

The German Studies Association and the International Brecht Society  
41st Annual conference, 5-8 October 2017, Atlanta

“Long Live Lenin”: Brecht and the Hundredth Anniversary of the Russian Revolution

In any compendium of major historical events, the Russian Revolution of 1917 figures near the top. On the occasion of its 100th anniversary, the International Brecht Society is calling for papers that connect the work of Brecht (and contemporaries on the German-language cultural left) with the Russian Revolution and its legacies. In particular, we hope for papers that explore new understandings of the Revolution and revolution generally from today’s standpoint or explore the revolutionary moment of the interwar years with attention to the full spectrum of actors from syndicalists to National Bolsheviks.

Brecht’s work – plays, poetry, prose, essays – is inextricably tied to the revolutionary politics actualized by the Russian Revolution, a connection that has both exalted and freighted his work, depending on the era and audience. Today, Bernie Sanders organizes in the name of “Our Revolution,” while, like Brecht, Steven Bannon professes admiration for Lenin, “Lenin wanted to destroy the state, and that’s my goal too.” The word revolution is suited to such vicissitudes, serving, as occasion demands, as a metaphor or concept, an empty signifier or strategic judgment, a singular event or historical inevitability. Given our hundred-year conjuncture, with the destabilization of Washington’s neoliberal consensus and the accession of anti-establishment right-wing movements to state power, with dominant states hovering perilously between strong-arm dirigisme and deregulatory laissez-faire, how can we read Brecht to open up the significance of the Russian Revolution for our uncertain times? Is Lenin’s revolution only an incarnation of Fortuna’s turning wheel? Or was it a true “Radwechsel”? But then on the road from where to where? To the extent it is no longer possible to believe that Brecht’s inscription “Long Live Lenin” is invincible, does our faith in Brecht’s poetry wane with our faith in Lenin, or is the relationship between art and politics a more resistant one, one that can even reinvigorate a faith otherwise susceptible to cynicism? What does it mean to think of political events through the lens of literature or theater in distinction to historiography?

Topics might relate Brecht and his work to:

- Bolshevik east and bourgeois west
- Revolutionary violence
- Revolutionary science
- Political theology (miracles, messianism, redemption)
- State and nation
- Revolutionary propaganda and aesthetic immortality
- Conservative revolutionaries (Jünger, Niekisch, Schmitt, et al)
- Critics of Lenin on the left (Kautsky, Kollontai, Luxemburg, Pannekoek, et al)
- “die Nachgeborenen” (e.g., Peter Weiss, Heiner Müller, Volker Braun...)

Send abstracts of 250 words by 7 February 2017, to Benjamin Robinson: [brobins\[a\]indiana.edu](mailto:brobins[a]indiana.edu), and to Stephen Brockmann: [smb\[a\]andrew.cmu.edu](mailto:smb[a]andrew.cmu.edu). All presenters at the GSA conference must become GSA members by February 15, 2017: [www.thegsa.edu](http://www.thegsa.edu)