Goethe's Garden House, Weimar.

Caption reads:

"Not at all pretentious
This little garden house
All who gather there
Leave behind their cares."
Ernst Bloch and Wilhelm Pinder: Out of Sync

FREDERIC J. SCHWARTZ

My legacy, how grand, broad and wide!
Time is my property, my field is Time.
—Goethe, Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre

The title page of Ernst Bloch’s Erbschaft dieser Zeit (Inheritance of This Time) bears the date 1935, but it appeared, it seems, more than a month early. The book is an intricate mosaic combining essays and sketches Bloch published during the Weimar period with more recent text, all arranged around the core of Bloch’s concept of Ungleichzeitigkeit—translated variously as “non-contemporaneity,” “nonsynchronicity,” or “nonsimultaneity.” Nonsimultaneity is the concept through which Bloch develops a Marxist theory of the nature of culture under twentieth-century modernity, a theory that allows him to cast considerable light on the reasons for fascism’s popular success and socialism’s failure in Germany at the same time as he begins to work out a strategy by which the Left might reclaim political ground by cultural means. Though idiosyncratic in style and superseded in matters of historical detail, the book remains imposing in its range of reference, extraordinary in its insight, and precise in articulation. All in all, it is an impressive performance and a valuable contribution to critical theories of culture.

Yet to this day, the book has not received the renown or reputation that it certainly merits. In contrast to the abundant attention paid to Walter Benjamin’s relatively rare and occasionally oblique references to National Socialism and Siegfried Kracauer’s approach to fascism through Weimar mass culture, scant notice has been taken of Bloch’s ambitious work on the topic; instead his contribution to the cultural battles of the day has been seen almost exclusively in the so-called expressionism debate. Perhaps the key to the problem can be found on the postdated title page of Erbschaft dieser Zeit: the book appeared, we might think, too early to be part of a distanced debate over the problems of Nazism and culture; the time for reflection had not yet arrived.

Indeed, the problematic reception of Erbschaft dieser Zeit dates from its premature appearance before the official date of
release. For its earliest audience, however, the book arrived too late, its material too old to have any real value. Kracauer, it has been speculated, was annoyed that the book merely reprinted what he considered a mediocre review of his own book, Die Angestellten (White-Collar Workers) of 1930. Benjamin was even more uncomfortable, having been warned by friends that the ambivalent review of his Einbahnstraße (One-Way Street) that Bloch had written in 1928 had also been rehashed and not reconsidered with the temporal distance now possible. His relationship with Bloch had always been strained, and the issue was usually a matter of priority: both worried that their ideas would be stolen and published first by the other. And then, the book never arrived. On 26 December 1934, Benjamin wrote to his friend Gershom Scholem: “Bloch’s Erbschaft dieser Zeit has been out for weeks. But do you think I have so much as laid eyes on the book? I know only this much, that . . . I am both congratulated on the tribute shown me in the text and defended against the invective it directs at me—allegedly contained in the same passages. Even a letter from the author himself has already arrived.” Benjamin felt forced to draft a response to Bloch—before he read the book. Benjamin did, a few weeks later, read Erbschaft dieser Zeit, and he chose to defuse tensions. But his response to the book was, in the end, negative, again on the grounds that it had arrived too late:

The severe reproach I must level against the book . . . is that it in no way corresponds to the circumstances under which it has appeared. Instead, it is as out of place as a fine gentleman who, having arrived to inspect an area demolished by an earthquake, has nothing more urgent to do than immediately spread out the Persian rugs that his servants had brought along and which were, by the way, already somewhat moth-eaten; set up the gold and silver vessels, which were already somewhat tarnished; have himself wrapped in brocade and damask gowns, which were already somewhat faded. Bloch obviously has excellent intentions and considerable insights. But he does not understand how to thoughtfully put them into practice.

It is the complex temporality of the appearance of Bloch’s theory of nonsimultaneity—the section on which was dated May 1932 but which was known to even his closest friends only at the very end of 1934—that seems to lie behind the criticism it received. Bloch was certainly thinking hard about this issue of historical arrival: the book came too late, but the title shows that the author was trying to move history forward enough to act while there was still time. Erbschaft dieser Zeit: an attempt to identify the inheritance to be received even while the moment had not yet passed, and certainly not passed away. “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 before-
hand.”9 The trope is the same as that behind Robert Musil’s title
for his slightly later collection of essays Nachlaß zu Lebzeiten
(Legacy in My Lifetime).10 But it impressed no one. Benjamin
commented dryly, “I would like to learn what I, as a child of my
time, am likely to inherit of my work from it.”11
To write of Bloch as himself nonsimultaneous with the vari-
ous times of his long life—he lived from 1885 to 1977—has
become something of a commonplace, but that is not my pur-
pose here. I have other reasons for wanting to look into the ori-
gins of the notion of Ungleichzeitigkeit. The first is historical:
the idea of nonsimultaneity emerged out of a debate among art
historians and theorists of culture about periodicity and the
nature of historical time, and it came to inflect debates on
architecture and the thorny issue of the relation of modernism
to fascism. The second is more contemporary. There is much
talk today of the possibility of a “politics of time,” and some of
it is rather loose.12 In this context, the strange story of the gene-
sis of Bloch’s attempt to catalogue an inheritance pre-posthu-
mously offers something very rare: a case study.

II
Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they
please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by them-
selves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given,
and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead
generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living.
—Karl Marx, The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte13

Bloch was a Marxist: he accepted Marx’s analysis of capital and
his analysis of history. He did not, however, toe the Communist
Party line. Though he (scandalously) supported Stalin through
the 1930s and (less scandalously) chose to live in the German
Democratic Republic from 1949 (when he left his American
exile) until 1961 (he was in the Federal Republic when the Wall
was built, and he chose to remain), he disagreed strongly with
party policy on propaganda issues
and cultural matters during the
interwar years. He rejected both
the Second International’s mecha-
nistic view of history as a process
that would lead spontaneously and
inevitably to the collapse of capi-
talism, and the Third Interna-
tional’s refusal of a tactical alliance
with the noncommunist opposi-
tion to fascism.14 He stressed the
need to mobilize the political subject emotionally and recognized early on that the Right had done so far more effectively than the Left. The forces of reaction, he realized, had managed to strike a chord in the electorate: “Nazis speak deceitfully, but to people; Communists quite truthfully, but only about things.” In Erbschaft dieser Zeit, he explores the strategies of the Right by means of a sociological analysis of the subjective experience of historical time.

“Not all people exist in the same Now,” writes Bloch under the rubric “Non-simultaneity and the Obligation to Its Dialectic.” They do so only externally, through the fact that they can be seen today. But they are thereby not yet living at the same time with the others.

Instead they carry earlier elements with them; this interferes. Depending on where someone stands physically, and above all in terms of class, he has his times. Older times than the modern ones continue to have an effect in older strata; it is easy to make or dream one’s way back into older ones here. . . . In general, various years beat in the one which is just being counted. . . . [They] contradict the Now; very strangely, crookedly, from behind.

These different times, the different “nows,” can be determined with a fair degree of precision using the coordinates of age, class, and geography. Bloch focuses on three impoverished groups, on their uncomfortable relation to the present and their susceptibility to the siren song of the Right. Youth, he writes, inevitably rejects its present; thus there is no politically centrist youth movement. The Right has the funds to support and seduce unemployed youth; while the better off, the “[y]oung people of bourgeois origin yet without bourgeois prospects, go to the right in any case, where they are promised some.” Most important has been the rhetoric of a “conservative revolution,” the stress on charismatic leadership, and the more successful appropriation of existing institutions of youth protest. The second group is the peasantry, which “[s]till lives almost exactly like its forefathers, does the same as them.” Though the economic base of such an existence has become marginal, the material social and legal structures (centering on the individual ownership of land for cultivation) anachronistically remain. Farmers, in other words, are tied to an outdated means of production, to the soil; they experience their world in a way that is not “modern,” that is in contradiction to the economics of the present. Yet their experience is genuine and their concerns real; and these experiences and concerns are the real base of an ideology of blood and soil to which fascism spoke. The “now” that orients the urban middle class is yet another zone of temporality. Its self-image as bourgeois is based on the relative financial

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security of the earlier Wilhelmine bourgeoisie. Though salaried employees' precarious social position was closer to that of the proletariat than to a secure middle class, their self-image was one that made sense in an earlier age, their actions governed by feelings of entitlement to a nonexistent social position, their politics the nationalism and conservatism that historically provided an ideological home to this group; their memories make them too "alien to their time." Each group had its own present, one that made sense on its own real and materially existing terms, but one that was out of sync with the development of capitalist modernity.

