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David C. Durst. *Weimar Modernism: Philosophy, Politics, and Culture in Germany 1918-1933.* Lanham: Lexington Books, 2004. 233 pp. $83.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7391-0777-5; $27.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7391-1006-5.

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"Not all people exist in the same Now": Jameson's Modernism and Ernst Bloch's Idea of Simultaneity of the Non-simultaneous in the Weimar Republic

The peculiarities of the Weimar Republic are often characterized as fundamentally related to "modernity" or "modernism." Weimar's affluence of cultural expressions and intellectual observations, together with the fragility of the political order and the violent demise of the republic, have been repeatedly described by scholars as either the most lucid example of the contradictory nature of modernity, or a distinctive case of deviation from the modern "project." In tandem with this tradition, David Durst's *Weimar Modernism* employs a synthesis of Ernst Bloch and Fredric Jameson's observations in order to argue that post-World War I German "philosophy, politics, and culture" were essentially related to "the development of modernism" (p. xxii).

Durst bases his explanation of the inherent correlation between Weimar and modernism on the similarities of Bloch's account of postwar Germany and Jameson's description of the "logic of capitalism" in a stage of incomplete expansion. The coexistence of contradicting social and cultural formations "from radically different moments in history" (the "simultaneity of non-simultaneous"), which characterized the Republic's reality according to Bloch, corresponds with Jameson's depiction of the second stage of capitalism's expansion and its cultural product: modernism. The identification of Weimar culture with "modernism" is thus achieved due to the incomplete expansion of modern capitalism, resulting in the existence of various premodern residues within Germany's social realities and cultural discourses. In other words, Weimar culture should be regarded as an extraordinary example of modernism because, as Bloch pointed out, Germany was "the classical land of non-simultaneity" (p. 21).

As frequently indicated by scholars, "modernism" is an exceptionally problematic explanatory category.[1] Facing this difficulty, Durst adopts Jameson's definition of modernism as a distinctive "structure of feeling," which is particularly compatible with the coexistence of non-simultaneous phenomena to which Bloch had related (pp. 105-106). Consequently, the first objective of this book is to trace the developments of that "structure of feeling," or "modernism," which was allegedly shared

by Germans during the Weimar years. It is noteworthy, however, that most of the time Durst establishes his arguments on the works of distinguished intellectuals and artists (such as Adorno, Heidegger, Kracauer, Hausmann, and so on), rather than on inspection of popular culture expressions and social behavior. The extent to which these intellectuals' reflections on popular cultural tendencies actually reflect general "structures of feeling" is still, at least, debatable.

Recounting the developments in the Germans' structure of feeling between 1918-1933, Durst points to three distinct periods. Each marks a different prevalent tendency among Weimar contemporaries. The first period indicates the years of hyperinflation (until 1924), which resulted in a culture of "contemplation," or, in LukÃ¡cs's words, "passive cognitive stance of the individual over a heterogeneous social object, event, or law" (p. 57). The second period relates to the years of economic stabilization (1924-1929), which are characterized by Kracauer's famous assertion about the "cult of distraction" (p. 89). Finally, the third period starts with the international economic crisis of 1929 and is identified with Ernst JÃ¼nger's conception of the age of "total mobilization" (p. 149).

The advantage of this depiction is evident: the seemingly fragmented cultural and philosophical endeavors of the Weimar era would be portrayed in this way as taking part in one, relatively coherent discourse of "modernism." Based on Jameson's conception of modernism, Durst's argument rests upon the actual existence of essential relationships between these three "structure(s) of feeling" and the "simultaneous appearance of conflicting historical realities." The second objective of *Weimar Modernism*, therefore, is to confirm these fundamental connections. In execution of this task, Durst utilizes theories of the most prominent intellectuals of Weimar years, and highlights surprising similarities between seemingly unrelated theorists (for example, between the conservative Carl Schmitt and Dadaist Raoul Hausmann).

