

Prisms of Realism.
On the Question of Emancipation
and Authority in Art
(Lukács, Brecht, Adorno, Kluge)

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Abstract

In a Marxian sense, artistic realism represents a crucial political, philosophical and artistic attitude. Artistic realism aims to reveal the underlying power structures of the socio-political reality, and thereby to raise awareness regarding the very process of emancipation from domination. But from where does an artist derive the authority to determine an adequate position towards reality? How should an artwork address its audience? How should form and content relate to each other and to the reality at stake, and in which way is a critical perception able to trigger mobilization? These questions were discussed in the so-called expressionism debate between Georg Lukács and Bertolt Brecht. This article examines their respective arguments, as well as a second fecund theorization: Alexander Kluge's concept of antagonistic realism, which not only further develops Brecht's position, but also takes into account Theodor W. Adorno's critique of engaged art.

Keywords: realism; authority; expressionism debate; emancipation; critique; Theodor W. Adorno; Alexander Kluge.