

The Transgressive Aesthetics of Populism

Thomás Zicman de Barros^{a*}

Théo Aiolfi^{b**}

^a*Centre for Political Research (CEVIPOF), Sciences Po Paris, Paris, France*

* 98 rue de l'Université, 75007, Paris, France | thomas.zicmandebarros@sciencespo.fr

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1657-6939>

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/bolandeira/>

^b*LT2D (Lexiques, Textes, Discours, Dictionnaires), CY Cergy Paris Université, Paris, France*

** 33 Boulevard du Port, 95000, Cergy, France | theo.aiolfi@cyu.fr

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6146-1332>

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/theo-aiolfi/>

The Transgressive Aesthetics of Populism

Abstract: This article aims to bridge the gap between the discursive and socio-cultural-performative approaches in the critical literature on populism by proposing that populism can be conceived as a transgressive aesthetics. The article draws on Jacques Rancière's notion of aesthetics as the “partage du sensible” and employs it to understand how populism transgresses the rules establishing what can appear in politics. The paper claims that populism is aesthetically transgressive in two ways: (1) by making visible subalternized subjects through the discursive articulation of the “people”, and (2) by naming the “elite” in a way that makes visible underlying structures of domination. The article argues that this framework allows for a more accurate understanding of the relationship between populism and topics such as crisis and institutionalism. Moreover, the paper employs this framework to differentiate between emancipatory and reactionary forms of populism, connecting emancipatory populism to queer aesthetic practices and explaining how it reinvigorates liberal democracy. Conversely, reactionary populism mobilizes that which Hannah Arendt called the “mob” and ends up reinforcing modes of domination.

1. Introduction

There is a gap to be bridged in the critical literature on populism. Not only a theoretical gap but also a gap between two of the main critical strands in populism studies. The first strand is the discursive approach, mainly inspired by Ernesto Laclau's conceptualization of populism as the discursive articulation of the divide between “people” and “elite”. The second strand is composed of the socio-cultural and performative approaches, which introduced new features to populism like the flaunting of the “low” and the performative mediation of crisis. These two strands of the critical literature are far from incompatible, indeed scholars from these two

perspectives have acknowledged a form of complementarity (Ostiguy, Panizza, & Moffitt, 2021, p. 256). However, their interconnection remains hitherto under-theorized. Despite their apparent proximity, no effort has been made to explain which transformations in the theoretical background of both strands are needed for them to be articulated. One could say that the two schools seem to develop in parallel, without hostility and even with some mutual sympathy, but that they never truly integrate.

In this article, we argue that these two strands can be integrated if one conceives populism above all as a transgressive aesthetics. The notion of transgression was already marginally present in the work of Laclau and has recently picked up salience, particularly in the socio-cultural-performative approach. However, these recent contributions tend to have a micro-sociological bias by focusing primarily on the performances of the populist leader. We argue that the potential of transgression should not be confined to the embodied practices of leaders but instead be expanded to capture the unsettling of the political order that is intrinsic to populism. For this purpose, we mobilize Jacques Rancière's notion of aesthetics as the "partage du sensible" to consider the way populism broadly transgresses the rules establishing what can be seen and what remains invisible in politics.

Beyond the embodied performances of particular leaders, we understand that populism is aesthetically transgressive in two senses. First, when the discursive articulation of the "people" makes visible and incorporates into politics what Laclau, after Antonio Gramsci and Georges Bataille, called the subaltern or the heterogeneous – marginalized subjects located outside of the public sphere. Second, populism is aesthetically transgressive when it names the "elite" in such a way that makes visible the underlying power structures that rule the "partage of the sensible". From these two sources of aesthetic transgression, one sustains a framework that encompasses Laclau's discourse theory and the contributions of the socio-cultural-performative strand in an articulated whole. Moreover, one also acquires tools for a clearer

differentiation between emancipatory and reactionary forms of populism, according to the distinct ways of performing and dealing with transgression.

To develop this argument, the article is divided into three sections. The first section provides an overview of the critical scholarship on populism, highlighting the synergies as well as the differences between the discursive and socio-cultural-performative approaches to showcase how the concept of transgressive aesthetics can act as the bridge between them. Following this, we make the case for an aesthetic conception of populism in the second part of the article. We explain how by naming the “people” and the “elite”, populism transgresses the rules guiding the “partage du sensible”, incorporating subalternized subjects into politics and disclosing invisible modes of domination. We also discuss how the idea of a transgressive aesthetics reframes central themes in the critical literature on populism such as the relationship between populism and crisis in its ontic and “ontological” dimensions, and the opposition between populism and institutionalism. The third part explains how seeing populism as a transgressive aesthetics sheds new light on the divide between emancipatory and reactionary forms of populism. On the one hand, an emancipatory populism constructs an inclusionary “people”. Connecting emancipatory populism to queer aesthetic practices, we defend that it serves as a means for subalternized subjects to claim their place in politics, reinvigorating liberal democracy. On the other hand, a reactionary populism mobilizes what Hannah Arendt called the “mob”. It involves scapegoating others, reinforcing structures of domination, and threatening liberal democracy. As a whole, this article seeks to offer more than just a synthesis of two theoretical perspectives on populism, it shows a path forward for the study of populism which genuinely captures the interconnection between politics and aesthetics.

2. The gap between discursive and socio-cultural-performative approaches to populism

Research on populism in political theory has been profoundly shaped by the work of Laclau. In the lineage of the post-Marxist approach to political hegemony, he developed with Chantal Mouffe (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985) and more widely of the Essex school of poststructural discourse analysis, Laclau's central idea is that populism constitutes the political logic that discursively and performatively articulates what he calls "empty signifiers" (Laclau, 1996, p. 38). The first empty signifier of a populist discourse is the "people", a name that works as the point of convergence of a series of unaddressed political grievances, giving shape to a sense of commonality. However, in populism this discursive articulation of the "people" also relies on a "negative" foil, from which this "people" is separated through an antagonistic frontier (Laclau, 2005a, p. 160). This "negative" empty signifier is usually described in the literature as the "establishment", "*la casta*" or more commonly, the "elite". Just like the "people", the "elite" is an empty signifier whose meaning is contested but it always relies on a similar core. Indeed, the "elite" is performatively framed as the focal collective of powerful subjects embodying what is wrong with the authoritative structures of the political system, the dysfunctioning part of society that ought to be changed. As such, the "people" and the "elite" are mutually co-constituted as collective entities that are exclusive to one another, although they are deeply connected through a power asymmetry benefiting the "elite" at the expense of the "people". By investigating the very process of the discursive construction of "people" and "elite", Laclau's theory provided the foundation of the critical research on populism, fostering a vibrant scholarship that further develops his perspective both empirically and theoretically.

A frequent criticism addressed to the discursive approach is an excessive and increasing formalism in Laclau's work (Stavrakakis, 2004, p. 262). According to Arthur Borriello and Anton Jäger, as Laclau tried to derive an ontological theory of the political from his ontic reflections on populism, he ended up "*with a notion of populism undone of any specific content*" (Borriello & Jäger, 2020, p. 308). To deal with this shortcoming, in parallel to this expansion

of this discursive approach to populism, which emphasized antagonism as the key feature of populist politics, other scholars engaged with other disciplines like sociology, rhetoric, and performance studies to demonstrate that there was more to populism than an opposition between “us” against “them” – in general, the “people” against the “elite” (Stavrakakis, 2017, p. 529). Among these scholars, Pierre Ostiguy argued that populism relied on “flaunting the low” (Ostiguy, 2017, p. 73), in opposition to the “high” register of practices and discourses dominant in the political elite. Building on Bourdieusian sociology, he argued that politics could not be properly understood by solely relying on the traditional axis opposing left and right and that it needed to be complemented by another opposition: the high-low axis which would capture the cultural component of politics. Mapping “*ways of being and acting in politics*”, and more precisely “*ways of relating to people*” (Ostiguy, 2009, p. 5), this new axis distinguishes the “high”, that is educated, sophisticated and procedural practices in politics, from the “low”, which conversely captures popular, raw and personalistic practices. Adding a Laclauian flair to his early definition, Ostiguy later defined populism as “*the antagonistic, mobilizational flaunting of the ‘low’*” (Ostiguy, 2017, p. 84). This “intuitively familiar” (Ostiguy, 2009, p. 1) definition was however limited by its lack of engagement with the minimal characteristic of populism in the discursive perspective: the opposition between “people” and “elite, which Ostiguy implicitly aligned with respectively the “low” and the “high”. While his approach captured a hitherto underexplored facet of populism, Ostiguy ignored the discursive and performative construction of the “people” and the “elite”.