Bloch is careful not to dismiss the groups that had moved to the right as in themselves reactionary: "It is certainly right to say that it is part of the nature of Fascist ideology to incorporate the morbid resources of all cultural phases; but it is wrong to say only the morbid." These energies were anticapitalist, and they were energies that could be of use to the revolution, but they had not been harnessed by the Left. "If misery struck only simultaneous people, even though of differing position, origin, and consciousness," they would understand "Communist language," which is "fully simultaneous and oriented exactly to the most advanced economy." But the differing classes are, precisely, nonsimultaneous: "Impulses and reserves from precapitalist times and superstructures are then at work, genuine non-simultaneities which a sinking class revives or causes to be revived in consciousness."

Bloch refines his terms in a way that allows him to argue implicitly against both the Second International’s belief in the spontaneity of capitalist decline and the Third International’s exclusive focus on the class consciousness of a narrowly defined proletariat. The notion of a "multileveled" or "multidimensional" dialectic does this sort of double duty. The contradictions by which the dialectic moved forward are analyzed in terms of objective and subjective sides. "Objective" contradictions represent remnants of the past, both material and ideological; they are the "continuing influence of older relations and forms of production . . . as well as of older superstructures." Germany, the "classic land of non-simultaneity," was particularly rich in such social remnants and outdated social forms. "Subjective" contradictions are the emotional experience of the subject in such a position. The "subjective non-simultaneous contradiction" of youth, the peasantry, and the middle class takes the form of "accumulated rage" that can activate
the objective contradictions as political force in any direction; the "subjective simultaneous contradiction" of the proletariat is revolutionary action. The point of these analytic nuts and bolts is that contradictions in the relations of production do not drive a dialectic in any sort of one-dimensional progress forward in time, but need instead to be channeled; furthermore, the contradictions are not found or felt only at the most advanced class ("simultaneous contradictions"), but filter down through declining remnants and layers of the unresolved past ("non-simultaneous contradictions").

The multilayered dialectic is described intricately and scrupulously, but the issues are simple enough. They concern the social situations, superstructural institutions, and subjective energies of capitalism in crisis, the broad gamut of the raw materials of revolution, the detritus of declining social forms and cultural material that had been abandoned by the Left and bequeathed to the reaction. The Left, wrote Bloch, could and needed to claim these contradictions for itself instead of leaving them to National Socialism to blow off the dust and refunctiion them for political use. The elements of the past were the political material of the present. This is what was at stake in the issue of cultural heritage, or Erbe, the reason to have a good look around the musty rooms and dark closets of that old aunt, that pensioner on borrowed time, that wealthy widow called capitalism.

The concept of nonsimultaneity can be given a pedigree that is completely Marxist. Indeed, Marx himself provided all the tools that were required. One of these was the notion of base and superstructure from the Preface to the Critique of Political Economy: "The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness.... It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being (Sein) that determines their consciousness (Bewußtsein)." And in Erbschaft dieser Zeit, Bloch introduces the second tool, the discussion of the "uneven rate of development" in the introduction to the Critique of Political Economy—an unevenness that can refer, as Bloch implies, to the different rates of development in the base and superstructure (to the extent, of course, to which one accepts the distinction or wishes to deploy it in any given analysis); or it can refer to the unevenness of economic development between societies or nations, or even between different sectors or regions within them. The base-superstructure formula can simply be crossed with the idea of uneven development, yielding...
a modified formula that reads something like the following: consciousness can be determined (simultaneously) by social being or (nonsimultaneously) by “unsurmounted remnants of older economic being (Sein) and consciousness (Bewußtsein).”

The evidence of terminology and contemporary debates, however, suggests a derivation more obscure and more troubling. Bloch’s theory and the terms by which he elaborated it emerged out of debates in the historical and human sciences and, in particular, out of the history of art in Germany. To understand it, we need to look specifically at the work of Wilhelm Pinder, a complex figure who was perhaps the most influential and widely read historian of art in Germany from the 1910s through the Second World War. Pinder was the main force behind the founding of the most important art-historical journal of the period, Kritische Berichte; and he was an effective, though moderate, supporter of modern tendencies in art and architecture. But he was also an early enthusiast for National Socialism, sharing the podium with Martin Heidegger to show the universities’ solidarity with Hitler in the heady early days of political power. His relations with the regime cooled over the course of the 1930s, and he was never quite the ideologue as, say, Hans Sedlmayr; but despite his increasing distance from the Nazi elite, he was imprisoned by the Allies after the war (perhaps due to mistaken identity) and died in 1947, in the wake of this disgrace. In 1926 Pinder created a stir with a book called Das Problem der Generation in der Kunstgeschichte Europas (The Problem of Generation in the History of European Art). At the core of Pinder’s discussion was his concept of “die ‘Ungleichzeitigkeit’ des Gleichzeitigen” (the nonsimultaneity of the simultaneous), and the remarkable similarity Bloch’s formulations bear to this discussion is no mere coincidence.

Das Problem der Generation and an article that preceded it were Pinder’s contribution to the methodological debates in the German-language historiography of art during the Weimar period; they also represent one art historian’s response to the so-called crisis of historicism, which was widely felt in the human sciences, or Geisteswissenschaften, at the time. Pinder seeks to circumvent the problems of art history’s traditional idealism and historicism, tendencies of thought that had established the intellectual profile of the discipline but which, after the contributions of the likes of Alois Riegl, Heinrich Wölfflin, and Max Dvorak, had proven to be unwieldy as a practical base and shaky as an epistemological foundation.

Pinder starts with a conundrum. Presented with a work of art, the traditional tools of stylistic analysis and their use in a Wölfflinian “art history without names” will yield an approximately correct dating.
The problem is that these tools have a certain built-in error, an error that has nothing to do with the skill with which they are deployed. Pinder puts pressure on this source of error by focusing on the banal fact that artists of different generations work side by side. Two works could have been executed simultaneously, but the art historian constructs “men of an indeterminate standard age,” ideal types that cause him to date the late work of an older artist before the early work of a younger artist:

Let us imagine that Leonardo’s Last Supper (1494–98) and Filippino’s frescoes in Santa Maria Novella in Florence (1502) were still [in the absence of documentation] to be considered within the parameters of an “art history without names.” Would not the difference of stylistic “phase” be expressed in a dating that completely reverses the actual temporal relation? . . . [Often] generational differences produce, when they are misread, an absolutely false historical picture. A picture of 1924 by Max Liebermann and a picture of 1914 by Franz Marc—without knowledge of the age difference, what art history without names would express this stylistic difference by a correct dating . . . or even place them in the right chronological order?32

“There is no simple ‘present,’” writes Pinder eight years before Erbschaft dieser Zeit, “because every historical ‘moment’ (Augenblick) is experienced by people with their own different senses of historical duration; each moment means something different for everyone—even a different time.”33 A particular style or idiom is not the simple and unmediated product of a spirit of the age; the periodicity of styles seems instead to respond to the date of birth of an artist, dates which, according to Pinder, show a remarkable tendency to cluster around particular and identifiable generations whose formal possibilities the art historian analyzes in terms of specific generational “problematics.” What determines the generational style is not a shared experience of the world, but rather an “inborn task which lasts an entire lifetime”—a telos or “fate” that is different from all others but not in any way more advanced. This generational “will” Pinder terms “entelechy”; it is an “essence” that remains constant but unfolds temporally and develops “more strongly as a result of birth than experience”: “it is as if one is born with experiences.”35 There are, however, entelechies other than those of birth that determine the development of artistic form, the entelechies of nation, of race, of “body type.” The entelechies are a “mystery” but a “fact of nature.”36

