present 'age of transition', thus itself also plays a crucial transitional role in the structural and philosophical development of Bloch's work as a whole, culminating in his wider theory of the world as open process and the concept of the Not-Yet-Conscious, the preconscious dimension in past, present and future, at the heart of his comprehensive philosophy of hope.

The bulk of the book was written in the early 1930s, although the oldest sections go back as early as 1924 (all dates given in the text are those of the original versions of the respective pieces). The enlarged and revised edition translated here, most notably incorporating the essays that formed Bloch's central contribution to the literary controversy in the late 1930s that has come to be known as the 'Expressionism debate',

was published in Frankfurt in 1962, shortly after Bloch had decided to remain in the West, after the erection of the Berlin Wall, and to accept a guest professorship at Tübingen university. Bloch's bitter disappointment with 'socialist' developments in East Germany, where he had been obliged to retire from academic life, is clearly apparent in his 1962 Postscript to the Preface to the first edition of the book, expressing an open disillusionment with the narrow totalitarian system he had just escaped (particularly with its official cultural policy of 'socialist realism'), which belies the superficial right-wing caricature of Bloch as a blinkered apologist for Marxist orthodoxy.

It was precisely against the dogmatic advocates of 'socialist realism' that Bloch made his courageous stand in defence of the artistic avant-garde in the vehement debate in the 1930s concerning the relative merits of Expressionism and realism. His particular adversary was the Hungarian literary critic Georg Lukács, one of his closest friends in younger days, who had sought to trace a direct link between Expressionism and National Socialism in his essay 'Größe und Verfall des Expressionismus' ('Greatness and Decline of Expressionism'), first published in an issue of *Internationale Literatur* in Moscow in 1934. But the Expressionism debate proper did not get under way until over three years later, sparked off by two essays in the September 1937 number of the literary magazine *Das Wort*, a major organ of the 'Volksfront' (a popular front of intellectuals of various political persuasions, united in their opposition to fascism). The first of these essays comprised an attack by Klaus Mann on the Expressionist poet Gottfried Benn's complicity with National Socialism, and the second, by the hard-line functionary Alfred Kurella (under the pseudonym of Bernhard Ziegler), also employed the example of Benn to support the thesis that Expressionism was a logical precursor of fascism. Other writers and artists were quick to spring to the defence of Expressionism by pointing out the tremendous political diversity of its major exponents, and the consequent absurdity of condemning the movement lock, stock and barrel as a homogeneous enterprise. There was indeed a strongly progressive, implicitly anti-fascist strain in the best Expressionist writing and art, dwarfing the work of a writer like Benn – writers of the calibre of Johannes R. Becher, Georg Heym, Else Lasker-Schüler or Ernst Toller, to name just a few.

Bloch himself had been an active exponent of this progressive vein of Expressionism in his first philosophical work *Geist der Utopie* ('The Spirit of Utopia') published in 1918, so his subsequent defence of the movement was sharpened by an element of direct personal and political commitment. His first major contribution to the Expressionism debate was the article 'Diskussionen über Expressionismus', first published in *Das Wort* in 1938 and later revised for inclusion in the enlarged edition of *Erbschaft dieser Zeit*. As a glaring topical example of the antipathy between Expressionism and fascism, Bloch could point to the Nazi

exhibition of 'Entartete Kunst' ('Degenerate Art'), containing works by almost all the great Expressionist artists, which opened in Munich in the summer of 1937 and which Bloch had already pilloried in the slightly earlier essays 'Der Expressionismus, jetzt erblickt' ('Expressionism, seen now') and 'Gauklerfest unterm Galgen' ('Jugglers' Fair beneath the Gallows'), both also later incorporated at different points into the enlarged edition of the present book. Coincidentally, this exhibition was organized by the would-be artist, Hitler's crony and President of the Reich Chamber of Art, Adolf Ziegler, his surname ironically identical with that of the time-serving Communist anti-Expressionist Kurella's adopted pseudonym. This chance echo highlights the fact that deep-seated cultural philistinism was not the exclusive preserve of the right at that time. Stalin's cultural *Gleichschaltung* (bringing into line) had been effected, and the truly revolutionary legacies of Russian Expressionism and Constructivism had already been sacrificed to sterile socialist realist conformity. And naturally this line was dogmatically followed by Communist parties all over Europe. It may indeed even be argued that the convergence of the artistic policies of right and left at this time irrevocably halted the development of a genuine revolutionary aesthetic in Europe.

