

Call for papers for a panel sponsored by the International Brecht Society at the Annual Conference of the Modern Language Association (MLA), Toronto, Canada, January 2026

## **Brecht and Hope**

In these new dark times of ever proliferating and exacerbating crises (social, political, ecological, economic, and other), the concept of hope is receiving renewed attention, including in research and pedagogy related to culture and the arts. Those engaged in this debate seek to elaborate adequate and usable conceptions of hope as critical, utopian, active, and just, some without acknowledging but others basing themselves explicitly on Ernst Bloch's pioneering work in *The Principle of Hope* (1959). In this context, the panel proposes to investigate connections between Bertolt Brecht's work and hope/hoping/hopefulness.

The few explicit treatments of hope in Brecht's work are ambivalent. The poem "You really should stop hoping / That times will get better / When or if they get better / They won't get better for you" ("Hoffe doch nicht mehr", 1931) asks the interlocutors to abandon hope for a better future for themselves, but leaves open the possibility of such a better future beyond their lifetime. "Those who hope!" ("Die Hoffenden!", 1933) is a clear indictment of passive, illusory, politically naive hope, while in "Is oppression so ancient" ("Ist die Unterdrückung so alt", 1938), mutual compassion among the oppressed is "the hope of the world". More important, beyond such explicit instances, reading Brecht's work through the lens of hope is possible. For example, Bloch, in his examination of the theatre in *The Principle of Hope*, discusses the Brechtian variant as a practical, pleasurable anticipatory theatre that experiments with forms of actions in order to determine and let the audience decide which ones are suitable to break through the stasis of existing negative conditions towards what will be better.

We invite a wide range of approaches to the topic of Brecht and hope, including but not limited to the following:

- Brecht's conceptions, figures, and criticisms of hope
- The principle(s) of hope in Brecht's work
- Can Brecht help us elaborate a conception of critical hope?
- Brecht, Marxism, and hope
- Brecht and eschatological hope
- The dialectics of hope and despair, hope and fear, hope and injustice, hope and ...
- Hopes inspired by Brecht
- Brecht and the pedagogy of hope
- How has Brecht's work been used or how could it be used as material for hopeful cultural production?

Please send paper/presentation proposals (max. 500 words) and a brief bio to Joerg Esleben by 28 Feb. 2025, jesleben [at] uottawa.ca; panelists must be members of the MLA by 1 April 2025.