Enough: Pinder starts with an insight born of the practical problems of dating and stylistic analysis but ultimately emerges on the far side of biological determinism and racial mysticism.
His theory cannot, however, be so easily dismissed as a simple and sterile mutation. First, such habits of thought were not so rare or politically suspect in the Weimar period as one tends to assume. (One need only consider Benjamin’s continuing interest in graphology and his productive engagement with the work of Ludwig Klages.) Indeed, Bloch found the notion of the “entelechy” to be quite helpful, though not in Erbschaft dieser Zeit. As an immanent telos of matter, the concept figures centrally in Bloch’s process philosophy, in his categories of “tendency,” “latency,” and ultimately “utopia” that he developed in his book Das Materialismusproblem, written in 1936–37, directly following Erbschaft dieser Zeit (though he relates the “entelechy,” logically enough, to Aristotle’s speculative materialism). And second, Pinder has a perfectly valid, indeed necessary, brief. The entelechies allow him, for one, to criticize art history’s sense of a spiritually unified time and a single style that expresses it. Since every moment is experienced differently, there can be no single spirit that unifies it. The appearance of a period style and of a Zeitgeist dissolves: any apparent “color” or “tenor” of an age is described as the “accidental accord” of different patterns of experience. The problem of generations also allows Pinder to challenge art history’s sense of unilinear time and development: he “declares war” on the “idea of a single valid ‘homogeneous time’ with its unified ‘progress’; its inescapable ‘present’ that ploughs over . . . existences . . . whose true essence consists in the fact that they are of different ages and participate in different ‘presents.’” To a notion of the one-dimensional movement of historical time, Pinder opposes a three-dimensional historical space in which each “point of time” is a plumb line through a broad band encompassing various generations, rhythmically staggered and unfolding at different stages. (Compare Bloch: “History is not an essence advancing linearly, in which capitalism, for instance, as the final stage, has resolved all previous stages, but is rather a polyrhythmic and multi-spatial entity with enough unmastered and as yet by no means revealed and resolved corners.”) Just as Bloch’s notion of nonsimultaneity is a challenge to institutionalized Marxism’s traditional tendency to fall into historical determinism and its belief in an unproblematic progress, Pinder’s book represents a challenge to art history’s traditionally unilinear sense of historical time; and where Bloch raises the “problem of a multi-layered dialectic,” Pinder had already written of art history’s need to
address the “multi-levelled reality” of history.\textsuperscript{42}

A theory of “nonsimultaneity,” the concept of “entelechies,” the exploration of a “multi layered” time: Bloch, like many others at the time, had read Pinder’s texts on the “problem of generation.” In the wake of the First World War and the German youth movement, the differences between generations and their experience of the world had become an important issue, and Pinder’s widely read book was only one of several treatments of the problem. Though Bloch had called attention to the lack of synchronicity between historical experience and broad patterns of historical change as early as his Würzburg dissertation of 1908, it is the problematic of generations that gave the decisive impetus for the ambitious reconsideration of the issue that represents the core of Erbschaft dieser Zeit.\textsuperscript{43} In 1927, sociologist Karl Mannheim wrote an article summarizing the growing literature on the problem of generation and called Pinder’s concepts of noncontemporaneity and the generational entelechies “valuable, even a stroke of genius.”\textsuperscript{44} Bloch, intellectual bricoleur par excellence, was hardly one to let someone else’s stroke of genius go unused. In the late 1920s, Bloch was in close contact with Mannheim, and it might well have been through him that Bloch came to Pinder. Before leaving the issue of where Bloch found the building blocks of his politics of time, it is worth mentioning another work of Mannheim’s: his essay on “Conservative Thought,” also of 1927. For here Mannheim incorporates his own version of the notion of nonsimultaneity—he calls it “enduring actuality”—and makes the point that “an attitude derived from social circumstances and situations anchored in the past” represented an “authentic style of experience,” and moreover one that would “play a dynamic role within the modern struggle of ideas.”\textsuperscript{45} These are insights that are central to Bloch’s willingness to grapple with ideas that had been hijacked by the Right and his attempt to incorporate the accumulated rage of those left behind, those who had waited but finally fell into step with the political reaction.

III

I believe (though I may be wrong) that some of the recent discussion was anticipated by myself when I was young, in the Appendix to an article . . . where I tried to define the difference between “historical” time and “chronological” time.

—Erwin Panofsky, letter to Siegfried Kracauer\textsuperscript{46}

By the time Bloch wrote on nonsimultaneity, the concept already existed, but there was still some complex philosophical work to be done. One could not simply remove the biological excesses of Pinder’s treatment and replace it with a sociological view of the specificity of generational experience (though
What was required was a clarification of the nature of historical time. The critique of a chronological sense of historical time as “homogeneous” or “unilinear” was an old one in the German cultural sciences. The uniqueness of historical cultures was stressed in that line of thought stretching from Friedrich Schleiermacher through Johann Gottfried Herder to Wilhelm Dilthey, then branching out into sociology and the history of art, that saw in differing positions in time not more or less advanced states but simply a historically specific state. It is a view, like Pinder’s, that rejects both timeless norms and any notion of progress. “Inner time” or experienced time could not be measured (and the appeal of theories of generations was that it seemed to provide a “natural” unit by which experience could be periodized). The problem of a philosophy of history based on a notion of subjective time as the only “real” time, however, is that it undermines the basis of a knowledge that is specifically historical. Eras can be judged only on their own terms; from the outside they can only be described in terms of artifactual remains; and without a properly analytical position outside a subjective state of mind, only nonimmanent, external explanations of change can be proposed.

The challenge was to mediate between time as experienced and time as the object of historical knowledge. In 1916, Georg Simmel—until 1914 Bloch’s teacher and friend—published one of the most ambitious and ingenious analyses of the problem, an essay called “The Problem of Historical Time.” He was particularly well suited to the task: though versed in neo-Kantian epistemological concerns, he was moving toward Lebensphilosophie, or a philosophy that stressed the importance of lived experience. His argument is complex and clever—vintage Simmel—and worth summarizing, as it was a reference point for many discussions of the philosophy of history at the time.

Something can be known historically, writes Simmel, only if it can be placed securely in a sequence of events: simply knowing that something took place in the past does not constitute true historical knowledge until it can be oriented in relation to other events. Yet he accepts that historical time is in its nature discontinuous; he is not arguing for the need to fix sequences in terms of a steady, abstract, and quantifiable calendar time, a time he terms “atomized.” The other sine qua non of historical knowledge is that it be knowledge of historical experience, and this can be known only by an empathic understanding.
or Verstehen, of the experience of the past. Here, however, there is a contradiction: Verstehen is radically ahistorical. The empathic reexperience of an event can be divorced from reality—the experience of a fictional event, for example empathy with Goethe's Werther, is not historical knowledge—and it says little about the placement of something in time.

At this point, Simmel enters into art-historical debates, taking on, I would suggest, none other than Heinrich Wölfflin. A reexperienced event in the past can include time; the event can be the causal emergence of one phenomenon from another, which is temporal; but this does not make it historical. For it does not position the entire event in history; the time experienced, the time known, is an immanent and thus ahistorical one. Simmel refers to art historiography’s touchstone for the study of historical change: the mutation or evolution from classic to baroque, the subject of Wölfflin’s famous Principles of Art History, published the year before Simmel’s essay. Here Wölfflin sought to explain this historical change, concluding that it was the result of a change in the mode of beholding, a change that is preprogrammed in a constant alteration through history of the two possibilities of visual perception. Simmel’s argument is that such a model of change—that every classic has its corresponding baroque—is immanent to the event discussed; the change cannot be explained in terms of other events before and after and says nothing about its placement in historical time. In other words, Wölfflin’s is not a historical explanation at all.

Simmel’s solution? That the two mutually exclusive criteria of historical knowledge—ahistorical Verstehen, or reexperience, and the exact placement in a series—can be met at the same time only when history, or a portion of it, is grasped as a totality, a totality in which each event—unlike Wölfflin’s eternal recurrence of the change from classic to baroque—can have only one determinate position. A closed totality gives an outside, Archimedean point from which events can be both positioned and experienced.

Simmel’s reaction to Wölfflin was part of a sustained and productive interchange between art history and philosophy in early twentieth-century Germany, an exchange in which each field looked to the other to sharpen its tools. If Simmel was responding to Wölfflin, who then would respond to Simmel? The answer is Erwin Panofsky. Panofsky was perhaps the most intellectually agile and ambitious young art historian working in Germany in the 1920s, so it is no surprise that he would find Simmel’s discussion of Wölfflin and historical time an irresistible challenge. What is perhaps surprising is that he responds, at the same time, to Pinder’s Problem der Generation.

The text at issue here is an appendix to an article Panofsky
published in 1927 on the four architects of the cathedral of Reims; he later reprinted the appendix alone under the Simmelian title “On the Problem of Historical Time.” Panofsky redates the work of the architects and the sculptors who decorated the different building campaigns in varying stylistic modes, pointing to the clear presence of what Pinder called “nonsimultaneity.” But he is not interested in letting Pinder have the last word on the matter. Instead, he takes the opportunity to explore some of the implications of the theory of art-historical nonsimultaneity and generations, and he does so by playing Simmel against Pinder.