To tackle this criticism and bridge Ostiguy’s approach with the work of Laclauian scholars, Benjamin Moffitt chose to include the “flaunting of the low” as one of the core features of what he called the populist style. As such, alongside the “*appeal to ‘the people versus ‘the elite’*” (Moffitt, 2016, p. 45) which corresponds to his inclusion of people-centrism and anti-elitism, he adapted Ostiguy’s concept by calling it “bad manners”, defined as “a

general disregard for ‘appropriate’ ways of acting on the political stage” (Moffitt, 2016, p. 55). Alongside a third feature, which he identified as “performance of crisis, breakdown or threat”, these additions to the antagonism between “people” and “elite” substantially enriched the stylistic approach to populism. However, their interconnection remained under-theorized and conceptually inconsistent. Indeed, his definition of what he called the populist style simultaneously included discursive framing (“appeal to ‘the people’ versus ‘the elite’”), socio-cultural practices (“bad manners”), and performative construction (“performance of crisis”) which were all different analytical categories without developing the way they were connected. Although their identification and juxtaposition were undoubtedly innovative, Moffitt’s three features remained ambiguous in their definition and lacked theoretical elaboration to make them more than descriptive tools to identify populism in action.

As a whole, while their contributions are inspiring, neither Ostiguy’s “flaunting of the low” nor Moffitt’s “bad manners” or performance of crisis sufficiently developed the theoretical implications of connecting their concepts with the discursive core of the antagonism between “people” and “elite”. In other words, even though their concepts proved intuitively relevant, their definitions did not justify why these socio-cultural and performative elements were fundamentally necessary within the articulation of the “people” and the “elite”.

Indeed, while a convergence around a “post-Laclauian consensus” was recently acknowledged between the discursive and performative approaches to populism, which was aptly named the “discursive-performative approach to populism” (Ostiguy et al., 2021, p. 256), this intuitive complementarity remains under-theorized. We argue that one of the main reasons for this lies in the intrinsic limitations of the concepts of “low” and “bad manners”. In his article defending a conception of populism as a “transgressive style”, Théo Aiolfi (2022) challenged Ostiguy and Moffitt’s concepts for under-developing the purpose of “flaunting the low”, ignoring a range of norm-breaking practices that “bad manners” could not capture and relying

on a normative binary. Starting from the premise that the strategic use of what Ostiguy and Moffitt describe as socioculturally “low” was to differentiate themselves from other political actors, he made the case for using instead the concept of transgression, defined as “*the violation of a norm of political relevance*” (Aiolfi, 2022, p. 6). This notion of transgression is already present in the work of Ostiguy and Moffitt (2021, pp. 51, 61) and other scholars from the performative approach, whether it is directly like María Esperanza Casullo (2021, p. 77) in her discussion of populist leaders as “transgressive figures” or indirectly in the work of Lone Sørensen (2021, pp. 58–59, 139–146) who talks about populism’s reliance on “disruptive performances”. More prominently, even Laclau mobilized the concept of transgression in his claim that “*the emergence of the ‘people’ as a historical actor is thus always transgressive vis-à-vis the situation preceding it. This transgression is the emergence of a new order*” (Laclau, 2005a, p. 228).

However, Aiolfi’s work focused primarily on the strategic use of transgression, developing a typology of transgressive performances based on whether they break interactional, rhetorical, or theatrical norms. While he hinted at the possibility of a deeper use of the concept (Aiolfi, 2022, p. 6), he remained limited by his focus on embodied performances which constrains transgression within the frame of the way particular political actors mobilize this transgressive style to appear different from others. In this article, we want to explore the wider ontological consequences of conceiving populism as constructed around a transgression, bridging the gap between discursive and performative approaches to populism. More widely, we want to demonstrate the ambivalent potential of populism when it shapes and is given shape by reactionary or progressive ideals.

To accomplish this bridging effort, we must move towards an aesthetic notion of transgression. In ordinary language, the word aesthetics is frequently used to refer to a “varnish”, to a “cosmetic” dimension of reality that does not touch its core. In other moments,

it is associated with beauty, or, in a slightly less restrictive way, with artistic expressions. Even authors who deal with the relationship between aesthetics and politics end up reproducing this trend: Mouffe, for instance, tends to associate aesthetics with art – even if she focuses on counter-cultural artistic movements (Mouffe, 2013, p. 88). Rancière’s understanding is very different. As he explains by going back to the roots of the word, aesthetics refers to the “*partage du sensible*” – to the sharing or partition of what is sensible (Rancière, 2000b, p. 12). This encompasses the traditional realm of arts, but by no means is restricted to it (Rancière, 2000b, pp. 27, 71–72). For Rancière, politics is at its core a matter of aesthetics, to what can be seen and what cannot be seen. The visible and the invisible.

Of course, Rancière’s idea of aesthetics invites further questions. For instance, one is led to think of the set of rules – Laclau would call the “logics” (Laclau, 1999, pp. 102–103, 2000, pp. 76–77) – establishing what can appear and that which is repressed, disavowed, foreclosed, hidden, invisible. It is interesting to notice, though, that these very rules can be read “aesthetically”. This is because not every rule is clearly, openly stated. In many cases, it takes part in an implicit grammar. Despite the differences between Rancière and Michel Foucault (Rancière, 1995, pp. 55–56, 2000a, pp. 89–92), the latter is useful here. Foucault not only shows us that the rules – he would call them “norms” (Foucault, 1978/2004, p. 58) – driving this “*partage du sensible*” have a “*permanent, repetitious, inert, and self-reproducing*” character (Foucault, 1976, pp. 122–123) but also stresses that they themselves might be ultimately invisible (Foucault, 1975, p. 189).

The question that interests us the most, though, is how the populist discursive articulation of entities such as the “people” and the “elite” can be interpreted as an aesthetic practice – and a practice that might transgress the rules and limits of what or who can be seen.

3. For an aesthetic conception of populism

Rancière's understanding of aesthetics adds a new dimension to the notion of transgression. For sure, one can refer to the transgressive performances of a political leader, as Ostiguy and Moffitt have done. All in all, a leader who breaks with the established rules of "proper" behavior in politics is aesthetically transgressive – he or she challenges and transforms the limits of what can be seen in politics. But the idea of an aesthetic transgression goes beyond this and leads one to consider what else can experience "*an exodus from invisibility*" (Arditi, 2019, p. 57). Specifically, it invites one to think more widely about what populism brings into politics. Sørensen says that populist disruptions perform an "expository function" (Sørensen, 2021, pp. 129, 144). This transgressive disclosure takes place in two combined ways: (1) through the inclusion of political subjects by the discursive construction of an empty signifier – the "people" –, and (2) through exposing the invisible modes of domination by naming a "negative" empty signifier – the "elite".

