

Review

Reviewed Work(s): Engagierte Expressionismus. Politik und Literatur zwischen Weltkrieg und Weimarer Republik. Eine Analyse expressionistischer Zeitschriften by Eva Kolinsky; Neue Sachlichkeit 1924-1932. Studien zur Literatur des 'Weissen Sozialismus.' by Helmut Lethen

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Source: *New German Critique*, No. 1 (Winter, 1973), pp. 179-182

Published by: Duke University Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/487642>

Accessed: 19-11-2024 14:36 UTC

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is. He forgets to reflect upon the relationship between practical consciousness and the socio-economic base. As a matter of fact, it would be easy to denounce Vormweg's position as ivory tower elitism. But his challenge to Marxists is valid: discuss language scientifically, employ structuralist methods of analysis, and avoid the idiosyncracies of a pseudo-bourgeois approach to modern literature. Nevertheless, if Vormweg means to imply that everybody can understand literary texts, that everybody can learn to master and change his practical consciousness, then he himself has fallen back into the traditional type of argument which maintains that literature can have an immediate effect on society. The crux of the matter is that Vormweg ignores the importance of class-structures, market, modes of production, etc. Vormweg would have to make use of Jaeggi's sociological methods and prove that experimental literature not only reflects but also produces changed consciousness in a larger social context. The outcome of such a sociological investigation of the new literature would not be difficult to guess.

Andreas Huysen

Eva Kolinsky: *Engagierte Expressionismus. Politik und Literatur zwischen Weltkrieg und Weimarer Republik. Eine Analyse expressionistischer Zeitschriften.* Stuttgart: J.B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1970. 232 pages.

Helmut Lethen: *Neue Sachlichkeit 1924-1932. Studien zur Literatur des 'Weissen Sozialismus.'* Stuttgart: J.B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1970. 214 pages.

After 1945 the literature of expressionism and certain selectively chosen works of the 1920s were dutifully rediscovered by penitent students of German literature. However, the process of rediscovery was a curious one. First these works were exhumed, then ceremoniously displayed, and finally placed in a casket and pompously reburied. For although they often sought indirectly to revolt against West German post-fascism, as well as the bourgeois restoration of the Adenauer period, and at the same time to participate directly in the cultural denazification and the critique of the past (*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*), these scholars, their literary texts, and their political views barely managed a meek roar of defiance. Despite their oppositional intentions they remained well within the framework of bourgeois liberalism and capitalist market economic doctrine and measured the literature of the early twentieth century with criteria derived from both. Thus, they experienced the anguish, that the works they studied succumbed to the same ideological suspicions that were directed towards their own ideological preconceptions. If these literary works are not to be threatened again with neglect, and if this literature is to be recognized for its real value and preserved, the myths attached to

expressionism and 1920s must be destroyed, and the accompanying stereotypes of post-war research in this area must be broken down.

This cleaning-up operation has been undertaken by Eva Kolinsky and Helmut Lethen. The fact that they come closer to literary-historical truth and grasp contemporary literature more profoundly than the majority of their predecessors, is in no small measure due to the German student movement, which introduced a process of ideological clarification, gave political thought new aims, and thereby helped literary scholarship re-examine its methods. In different ways the works of both authors can be considered 'work in progress'—they give this work out cliché new meaning—since both authors lead the way out of the dead end street of literary research in the 1950s and early 60s, illuminate the force of new methods, politically redirect themselves, and move towards new political orientations.

Eva Kolinsky places literary expressionism "in a tension between the poles of the 'decline of the old era' and the 'utopia of a better era and a new mankind' " (146). Her study investigates the utopian concept of renewal and the initiatives of political activity which appeared in German expressionism under the impact of war and revolution. Kolinsky focuses on the political direction of the programs of expressionist journals like *Die Aktion*, *Die Weissen Blätter*, *Der Sturm*, *Das Tribunal*, etc. in the various phases of their appearance. Although she relies upon an 'immanent' interpretive method, she enriches her work nonetheless through historical research, ideology-critical textual analysis, and socially relevant influence analysis.

For Kolinsky, the "problematic of expressionist engagement" (167) is contained in its refusal to be exhausted in artistic revolt, but at the same time in its inadequacy for the political demands of reality. This contradiction, aroused by the unresolved "tension between the utopian postulate and the factual world" (166) brought on by the war and continuing into the post-war world, is central. The utopian hope for the "transformation of mankind in 'paradise' diverts from forceful intervention in politics" (167); the concentration on the "conversion of men to 'new men' paralyzes engagement for concrete aims" (166); the trust in the "intensity and unconditionality" (78) of the revolutionary ethos at the expense of a precise determination of goals demands an abstract radicalism, and favors the 'confrontation' over institutions, organizations and parties, and against its own will serves as an affirmation of the existing forces of domination. Although one can differentiate among viewpoints from journal to journal, from literary group to literary group, and from author to author, Kolinsky conclusively maintains that the expressionists engaged in politics only apparently and through this lack of consequential activity perpetuated the isolation, alienation from reality, and inefficacy which they fancied they were overcoming with their pseudo-political positions and gestures. They called themselves 'political,' even though they proved only the programmatical and not the social and historical value of the slogans and goals which they proclaimed as political authors (148).

