International Brecht Society

Call for Papers

German Studies Annual Conference

15-18 September 2022 (Houston, TX)

Documentary and Realism

Brecht’s insistence that fascism begins with the lie casts a daunting perspective on the times we now live in. The willingness of parts of society to believe unproven “truths” and “alternative facts,” combined with technologies that spread false information instantaneously, bring notions of “truth,” “reality,” and “realism” back into focus. Critics speak of a "hunger for reality," a "rediscovery of realism" in the inter-arts context. This has led to a boom in documentary and interventionist projects since the millennial turn, pointing to the fraught relationship between reality and fiction, between engagement and autonomy, whose boundaries have changed historically and culturally. Long shunned as outmoded in academic discourse, now reality and realism have returned with fresh urgency to current debates.

Brecht’s critical engagement with realism has become part of his interventionist aesthetics in theater and film projects. These techniques have influenced following generations of playwrights who engaged with urgent political problems of their own times through documentary theater (e.g., Peter Weiss and Heiner Kipphardt). This kind of documentary engagement prevails to this day in forms that include montage and/or surrealist imagery that we encounter in “cinéma verité” as well as in the films of Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Alexander Kluge, and Lars von Trier among others. In addition, disagreements over the meaning and nature of realism also stimulated theoretical debates, such as the *Realismusdebatte* of 1937 (especially between Brecht and Georg Lukács), which was followed by a debate between Brecht and Adorno, all of which served as foundations for conceptions of postmodernist relativity.

This panel seeks to interrogate the tension between the multiple levels of reality and their representation both in Brecht’s works and in that of those who have followed explicitly in his footsteps, as epigones or critics. We invite proposals that engage the issues in all their theoretical and practical variations from diverse fields including literary theory, performance theory, political theory, art history, filmmaking and film theory, history and the history of mentalities.

Submit proposals (ca. 250 words) and a short biographical summary by 7 March 2022, to Astrid Oesmann (astrid.oesmann@rice.edu).

Panel participants must become a paid-up member of the GSA before 15 March 2022.