If one accepts Pinder’s account as it stands, Panofsky asks, must one not, following Simmel, reject the possibility of meaningfully placing these events in historical time?

If . . . the chronologically simultaneous pieces are stylistically so different, even appearing to be from different ages, is it still permissible to consider an art-historical problem as an historical problem? . . . For it is self-evident that . . . if one rejects the illusion of historical simultaneity, then its corollary, i.e. the illusion of different historical times, must also be rejected, and thus the idea of an historical temporal relation proves to be practically unproductive and even logically contradictory.

In other words, Pinder’s theory of nonsimultaneity denies the existence of a meaningful relation between events that occur in different subjectively experienced times. Each generation is born with its “entelechy”; its activity is simply the unfolding of the different formal possibilities existing within the parameters of this problematic. Panofsky’s point is a valid one: born with its fate, each generation lives out an already defined problem, making their interaction with others living at the same chronological time incidental, a matter of accident. The generations are, for Pinder, indivisibly individual phenomena, utterly unique, irruptions of nature; history is defined spontaneously, at the moment, from the moment, out of the moment. Like a cast of the dice—this is Pinder’s telling image—the event is not determined by previous events and does not determine subsequent events. The moment is simply there—a matter of complete immanence, a mystery, a miracle. This means that, in Simmel’s terms, moments are not situated in a properly historical time, as the order in which they appear cannot be seen as necessary or meaningful.
And thus, quite correctly, Panofsky calls the Pinderian skepticism about historical simultaneity “nihilistic.” But Panofsky does not accept the problem that Pinder defines as a valid one. The incongruity between “lived” or “experienced” time and historical time is a fallacious problem, he writes, a mirage that is the result of a “conceptual duplicity” of the historian’s habits of thought. He accepts a distinction between “natural” and “historical” time, defining the former as the quantifiable chronological time of the natural sciences, the latter as the meaningful time of which the historian seeks knowledge. And he accepts Pinder’s expansion of time to a sort of “spatial” system of coordinates—historical time comprises a system of reference points in which things make sense in terms of each other, but not every simultaneous moment has the same “meaning” in the very different and incommensurate systems that exist side by side. But these seeming paradoxes and complexities of nonsimultaneity are, he writes, the result of the fact that historians are actually working with two very different concepts of time. “Simultaneity” can be interpreted in two ways—as either “natural” or “historical” simultaneity. Nonsimultaneity appears or disappears depending on the arbitrary way in which a stretch of “historical” time is defined. In any one system, the difference between natural and historical time can be reduced to zero, depending on how that spatial or temporal system is defined, and in particular by narrowing the system of reference. Nonsimultaneity thus disappears mathematically, becoming mere error that tends toward zero, as long as the system to be studied is defined properly. Panofsky shows this using two extreme cases of interpretation:

[The first extreme is represented by two works that are as closely “related” as imaginable, i.e. two products of the same artistic personality. Here the difference between natural and historical simultaneity can be practically ignored. The second is represented by two “unrelated” works, for example a Negro sculpture made around 1530 and the Medici Madonna of Michelangelo, in which case the difference is so great that the natural “simultaneity” connecting the two works becomes historically irrelevant.]

Thus “nonsimultaneity” becomes a mirage created by the superimposition of two incommensurable temporal conceptions, an error that in actual fact diminishes asymptotically.

But this is far too tidy, not to say sophistic, a solution. And Panofsky has pulled a fast one. His solution appears because he has, in fact, completely changed the terms of the argument in a way that is not so apparent because the terminology remains the same. Pinder and Panofsky are both working with a distinction between “natural” and “historical” time, but Panofsky’s
“natural” time is precisely the astronomic or chronological time that Pinder does not consider; the “natural” time Pinder considers is the time of experience. The situation can be summed up this way: Panofsky dismisses nonsimultaneity as a philosophical problem; he sees it as the result of “conceptual duplicity,” of a category error. And he dismisses it as an epistemological problem: one need only pick the “smallest system of reference” in which to situate a historical event, and the difference between the two kinds of time disappears. But by changing the terms from the phenomenological to the epistemological, by switching philosophical frames of reference from Lebensphilosophie to neo-Kantianism, Panofsky ignores nonsimultaneity as a problem of experience. He fails to register the fact that, as Pinder points out, history feels very different from the pictures we draw of it. Panofsky missed the subtext of the argument—that the present was experienced not as stability and unity but as conflict and confusion, that time unravels into strands as its weave disintegrates. Panofsky has no sense of the instability of history, the vertigo it creates, its disorienting tendency to move in one direction while one is looking in another. He has, in other words, no sense of the modern—or he studiously, and perhaps anxiously, avoids it. And if one shifts the terms from a phenomenology to an epistemology of history, as Panofsky does, one refuses to acknowledge the urgency, or even the possibility, of a politics of time.

There is, I am arguing, much more to Pinder’s argument than a simple fallacy. Bloch clearly thought so too, and he was certainly doing far more than simply accepting the scenario as Pinder describes it and giving it sociological coordinates as opposed to biological ones. Now I don’t know that Bloch read Panofsky’s article in the Jahrbuch für Kunstwissenschaft (in fact, I’d rather doubt it). What is noteworthy, however, is that he follows the same procedure as Panofsky—playing Simmel against Pinder—but comes to very different conclusions. He accepts the problem Pinder defines—the distinction between the lived time of experience and the historical time of meaning. But he rises to the neo-Kantian challenge set by Simmel: the demand for an Archimedean point from without by which to gain a view of history as a total process, a view that would provide a ground from which to see history as something other than Pinder’s meaningless agglomeration of intransitive moments.
And (probably without knowing it) he stays in the game by matching the ante raised by Panofsky, who points out the epistemological trap of rejecting the presence of an objectively valid and knowable historical time to which one could relate the different subjectively experienced times.

For Pinder, there is no such thing as simultaneity beyond the generation. For Bloch, however, there is an absolutely defined simultaneity: that which is “oriented exactly to the most advanced economy” and manifests most directly the latest stage of relations of production. In other words, he accepts Marx and his philosophy of history based on the primacy of production. The state of production and the social relations corresponding to it must be defined individually and with great care (and here, occasionally, Bloch fails), but they provide the outside Archimedean point by which to evaluate and know historical events. Thus the economic state of the peasantry, though real, is out of sync with the development of the economy and the forces that move it; it is objectively nonsimultaneous, it is not sustainable, not, in a way, correct. And the state of mind of the white-collar worker, with his claims to bourgeois entitlement and demands for security, his belief in his own social superiority over those with more direct physical contact with the machinery of production, is subjectively nonsimultaneous; it is ideological, a system of beliefs emerging from an untrue state of affairs. This is Bloch’s ontology, and it is Marxist. But though economic activity or ideological systems can be right or wrong, experience is always real, and it is the raw material of politics.

Bloch accepts historical materialism’s philosophy of history, but he allows time to expand. He did so in the wake of art history’s struggle to relate form meaningfully to history, in the wake of problems that emerged as visual form mutated through time: developing logically and then stopping, reversing, or changing direction; cleaving unpredictably along fault lines of space and time. It was in the history of art that time, as it bent and clove, became visibly spatial, but with absences and voids, faster and slower zones. For the philologist of form, time began to move in chaotic ways, ways that looked mysterious, like miracles, or that called forth the sternest attempts to bring it into sync and under control. For politics, time lost its forward force. It expanded and condensed into strange spaces from which time looked different, microtemporalities in which reaction could set in, where dust could turn to mold, where the future could be prevented and the present eternalized, where one could identify a pathological politics of distorted and indefinitely extended time. This was the “multi-spatial entity” with “unmastered and as yet by no means revealed and resolved corners,” the chaotic and erratic dialectic that constitutes an obligation to pursue an active politics, to do battle on very different temporal fronts simultaneously.
In the German architecture of the late Weimar period, the radically new, the radically “now,” was claimed by a tendency that was referred to as the Neue Sachlichkeit (New Objectivity) and often referred to itself as the Neues Bauen (New Architecture). It is these architects—Walter Gropius, Bruno Taut, Ernst May, Hans Scharoun, and others—who sought most programmatically and often politically to be “fully simultaneous and oriented exactly to the most advanced economy.”