To understand the first way populism is transgressive – i.e. how it can bring political subjects into politics – a key notion is Rancière's idea of a "part of no part" (Rancière, 1995, p. 31). The notion of "part of no part" is intrinsically linked to his reflections on politics and aesthetics – on politics as a matter of visibility and invisibility. For Rancière, the "part of no part" refers precisely to those who cannot be seen: subjects who are a by-product of the symbolic order, but remain ignored at its margins. With the notion of "part of no part," it becomes clearer how Rancière's understanding of aesthetics is key in bridging the gap between Laclau's work and the performative approaches to populism. Indeed, whereas Laclau and Rancière engaged in public debates that could lead one to think that their approaches are distinguished (Laclau, 2005a, pp. 244–249), there is a complementarity, not to say an overlap, between their work. For instance, that which Rancière names the "part of no part" is in the vicinity of Laclau's reflections on what he calls "heterogeneity".

Such as Rancière's "part of no part", the idea of heterogeneity in Laclau's work refers to the invisibilized elements that do not fit into the categories structuring the hegemonic discourse. To be precise, this idea appeared and was developed in three moments and different forms in Laclau's work. It first emerged latently in the early 1990s, when Laclau commented critically on G. W. F. Hegel's notion of "peoples without history" (Hegel, 1830/1975, p. 190, see also 1817/2007, p. 248; Laclau, 1991/1996, p. 24). For Hegel, these peoples have no place in the dialectical logic that would govern history and, for Laclau, indicate the inconsistency of Hegelian theory. As Laclau would later say, these "blind spots" jeopardize Hegel's model, showing that there was something that could not fit in it (Laclau, 2006, p. 666).

A second, and more important influence on Laclau's comments on a non-symbolized excess was Gramsci's notion of subalternity, with which he dialogues towards the turn of the century (Laclau, 1999, pp. 93–95, 2001, pp. 9–10). The subalterns, in Gramsci's thought, are those "*at the margins of history*" (Gramsci, 1934/2021, Q25 §1). Whereas Gramsci's notion of the subaltern somehow overlaps with Karl Marx's concept of the mass – a disorganized, inorganic social group that does not constitute a class for itself (Marx, 1847/1976, p. 211, 1852/1979, pp. 187–189) – he goes further than Marx. For him, the subaltern also seems to refer to many – not to say every – category that is not covered by Marx's main social classes, or by the very idea of class. He explicitly refers to race, religion, and even gender groups as subalterns (Gramsci, 1934/2021, Q25 §4).

The word "heterogeneity" to name what does not fit in the symbolic order appears in Laclau's work after 2005, in explicit references to Bataille (Laclau, 2005a, pp. 155–156, 2006, p. 672). For Bataille, the homogeneous is described as what is "*defined and identifiable*", or even "*measurable*" (Bataille, 1933/1989, pp. 137, 142). The homogeneous is what appears at first sight to social scientists: the dynamics of a well-ruled community, and the main categories taking part in the ordinary production and reproduction of this community (Bataille,

1933/1989, p. 140). By contrast, heterogeneity refers to what is beyond measurement and production. That “*accursed part* [la part maudite]” which is “*incommensurable*”, “*unassimilable*” and “*unproductive*” and somehow puts production in peril, subverting its ordinary dynamics (Bataille, 1949/1976, p. 17, 1933/1989, p. 142). In a metabolic metaphor, heterogeneity refers to the waste, the residue, the excrements of society (Bataille, 1930/1970, pp. 58–59).

Before continuing, it is worth indicating that other authors have discussed similar ideas. Arendt – after Martin Heidegger – refers to the worldless: those aloof subjects who are excluded from the “space of appearances” – her expression for the symbolic order, the sphere of politics (Arendt, 1971/1978, pp. 19, 29, 1958/1998, pp. 115, 118, 201; see also Heidegger, 1930/2012, p. 177). Judith Butler refers to what she calls the “abject” (Butler, 1993, p. 3), referring to “*what is left outside binaries, what is not even speakable*”, “*that which was never supposed to be possible*” (Butler, 1998, pp. 284–285). She is interested in that which is not “*culturally intelligible*” (Butler, 1990, p. 23, see also 1993, p. xi).

It is also important to indicate that both Rancière and Laclau stress that one should not essentialize the subaltern heterogeneous, reducing it to concrete excluded social groups that would exist before representation (see also Butler, 2020, p. 17; Laclau, 2004, p. 126, 2006, p. 669; Thomassen, 2005b, pp. 113–114). For Rancière, the “part of no part” is neither seen nor measurable, as he says (Rancière, 2009, p. 576, 2006/2012, p. 161). Whereas political analysts tend to classify subjects in sociological categories, Rancière claims that one should not “sociologize” the “part of no part”. It cannot fit in any pre-assigned box, and cannot be replaced by concrete “*social groups, identity groups, and so on*” (Rancière, 2004, p. 306).

Going further, Laclau would claim that, as one’s identity is never given, every group would have a heterogeneous dimension in it (Laclau, 2001, p. 10, 2005a, p. 225). One is never identical to oneself, and the subject will always be inhabited by something *extême* – Jacques

Lacan's neologism for an uncanny internal element that is experienced as being foreign (Biglieri & Perelló, 2011, p. 60; Lacan, 1969/2006, p. 224).

In its different names and configurations, this “real” at the internal margins of the symbolic order has a transgressive dimension. And here we can understand that whereas Ostiguy, Moffitt, and Aiolfi indeed grasp something important about populism in their works on performance studies, stressing that beyond the “people” versus “elite” divide one should consider populist leaders' transgressive style, there is something more to take into account. Populist transgression is not only a matter of style, narrowly understood as the expression of the political communication of particular politicians. This can be the case, but its transgressive dimension must be understood more broadly – as an aesthetic transgression. And although an aesthetic transgression can be expressed in the embodied performances of leaders – which might frequently be the case –, this transgression manifests itself especially when the discursive articulation of the “people” mobilizes the invisible, the subaltern, the heterogeneous, the “part of no part”. The call for the “people” offers a point of affective identification (Mouffe, 2022, pp. 35–49) which appeals to isolated and powerless subjects through a counter-hegemonic narrative of obfuscated agency, allowing for the wordless to transgressively erupt in the space of appearances and reshape the limits the symbolic order.

That all said, populism is not only aesthetically transgressive for bringing silenced voices into the public sphere in the name of the “people”. Just as the articulation of the “people” incorporates invisible subalterns in the symbolic order, the discursive construction of the other, “negative” empty signifier of the populist antagonism – the “elite” – also involves bringing something out of invisibility. By naming the “elite”, populism provides a representation of the invisible underlying rules that establish what can be seen and what remains invisible. While a populist discourse does not – and cannot – capture the “real” diffuse and systemic roots of the norms ruling the “partage du sensible” and silencing marginalized perspectives (Laclau, 2006,

pp. 657–658), the discursive articulation of “elite” offers a symbolic embodiment for what Foucault called their “terminal forms” (Foucault, 1976, p. 121). Whether they take the shape of the “establishment”, the “1%” or “*la casta*”, populism gives a face to dominant political norms. It lays bare the modes of domination, exposing their very existence. As such, in parallel to the “people” serving as a way to foster unity and change, the “elite” serves as a point of identification for popular mobilization, acting as a catalyst impetus to take action.

Whereas the argument that populism involves an aesthetic transgression bridges the gap between discursive and performative approaches by showing how the articulation of the antagonism between “people” and “elite” relies on transgression, it also solves an issue with Moffitt’s framework. As we have indicated, whereas Moffitt’s approach is insightful, the three features he associates with populism – (1) the “people” versus the “elite”, (2) “bad manners” and (3) the performance of crisis – end up being simply juxtaposed, and may even seem rather arbitrary. By moving beyond the stylistic idea of “bad manners” and giving to the notion of transgression a central role in populism, we integrate these three dimensions. First, as we have seen, the idea of populism as transgressive aesthetics allows us to grasp that the very articulation of the empty signifiers “people” and “elite” is transgressive. Furthermore, this broader understanding of aesthetic transgression illuminates the connection between populism and the performance of crisis.