Although Bloch's argument for the non-simultaneity of post-WWI German reality was only coherently formulated during the 1930s, this idea can already be traced in his earlier writings, as Durst convincingly shows. Crucial to the development of Bloch's idea was his dissent with Georg LukÃ¡cs in the years following the latter's conversion to Marxism. According to LukÃ¡cs, the crisis of modern culture is a result of the inherent contradiction of liberal capitalism: the contradiction between an ideology of subjective freedom and a social order of industrial production (pp. 12-13, 44). Modern Germany, he argues, was thoroughly under the effect of the "homogenizing dialectic of capitalist synchronicity" (p. 19), which resulted in utopian ideas (such as Bloch's early 1920s thoughts) and the "pseudorevolutionary" art forms (e.g. the avant-garde's montage, p. 64), which is passive by nature. To respond to such an attack, Bloch sought to reach beyond LukÃ¡cs's economic reductionism, and sought to explain the "crisis" of German culture and the immense appeal of fascism by emphasizing the important role of premodern elements in the Weimar economy, administration, and–most importantly–in Germans' perception of reality. Since the concept of "non-simultaneity" rejects a homogenizing capitalist totality, the new art forms are no longer a mere symptom of the crisis of liberal capitalism, but an "account of … reality as actually experienced" (p. 25).

Intriguingly, the key concepts of the theoretical dispute between LukÃ¡cs and Bloch were echoed in the writings of some prominent Dadaists in the early 1920s. Like Bloch, they found the reason for the crisis in the residues of premodern foundations present in the core of Weimar culture (Hausmann writes, "the first expressionist was…Martin Luther", p. 45). Like LukÃ¡cs, however, they identified the essence of the crisis with the passive, contemplative character of the older art form. The future vociferous conservative critic of Weimar parliamentarism, Carl Schmitt, takes a similar approach in the early 1920s. Concentrating on the political sphere, Schmitt locates an attitude of "political romanticism" among prominent political leaders of the republic. This residue of premodern perceptions leads bourgeois regimes to chronic passivity.

Nevertheless, the paths of the above commentators diverged quickly, together with the economic stabilization and shift of emphasis among various intellectuals–from critique of passivity, to critique of the "cult of distraction." The assertion that hyperinflation and the relatively quick stabilization of German economy after 1923 had had a vast effect on the break from prewar cultures and the beginning of the age of mass (consumption) culture is today almost a truism. Durst argues further that the vast devaluation of currency (the unthinkable gap between gold and its paper money representations) also generated new evaluations of the relations between the self and its artistic representations, and hence, new forms of abstraction in expressionist art. Consequently, the stabilization of currency resulted in desertion of abstraction and the emergence of face-value realism of the *neue Sachlichkeit* (pp. 86-87). The marginalization of prewar cul-

tural phenomena, such as expressionism, left room for a new critique of modern "capitalist synchronization" (p. 93).

Durst chooses to highlight here Kracauer's reflections on the "mass ornament." When intellectual contemplations became commodities (Weber) and the city "salaried masses" tried to forget their insecurity, a new popular "cult" was formed around the consumption of culture, which now gave an illusion of synchronized reality without any trace of "nonsynchronic" elements. However, Durst stresses that this sense of harmonious capitalist order was not symptomatic of the German new "structure of feeling" after 1924. Between Bloch and Kracauer, Durst sides with the former, who maintained that even in Weimar big cities premodern perceptions were still prominent (p. 98). Even if it was never fully realized in 1920s Germany, the threat of a synchronized capitalist regime led significant thinkers back to the idea of the simultaneous existence of non-simultaneous formations– this time not as a cause for the crisis, but as a solution to it.