Stylistically, the architecture of the time can be considered in terms of a battle over the very appearance of the modern world. The front was located, by and large, in the area of domestic architecture where, in the wake of a nearly chronic housing shortage, demands were greatest. And the war assumed forms that bordered on the comic. It broke out, for example, around the Siedlungen, or mass housing estates, built by local governments, trade unions, employee organizations, and housing societies. By means of their architecture, the client organizations made stylistic statements about their vision of the world, and these statements prompted retorts. In the most famous skirmish, hostilities broke out in the southwestern Berlin suburb of Zehlendorf, where between 1926 and 1932 Bruno Taut, Hugo Häring, and Otto Rudolf Salvisberg built a large estate with the left-leaning GEHAG (Gemeinnützige Heimstätten-, Spar- und Bau-Aktiengesellschaft) organization. Their vision of the modern was modernist, egalitarian, and socialist in its delight in the serial repetition of the units of the apartment blocks; it was urban and machine-inspired in its hard-edged geometry and flat roofs; but it bore, at the same time, the bright colors of a utopian fire. The white-collar GAGFAH (Gemeinnützige Aktiengesellschaft für Angestellten-Heimstätten) organization bought up land across the street and built a counter-estate showing a predictably comfortable bourgeois future. Many of the houses were built for single families or were meant to look as if they were. Even if multiple-occupancy, they were individualized, solid, and dignified; they foregrounded a handcrafted quality and a rural look with their pitched roofs. This was the so-called battle of the roofs.

Bloch took note of the battle of the roofs. He did not take sides at the time, and when he wrote about it in Erbschaft dieser Zeit, he rejected the choice as it was presented. But one thing is certain: Bloch, who accepted the imperative of the “now,” oddly enough rejected the Neues Bauen’s claim of simultaneity, while Pinder, who did not accept the notion of an artistic style expressing the spirit of an age and who rejected completely the notion of the simultaneous,
accepted the claims to absolute contemporaneity. Even under Nazism, it was Pinder who supported the modernist tendencies that we now associate with the Left. Bloch did not. That is no scandal in itself: the association of modern architecture with the Left was a complex matter, and the phenomenon of “reactionary modernism” is well known. But it is worth exploring Bloch’s and Pinder’s views on the advanced architecture of their era, for they provide a sort of test case for their views about form and historical time.

The discussion of architecture appears in Erbschaft dieser Zeit in a section called “Upper Bourgeoisie, Objectivity, and Montage”; in the original edition of the book, Bloch adds dates as a subtitle: 1924–1933. His critique of architectural modernity is not of the same incisiveness as other parts of his book, but to the extent that it is an argument, it has three points. First, Bloch separates the contemporaneity of the Neues Bauen from history by assimilating it to another model by which form can be related to temporality: he considers it to be a mere fashion. Its modernity, like that of the city of Berlin in general, is that of the “simultaneous’ in the limited, indeed inauthentic sense, namely that of being merely up to date.” It is not true Gleichzeitigkeit but “inauthentic or relative simultaneity.” Second, Bloch finds the Neues Bauen unheimlich, or uncanny: in a section titled “New Corner Window,” he writes, “This one is hardly a place for relaxation. . . . The big window does not just shed light on the quiet table, but also on the lives of those without one.” The uncanniness or homelessness is, for Bloch, precisely capitalist reification: the shining surfaces of the machine aesthetic are “nickel-plated emptiness,” the objectivity of the objects is rationality taken to extremes and yet . . . remaining abstract; at the same time this corresponds, in its abstractness, to the latest capitalist style of thought. It corresponds to the ‘capitalist planned economy’ and similar anomalies with which capitalism reaches for the forms of tomorrow in order to keep those of yesterday alive. This kind of objectivity, of course, achieves, in the economy and in architecture as well as in ideology, nothing but sheer facade; behind the built-in rationalities the total anarchy of a profit economy remains. Under cover, of course, many things are stirring even here; the implements become simple and standardized, the machine produces in series, the steely rooms become absolutely practical, and if they were not so expensive, they would seem almost classless.

And precisely as Bloch sees a continuity between capitalism and fascism both in the organization of exploitation and the
irrationality of its ratio, the objectivity of the upper-bourgeois fashion for modernity is perfectly valid as a style of fascism:

Wherever there is an upturn in the business cycle, as illusion or sparked by the war industry, high Fascism too seeks renewed contact with technology and the most modern ‘Ratio’ in its wake. In Hitler’s Germany this contact is thwarted by non-‘degenerate’ bourgeois conformism together with anaesthetic, or appears merely as one element among others in the tension between Goebbels and Rosenberg, flat roof and pitched roof. . . . but in Mussolini’s Italy precisely the ‘most progressive’ architecture is effective, and in general a ‘cultural life’ that is completely functionalist, to the point of snobbery. 66

Thus far, Bloch has equated the illusory objectivity of the Neue Sachlichkeit in architecture and design with capitalism and with fascism. It is only logical that he should also equate it with the wrong kind of socialism (seen from the perspective of Third International Marxism, which is the audience he addresses); in other words, with social democracy. Yet these are perhaps the most powerful passages in his critique of architectural modernism. Bloch is certainly unfair in his dismissal of the significant efforts of committed socialist architects, but he has put his finger on a major problem of architectural style considered in an unmediated way as politics. Bloch equates the enthusiasm for modern architecture, to the extent that it remains an aesthetics in place of a politics, with left revisionism, with the mechanistic reformism of a compromised non-revolutionary socialism. His clearest target is the Swiss art and architectural historian Sigfried Giedion, student of Wölfflin and first secretary of the CIAM (Congres internationale d’architecture moderne) founded in 1928. He writes disparagingly of

social-democratic “modernity” à la Giedion . . . [of] an architect’s smugness which has definitely not grown out of politics, but out of technoidally progressive expertise and the desire for its application, but which likewise propounds, even if in other words, a kind of “peaceful evolution of capitalism into socialism.” . . . But this seems a false directness, namely none at all; seeing a piece of a future state in every sliding window, it obviously overrates the technical-neutral and underrates the class-biased element. It overrates the neutral cleanliness, comfort of the new architecture, the origin in the factory, in technical expediency and standardized mass-produced commodity. It underrates
the fact that this “uniform hygienic living” is still in no way oriented nor can be oriented even only potentially towards a classless society, but rather towards the young, modern-feeling, tastefully clever middle classes, towards their very specific, in no way classless, let alone eternal needs. It underrates the termite character which New Objectivity sets up and underscores wherever—as in workers’ and employees’ estates—there is not enough money for the Babbitt environment; it underrates the representative functions which, on the other hand, modern big business creates out of its “functionalism.”

Bloch is also referring, it seems clear enough, to the work of Hans Scharoun, a prominent young architect who designed buildings such as apartment blocks for “bachelors” and “young married couples” as well as mass housing for estates such as Berlin’s Siemensstadt. Bloch’s own preference was, famously, for the work of expressionist artists, for the primitive, the handmade, the ornamented; his interest was less a matter of style or technique but rather the phenomenology of making and warmth of use. To discuss this aspect of Bloch’s aesthetics as characterized by expressionist elements and by a romantic anticapitalist rejection of modernity is certainly a vast oversimplification, but it captures something of his utopian aesthetics and casts light on his rejection of a cold strain of modernism.

At the high point of the Neues Bauen and the debate over the problem of generations, Pinder was invited to address the German Werkbund, the largest professional organization of advanced architects and a broad forum for the discussion of architecture’s role in society. He was aware that architecture constituted an embattled cultural terrain, and in his address at the annual meeting in 1928 the first point he wanted to make was “that I stand on your side and not the side of your opponents.” The loose alliance that constituted the Neues Bauen, however, comprised only one wing of the stylistically and ideologically varied ground of advanced architecture, and Pinder makes clear that it is not so much the developing International Style of Le Corbusier, Gropius, Taut, May, and Scharoun that he stood behind, but rather the more moderate modernism that accepted the challenges of modernity but sought a closer contact with tradition and thus appealed to a broader range of tastes and a less radical politics. He refers to the Stuttgart train station of Paul Bonatz, which combines a monumental Romanesque with the unornamented, stripped-down surfaces and clear geometry of more radical idioms. It seeks an architectural expression of a very modern building type, but with the mass of its unadorned stone, its symmetry, and references to the classical colonnade, it preserves the representative func-
tions of architecture, functions whose rejection by the New Objectivity struck Bloch as problematic: it is precisely the lack of representative ambition in the architecture of the Neues Bauen, the lack of “some surplus, something sublime, something unifying” studiously avoided by the architectural radicals, that he misses. Pinder accepts the new form of building, but only to the extent that its traditional functions can be preserved.