Moffitt was not the first to connect populism and crisis. Indeed, associating populism with crisis is commonplace in political studies (Stavrakakis, Katsambekis, Kioupiolis, Nikisianis, & Siomos, 2018, p. 12). On this topic, however, three perspectives stand out. The first, traditional approach was adopted by authors like Kenneth Roberts (1995, p. 113, 2015, p. 141) and Kurt Weyland (1999, p. 395) and presents populism as being caused by economic or political crises. To some extent, the second perspective presented by Moffitt reversed this traditional approach. He has defended that populism is not – or at least it is not only – a by-

product for a crisis, but instead should be thought of as actively producing crises. Moffitt's reflections allow us to understand a new populist proverb stating that "*the best way to weather the storm is to be the storm*" (Zicman de Barros & Lago, 2022, p. 9). Inspired by Gramsci's comments that economic crises do not determine political crises (Gramsci, 1934/1978, Q13 §17), Colin Hay had developed the opposition between "failure" and "crisis" – which correspond respectively to any structural issue within a system and the symbolic mediation of these failures (Hay, 1995, p. 74, 1999, p. 335). Building on this, Moffitt claimed that populism relied on the choice of a specific failure that would be performatively turned into a crisis within the populist articulation of politics (Moffitt, 2016, p. 120).

As some have interpreted it, Laclau developed a third approach to crises from a post-foundational perspective (Stavrakakis et al., 2018, p. 16). Not far from the distinction between failure and crisis, he taught us that every crisis has two dimensions: an ontic dimension and an "ontological" dimension (see also Howarth, 2004, p. 268). When one talks about an "economic crisis", a "political crisis" or even a "sanitary crisis", one is referring to the ontic dimension of a crisis. A crisis that has a given object, a crisis that to a large extent can be symbolized. There is something more in a crisis, though – and here Laclau's notion of dislocation is key (Laclau, 1990, p. 39; Stavrakakis et al., 2018, p. 15). Whereas dislocation appeared in Laclau's work before his reflections on subalternity and heterogeneity, it already grasped something of the *malaise* caused by this *extême* "real" always latently troubling the symbolic order (Biglieri & Perelló, 2011, pp. 54–56). In this sense, the idea of dislocation shows an ontological dimension of crisis – to recall the expression used by Myriam Revault d'Allonnes: an "endless crisis" that marks a world without foundations (Revault d'Allonnes, 2012, p. 53). There are anguish-provoking "ontological insecurities" in modernity (Steele & Homolar, 2019, p. 215). As such, populism emerges as a way to deal with dislocations, providing an ontic content to cope with

an “ontological” discontent (Stavrakakis et al., 2018, p. 16; Zicman de Barros, 2020, pp. 515–516).

From our understanding of the transgressive aesthetics of populism, the notion of crisis gains a new contour, also bridging performative and discursive approaches. From Moffitt, we take the idea that populism produces crises. From Laclau, we understand that this crisis has an “ontological” dimension. In a nutshell, our argument is that crisis and transgression overlap – that crisis is a consequence of populism’s aesthetic transgression. The “ontological” crisis emerges because the populist articulation of the “people” versus the “elite” transforms the symbolic order. The transgressive irruption – or “disruption” – of the heterogeneous, the “abject” in the public sphere performs “*an insurrection at the level of ontology*”, to recall the words of Butler (2004, p. 33). And something equivalent takes place when one names the underlying invisible rules that guide the “partage du sensible”. Indeed, the connection between ontic and “ontological” dimensions of crisis gets even clearer if one thinks of the act of naming the “elites”. In brief, the ontic crises that Moffitt says populism produces – the “spectacularization of a failure” (Moffitt, 2016, p. 120) that names a wrong and brings up new problems to be debated in the political arena – are aesthetically transgressive in themselves, and always have “ontological” implications. All in all, by transgressing and unsettling the rules of what can be seen in politics, populism transforms the frame through which one “reads” reality. This explains why populist outbursts are frequently experienced as surprising, disquieting.

These comments on populist aesthetic transgression and crisis also help one to rethink another common trope in populism studies: the opposition between populism and institutionalism. Anti-populist scholars have frequently stressed that populism threatens liberal democratic institutions (Arato, 2013, p. 161; Urbinati, 2019, p. 8). From a more sympathetic position towards populism, Laclau himself used to claim that the populist logic would be at the

antipodes of the logic of institutionalism (Laclau, 2005b, p. 45). From the idea of politics as a matter of aesthetics, we believe these claims can be reassessed. Drawing on Foucault's idea that modes of domination themselves can be tacit, invisible (Foucault, 1975, p. 189), an aesthetic perspective on institutions understands them as the written and unwritten rules of society, rules establishing what can appear and what cannot appear in politics. Therefore, as a transgressive force, populism would indeed be able to challenge the institutions by taking these rules out of invisibility by naming them, and by transforming the limits of the symbolic order – by transforming the rules of the game (Zac & Sayyid, 1998, p. 252).

4. Emancipatory versus reactionary aesthetic transgressions

As we have argued, the articulation of the “people” against the “elite” that includes subjects that could not appear in politics and exposes underlying structures of domination is transgressive. A question remains, however, on the normative and ethical implications of this transgressive articulation. Whereas some mainstream authors tend to present populism as inherently exclusionary and undemocratic (Arato, 2013, pp. 156–160, 2019, p. 466; Urbinati, 2019, pp. 4–5) and other critical scholars claim that it is constitutively inclusionary and radical democratic (Biglieri & Cadahia, 2021, p. 40; Tarragoni, 2019, pp. 26–30; Vergara, 2020, pp. 237–241; 2020b, pp. 92–93), we believe that the idea of an aesthetic transgression allows for nuanced analysis. We argue that the populist aesthetic transgressions can assume *both* emancipatory and reactionary traits.

The emancipatory potentiality of the heterogeneous as an aesthetically transgressive force was already latent in Bataille's work. Bataille is excited in his celebration of the heterogeneous. For him, homogeneity would be tedious, dull, monotonous, automatic, and human existence could only realize itself in the passionate, heated, and tumultuous movement of heterogeneity (Bataille, 1939/1970, p. 228). Bataille's keenness would even rouse Foucault,

who otherwise seemed rather skeptical and hopeless towards the idea of emancipation (Foucault, 1976, pp. 210–211). In a poetic comment on Bataille, Foucault would claim that transgression

[...] is like a flash of lightning in the night which, from the beginning of time, gives a dense and black intensity to the night it denies, which lights up the night from the inside, from top to bottom, and yet owes to the dark the stark clarity of its manifestation, its harrowing and poised singularity; the flash loses itself in this space it marks with its sovereignty and becomes silent now that it has given a name to obscurity (Foucault, 1963, pp. 755–756).

In the same spirit, Butler celebrates the emergence of the “abject” in politics – as this abjection can challenge naturalized hierarchies (Butler, 1993, p. 3). Furthermore, Butler comments that for Arendt the wordless can transgress the boundaries of the symbolic order and get out of invisibility in an emancipatory way. They can take part in constructing and reshaping a space of appearances in the name of what Arendt called “the right to have rights” – the claim to be part of the polity (Arendt, 1958/1998, p. 199; Butler, 2015, pp. 77, 80; Canovan, 2002, p. 420). Finally, Rancière understands that politics properly speaking only exists as such when the “part of no part” irrupts in the public sphere, always bringing forward a claim for equality (Rancière, 1995, pp. 63–64, 127).