As Bloch rightly points out in his first detailed riposte in 1938 to Lukács's essay of four years earlier, it does not refer to a single Expressionist painter and contains only the sketchiest of allusions to actual Expressionist writers, confining its attention almost exclusively to the programmatic statements of theorists of the movement. It is above all Lukács's underlying conception of literature as a closed totality, his admiration of the classical tradition (echoing the strong neo-classicist element in 'socialist realism'), which Bloch attacks and counters with his own unorthodox Marxist vision of art as future-orientated, necessarily fragmentary (giving rise to the radical innovatory technique of montage), at its best reflecting the light of a world that is not yet there (illustrated by the very concept of 'Vor-Schein' that lies at the heart of Bloch's aesthetic theory, with its double connotation of 'pre-appearance' and 'shining ahead'). In contrast to Lukács's stubborn allegiance to the mainstream literary tradition of bourgeois realism sustained by a writer like Thomas Mann, Bloch champions modern experimental writers such as Bertolt Brecht, who incidentally also himself took issue with Lukács's narrow definition of realism in a series of private notes which he decided not to publish at the time in an attempt to avoid any further exacerbation of the virulence of the debate. For Bloch, Brecht is a supreme modern example of those artists who stand on the very Front of their age, from where they can anticipate future developments.

For all their differences, Bloch's dispute with Lukács is unmistakably based on a mutual respect grounded in their early close friendship. In retrospect, it seems astonishing that such a similarly open debate as a

whole was possible in Stalinist circles at this time on questions of literary theory. But it was the tolerant atmosphere of the 'Volksfront' – the united struggle against fascism embracing a vast spectrum of left-wing and bourgeois liberal opinion – which made this possible. This openness was soon stamped out again in East Germany after the war, as Bloch was to experience at first hand, and fittingly it was Alfred Kurella himself – a leading instigator of the whole controversy over Expressionism – who played a dominant role in this fresh cultural repression, from his appointment in 1957 as cultural commissar in the GDR up until his death in 1975.

Underlying the clash between Bloch and Lukács over the respective virtues of Expressionism and realism was the deeper question of cultural inheritance. Whereas Lukács saw only bohemian decadence symptomatic of an age of capitalist decay – and hence nothing worth inheriting – in the work of the modern artistic avant-garde, Bloch passionately believed there were positive elements to be extricated and claimed from cultural developments in all ages (not just that of classical bourgeois art favoured by Lukács), including the current 'age of transition'. Indeed, the primary task he set out to accomplish in this book was to readdress the real target of fascism, to rescue positive elements of the genuine German cultural tradition of both past and present from the thieving magpie grasp of Nazi ideology, and to claim this inheritance for the future. As a demonstration of his commitment to contemporary experimental departures in the arts, Bloch also used montage as an organizing principle for his own book. It is a heterogeneous patchwork of ideas and insights, juxtaposing segments of acute social and political analysis with others of critical perception and broader cultural vision. The book cuts and pastes from across the whole spectrum of high and popular culture, setting Wagner alongside colportage, for example, in order to rescue a hidden legacy of colportage from the portentous composer, drawing on the undiminished cultural energy of the fair and Karl May alongside Proust and Joyce, and even extracting positive images for the future from the nineteenth-century parlour. With its combined wealth of culturally specific reference and transcendent philosophical perspective, the content thus mirrors the style of the book in its exemplary embodiment of the heritage of our times.

One of the key philosophical concepts Bloch develops in the book is that of 'Ungleichzeitigkeit' (non-contemporaneity), the obligation to the dialectic of which is explored in a significantly central section. Social and cultural structures of the past continue to flourish in the present alongside contemporary capitalist ones and those pregnant with the future. Bloch believed that the anachronism of large parts of the peasantry and petite bourgeoisie in the modern capitalist world was not exclusively a negative phenomenon but also the source of potentially fruitful contradiction. It was largely the scornful wholesale rejection by

vulgar Marxists of these seemingly anachronistic and irrational features of earlier social modes which had surrendered this whole fertile and influential area to the Nazis without a struggle, and had thus allowed them to occupy the positive, genuine elements of non-contemporaneity along with the negative ones. Bloch's book is ultimately an appeal for the cultivation of the dialectic sparked by these non-contemporaneous contradictions alongside the contemporaneous dialectic spearheaded, in his view, by the proletariat.