To have laid bare this strikingly unpolitical attitude and unmask it in its anti-

political ineffectiveness is, however, more than a scholarly service, and achieves actual and practical political value. Eva Kolinsky's insights are a warning against an undifferentiated and uncritical identification with the pseudo-political revolutionism of expressionism, and demand that we learn from the self-deceptions, lost opportunities and errors of the expressionist generation, pointing to concrete and definite partisanship as the demand of the hour.

Helmut Lethen gives direction and goal to this demand. In his study of the literature of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity) he investigates the liberal self-concept of the bourgeois literati of the 1920s, who countered expressionist illusions with disillusioned melancholia. These writers saw themselves as standing before the alternatives of "socialism" or "nihilism" (142) and in an attempt to find a way out, remained within the limits of their class, with most of them tending to lend their assistance to the "self-negation of liberalism...in order to save their social position" (179). These conclusions are the result of Lethen's method which relies on the real political experiences of the 1960s, and in its radicalism, profundity, and penetration goes beyond Eva Kolinsky's methodological initiatives.

Lethen analyzes literature as a "symptom of real social forces," (2) and on the basis of literary documents, investigates the relation of the twenties to the forces of domination which culminated in fascism (7). He describes "the contradictions within society" (7) that are expressed in the literature, and works out "the correct, that is, for socialism, useful, moment in the false moment of the cultural current 'Neue Sachlichkeit'" (6). In this way he is able to disclose the catchword *Sachlichkeit* as a "normative concept for the ruling class" (8), with whose help the "deficient synchronization of the ideologies of the fighting parties can be corrected with the ideology of the industrialization process" (71). Thus the class nature of society is concealed and the class struggle is camouflaged. 'White Socialism,' Americanism, and 'technique-cult' reveal themselves as intellectual fads, promising to obscure and suppress the fundamental contradiction between capital and labor, the necessity for class war, and the forces of revolution.

Though the majority of bourgeois writers appeared to succumb impotently to these tendencies, Bertolt Brecht and Walter Benjamin drew from them important theoretical conclusions. Both authors, therefore, are singled out with good reason by Lethen. They included the praxis of class struggle in their theories, demanded direct participation in class struggle, and began systematically to examine "the productive forces developed in the womb of the old society in terms of their value for the revolution" (115)—that is to set these forces free and make them fruitful for the revolution. Lethen himself follows Brecht and Benjamin's lead toward further analysis. He does not suffice with the mere disclosure of *neusachliche* fad, or with an ideology-critical view of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* as an affirmative and therefore retrograde phenomenon. Nor does he simply knock down the poorly advised West German enthusiasm for the 'golden twenties.' Rather Lethen proves worthy of the teachings of Brecht and Benjamin insofar as he goes beyond them and sheds the residues of the 1920s contained within them. In his 1971 essay in the volume *Von*

der kritischen zur historisch-materialistischen Literaturwissenschaft (Berlin: Oberbaumverlag 1971), Lethen closes the gap from a class-struggle-based insight to a class-struggle-based praxis, and announces that the idea of class struggle can only be concretized through attachment to the labor movement, that only in partisanship for the labor movement can standards for literature as well as perspectives for social practice become accessible.

Eva Kolinsky sets right the picture of expressionism created by previous scholarship and demythologizes expressionist ideology, so that the errors of the expressionist generation will not be committed anew. Helmut Lethen destroys the mask of the *Neue Sachlichkeit*, also created by scholarship, and in a counter-move draws up a progressive strategy in order to once and for all pierce the ruling class ideology of the 1920s as well as of today, and aid in the real class struggle. The books of both authors are therefore useful in the best sense of the word. Whether they remain true to their promise and lead towards a practical impact beyond all book wisdom must be left to the future.

Horst Denkler

Herbert Marcuse, *Counter-Revolution and Revolt*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1972. 138 pages.

Marcuse's recent book, *Counter-Revolution and Revolt*, is in one sense a supplement to his earlier book, *One-Dimensional Man*. Again the focus is on the nature and structure of western industrial capitalism; yet, whereas *One-Dimensional Man* offered simply a theoretical (and highly pessimistic) critique of capitalism, *Counter-Revolution and Revolt* continues the trend of *An Essay in Liberation* and attempts to develop a theoretical framework which will lead to practical expression. The title indicates what Marcuse views as basic antagonisms in the structure of contemporary western capitalism: on the one hand, the capitalist system presently requires the organization of preventive counterrevolution both at home and abroad in order to assure the necessary stability for production. At the same time, however, the inner dynamic of the capitalist mode of production has not reduced, but rather extended the potential mass base for revolution. And it is Marcuse's intention here to articulate what he considers to be the objective and subjective factors involved in the reemergence of revolutionary potential in western capitalism.

Marcuse's analysis begins with an examination of the base or infrastructure of western capitalism, in particular that of the United States. Central to his argument is the insistence that the conditions of twentieth-century capitalism have so significantly changed from those of the nineteenth that a future revolution "will have a base, strategy, and direction quite different from its predecessors" (p. 8). The