Inspired by these authors’ enthusiasm, we understand that the aesthetic transgressions of populism can be emancipatory when they include subalternized subjects claiming equality. There is a transgressive dimension in the very presence of workers, black and indigenous people, women, and non-binary gender minorities in places of power they were structurally forbidden to occupy and that were traditionally exclusive to privileged groups. Not by chance, the subalternized “people” that dare to transgress the norm and move out of invisibility – furthermore “giving a name to obscurity”, i.e. the “elite” – are faced as “*an unknown and*

dangerous force” (Bataille, 1933/1989, p. 142; see also Gramsci, 1934/2021, Q25 §1). They are frequently described as “hysterical” (Eklundh, 2020, p. 108), and their irruption in the public sphere is experienced as “*violence, excessiveness, delirium, madness*” (Bataille, 1933/1989, p. 142) – even when, “objectively”, no violent means have ever been deployed.

In this sense, despite the discomfort the emerging excluded subjects might cause, it is important to stress that for Laclau and Mouffe this emancipatory populism does not endanger liberal democracy (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. xv). On the contrary, it is a means for the subaltern to claim their place in liberal democracy (Zicman de Barros & Lago, 2022, pp. 92–93). It radicalizes liberal democracy (Mouffe, 1990/1995, p. 20). It points to the blind spots of liberal democracy, to incorporate those that the promises of liberal democracy have not encompassed yet.

To further understand the transgressive aesthetics of emancipatory populism, it is worth discussing a set of notions recently developed by Oliver Marchart. In an essay on aesthetics and protest politics, Marchart introduces the idea of a “conflictual aesthetics”, which he quickly separates into two parts: an “aesthetics of conflict” and a “conflicting aesthetics” (Marchart, 2019, p. 23). For Marchart these two dimensions always go together. We believe that they can indeed coexist, but that they should not be amalgamated – notably because the idea of a conflicting aesthetics is key for an understanding of radical democratic populism. As Marchart explains, an “aesthetics of conflict” refers to the aesthetic practice of drawing a thick line between “us” and “them” (Zicman de Barros, 2022a, p. 81). Differently, a “conflicting aesthetics” refers to practices that do not “fit” – sublime practices that not only trouble the symbolic order but invite one to welcome this “trouble”. This conflicting aesthetics establishes a paradoxical counter-hegemonic hegemony – a hegemony that relentlessly questions its own basis (Zicman de Barros, 2019, pp. 92, 111). It incites the ceaseless exposure of the dislocated

character of the symbolic order, invites the subversion of its norms, and instigates the constant openness to that which does not “fit”.

Playing with the very etymology of the word transgression and, such as Mark Devenney, taking a cue from queer studies, one can claim that this conflicting aesthetics constitutes a trans-populism (Devenney, 2020a, p. 92, 2020b, p. 151–152). An emancipatory populism is queerly trans* in the sense that the aesthetic practices it entails question identities – that they trigger the redrawing of the lines establishing the identities of “us” and “them”.

To conclude, and to refer to another of Arendt’s concepts, one can claim that this conflicting aesthetics of emancipatory populism allows for “new beginnings” (Arendt, 1963/1990, p. 206, 1958/1998, p. 237; Revault d’Allonnes, 2006/2012, p. 55). It sets a moment of foundation that raises awareness for the radical contingency of social practices, inviting the constant challenge of naturalized inequalities.

Our references to Arendt here are not dilettante, as another of her concepts is key to understanding the possibility of a reactionary populism: the concept of “mob” (Arendt, 1951/1967, p. 107; Zicman de Barros & Lago, 2022, pp. 17–18). Before exploring Arendt’s notion, however, it is worth stressing that various authors have indicated the risks involved in mobilizing the heterogeneous. Laclau himself has criticized Rancière’s conflation between the inclusion of the “part of no part” and emancipation (Laclau, 2005a, pp. 246–247; Rancière, 2021, p. 102).

Lasse Thomassen has pointed out that “*normatively, there is[n’t] anything inherently progressive about heterogeneity*” (Thomassen, 2005a, p. 301). Thomassen reminds us of the suspicions against the heterogeneous present in Marxism. In Marx’s tradition, heterogeneity is associated with the lumpenproletariat – a social group excluded from the relations of production – and has been frequently vilified. Friedrich Engels, for instance, the lumpenproletariat is “*this scum of depraved elements from all classes*”, a “*rabble*” which “*is*

absolutely venal and absolutely brazen” (Engels, 1870/1985, p. 99). In a slightly more nuanced take, Marx himself presents the lumpenproletariat as malleable, meaning that it could assume many shapes. Hence, if on the one hand, the lumpenproletariat is “*capable of the most heroic deeds and the most exalted sacrifices*”, on the other hand, it can also embody “*the basest banditry and the foulest corruption*” (Marx, 1850/1978, p. 62). Not by chance, Marx presents the lumpenproletariat as “*a regressive force and as the foundation for the conservative discourse of Bonapartism*” (see also Marx, 1852/1979, p. 149; Thomassen, 2005a, p. 301). In a similar mood, Vladimir Lenin would claim that the lumpenproletariat is mostly inert and unable to fight and that its rare revolts in general tend towards simple thieving (Lenin, 1906/1962, p. 216). Finally, Gramsci also had reservations towards the subalterns, whose spontaneous revolt is marked by diffuse anger, tending to be led by a reactionary leadership and to sustain far right – and sometimes tyrannical – *coups d'état* (Gramsci, 1930/1996, Q3 §48).

Even Bataille defined fascism as “*total heterogeneous power [pouvoir hétérogène total]*” (Bataille, 1933/1970, p. 161, see also 1933/1989, p. 143). To some extent like Heidegger, Bataille flirted with fascism for its mobilizing power (Bataille, 1958/1976, p. 461; Heidegger, 1948/1991, p. 30). Soon, however, he ended up conceding that the fascist leader’s mobilization was limited (Bataille, 1947, pp. 521–522). Reactionary forces develop in the tension between enjoying the transgression of the law and ultimately reaffirming this law (Bataille, 1957/1987, p. 68; Butler, 1990, pp. 103–104; Foucault, 1976, pp. 61–62). All in all, the fascist leader is a heterogeneous actor in a movement towards homogenization, trying to reunify the community, and producing new exclusions – new heterogeneities – to be repressed (Bataille, 1933/1989, pp. 145–148, 153–154).

In the case of reactionary populism, transgression mobilizes and includes excluded subjects. But it is a paradoxical inclusion because it has an exclusionary character. One is

dealing with the incorporation of what Arendt called the mob. For Arendt, the mob is one of the expressions of the worldless. However, whereas in some circumstances the wordless can be mobilized in an emancipatory way, this is not the case with the mob.

For Arendt, the mob is not the poor. It is a basket of deplorable types, composed of “*the residue of all classes*”, or even the “*refuse of all classes*” (Arendt, 1951/1967, pp. 107, 155; see also Canovan, 1978, pp. 9–10). The mob is described as excluded both from society and from political representation, emerging violently in the political sphere (Arendt, 1951/1967, p. 108). Moreover, the mob tends to fall into the temptation of the “*strong man*” or the “*great leader*” (Arendt, 1951/1967, p. 107). It fosters resentment among its members towards an antagonistic other (Arendt, 1951/1967, pp. 107, 392).