But of course one of the most fascinating aspects of the book is that it also reads as a contemporary observation of the rise of the Nazis. It probes their bogus roots in German history and mythology at the very moment the ludicrous ideologies of Blood and Soil and the Blond Beast are actually taking hold of the German people. Reading these essays today, it is sometimes hard to believe that many of them were written either from within Germany long before Hitler came to power, or from the distant standpoint of exile in the thirties, long before the rest of the world had begun to grasp the full horrors of the National Socialist regime. Though he subsequently had the opportunity to add to and to revise this collection of essays in the postwar period, there is no question of hindsight. Bloch's original analysis of developments in Germany was astonishingly prescient, literally before its time, and brilliantly anticipating the welter of post-war analysis of the phenomenon.

Bloch focuses not so much on the proletariat in this work, as on the petite bourgeoisie, the ground-swell of Hitler's support. He lays bare the rising political consciousness of this class, its negative and positive heritage, the legacies it inherited or failed to inherit from German history, and shows how at this crucial point it took the wrong road, towards fascism. But the analysis is not confined to the rise of German fascism, its implications are much wider. It springs immediately into new significance for the late twentieth century, when the lower middle class, albeit by other means – technological, monetarist, corporate means – are once more in the ascendancy. It is particularly appropriate that an English edition of *Heritage of Our Times* should appear at the end of the first decade of the political hegemony of that class in America and Britain – since many of the cultural reflexes Bloch identifies in the 'Golden twenties seen differently' may be reidentified in 'democratic' disguises in the consolidating reaction of the 1970s and 1980s. It was a depressing confirmation of the view that the new-found West German allegiance to democracy is little more than skin-deep to glance through the visitors' book at the recent exhibition in Munich to mark the fiftieth anniversary of that grotesque Nazi show-trial of modern art, of 'Entartete Kunst', and to discover that many contemporary Federal German citizens still share the same barbarous Nazi perception of the 'degenerate' nature of some of the very finest achievements of twentieth-century German art. The post-war European democracies have been patently

unable to enter upon the heritage of the revolutionary avant-garde which Bloch defended so staunchly in this book, largely contenting themselves instead with a diet of American realism and the increasingly synthetic products of the Hollywood dream-factory.

The events of 1989–90 in Germany, the demolition of the Berlin Wall, the economic reunification of East and West, the recreation of a Greater Germany, lend Bloch's assessment of the rise of Nazism a fresh significance for our immediate times. His analysis of the cultural antecedents in German history of the idea of the 'Third Reich' and of the will towards racial and economic supremacy is rendered topical once more. Such analysis is of crucial importance at a juncture where the reunited and once again democratic German state will inevitably emerge as the dominant economic power in the European Community. The events of 1933–45 may now be viewed retrospectively from a platform of peace amongst the Western democracies which Germany has rejoined. But Bloch's work does allow us to assess how fragile and unsteady that platform may be and what 'non-contemporaneous' cultural mythologies and dangerous unclaimed heritage might still lie beneath it, not only from Germany, but from all those democracies currently congratulating themselves on the global success of the capitalist system.

Yet, alongside this negative perspective on our own period, we are also being offered here the positive legacies of the 1920s and 1930s, the unclaimed ideas and images that Hitler and Stalin tried to eradicate, and which post-war Europe and America continue to repress. Indeed, the pre-appearance and reappearance of Bloch's book itself certainly forms a perfect example of its central thesis that a genuine anticipatory heritage is not just to be claimed from the conveniently closed, safely packaged and neatly labelled ages of the past but also from the open, experimental and transitional cultural process of our own times.

Neville Plaice
Stephen Plaice

# PREFACE TO THE 1935 EDITION

A broad view is taken here. The times are in decay and in labour at the same time. The situation is wretched or despicable, the way out of it crooked. But there is no doubt that its end will not be bourgeois.

The New comes in a particularly complex form. It is here considered as such, even in what hinders it. But above all in the involuntary crack and some of its shimmering signs. These are, as goes without saying, definitely found only in the victims, the deceived and intoxicated ones. The dupers themselves, the actions of those who preside over Germany, do not shimmer. They only have the character and function, for the capital that called them, of producing the most expedient degree possible of terror and confusion. There is no novelty here, not even a crack that could be used as a handhold. The powers which still *rule* today are united in spite of everything.