To Pinder’s credit, when push came to shove he stood by his principles. In the confused early months of Nazi cultural politics, it was not clear which tendencies would be supported, which style or styles would be claimed by the regime to represent and legitimate its rule. Propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels leaned toward a modernist and even expressionist cultural face for the Third Reich; Alfred Rosenberg, architect Paul Schultze-Naumburg, and others stood behind the völkisch aesthetic most commonly associated with Nazism. Stylistically (though not institutionally), the complex battle was largely won by the latter tendency, though the prominence modern idioms could obtain in certain cultural spheres has recently become clear.

Pinder took his stand in a prominent lecture before the Pedagogic-Psychological Institute of the University of Munich in August 1933, entitled “Art in the New German State.” Like Walter Gropius, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Hugo Häring, and others who sought to reconcile their modernism with National Socialism, Pinder saw how very urgent the issue was, saw the fact that the battle over the historical face of the modern world would be decided by one person, at one moment, and very soon: “Both Dr. Goebbels and Alfred Rosenberg have indicated that discussion would be beneficial. It has been in progress for a few weeks.” Unlike the architects, however, he was much more concerned to establish his ideological credentials: “I can see and identify my political opponents. Liberalism and Bolshevism: these are my natural adversaries of yesterday, today and tomorrow, and I must oppose them as a good soldier of our current state.” He argues, though, against too close an association of artistic and political tendency: “If a man works in secret for the Red Front, then he is a Communist and an enemy of the State, there’s no question about that. But if someone paints a landscape differently from another, then it is simply too easy to say ‘That man’s a bolshevist.’”

Like Bloch, Pinder points to the fact that Italy, Germany’s ally in fascism, had welcomed architectural modernism in representative state commissions, while Stalin’s Soviet Union had suppressed
abstraction, expressionism, and Neue Sachlichkeit—precisely the tendencies commonly termed “degenerate” by the majority of the German Right. And he points to the reception of this tendency in Italy as specifically German: “the new European style, which is certainly not yet mature . . . but is nonetheless the expression of our own era! This style has been developed especially in Germany, and the Italian of today speaks . . . admiringly of the ‘nuovo stile tedesco,’ the new German style!”76 This style—“let us call it for short, if not completely accurately, ‘Bauhaus-style’”77—is, for Pinder, as yet incomplete, but it is a style he describes in the traditional terms of the visual expression of a unifying spirit: “Styles represent a unified direction of life. Community stamps the styles. We however are only on the path to a new community.”78 The style will express the spirit of the age: “the grand task [is] to find the beat of the historical moment.”79 And thus the style of that modern moment, the moment of the new community, will be resolutely modern:

I don’t have the right to say what this new style will be, a style which cannot yet exist. But it will be contemporaneous (Zeiteigen), it will not be Biedermeier, Baroque, Classical. It will, on the other hand, be similar in the binding, organizing power of these last, great, living styles. . . . And I believe that the modern architectural style, so often scorned as “bolshevist,” which has at least brought a contemporaneous element, if not a monumental one—this style will provide the raw material.80

Pinder’s defense of architectural modernism and modernists follows a strategy similar to that of the practitioners themselves. Hugo Häring, in close collaboration with Gropius, wrote the following in the winter of 1933–34:

Abroad it was acknowledged that a new style was in formation, and they called this new style the German style, the stylo tedesco. We had succeeded in achieving what had been sought in vain for the last 150 years: to create a German style. And we succeeded by following a path different from those before us: the path of a new artistic principle (Gestaltungsprinzip) and not the path of tradition, the path of reviving Mediterranean forms and their principles. . . . The Neues Bauen movement does not seek only to “awaken”; it seeks to create anew and seeks to do so from new artistic principles that it takes to be the essence of German characteristics and a German will to culture.81

This strategy consisted in stressing the necessity of contemporaneity while showing a willingness to force the stylistic evolution away from forms too closely associated in some people’s minds with socialism. Consider also Gropius’s competition
entry for the new Reichsbank building of 1933.82 Here he has returned to the static symmetry and classicizing rhythms of his last project of the last German empire, the Model Factory at the 1914 Werkbund exhibition in Cologne. His project represents a change toward a greater monumentality, one with which the new regime could identify and one which did not involve too many stylistic compromises on the architect’s part.

In his desire to make a cultural impact while speaking a language that corresponded to the political expediencies of the moment, in his desire to find the beat of the moment and to march with it, Pinder jettisoned his own critique of the art-historical concept of style. And in doing so, he took a step backward: by the 1920s, both the Rieglian notion of form directly reflecting the state of mind of an age and the Wölfflinian sense of an unmediated indication of a historical time’s mode of perception had already lost their relatively recent currency and were widely subject to critique in what was termed, even then, a crisis of the discipline.83 Pinder knew that ages didn’t have a single spirit and that any equation of form and mind at all was questionable. It was, shamefully and ironically, his own early attempt at Gleichschaltung—the Nazi phrase for the attempt to bring all of a society into line, to synchronize it according to the imperatives of a totalitarian regime, to bring it into a unified time and beat—that caused Pinder to fall into the trap of a nonsimultaneous concept of artistic form. In a moment of blindness, willful or not, he failed to see both the absurdity of trying to define the appearance of the “now” and the very real violence involved in the task of synchronizing a modern industrial society, of cleaning out its corners and bringing the chaotic space of time into line. He failed to realize that time could not be gleichgeschaltet, or synchronized, and that any attempt to do so would result in a set of petrified, forcibly checked temporalities in which dust and cobwebs would grind the energies leading out of them to a dangerous halt.84

Marlite Halbertsma has pointed out that Pinder’s theory of generations had little or no effect in the art-historical discussions of the time, that it was, with its outdated sense of form and its grand attempt at a total theory, itself nonsimultaneous.85 Ambitious young scholars—one thinks of Panofsky (born 1892), Hans Sedlmayr (1896), or Otto Pächt (1902)—had no use for the theory of a man (born 1878) who was professionally at the height of his career but intellectually a has-been. Yet by the time of the Third Reich, Bloch (born 1885) was
pushing fifty himself. He didn’t share Pinder’s politics, and he didn’t share his idealism, but he did share certain habits of thought with the art historian. Both were accustomed to thinking about history philosophically and systematically; both accepted that art had to be studied in terms of a history of art (Kunstgeschichte) and not a science (Kunstwissenschaft), as the new generation tended to assert; both were sensitive to the philosophical problems of lived experience. Bloch, in other words, could grasp that the problem Pinder laid out was an important one, one that merited serious attention.86 Bloch and Pinder shared, one could say, similar generational styles of thought, styles that accepted certain problems, however much their solutions differed.

But Bloch, needless to say, had a very different view of a style of National Socialism. As he described it, it was less a formal idiom than a signifying strategy that mobilized and manipulated styles politically. Like Pinder, he accepted that in the twentieth century, “one can choose... styles, one can label styles politically.”87 And Bloch realized that in the face of the nonsimultaneity of the simultaneous that Pinder described, the Nazis were doing just that. Out of an outdated problematic, Bloch develops a very modern sense of styles as signs that functioned semiotically as a cultural currency, that were circulated, embattled, and stolen. In Erbschaft dieser Zeit, he describes how the reaction had stolen the dreams, insignia, and signs of the revolution, calling it “brown theft”:

So they stole the red flag, putting in the Aryan symbol; stole the marches... the music of the songs, made a few crude changes... Stole the word “worker” and “worker’s party” with as much cunning ignorance as suggestion; and precisely here they let loose a fog in which no one knows anymore who’s the guest and who’s the waiter, in which one is “redeemed” from class conflict between “workers of the head and of the fist” by a “universal working class” and their even hazier cliches; they put up posters about a “socialist folk-community” between a productive Capital and those who have none, but are at least productive. Finally they stole the Russian relation of theory and praxis, though in such a way that they confuse it with the mere relation of theory and propaganda.... But certainly the theft of red means for reversed purposes has the seeds of its own revenge within it. Certainly one cannot in the long run use revolutionary forms on anti-capitalist masses... for the defense and support of capitalism. Certainly time works even in non-simultaneous levels—if not for proletarian socialism, at least against the immense fraud of fascism, against the people’s irrational
hopes that the problem of economic crises can, just as irrationally, be solved on the basis of capitalism. But as fleeting as this last Nazi-grotesque is, so fantastical its anti-reality: it contains the lesson that emblems must not remain undefended, and especially that things truly central to the revolution must not be left unoccupied. Communism stands in a particular position with regard to these central things and the way they have, admittedly, been “seduced”: that of being able to “inherit” its own earlier property.