To avoid group essentialism and to be coherent with Laclau’s formulation of heterogeneity and Rancière’s reflections on the “part of no part”, we can say that the mob mobilizes a reactionary discourse that reproduces itself at the margins of society, at the fringes of the public sphere. A discourse that can be extremely persuasive for the masses who suffer from the transformations of modernity, from not only dislocation but from what Arendt has described as the actual “collapse” of the symbolic order as a whole (Arendt, 1954/1994, p. 357; Canovan, 2002, pp. 407–408). A symptomatic discourse that, to bring certainty in a context of anguish and vulnerability, relies on moral panic and scapegoating (Zicman de Barros, 2022b, pp. 223–228). To the extent that it questions the established symbolic order, reactionary populism is counter-hegemonic. However, it is not faithful to its counter-hegemonic character. To reappropriate Gramsci’s expression, it is a “revolution-restoration” (Gramsci, 1934/1978, Q13 §27) that seeks to install a reinforced close hegemony. In a pure expression of an “aesthetics of conflict” (Marchart, 2019, p. 23), the mob’s discourse tries to trace thick and solid lines separating “us” from “them”. As such, it seeks to reaffirm structures of domination and social hierarchies and attempts to silence other underprivileged subalternized subjects.

It is important to stress that when reactionary populism refers to a “negative” empty signifier such as “elite”, it also disruptively exposes some invisible rules structuring the “partage du sensible”. But while it may point at dysfunctions of liberal democracy, reactionary populism not only relies on the process of scapegoating that the mainstream literature mistakenly associates with all forms of populism, it also creates a connection between excluded sectors and the “elite”. Whether these outgroups are directly framed as the “elite” itself, which is for instance the case in the conspiratorial tropes of antisemitism (Gherman, 2022, p. 158; Subotic, 2022, pp. 463–464), or whether the “elite” is framed as passively complacent or actively complicit in enabling these outgroups to threaten the homogeneity of the “people”, far-right political actors have understood the appeal of populism’s transgressive aesthetics to further their reactionary agenda.

Destabilizing the “partage du sensible” this way thus aims to rehabilitate ideas banned from the public discourse like racism, islamophobia, sexism, homophobia, antisemitism, and so on. Often without explicitly advocating for their return, reactionary politicians connect these political taboos of liberal democracy with the established hegemony to slowly undermine the norms upon which they rest and thus erode their public acceptance. By doing so, reactionary populism threatens the very foundations of liberal democracy, praising the mob as alleged “taboo-breakers” who fight for “free speech” against “thought police” and “political correctness” silencing their voices (Mondon & Winter, 2020, pp. 75, 81, 92). Once again, however, this exodus from invisibility is not emancipatory, as the rules they question are precisely those loosely keeping far right discriminatory discourses at bay (Zicman de Barros & Lago, 2022, pp. 102–109). As Ugo Palheta argued, this use of the transgressive aesthetic of populism by neo-fascist actors is nothing but a “*reactionary revolt, a highly explosive mixture between false subversion and ultra-conservatism*” which “*allows it to seduce a diverse range of social groups, whose aspirations and interests are profoundly antagonistic*” (2022, p. 25).

All in all, the mob's transgressive character is limited. Its appeal to transgression ends up only feeding the fantasy of the triumph of the will of a virile white man, who limitlessly does whatever he wants, however, he wants, whenever he wants, disregarding the others.

As such, Arendt's categories allow for a differentiation between emancipatory and reactionary aesthetically transgressive articulations of the "people". On the one hand, in the case of emancipatory populism, one is dealing with subalternized subjects that enter and reshape the space of appearances to welcome new beginnings, a constant questioning of naturalized social hierarchies. It does not challenge liberal democracy but seeks to radicalize it. On the other hand, reactionary populism aesthetic transgression reinforces the discourse of the mob, seeks to build gated communities, and represses vulnerable subjects.

5. Conclusion

This article tried to bridge the gap between discursive and performative approaches to studying populism. By relying on Rancière's concept of aesthetics, we argued that a possible way to connect these two perspectives was to claim that populism involves a particular transgressive aesthetics. For Rancière, aesthetics is a matter of what can be seen and what remains invisible – and, as we claim, populist discourses would transgress the limits of this regime of visibility and invisibility.

The idea of aesthetics allowed us to move beyond stylistic features such as Ostiguy's "flaunting of the 'low'" and Moffitt's "bad manners" and give a more central position to the idea of transgression. Beyond the transgressive style of populist leaders, we argued that populism is transgressive in two ways. First, the articulation of the empty signifier such as the "people" brings subaltern subjects into politics, breaking with the norms of what or who can appear in the public sphere. Second, by naming the "elite", populism denounces the invisible "grammar" of domination: it challenges the sedimentation of modes of domination by "giving

a name to obscurity”. This understanding also allows us to grasp how populism is related to the idea of crisis, for by transgressing the norms of what can be seen, populism transforms the way one interprets reality, triggering an “ontological” crisis.

The article concludes with a necessary differentiation between emancipatory and reactionary expressions of populism. On the one hand, we argue that emancipatory populism involves a “conflicting aesthetics” that constantly troubles the symbolic order to incorporate subaltern sectors, radicalizing liberal democracy. Recovering and being faithful to the very root of the word transgression, one is dealing with a queer trans-populism whose aesthetic practices challenge identities and inequalities. On the other hand, we claim that ultimately reactionary populism is not committed to its transgression. It is aesthetically transgressive to incorporate the discourse of what Arendt called the “mob” – a reactionary discourse that reinforces modes of domination.

References

- Aiolfi, T. (2022). Populism as a Transgressive Style. *Global Studies Quarterly*, 2(1), 1–12.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/isagsq/ksac006>
- Arato, A. (2013). Political Theology and Populism. *Social Research: An International Quarterly*, 80(1), 143–172. <https://doi.org/10.2307/24385712>
- Arato, A. (2019). Socialism and populism. *Constellations*, 26(3), 464–474.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8675.12428>
- Arditi, B. (2019). Fidelity to Disagreement: Jacques Rancière’s Politics without Ontology. In *Distributions of the Sensible: Rancière, Between Aesthetics and Politics* (pp. 53–78). Evanston: Northwestern University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvjdzcrf.8>
- Arendt, H. (1967). *The Origins of Totalitarianism* [The Burden of Our Time]. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. (Original work from 1951)
- Arendt, H. (1978). *The Life of the Mind: The Groundbreaking Investigation on How We Think*. Vol. 1, Thinking. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. (Original work from 1971)
- Arendt, H. (1990). *On Revolution*. New York: Penguin. (Original work from 1963)
- Arendt, H. (1994). Understanding and Politics (The Difficulties of Understanding). In *Essays in Understanding, 1930-1954* (pp. 328–360). New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. (Original work from 1954)
- Arendt, H. (1998). *The Human Condition*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
<https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226924571.001.0001> (Original work from 1958)
- Bataille, G. (1947). De l’existentialisme au primat de l’économie. *Critique: revue générale des publications françaises et étrangères*, (19, Décembre), 515–526.
- Bataille, G. (1970). La royauté de l’Europe classique. In *Œuvres complètes* (Vol. 2, pp. 222–232). Paris: Gallimard. (Original work from 1939)
- Bataille, G. (1970). La valeur d’usage de D.A.F. de Sade. In *Œuvres complètes* (Vol. 2, pp. 54–72). Paris: Gallimard. (Original work from 1930)