But those among whom they deceive are a different case. The peasants and the susceptible petit bourgeois who are not 'satisfied' in more senses than one today are in a partly obscured, partly strange unrest of a kind which was never seen before the crisis. There thus remains the question of their susceptibility or of a New which is at any rate complex even in what really or apparently hinders it. There is also an anti-capitalist 'drive' outside the proletarian stratum, although the latter, theoretically and practically, carries forward the real development, although proletarian liberation and hence, ultimately, that of all human beings can only be the work of the working class itself. The tenor of these pages, the position from which things are examined, is specifically Marxist. But precisely within this tenor another question arises, indirectly, concerning the ideological movement of the lower, and especially the upper, middle-class cultural stratum. It is this: does the declining bourgeoisie, precisely because it is declining, contribute elements towards the construction of the new world, and if so what are these elements? It is a purely indirect question, one of diabolical application; as such it has, as

it seems, been neglected up to now, although it is thoroughly dialectical. For a dialectically useful 'inheritance' can be contained not only in the revolutionary rise or in the vigorous blossoming of a class, but also in its decline and the various contents which the disintegration itself releases. Seen as such, directly, the flickering or intoxicating deceit of fascism serves only big business, which thereby diverts or dims the glance of strata becoming impoverished. But indirectly there appears in this diversion the shallow crack of a previously even more shallowly closed surface, in this irrational intoxication vapour from chasms which are useful not just to capitalism alone. Apart from nastiness and speechless brutality, apart from stupidity and panic-stricken deceivability, which are illustrated by every hour and every word of the Germany of terror, there is an element of an older, romantic contradiction to capitalism, which misses things in present-day life and longs for something vaguely different. The susceptible situation of the peasants and employees has its different reflex here, and not merely one of backwardness, but occasionally one of genuine 'non-contemporaneity' as well, namely of an economic-ideological remaining existence from earlier times. Today the contradictions of this non-contemporaneity exclusively serve the forces of reaction; but in this almost undisturbed usability there lies a particular Marxist problem at the same time. The position of the 'Irratio' within the inadequate capitalist 'Ratio' has been all too abstractly cordoned off, instead of its being examined from case to case and the particular contradiction of this position possibly being concretely occupied. That is why dogs and false magicians[1] were able to break into large, formerly socialist areas undisturbed. That is why these areas are not only quiet corners and arsenals of reaction but are in danger of remaining storm corners even for later on, even for victorious Marxism. It is high time to knock these weapons out of the hands of the forces of reaction. Especially high time to mobilize contradictions of non-contemporaneous strata against capitalism under socialist direction. The 'Irratio' must not be ridiculed wholesale here, but occupied: and from a position which has a rather more genuine awareness of 'Irratio' than the Nazis and their big business partners. This purpose is served in the book, after the short introductory section 'Dust', after the differently preparatory 'Diversion' which employees have already experienced, above all by the section 'Intoxication'. One chapter of 'Intoxication' (that is, of National Socialism), 'Non-contemporaneity and obligation to its dialectic', stands at the orientating centre.

But the astonishing times are not thereby exhausted. For even the declining upper strata produce elements, or release them, which do not

1 As elsewhere in this introduction, Bloch has Mephisto in Goethe's *Faust* in mind here. Mephisto appears as both a dog and a false magician in *Faust*, Part I.

