

Cultures of the Left in the Age of Right-Wing Populism

Manifestations and Performances

Keynote Speaker: Professor Chantal Mouffe

Call for Papers

This conference event is the culmination of a substantial period of research funded by the British Academy Partnership and Mobility grant (2016-19) that brought together an interdisciplinary group of scholars from Warwick University (UK) and Jawaharlal Nehru University (India) as well as researchers, artists and activists from other European and overseas institutions and places. It started as a retrieval project asking What's Left of the Left? What is left of the Left institutions, practices, critical discourses and its other cultural manifestations at the present junction? During the lifespan of this project, however, Narendra Modi solidified his power in India, Donald Trump became the President of the USA, Brexit vote was cast fuelled by right-wing populist rhetoric of xenophobia, Victor Orban's right wing government erected razor blade fences at the Hungarian boarder to stop refugees, pro-fascist oriented Luigi Di Maio became the Deputy Prime Minister of Italy, and most recently, dictatorship-loving and openly anti-LGBT Jair Bolsonaro won the Brazilian presidential elections. It has quickly become apparent that our initial research question 'What's Left of the Left?' is no longer tentative, but urgent and that it needs to be re-formulated accordingly.

In her latest book entitled *For a Left Populism* (2018), Chantal Mouffe argues that the success of right-wing populist movements should not encourage the left to try and reclaim the centre, but to offer a populist alternative. While both types of populism aim to federate unsatisfied demands, they do it in very different ways. In contrast to right populism, which constitutes the people through xenophobic or 'national' rhetoric (especially against immigrants, seen as a threat to the identity and the prosperity of the nation), left populism can do so via the language of social justice (especially against 'the oligarchy') in such a way that it 'addresses the diverse forms of subordination around issues concerning exploitation, domination or discrimination' (Mouffe). In her book, she also foregrounds art as an important agent in the public sphere.

Taking the cue from Mouffe and other political theorists we have engaged with (Balibar 2005; Badiou 2008; Douzinas and Zizek 2010; Bosteels 2014; Traverso 2016 , to mention a few), the conference seeks to explore cultures of the Left both as context-specific and as globally connected to

foreground their potential to offer an alternative to the current right-wing populist turn. Our interest is in looking both synchronically and diachronically into the cultural Left as a means through which the languages and gestures of Leftist resistance could be shaped.

The performance studies framework of the conference provides an interdisciplinary exploration of cross-cultural patterns of performance and the performative nature of political dissent. This enables us to explore scenarios that have been unfolding through the interplay between radical political thought and performative manifestations of the Cultural Left as embodied political, social, cultural and art practices.

We are asking how could both the historical legacy of the Left and its current manifestations and performances contribute to formulating an aesthetic of resistance not only as a reactive practice, but as a way to sustain the politics of inclusion, equality, care for the commons and social justice? The concept, coined by playwright Peter Weiss against the backdrop of rising fascism in the 1930s—asserts that art and culture, by formulating an aesthetic of resistance, are the means of finding new modes of political action and new forms of social understanding. The urgency of this project is to explore the politics and aesthetics of these forms as means of dissent, but even more importantly, as strategies of sustaining the progressive political agenda both against the backdrop of the alarmingly rising Right and on its own terms. In other words, we ask broadly what is the potential of Leftist cultural performances and manifestations to formulate an aesthetic of resistance to both reinforce a Leftist political response to Right-wing populism and offer sustainable modes of doing leftist politics so as to secure its more permanent impact?

We invite contributions from different geographical and political contexts including Latin American, African and Asian countries, as well as case studies from areas that we have been researched more closely within our project: India, Europe, USA. The themes could include, but are not limited to issues of how Cultures of the Left perform:

- Social justice and solidarity
- Gender politics
- Asylum and migration issues
- LGBT issues
- Forms of protest and resistance
- Sites
- Legacy

- Aesthetics
- Political theory

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Chantal Mouffe is Professor of Political Theory at the University of Westminster. She is the author of For A Left Populism (Verso 2018), Agnostics: Thinking the World Politically (Verso, 2013), The Return of the Political (Routledge,2006) and others.

The conference will take place from April 15th-17th, 2019 at the premises of Warwick University in Venice

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Please send a 700 word abstract and a short bio by January 8th, 2019 to s.jestrovic@warwick.ac.uk.

Notification of selection will be no later than January 31st, 2019.

Registration fee:

Regular - £100

Students/Unwaged - £50

(inclusive of opening cocktail on April 15th and lunch April 16th)

Conference Committee:

Prof Bishnuprya Dutt (JNU)

Dr Milija Gluhovic (Warwick)

Dr Silvija Jestrovic (Warwick)

Dr Ameet Parameswaram (JNU)

Prof Janelle Reinelt (Warwick)