- Bataille, G. (1970). Textes se rattachant à ‘La structure psychologique du fascisme’. In *Œuvres complètes* (Vol. 2, pp. 159–164). Paris: Gallimard. (Original work from 1933)
- Bataille, G. (1976). La part maudite. In *Œuvres complètes* (Vol. 7, pp. 17–180). Paris: Gallimard. (Original work from 1949)
- Bataille, G. (1976). Notice autobiographique. In *Œuvres complètes* (Vol. 7, pp. 459–462). Paris: Gallimard. (Original work from 1958)
- Bataille, G. (1987). L’erotisme. In *Œuvres complètes* (Vol. 10, pp. 379–383). Paris: Gallimard. (Original work from 1957)
- Bataille, G. (1989). La structure psychologique du fascisme. *Hermès*, (5–6), 137–160. (Original work from 1933)
- Biglieri, P., & Cadahia, L. (2021). *Seven Essays on Populism: For a Renewed Theoretical Perspective*. Medford: Polity Press.
- Biglieri, P., & Perelló, G. (2011). The Names of the Real in Laclau’s Theory: Antagonism, Dislocation, and Heterogeneity. *Filozofski Vestnik*, 32(2), 47–64.
- Borriello, A., & Jäger, A. (2020). The antinomies of Ernesto Laclau: A reassessment. *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 26(3), 298–316. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569317.2020.1855775>
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203824979>
- Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies that matter: On the discursive limits of ‘sex’*. New York: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203828274>
- Butler, J. (1998). How Bodies Come to Matter: An Interview with Judith Butler. *Signs*, 23(2), 275–286. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3175091>
- Butler, J. (2004). *Precarious life: The powers of mourning and violence*. London: Verso.
- Butler, J. (2015). *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. <https://doi.org/10.4159/9780674495548>
- Butler, J. (2020). *The force of nonviolence: An ethico-political bind*. London: Verso.
- Canovan, M. (1978). The Contradictions of Hannah Arendt’s Political Thought. *Political Theory*, 6(1), 5–26. <https://doi.org/10.1177/009059177800600102>

- Canovan, M. (2002). The People, the Masses, and the Mobilization of Power: The Paradox of Hannah Arendt's "Populism". *Social Research: An International Quarterly*, 69(2), 403–422.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/40971555>
- Casullo, M. E. (2021). Populism as Synecdochal Representation: Understanding the Transgressive Bodily Performance of South American Presidents. In P. Ostiguy, F. Panizza, & B. Moffitt (Eds.), *Populism in Global Perspective: A Performative and Discursive Approach* (pp. 75–94). London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003110149-6>
- Devenney, M. (2020a). Populism, Democracy and the Transnational People: In Defence of Democratic Populism. In E. Eklundh & A. Knott (Eds.), *The Populist Manifesto* (pp. 83–93). London: Rowman & Littlefield International.
- Devenney, M. (2020b). *Towards an Improper Politics*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1515/9781474454056>
- Eklundh, E. (2020). Excluding Emotions: The Performative Function of Populism. *Partecipazione & Conflitto*, 13(1), 107–131. <https://doi.org/10.1285/i20356609v13i1p107>
- Engels, F. (1985). Preface to the Second Edition of *The Peasant War in Germany*. In *Marx and Engels Collected Works* (Vol. 21, pp. 93–100). London: Lawrence & Wishart. (Original work from 1870)
- Foucault, M. (1963). Préface à la transgression. *Critique: revue générale des publications françaises et étrangères*, (195–196, Hommage à Georges Bataille, Août-Septembre), 751–769.
- Foucault, M. (1975). *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la prison*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Foucault, M. (1976). *Histoire de la sexualité* (Vol. 1, La volonté de savoir). Paris: Gallimard.
- Foucault, M. (2004). *Sécurité, territoire, population*. Paris: Seuil, Gallimard. (Original work from 1978)
- Gherman, M. (2022). *O não judeu judeu: A tentativa de colonização do judaísmo pelo bolsonarismo*. São Paulo: Fósforo.
- Gramsci, A. (1978). *Cahiers de prison* (Vol. 3, Cahiers n° 10-13). Paris: Gallimard. (Original work from 1934)

- Gramsci, A. (1996). *Cahiers de prison* (Vol. 1, Cahiers n° 1-5). Paris: Gallimard. (Original work from 1930)
- Gramsci, A. (2021). *Subaltern Social Groups: A Critical Edition of Prison Notebook 25* (J. A. Buttigieg & M. E. Green, Eds.). New York: Columbia University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.7312/gram19038-005> (Original work from 1934)
- Hay, C. (1995). Rethinking Crisis: Narratives of the New Right and Constructions of Crisis. *Rethinking Marxism*, 8(2), 60–76. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08935699508685442>
- Hay, C. (1999). Crisis and the Structural Transformation of the State: Interrogating the Process of Change. *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 1(3), 317–344.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-856X.00018>
- Hegel, G. W. F. (1975). *Lectures on the philosophy of world history: Introduction, reason in history* (H. B. Nisbet, Trans.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (Original work from 1830)
- Hegel, G. W. F. (2007). *The philosophy of mind* (M. J. Inwood, Ed.; A. V. Miller & W. Wallace, Trans.). Oxford: Oxford University Press. (Original work from 1817)
- Heidegger, M. (1991). Letter from Martin Heidegger to Herbert Marcuse, January 20, 1948 (R. Wolin, Trans.). *New German Critique*, (53, Spring-Summer), 30–31.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/488243> (Original work from 1948)
- Heidegger, M. (2012). *The fundamental concepts of metaphysics: World, finitude, solitude* (W. McNeill & N. Walker, Trans.). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvswx8mg> (Original work from 1930)
- Howarth, D. (2004). Hegemony, Political Subjectivity and Radical Democracy. In S. Critchley & O. Marchart (Eds.), *Laclau: A critical reader* (pp. 256–276). London: Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203714720-19>
- Lacan, J. (2006). *D'un Autre à l'autre: 1968 – 1969*. Le champ freudien. Paris: Seuil. (Original work from 1969)
- Laclau, E. (1990). *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*. London: Verso.
- Laclau, E. (1996). Universalism, Particularism and the Question of Identity. In *Phronesis. Emancipation(s)* (pp. 20–35). London: Verso. (Original work from 1991)

- Laclau, E. (1996). Why do Empty Signifiers Matter to Politics? In *Phronesis. Emancipation(s)* (pp. 36–46). London: Verso.
- Laclau, E. (1999). Politics, Polemics and Academics: An Interview by Paul Bowman. *Parallax*, 5(2), 93–107. <https://doi.org/10.1080/135346499249722>
- Laclau, E. (2000). Identity and Hegemony: The Role of Universality in the Constitution of Political Logics. In J. Butler, E. Laclau, & S. Žižek, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left* (pp. 44–89). London: Verso.
- Laclau, E. (2001). Theory, Democracy and the Left: An Interview with Ernesto Laclau. Interview by Carlos Pessoa, Marta Hernández, Seoungwon Lee and Lasse Thomassen. *Umbr(a): Polemos*, (6), 7–26.
- Laclau, E. (2004). An Ethics of Militant Engagement. In P. Hallward (Ed.), *Think again: Alain Badiou and the future of philosophy* (pp. 120–137). London: Continuum.
<https://doi.org/10.5040/9781472547743.ch-009>
- Laclau, E. (2005a). *On Populist Reason*. London: Verso.
- Laclau, E. (2005b). Populism: What's in a Name? In F. Panizza (Ed.), *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy* (pp. 32–49). London: Verso.
- Laclau, E. (2006). Why Constructing a People Is the Main Task of Radical Politics. *Critical Inquiry*, 32(4), 646–680. <https://doi.org/10.1086/508086>
- Laclau, E., & Mouffe, C. (1985). *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (1st ed.). London: Verso.
- Laclau, E., & Mouffe, C. (2001). Preface to the Second Edition. In *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (2nd ed.). London: Verso.
- Lenin, V. (1962). Guerrilla Warfare. In *Lenin Collected Works* (Vol. 11, June 1906-January 1907, pp. 213–223). Moscow: Progress Publishers. (Original work from 1906)
- Marchart, O. (2019). Being Agitated – Agitated Being. In *Conflictual aesthetics: Artistic activism and the public sphere* (pp. 9–42). Berlin: Sternberg Press.
- Marx, K. (1976). The Poverty of Philosophy. In *Marx and Engels Collected Works* (Vol. 6, pp. 105–212). London: Lawrence & Wishart. (Original work from 1847)