absolutely belong to them. The fact that each latest machine which late-bourgeois technology produces is the best is not contested by Marxists. Yet almost no inheritance whatsoever is acknowledged in the ideological manifestations and products of the late period. Apart from 'objectivity' as a technoid and at the same time apparently collective form, the final spurt is not taken into account, although it is full of curiosities. Some of these are certainly, even indirectly, totally insubstantial or only 'sociologically' interesting: but a few of them, such as above all the strange late-bourgeois 'montage', undoubtedly carry more than decline. For montage breaks off parts from the collapsed context and the various relativisms of the times in order to combine them into new figures. This process is often only decorative, but often already involuntarily experimental or, when used, as in Brecht for example, voluntarily so; it is a process of interruption and thereby one of intersection of formerly very distant areas. Precisely here the wealth of a cracking age is large, of a conspicuous mixed period of evening and morning in the 1920s. This extends from visual and pictorial connections which have hardly been like this before to Proust, to Joyce, to Brecht, and beyond, it is a kaleidoscopic period, a 'revue'. This content is served by the section 'Objectivity and montage'; at the same time it contains the specific 'Irratio' of the upper middle class itself, the cunning and refined weariness of 'empty mechanics'. The bourgeoisie prepared this lyrically and philosophically for thirty years, partly as an emergency fund, partly as a cracking place of its own fatigue. Capital now occupies these cracking places with armed petit bourgeois in the fight against the proletariat; if properly occupied, they could be breaches or at least weakenings of the reactionary front. 'Life', 'soul', 'unconscious', 'nation', 'totality', 'Reich', and similar anti-mechanisms would not be so one hundred per cent usable in reactionary terms if the revolution did not merely wish, with justification, to unmask here but, with just as much justification, concretely to outdo, and to recollect the ancient possession of these very categories. The ancient possession: which does not mean that it can be the modern one unchanged since the days of the young Marx. But the obligation to examine and occupy possible contents exists here too; this book is a scuffle, moreover in the midst of the susceptible, indeed in the midst of the enemy, in order to rob him if need be. It is confined to topical features, names and the symptom that is posited with them; the background is concrete-utopian, here also composed of the colours, which are still so involuntary, the heirlooms of a not-to-be-forgotten phase, of its end and transition. The present work contains its share of late-bourgeois temporal content, for the most part in ambiguous form and thus dialecticized.

This begins with something small, first hears its way in as it were. Always pounces on the instances anew, advances with interruptions, as is proper today. Both linguistically and thematically, until the pace is

reached to cover the large questioning stretches themselves. The book was essentially written during the times it examines; and in Germany. Its theme is in fact the dust-spreading bourgeoisie in decay, and in strata and periods one behind the other: thus the 'diversion' (1924–29) is already over, the 'intoxication' (1924–33) still in full swing; but both continue to have an effect in transition. 'Objectivity and montage', as the contradictory condition of the upper strata, encompass even temporally the two lower manifestations of the transition. The accent lies not only on the unmasking of ideological appearance, but on the scrutiny of the possible remainder. Of course, the way of dealing with witches[2] is not lacking, indeed it is the critical music of every beginning, but it is in fact more important to take out of the bankrupt's estate that which appears to be susceptible and usable in mediated form, and to neutralize that which is dubious. One more word to hinder misunderstanding, which likes to make itself comfortable. Even if this work speaks not only from above, even if it also considers all kinds of evil or glittering confusion, it still does not extend its so-called little finger to the devil.[3] But hopefully – with considerably more effort than that of the little finger – he is relieved of his lying weapons and his dazzling delusions. But this does not occur through the proof alone that the petit bourgeois rebel only crookedly and dully: we knew that long ago, in any case. The fact that with them there exists 'nothing but petit-bourgeois opposition': there is no argument about this part of the assessment, for what should the petit bourgeois have at their disposal other than, at best, petit-bourgeois opposition? But more important today than this interesting, only somewhat stereotyped, assessment is differentiation and reconnaissance, is a campaign which does not underestimate the opponent, who is above all intent on booty. On booty of people who have become restless, of the frequently ambiguous, indeed revolutionary material which solely in its ambiguous capacity can serve the 'anti-capitalist' deception. We notice there is a new formulation of the question here, it does not articulate petit-bourgeois opposition itself, nor upper middle-class infection or whatever else sings the song of the old barrel-organ. Instead both conditions are only indirectly located from a Marxist position and their dialectical character noted, provided it exists – in the midst of the mere, insubstantial rottenness of decay – as one of transition. Nor has this formulation of the question the slightest thing in common either with social-democratic dilution or with Trotskyite obstructionism; since what the party did before Hitler's victory was completely correct, it was simply what it did not do that was wrong. The

2 Mephisto in *Faust*, in the Witches' Kitchen, Part I, 2517.

3 Bloch is here playing on the German proverb which reads literally, 'If you extend your little finger to the devil, he'll take your whole hand', the English equivalent of which would be, 'Give him an inch, and he'll take a mile'.

tendency destroys that which stands in its path, it inherits that which lies along its path.