Nazi cultural politics represented the theft of communism’s rightful inheritance.

Any attempt to trace Bloch’s inspirations, the elements of notions he combined into concepts and concepts he combined into theories, meets the resistance of Bloch’s own desire to leave them in the dark. He divides concepts from the words that designate them, he separates parts of theories and deploys them far from each other in his own system, he does not like the footnote and the way it maps out systems of intellectual exchange. One wonders why. His use of the contemporary concept of nonsimultaneity, shifted from the hermeneutical to the sociological to the political arena, involved the sort of work of which scholars engaged in a more traditional sort of exchange might have been proud. For whatever reason, Bloch preferred to play the prophet, to emerge from the mountains, from the Alps, from exile in Switzerland, with a message ex dei or ex nihilo. And this is a pity, for the history of the notion of nonsimultaneity shows that Bloch practiced exactly what he preached. He dusted off an idea seen by most as old and rusty, even politically suspect, something they left unattended and unwanted. Bloch took it and reused it; he knew just how. One could call it red theft.

V
More light!
—Goethe’s last words

Bloch would have recognized that metaphors of time represent a well-worked terrain. For Goethe, time turned to space: it was a field, one to be surveyed, one to be worked with care so that it would yield a good harvest in the present and be a proper legacy for future generations. Every moment, every instant, he told Johann Peter Eckermann, is of infinite value because it contains within it all of eternity. This is what literary historian Fritz Strich called in 1928 the classic sense of time. For the romantics, however, no moment
is complete. The moment, the instant, the time of the blink of an eye, eludes one's grasp, dissolving into past and future. They sought to unite past and future within the present, but time resisted; reality remained infinitely extended in time.91

At the same time, writes Strich, time becomes politicized: “The new experience of time opened a new temporal dimension to poetry: the simultaneous, the side-by-side. Thus the social problem moves to the center of poetry and creates for it a sort of social form.”92 For Heinrich Heine and the Young Germany, this synthesis that was the object of longing, the synthesis in which opposites could be reconciled in the realized moment, was termed the “Third Reich.”93 The Third Reich, as it was proclaimed, sought to bring time into line and extend it indefinitely: the mythical thousand years.

When the Third Reich descended with its thirteen chronological years of darkness, Walter Benjamin described the historical moment and its politics differently. “History,” he wrote, “is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogeneous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now.”94 The historical moment is the “moment of danger,” a moment when the chronological “now” has to be reunited with the “now” of the historical moment that is “seized” as it “flashes up” briefly. This could only happen with one’s eyes wide open; one could not blink. Recall that Benjamin’s objection to Erbschaft dieser Zeit concerned not content but timing: Bloch, he implied, had missed the moment of danger; the historical instant had passed. The catalogue of communism’s cultural legacy came not preposthumously but postmortem. Of course, Benjamin’s own timing was no better. He was slower than Bloch to formulate a political response to fascism; he articulated his support for Soviet modernism as its representatives were disappearing into the Gulag; his sense of the politics of culture was similarly out of sync.95

Bloch too had a metaphor for the moment. In his debut in Geist der Utopie and till the end of his days, he spoke of the “darkness of the lived moment”: 

Now I cannot experience and hold my self. Not even that I am smoking now, writing; precisely this is too close, will not stand before me.

Only immediately afterwards can I calmly hold such things before me, turn them around in front of me, so to speak. Thus only the immediately past is present for me, corresponding to what we, seemingly being there, experience.96

As for the romantics, the “problem of the radically New” disappears into infinity as the problem of “God.”97 The situation is one Bloch describes in Geist der Utopie as follows: “We have no organ for the ‘I’ or the ‘we.’ Instead, we stand ourselves in
the blind spot, in the darkness of the lived moment (im Dunkel des gelebten Augenblicks)."98 Fifty years later, he expanded on his use of this familiar concept from physiological optics: "This darkness can be explained by the blind spot in our eye at the point where the optic nerve enters the retina and where we cannot see. Only when the point of the blind spot has been passed do we see the pencil point again as it goes by."99

History, for Bloch, happens in the dark, in the blind spot. One can never see the flash of light that marks the moment of danger, the moment of action, the moment at which one can recognize simultaneously the "now" of the present and the charged "now" of the past. A political optics of history has to be binocular: one eye needs to be fixed on the present, the other on the past. The present provides the Archimedean point from which to know history in a way allowing one to act. Yet the present nonetheless falls into the blind spot. Though he fell victim to it time and again, Benjamin understood this fundamental problem of epistemology and of politics. From the notes that constitute the Arcades Project:

The Copernican revolution in the conception of history is this: the "past" has been considered the fixed point, the task of the present as that of leading knowledge carefully and hesitantly to this firm ground. Now this relation should be reversed, and the past made into a dialectical fulcrum, to a thought of the awakened consciousness. Politics assumes primacy over history. The facts become something that strikes us now; to determine them becomes a matter of memory (der Erinnerung). And in fact, awakening is the exemplary case of memory.... What Proust means by the experimental rearrangement of furniture in the half-sleep of the morning, what Bloch recognizes as the darkness of the lived moment, is nothing but that which is to be secured here at the level of the historical and collective.100

Why, then, Benjamin's sour response to Bloch's book? Perhaps because, as if due to bad conscience, Bloch did not bring up the issue of the darkness of the lived moment in Erbschaft dieser Zeit, precisely when the moment was at its darkest. Instead he implied a visible and illuminated present in his title, and he dated many sections of the book with the pre-1933 dates of their drafting or conception, as if to argue for their early rather than late arrival.101 In a letter to Benjamin, who, he assumed, had already received Erbschaft dieser Zeit, Bloch
excused himself by mysterious reference to an allegedly already completed book that may never have seen the light of day:

There is not a word in this book about our common problems. . . . They are not a part of the “content of the time” that is discussed here. That is another field of time and the field of another time. Therefore in the preface I refer clearly enough to a second book, which, although also completed, could not be linked to this one for both material and publishing reasons.102

Bloch’s Goethean image, the “field of time,” implies an anachronistically classical ability to make time stand still long enough to work the ground with care and caution. In any case, Bloch seems to suggest his own prophetic ability to think simultaneously in an expanded moment, however dark—when he, more than anyone else, knew better.
Notes


2. Ernst Bloch, Erbschaft dieser Zeit, Werkausgabe, vol. 4 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1985); this edition is translated by Neville Plaice and Stephen Plaice as Heritage of Our Times (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990). I will refer both to the German original (as Erbschaft) and the excellent English translation (as Heritage), though I have often modified the latter where I feel that a particular nuance is important. The first edition of Erbschaft dieser Zeit (Zurich: Oprecht und Helbling, 1935) does not contain many texts that Bloch later added; it also includes some texts that Bloch later revised and incorporated in different ways. All of the passages I discuss appeared in the book as it was originally published; where they do not appear in the revised edition of the Werkausgabe, I will refer to the first edition. The book was actually published on 27 October 1934; see Ernst Bloch, Briefe, vol. 2, ed. Karola Bloch et al. (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1985), 465, 657 n. 2.


12. The context, of course, is the postwar mainstream breakthrough of a critique of Enlightenment and of notions of progress in a postmodern or “posthistorical” condition. If historical time does not move “forward,” how then does it move? Peter Osborne gives an intelligent account and critique of many of these positions in The Politics of Time: Modernity and Avant-Garde (London: Verso, 1995).
14. In Germany, this took the form of the Communist Party’s notorious opposition to Social Democracy as “Social Fascism.”
17. Erbschaft, 105; Heritage, 98.
34. Pinder, Das Problem der Generation, 39.
42. Erbschaft, 122; Heritage, 113 (trans. modified); Pinder, Das Problem der Generation, 12.
43. See Ernst Bloch, “Kritische Erörterungen über Rickert,” in Tendenz-Latenz-Utopie, Werkausgabe, vol. 10 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1978), 68–72, esp. 70–71. On the flurry of discussions of the problem of generations in the history of art and literary studies at the time, see Jost Hermand, Literaturwissenschaft und Kunstwissenschaft (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1965), 46–49. When this article had already gone to press, I became aware of Beat Dietschy’s Basel dissertation Gebrochene Gegenwart: Ernst Bloch, Ungleichzeitigkeits und das Geschichtsbild der Moderne (Frankfurt: Vervuert, 1988). Dietschy surveys anticipations of the theory of nonsimultaneity in Bloch’s previous writings as well as the larger intellectual context of Bloch’s work, mentioning Pinder’s Das Problem der Generation (129–30). From the standpoint of intellectual history, Dietschy provides a wide-ranging discussion of the “image of history” at Bloch’s time. My focus on Bloch’s engagement with art-historical literature is intended to thematize how the challenge of thinking the visual provided a crucial impetus to the discussions of the Critical Theorists. My thanks to David Durst for this reference.