Facing the alarming tendency of the city masses to embrace the culture of mass commodification, Theodor Adorno turned to the music of the SchÃ¶neberg School for inspiration. Using and adapting elements from different musical traditions, Adorno wrote, Alban Berg's *Wozzeck* "transform[s] the familiarity of the past into the strange perspective of the future" (p. 121). In other words, Berg found a way to present non-simultaneous elements simultaneously in his music; this is the only way art could fight the totality of capitalism (p. 117). Adorno was not the only one to identify the false synchronization offered by the "cult of distraction" and the need to find a substituting conceptual framework to this system. Durst reads Heidegger's *Being and Time*, for instance, as a (Kracauerian-like) critique of urban society of the late 1920s: "not surprisingly," he writes, "Heidegger describes the inauthenticity of the 'Dasein' in terms of distractedness" (p. 139). The fast change in Heidegger's thoughts in the beginning of the 1930s symbolizes for Durst a new phase in Weimarian "structure of feeling," a tendency towards "total mobilization," best manifested in the works of Ernst JÃ¼nger.

In his works of the early 1930s JÃ¼nger sought to promote a new age in which the worker would be totally mobilized to act for the goals of the new imperial state. Alas, total mobilization, according to JÃ¼nger, was prevented in Germany before–and most notably during¿'World War I, because German society lacked the "inner armament" (p. 150). The problem, according to JÃ¼nger, was "ideological fixation" on outdated liberal ideas, or, put simply, the simultaneous existence of antiquated ideas of the past within the present. Like Bloch and Adorno, JÃ¼nger saw in the false synchronization of capitalism an enemy to be overcome; unlike them, he understood the coexistence of non-simultaneous elements as an obstacle rather than an answer to contemporary crisis. Notably, similar to Bloch, JÃ¼nger appreciated the effect of montage (for this essentially meant photographic montage); the work of the montage in his books, however, aimed to encourage elimination of the non-synchronized elements, and not–as in Bloch's thought– to emphasize them.

JÃ¼nger symbolizes for Durst the beginning of National Socialism's victory over the democratic republic. The Nazis showed as early as the elections of 1929 a skill for mobilization of voters, basing their popularity by appealing to the "level of feeling" (Durst recounts here Carl Mierendorf's observation of 1930, p. 181). Walter Benjamin's analysis of Bertolt Brecht's epic theater serves as an epilogue to the book, as an example for a sad, unsuccessful attempt to lead popular support away from Nazi totality. Against the level-of-feeling's symbolic totality of fascism, Brecht's epic theater evokes "disruptive, critical thought," which eradicates "hypnotic illusion" (p. 183). Benjamin's appreciation of the "montage" quality and of the "interruption" of the viewers' experience in Brecht's 1930s theater recalls Bloch's definition of the coexistence of non-simultaneous elements, as well as Adorno's quest for synchronization of non-synchronized elements in avant-garde art. Total mobilization, however, according to Durst, proved to be much more appealing than interruption and critical reflection of reality.

Weimar Modernism, therefore, tells the story of Weimar Germany as an extreme case of Jameson's "modernism," of the simultaneous existence of contradictory elements; the end of the republic is accordingly depicted as the true change from non-simultaneity to total mobilization. It is an enriching survey of an intellectual discourse in one of the most fascinating periods in the history of modern thought and culture. The weak point of the book, and maybe of its genre, is revealed in the intersections between the descriptions of critical intellectual discourse (of prominent philosophers, cultural critics, and elite artists), and portrayals of the "structure of feeling" supposedly common to Weimar contemporaries. The abundance of scholarship on popular culture in the Weimar Republic does not always correspond with Durst's findings in the critical writing of in-

tellectuals. For example, were ideas of total mobilization really absent, or negligible, in popular culture of the stabilization period? Again, was the extreme right the only side that effectively employed emotionally appealing symbolism, and was it only towards the end of the republic? The study of the Weimar Republic calls, indeed, for an additional synchronization of allegedly non-synchronized elements: synchronization of the critical intellectual discourse–to which *Weimar Modernism* contributes an interesting synopsis–and actual everyday practices in the modern urban sphere, the mass consumption and production of popular culture, as well as collective memory/memories and self-perceptions.

Note

[1]. See, for instance: R. Wohl, "The Heart of Darkness: Modernism and its Historian," *Journal of Modern History* 74 (2002): pp. 573-621; S. S. Friedman, "Definitional Excursions: The Meanings of Modern/Modernity/Modernism," *Modernism/Modernity* 8 (2001): pp. 493-513.