This was seldom more due than today. Of course the aunt whose estate one wants to inherit must first be dead; but one can have a very good look round the room beforehand. Of course once the revolution has occurred it will liquidate a whole series of questions and apparent contents which today still count as such; but not all that is still 'irrational' is simply dissolvable stupidity. The hunger for – let us say – complications remains or it would be the first to have been appeased by the withdrawal of nourishment. The damned clearly surveyable talent has no place even in 'heaven on earth', there are questions and contents which precisely the really concrete concept does not automatically dissolve, but to which it does justice beforehand. The case is admittedly different with regard to the degree of the 'rescue' of such contents, or rather of their robbery for a different purpose. For once anyone has tasted Marxist criticism, he is not just disgusted for ever by all ideological claptrap, but also that which possibly remains after the criticism is not for him a happy end at all costs or the miserable logic of the Yes-But. Yet there often ensues only the warning of a dangerous, of an enduringly seductive quiet corner and storm corner of an irrational kind, in no uncertain terms. And the indirectly 'positive' inheritance which remains appears all the more strongly for consideration or as doubtful consideration; this 'rescue' then provides material for a Marxist problem or for propaganda among the susceptible or for neutralization. If we want to understand and overcome the remedies that are dished out precisely against genuine revolution to a bourgeois citizen becoming impoverished, then we must go – diabolically – into the bourgeois citizen's land, or rather on to his ship. He has only one ship left; for it is the age of transition. May this book play its part in determining the longitude and latitude of the final bourgeois voyage, so that it really is a final voyage.

Locarno, 1934

# POSTSCRIPT, 1962

Since then almost thirty years have passed. But the times from which the present book emerged are still vividly in the air. Their vividness is even growing, precisely among young people who never experienced them and who miss them in an almost sentimental way instead, in keeping with the term 'Golden twenties' and the other, incidentally older exaggeration that until the night of 1933 Berlin was the intellectual capital of the world. But the *age of transition*, illustrated by the 1920s, has undoubtedly remained one, at least in its predisposition, and certainly in its appeal. This transition from one society to another did not blunt the class fronts, but stood in the way of any hardening into a fixed pattern. The more than interesting character of such a mixed shipping period is merely concealed in the modern West by surprising prosperity and extensive boredom, and in the modern East by equally surprising non-prosperity and monolithic boredom. The transition in the modern East, in so far as inhuman distortion and undialectical hindrance has occurred there, has even been ensnared in grim narrowness and stereotyping. The celebrated eleventh thesis on Feuerbach by Marx states: 'previous philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways, but the point is to change it.' But above all in Franco-type countries on the eastern side this was practised to the following effect: The point is only to interpret unanimously the world decreed from above, it is forbidden on pain of downfall[4] to change it. This not even partially socialist and nevertheless, or rather therefore totalitarian system still certainly lacks much more, something distinctly different from the heritage of the transition. The hindrance there comprises far more than the merely sectarian narrowness which then promoted the débâcle of 1933. Far more than the connection missed at that time with the several dust-

4 Bloch is perhaps also thinking of his own fall from grace in East Germany here.

potentialities (diversion, intoxication, montage) out of collapse. With the conscious-unconscious element of proletarianized but not proletarian strata, then with the hypnotized experimental gaze of highly susceptible cultural upper strata. So-called socialist realism continued to do its bit as kitsch long afterwards to demonstrate both the aridity and the full showy backwardness in such narrowness. But what is this in comparison with the differently lacking element whereby the greatest liberation movement, which had been intended as definitive, could become so alienated from itself? Capitalism with the product of two world wars and with fascism has no need to advertise itself, but the corruption of what is better becomes no clearer despite pharisees who often do not even have the right to be right. The ring of freedom in the old impetus, in the implied goal, is lacking, the inheritance of 1789, with the Ninth Symphony which can no longer be revoked. The inheritance of corrected Natural Right is lacking, as the sought-for facultas of walking upright, 'honoured in individuals and secured in the collective' (Natural Right and Human Dignity).[5] And – in this respect a foil to the more central lack of ideas in the modern West – the development of theory is lacking, most urgently in economic terms, a reformatio literally in capite (which does not mean 'Führer') and in membris (which certainly does not mean an apparatus with lackeys). But what exists and is still not yet lacking is that which made the greatest liberation movement in the world, formulated, though not securingly thought through, appear as a scourge of fear instead of a breaking of the last chain; that which endowed it with the archetype of the wall instead of the 'leap from necessity into freedom'.[6] Nevertheless, at least the aridity and narrowness are connected with that sectarian pseudo-enlightenment which made people in the twenties so helpless against the deceitful intoxication but also so unappreciative of an experimental art. This latter lack of appreciation, which has remained official, is in fact called socialist realism, due to absence of both elements. Thus from this viewpoint too, it is instructive to glance at the so little surmounted luring ground of the Nazis, but then at the strangeness and dissolving density, now become so homeless, of works which even today totally lack the smug gallery tone, which still challenge their century – in so far as even their montage is one of rhetoric, and precisely for that reason. 'Heritage of our times' therefore, of the continuingly influential times of montage above all: if the book devoted to this subject appears in a new, little altered edition, then that which is dismissed and converted in it should even seem like present times in places, negatively and positively. Together with several pieces written at the time, which have further been inserted into the

5 A further work by Bloch himself, published in 1961.

6 Cf. Engels in *Anti-Dühring* on the 'leap of humanity out of the realm of necessity into the realm of freedom'.

montage of the book itself. 'The Golden twenties': the Nazi horror germinated in them, and no light fell down below here, experimental art drew its lines into unheard of regions and found nothing it can hold on to – may that be different one day. Hollow space with sparks, this will probably remain our condition for a long time, but a hollow space which allows us to walk undisguised, and with sparks which increasingly model a figure of direction. The paths in the midst of collapse are layable, right through the middle.

Tübingen, March 1962

# DUST

# HALF

We still are. But it only half works. The little man holds too much back. He still thinks, for himself alone.

# MUSTINESS

We live with it more than ever. Children are not taken out of the mustiness. They continue to absorb it or suffer until they become like their father. Even those who are not listening take notice of the conversations of the bourgeois conformist; so propping up the table remains, the gossip, the visitors, the false laughter and the real poison they strew amongst each other. The close, stale air still greets even those who are not breathing it. It seeps down to the young man, and up to the beautiful people. Keeps him good and quiet, them good and deaf.

# GOSSIP

No one believes it could be done to them. Those with little positions would not put up with it, namely from others like themselves. The little man has no desire whatever to rebel upwards, except in quite general terms, against red tape and the like. But he lets out what is tormenting him all the more readily at home; inauthentically, as a dispute with those weaker than him, as gossip versus the neighbours. Even the peasants know Gossip, a sweet expression on his face, leaving a stink behind. But country life never lets him feel as much at home, never lets him become as much the neighbourhood itself as he does in the block of flats. The worms crawl out of this place every day; they come out of the flour that is lacking, out of the borrowed pots, out of the many morals which are there for the purpose of having offended against them. Gossip crawls up and down the stairs, holds these people together by keeping them apart. He is the crooked way of being dissatisfied, the wrongly addressed way, the desire to fight without squaring up to the opponent. If he squares up, however, hands on hips, then it is clear just what a limited person is made of. Where he is, you can never do anything right by him.

# KNOWING EYES

Occasionally little people still get up satisfied. Sometimes there is enough for this, only for this and only just. But the meagrely paid man has never got beyond doing sums, and he seldom splashes out. Strange then that he finds this limited life not only cheap, but also proper.[1] That he begrudges the stratum below him anything to spread on their bread; and the top brass are doubly respected if they save. As for the beggar, he is not allowed to get beyond pennies; the coinage he is entitled to is small and, above all, it is only for bread. It pains the generous donor when poor children buy sweets with his penny; woe betide, then, the beggar who drinks away his mite that is no match for any misery. Because alms demand that the receiver is even more modest than they are themselves.

But even little people sense that they have nothing to laugh about. And they console themselves about this, namely with the illness of others which supposedly follows pleasure. It is quite in order then if enjoyment revenges itself on those who have it. The 'dissipated' young man belongs here, and especially also the 'knowing eyes'; the latter usually occur in adolescents and then preferably with dark rings around them. As if the body, of all things, were doing the creeps the favour of seeing to their business for them. As if even a hangover did not come from bad schnapps, but from riotous living. But the petit bourgeois never stop undermining their own kind, let alone those who are not their own kind, with illnesses which their revenge-drive mined in the first place. When a dancer dies, she has died of the ever wilder stimuli of her life, and the hack compounds these with consumption. Her delicate, childlike body was not up to the stresses of her way of life; a sad ending, he says, to a life without inhibitions. To the satisfaction of the

1 Bloch is playing on the German expression 'billig und recht' – 'right and proper'; 'billig' also carries its other connotation of 'cheap' here.