51. “Reims becomes a question of the ‘problem of generations,’ or rather of what we might term the ‘problem of historical time’—for the ‘problem of generations’ is here only a special case, and not even the most important.” Panofsky, “Zum Problem der historischen Zeit,” 77. Panofsky does not refer to Pinder by name; he refers to Simmel’s essay on pp. 79 and 83 n. 3. Silvia Feretti discusses the relation of Panofsky’s essay to Simmel’s work (but not Pinder’s) in Cassirer, Panofsky, and Warburg: Symbol, Art, and History, trans. Richard Pierce (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 213–17.


53. “The stars of one's birth are clearly a force of nature. . . . It is not enough to point to the similarity of external conditions, a certain equivalence of experience (for example the common experience of great wars) that make those of the same age simultaneous. The miracle of the ‘casts’ of nature (Würfe der Natur), the scientifically demonstrable formation of groups in the birth of decisive souls is not in this way explained. It is merely witnessed.” Pinder, “Kunstgeschichte nach Generationen,” 11. “Is there any law to explain the grouping of decisive births? Yes, in this sense: that the close convergence of these births is an ever-recurring fact—a mystery, but a fact.” Pinder, “Kunstgeschichte nach Generationen,” 15.


57. In any case, this is Bloch's solution. But for a Marxist critique of this “standard” of simultaneity, see Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar, Reading Capital (London: New Left Books, 1970), 91–118. For a critique of Althusser's critique, see Osborne, The Politics of Time, 23–29. Althusser, it should be noted, wrote within a different tradition of thinking about historical time, a predominantly French line of thought stretching from Henri Bergson through the Annales school, and encompassing the well-known art-historical work of Henri Focillon and George Kubler.


63. Erbschaft, 213; Heritage, 196 (trans. modified).

64. Erbschaft, 207; Heritage, 190.

65. Erbschaft, 217; Heritage, 199.
68. The reference to Scharoun is clear in another passage, from a section called “The Ship House”: “From this too we learn to freeze. Inside and out the wall is bare. But in return we see the inside open, the outside breaks through. . . . Even this house no longer pretends to take root here. Straps run round the ledges, made of blue steel, shining at night. . . . Deprivation forces people into large blocks, but the open age blows on the die and changes its shape. Low doors no longer lead into the safe house, but on board. Curves form a ship’s bow, the queues pull bands around the hull, even the flat roof . . . is . . . more like a sundeck. Steps on the outside, riveted circular windows strengthen the travelling impression: the whole house becomes a ship.” Erbschaft, 229; Heritage, 210. Scharoun’s apartment block for bachelors and young married couples on the Hohenzollerndamm—close to the underground line that Bloch would have used traveling between his home in the Friedenau section and the center of Berlin—had a prominently placed band that was illuminated at night at the “curved bow”; Scharoun’s most publicized building, in Berlin-Siemensstadt, famously dubbed the “battleship” or “armored cruiser” (Panzerkreuzer), matches Bloch’s description of circular windows and outside stairways quite precisely. See J. Christoph Bürkle, Hans Scharoun (Zurich: Artemis, 1993), 74–79; and Annemarie Jaeggi, “Siemensstadt,” in Vier Berliner Siedlungen der Weimarer Republik (Berlin: Bauhaus-Archiv, 1985), 163–64.

69. And in exploring, from a revolutionary standpoint, the philosophical potential of the romantic critique of modernity, he is closely associated with the Lukács of History and Class Consciousness.


81. Hugo Häring, “Für Wiedererweckung einer deutschen Baukultur,”
Stefan Germer raises the possibility that Pinder’s Munich address was an
important source for Häring’s formulations: Germer, “Die italienische
82. Two perspectives for Gropius’s Reichsbank building competition entry
of 1933 (Busch-Reisinger Museum, Harvard University, Gropius Archive 20.2
and 70.4) are reproduced in Winifred Nerdinger, Walter Gropius (Berlin:
83. One prominent statement was Josef Strzygowski, Die Krisis der
Geisteswissenschaften vorgeführt am Beispiele der Forschung über bildende
Kunst (Vienna: Schroll, 1923).
84. After the early years of National Socialism, Pinder (never, it seems, a
party member) did not remain close to the regime. This seems to be the result
of both the unpopularity of his views in government and his own disen-
chantment with the party. See Halbertsma, Wilhelm Pinder und die deutsche
Kunstgeschichte, 129–63.
86. Younger figures did not. Besides Mannheim, Bloch’s younger col-
leagues showed little interest in the issue of generations and their historical
meaning. Adorno refers to the problem of generations but does not find the
issue worth taking up: Ästhetische Theorie (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1973), 59.
Benjamin does not mention the debate; he did, however, read Simmel’s
“Problem der historischen Zeit,” and he was disappointed: “Some time ago I
read Simmel’s Das Problem der historischen Zeit, an extremely wretched
concoction that goes through contortions of reasoning, incomprehensibly
uttering the silliest things.” Letter to Scholem, ca. 23 December 1917, in
Benjamin, Briefe, vol. 1, 162; The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin, 106.
Only Siegfried Kracauer (born 1889) showed interest. See his letter to Bloch
of 7 February 1935, in Bloch, Briefe, vol. 1, 385. In his old age, Kracauer dis-
cussed nonsimultaneity at length, with reference to Marx, Henri Focillon’s
Life of Forms, and Kubler’s The Shape of Time. Siegfried Kracauer, History:
The Last Things before the Last (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969),
chap. 6. See also his letter to Bloch of 17 June 1963 and an undated letter from
approximately 1965, in Bloch, Briefe, vol. 1, 398–403; and his correspondence
with Panofsky from the same period in Breidecker, Siegfried Kracauer—
Erwin Panofsky: Briefwechsel, 67–74.
88. Erbschaft dieser Zeit, 1st ed., 94–95. The section with the title “Instead
Brown Theft” (“Statt dessen brauner Diebstahl”) does not appear in the 1962
edition that is reprinted in the Werkausgabe. Similar material is discussed
instead in a section called “Inventory of Revolutionary Appearance” (“Inventar
der revolutionären Scheins”), which bears the date 1933. Erbschaft, 70–75;
Heritage, 64–69.
89. “Jeder Zustand, ja jeder Augenblick ist von unendlichem Wert, denn
er ist der Repräsentant einer ganzen Ewigkeit”: Johann Peter Eckermann,
Gespräche mit Goethe, in Goethe, Gedenk ausgabe, vol. 24 (Zurich: Artemis-
Verlag, 1949), 67.
90. Fritz Strich, Deutsche Klassik und Romantik, oder Vollendung und

Hans Scharoun. “Armored
cruiser” apartment building,
91. Strich, Deutsche Klassik und Romantik, oder Vollendung und Unendlichkeit, 69.

92. Strich, Deutsche Klassik und Romantik, oder Vollendung und Unendlichkeit, 379.


101. In many cases, the early texts were not published at the time. Where they were, inspection of the original texts shows that considerable changes and elaborations were made (compare “Amusement Co., Grauen, Drittes Reich,” dated September 1930 in Erbschaft, 61–67, with the original publication as “Zum ‘Dritten Reich,’” in the Frankfurter Zeitung, 22 November 1930, reprinted in Ernst Bloch, Fabelnd denken: Essayistische Prosa aus der “Frankfurter Zeitung,” ed. Gerd Ueding (Tübingen: Klöpfer und Meyer, 1997), 109–14. For a discussion of the problem of text dating that has plagued the reception of Bloch’s work and a convincing argument that no bad faith on the author’s part was involved, see Oskar Negt, “Ernst Bloch: The German Philosopher of the October Revolution,” New German Critique 4 (1975): 3–16.