- Marx, K. (1978). The Class Struggles in France, 1848 to 1850. In *Marx and Engels Collected Works* (Vol. 10, pp. 45–146). London: Lawrence & Wishart. (Original work from 1850)
- Marx, K. (1979). The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte. In *Marx and Engels Collected Works* (Vol. 11, pp. 99–197). London: Lawrence & Wishart. (Original work from 1852)
- Moffitt, B. (2016). *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style, and Representation*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.11126/stanford/9780804796132.001.0001>
- Mondon, A., & Winter, A. (2020). *Reactionary democracy: How racism and the populist far right became mainstream*. London: Verso.
- Mouffe, C. (1995). Radical Democracy or Liberal Democracy? In D. Trend (Ed.), *Radical democracy: Identity, citizenship, and the state* (pp. 19–26). London: Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315021959-9> (Original work from 1990)
- Mouffe, C. (2013). *Agonistics: Thinking the world politically*. London: Verso.
- Mouffe, C. (2022). *Towards a green democratic revolution: Left populism and the power of affects*. London: Verso.
- Ostiguy, P. (2009). The high and the low in politics: A two-dimensional political space for comparative analysis and electoral studies. *Kellogg Institute Working Paper*, (360).
- Ostiguy, P. (2017). Populism: A Socio-Cultural Approach. In C. Rovira Kaltwasser, P. Taggart, P. Ochoa Espejo, & P. Ostiguy (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Populism* (pp. 73–97). Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198803560.013.3>
- Ostiguy, P., & Moffitt, B. (2021). Who Would Identify With An “Empty Signifier”? The Relational, Performative Approach to Populism. In P. Ostiguy, F. Panizza, & B. Moffitt (Eds.), *Populism in Global Perspective: A Performative and Discursive Approach* (pp. 47–72). London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003110149-4>
- Ostiguy, P., Panizza, F., & Moffitt, B. (2021). Conclusions: Reflections on the Lessons Learned. In P. Ostiguy, F. Panizza, & B. Moffitt (Eds.), *Populism in Global Perspective: A Performative and Discursive Approach* (pp. 255–274). London: Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003110149-15>

- Palheta, U. (2022). *La nouvelle internationale fasciste*. Paris: Textuel.
- Rancière, J. (1995). *La méésentente: Politique et philosophie*. Paris: Galilée.
- Rancière, J. (2000a). Biopolitique ou politique? *Multitudes*, 1(1), 88–93.
<https://doi.org/10.3917/mult.001.0088>
- Rancière, J. (2000b). *Le partage du sensible: Esthétique et politique*. Paris: La Fabrique.
- Rancière, J. (2004). Who Is the Subject of the Rights of Man? *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 103(2–3), 297–310. <https://doi.org/10.1215/00382876-103-2-3-297>
- Rancière, J. (2009). *Et tant pis pour les gens fatigués: Entretiens*. Paris: Éditions Amsterdam.
- Rancière, J. (2012). La démocratie est-elle à venir? Éthique et politique chez Derrida. *Les Temps Modernes*, 67(669–670), 157–173. <https://doi.org/10.3917/lm.669.0157> (Original work from 2006)
- Rancière, J. (2021). Peuple, populaire, populiste: Usage des mots. In R. Iveković, D. Sardinha, & P. Vermeren (Eds.), *Hégémonie, populisme, émancipation: Perspectives sur la philosophie d'Ernesto Laclau (1935-2014)* (pp. 99–117). Paris: L'Harmattan.
- Revault d'Allonnes, M. (2012). *La crise sans fin: Essai sur l'expérience moderne du temps*. Paris: Seuil.
- Revault d'Allonnes, M. (2012). *Le pouvoir des commencements: Essai sur l'autorité*. Paris: Seuil.
 (Original work from 2006)
- Roberts, K. (1995). Neoliberalism and the Transformation of Populism in Latin America: The Peruvian Case. *World Politics*, 48(1), 82–116. <https://doi.org/10.1353/wp.1995.0004>
- Roberts, K. (2015). Populism, political mobilizations, and crises of political representation. In C. de la Torre (Ed.), *The promise and perils of populism: Global perspectives* (pp. 140–158). Lexington: University Press of Kentucky. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt12880g5.8>
- Sørensen, L. (2021). *Populist Communication: Ideology, Performance, Mediation*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-65756-7>
- Stavrakakis, Y. (2004). Antinomies of formalism: Laclau's theory of populism and the lessons from religious populism in Greece. *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 9(3), 253–267.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1356931042000263519>

- Stavrakakis, Y. (2017). Populism and Hegemony. In C. Rovira Kaltwasser, P. Taggart, P. Ochoa Espejo, & P. Ostiguy (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Populism* (pp. 535–553). Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198803560.013.26>
- Stavrakakis, Y., Katsambekis, G., Kioupiolis, A., Nikisianis, N., & Siomos, T. (2018). Populism, anti-populism and crisis. *Contemporary Political Theory*, 17(1), 4–27. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41296-017-0142-y>
- Steele, B. J., & Homolar, A. (2019). Ontological insecurities and the politics of contemporary populism. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 32(3), 214–221. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2019.1596612>
- Subotic, J. (2022). Antisemitism in the global populist international. *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 24(3), 458–474. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13691481211066970>
- Tarragoni, F. (2019). *L'esprit démocratique du populisme*. Paris: La Découverte.
- Thomassen, L. (2005a). Antagonism, hegemony and ideology after heterogeneity. *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 10(3), 289–309. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569310500244313>
- Thomassen, L. (2005b). In/exclusion: Towards a radical democratic approach to exclusion. In L. Tønder & L. Thomassen (Eds.), *Radical democracy: Politics between abundance and lack* (pp. 103–121). Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Urbinati, N. (2019). *Me the people: How populism transforms democracy*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvk12sz4>
- Vergara, C. (2020a). Populism as Plebeian Politics: Inequality, Domination, and Popular Empowerment. *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 28(2), 222–246. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jopp.12203>
- Vergara, C. (2020b). The plebeian people of populism. *Revue européenne des sciences sociales*, 58(2), 77–96. <https://doi.org/10.4000/ress.6813>
- Weyland, K. (1999). Neoliberal Populism in Latin America and Eastern Europe. *Comparative Politics*, 31(4), 379–401. <https://doi.org/10.2307/422236>
- Zac, L., & Sayyid, B. (1998). Political Analysis in a World Without Foundations. In E. Scarbrough & E. Tanenbaum (Eds.), *Research strategies in the social sciences: A guide to new approaches*

(pp. 249–267). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/0198292376.003.0011>

Zicman de Barros, T. (2019). Identité, jouissance et les potentialités démocratiques du populisme. In C. Hoffmann & J. Birman (Eds.), *Une nouvelle lecture du populisme: Psychanalyse et politique* (pp. 79–115). Paris: Maison d'Édition Langage.

Zicman de Barros, T. (2020). Desire and Collective Identities: Decomposing Ernesto Laclau's notion of demand. *Constellations*, 28(4), 511–521. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8675.12490>

Zicman de Barros, T. (2022a). 'It's All a Matter of Image!': Aesthetics and Radical Democracy in the Yellow Vests Movement, or in Praise of Eugênio Bucci. In A. Eder-Ramsauer, S. Kim, A. Knott, & M. Prentoulis (Eds.), *Populism, Protest, and New Forms of Political Organisation* (p. 71-85). Baden-Baden: Nomos. <https://doi.org/10.5771/9783748931669-71>

Zicman de Barros, T. (2022b). Populism: Symptom or sublimation? Reassessing the use of psychoanalytic metaphors. *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society*, 27(2), 218–234. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41282-022-00282-4>

Zicman de Barros, T., & Lago, M. (2022). *Do que falamos quando falamos de populismo*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras.