

Populism on the Loose: From Democracy to Demography

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Theory

1

1

101010100011111110111
0111111110111110111111

Unity in the movement

101010100011111110111
0111111110111110111111

Movement may change

101010110011000110111
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Meanings/policies/leaders may change

0

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Ernesto Laclau &

Chantal Mouffe

HEGEMONY

& SOCIALIST

STRATEGY

TOWARDS A RADICAL

DEMOCRATIC POLITICS

*'... a brilliant tour de force of scholarship
and argument.' Marxism Today*

Theory of hegemony

- politics and the political
- radical democracy
- populism
 - populism a particular mode of hegemony?
 - democratic——anti-democratic
- *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, London: Verso 1985
- Characterised as:
 - anti-essentialist
 - post-Marxist
 - post-structuralist
 - post-foundational

Theoretical underpinnings

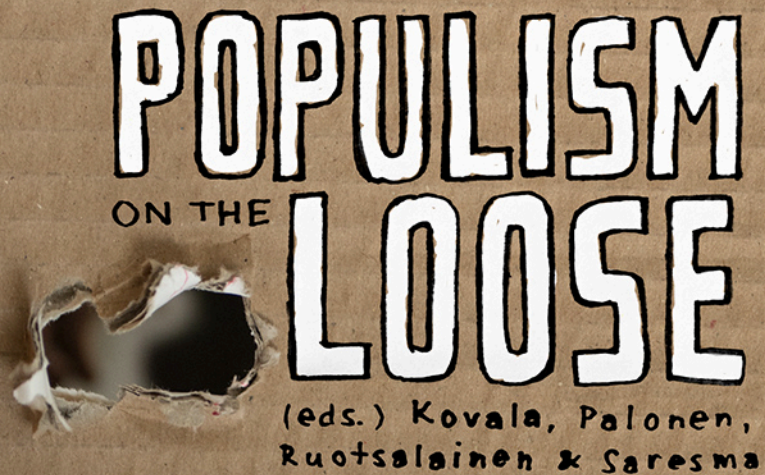
- Ernesto Laclau (1935-2014):
 - psychoanalysis (Freud, Lacan)
 - deconstruction (Derrida)
 - rhetoric (Paul de Man)
 - Gramsci (organic intellectuals)
 - linguistic theory
 - empty and floating signifiers
- Chantal Mouffe (1943-):
 - Carl Schmitt (anti-reading)
 - Habermas (anti-reading)
 - Althusser (recognition)
 - Republican ideals of politics as debate
 - the political
 - Agonism
- See e.g. Lasse Thomassen (2016) Hegemony, populism and democracy: Laclau and Mouffe today (review article) *Revista Española de Ciencia Política*. N.m. 40. Marzo 2016, pp. 161-176
 - David Howarth (ed.). Ernesto Laclau: Post-Marxism, Populism and Critique. London: Routledge, 2015.
 - Ernesto Laclau. *The Rhetorical Foundations of Society*. London: Verso, 2014, 229 pp. ISBN 978-1781681701.
 - James Martin (ed.). Chantal Mouffe: Hegemony, Radical Democracy, and the Political. London: Routledge, 2013, 241
 - Chantal Mouffe. *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically*. London: Verso, 2013.

Populism

- Chantal Mouffe: On the Political (2005): debate to challenge consensus
- Ernesto Laclau: On Populist Reason (2005): logic of populism us vs. them



Check out our OA-book available,
based on our Academy of Finland project
and its final conference,
Populism as rhetoric and movement
<http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-951-39-7401-5>



Populism on the Loose

- Concepts and graphic
- Part I: Theory of hegemony
- Part II: Emergence of the “people”
- Part III: Democracy and demography

- Is it OK if we all define populism differently?
- What follows from the different articulations of populism?

populism as a threat (anti-populism, Stavrakakis)

How can liberals defeat populism? Here are four ideas

1. Political parties (established and emerging) should seek to propose inclusive visions and programs that deliver benefits for all citizens, not only for a part of the voters.
2. Participatory and deliberative platforms and initiatives (citizens' assemblies, juries, forums) should be embedded into the decision-making processes to balance the oligarchic tendencies of electoral democracy.
3. Social media should be regulated and held accountable for damaging a pluralistic, fact-based and hate-free political debate, in the same way as traditional media.
4. Civil society organizations defending human rights and equality against populism should agree on a common agenda and strategy across identity politics divides.

Cas Mudde (The [Guardian](#) 13 February 2018)



The Dangers of Populism - Interview with Jan-Werner Müller

■ This is a mistake, because populism represents an important dimension of democracy. Democracy understood as “the power of the people” requires the existence of a “demos” - a people. Instead of rejecting the term populist, we should reclaim it.

Chantal Mouffe defends left populism quoted in [Guardian](#) 8 April 2018.

Was ist Populismus? Or what populism is not?

01

Well, it's not nationalism,
as has been suggested
between the lines

02

Can get entangled with
nationalism and racism,
xenophobia

What is Populism?

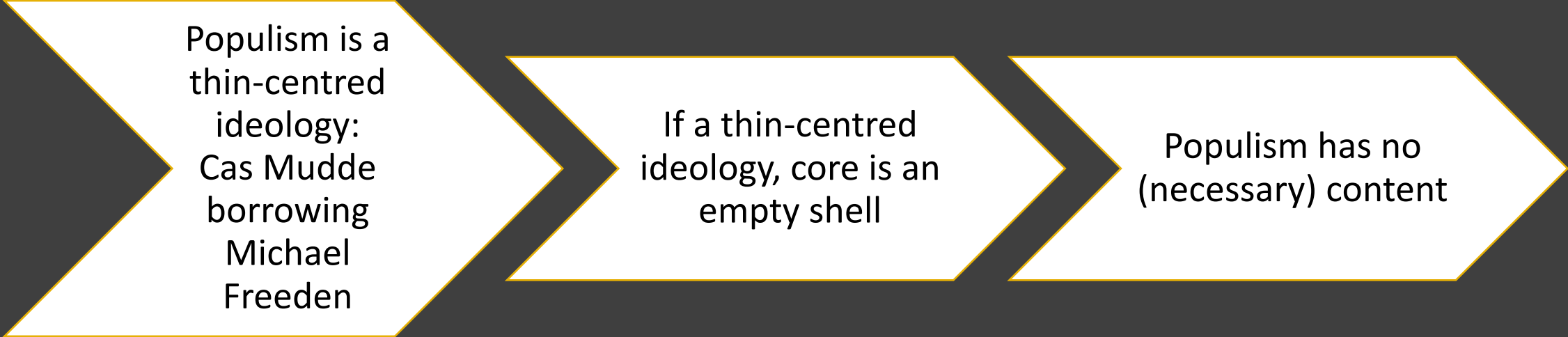
“What is in the name?” (Laclau)

- Most usual reference is the elite-people distinction (Cas Mudde)
 - Who the are the people and the elite? – ‘Mere’ rhetoric?
- Political science reveals wide range of references for the people
 - Populism could be anywhere where there is the nation or us?
- What about the populists (especially when in power) are they not the elites?
 - E.g. Berlusconi, Orbán, even Timo Soini?



- Naming process
- Symbolisation
- Fixing meaning

Anti-essentialist definition!



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graph LR; A[Populism is a thin-centred ideology: Cas Mudde borrowing Michael Freeden] --> B[If a thin-centred ideology, core is an empty shell]; B --> C[Populism has no (necessary) content]
```

Populism is a
thin-centred
ideology:
Cas Mudde
borrowing
Michael
Freeden

If a thin-centred
ideology, core is an
empty shell

Populism has no
(necessary) content

What does this mean?

When things are empty they don't have content *BUT* they may have a form

Dichotomy and a reference to an "us"

There may even be an emotional, gripping element!?

Populism as a logic has form
formula for populism:

$$P = A + B + C$$

A


Abstract content to
identify with

B

Dichotomy that
sustains a notion of
them

C

Gripping element /
emotional
attachment



The people
“us”;
them, limit &
frontier

Frontier building: Case Hungary

Viktor Orbán, Hungarian PM 1998-2002, 2010-
, Fidesz leader 1989-

Transformation: youth > nation >
polgári/civic/bourgeois/progressive anti-
communism 2002
> extra-parliamentary village populism in
striped shirts > anti-immigration statesman

Continuous articulation of us vs. them

Architecture, memorials

permanence/return of 'revolution': continuum
not a rupture

Key moments:

2002 election campaign: "remove the kokárda
at the polling station

2010 "this is a revolution at the polls"

2018 "Soros fighters"



Too much of populism vs. too little

- Articulation of the people
on a continuum

2001, 105–110). This is in harmony with the way in which Laclau conceptualizes actual politics as ‘operating at the diverse points of a continuum’ between two theoretical extremes: ‘pure institutionalism’ and ‘pure populism’ (Laclau 2005, 45). He argues that, as *reductio ad absurdum* points of logical impossibilities, these discourses constitute the unreachable poles of politics, whose concurrent presence and tension are nonetheless prerequisites of the very existence of politics and its perpetual movement on that continuum (ibid., 46). Their ‘[t]ension and reflection can be contingently combined in unstable equilibria, but neither is entirely able to eliminate the other’ (Laclau 2007, 120).

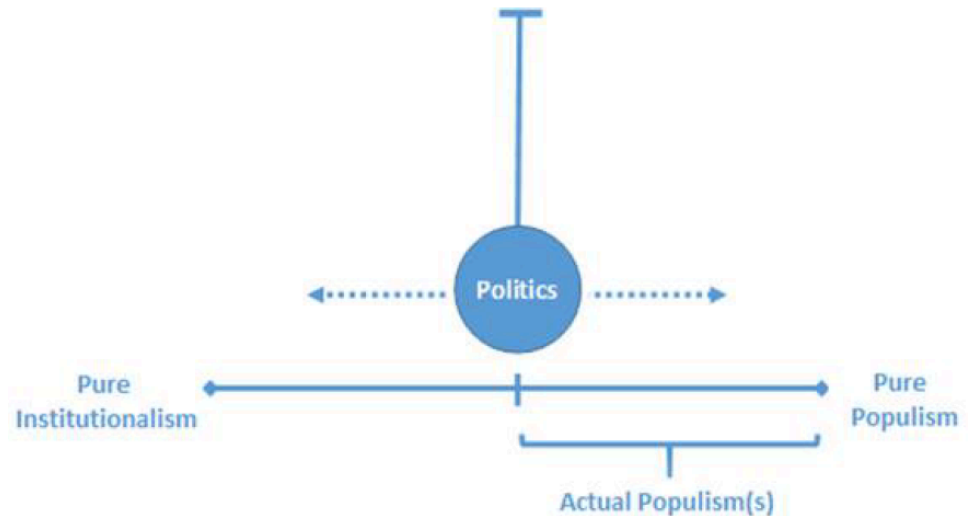
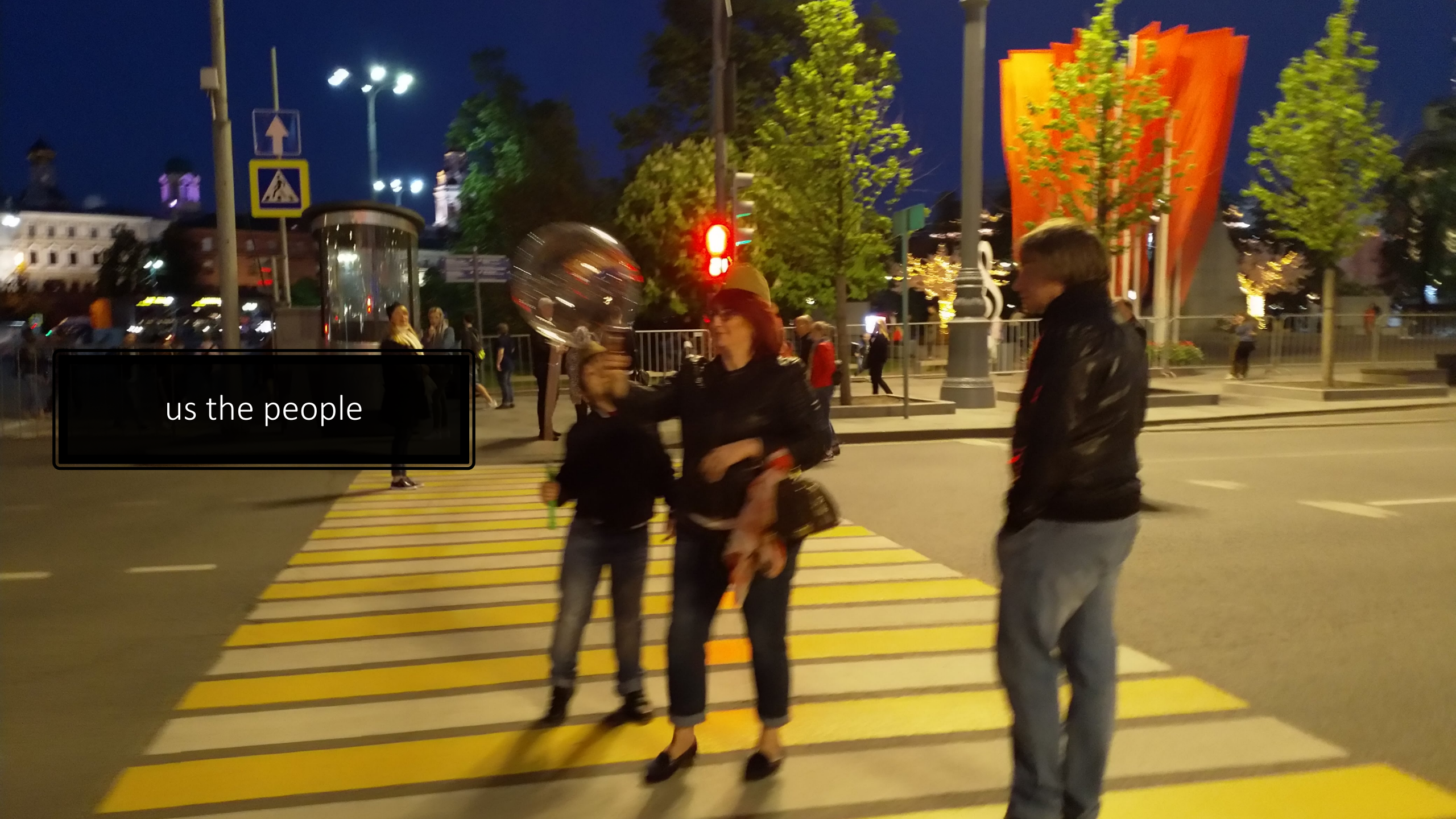


Figure 1: Laclauian Continuum of Politics. P 59

A woman with red hair, wearing a black jacket and dark pants, is walking across a yellow-striped crosswalk at night. She is holding a young child in her arms and a small dog. To her right, a man in a black leather jacket and blue jeans is walking in the same direction. The background shows a city street with trees, streetlights, and a red traffic light. A large orange sculpture is visible in the distance. A black box with white text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

us the people

nation and nationalism

VAS, FÉM, PÓRÉES
AKKUMULÁTOROK, LADEK
KIVÁRÁS



STOP

STOP

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15. évforduló



„A haza minden előtt”

15. évforduló

15. OKTÓBER 23. BUDAPEST, KISSUTHY TER

LEADER



MIKÖRKÖZMŰVÉSZLETI ÉRTÉKELÉS

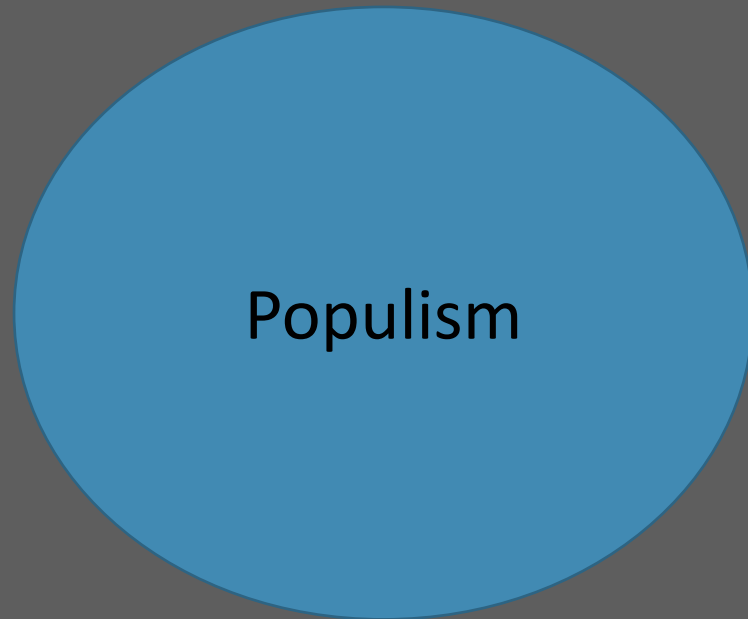
Dr. György István

Populism in crisis of representation

German occupation
memorial in Budapest;
Living memorial



Polarisation



Political frontier

Populist challenge to democracy

- New dichotomies
- Illiberal democracy vs. liberal democracy
 - Takis Pappas: populists are for democracy, but not liberal sort
 - For Orbán illiberalism = against liberals his political other
- Liberal and radical democracy
 - Politics as a constitutive praxis
- Politics as activity and politics as system
- Politics as identification vs. institutionalised identities
- Democracy and demography

Democracy vs. demography

Demography Socio-economic

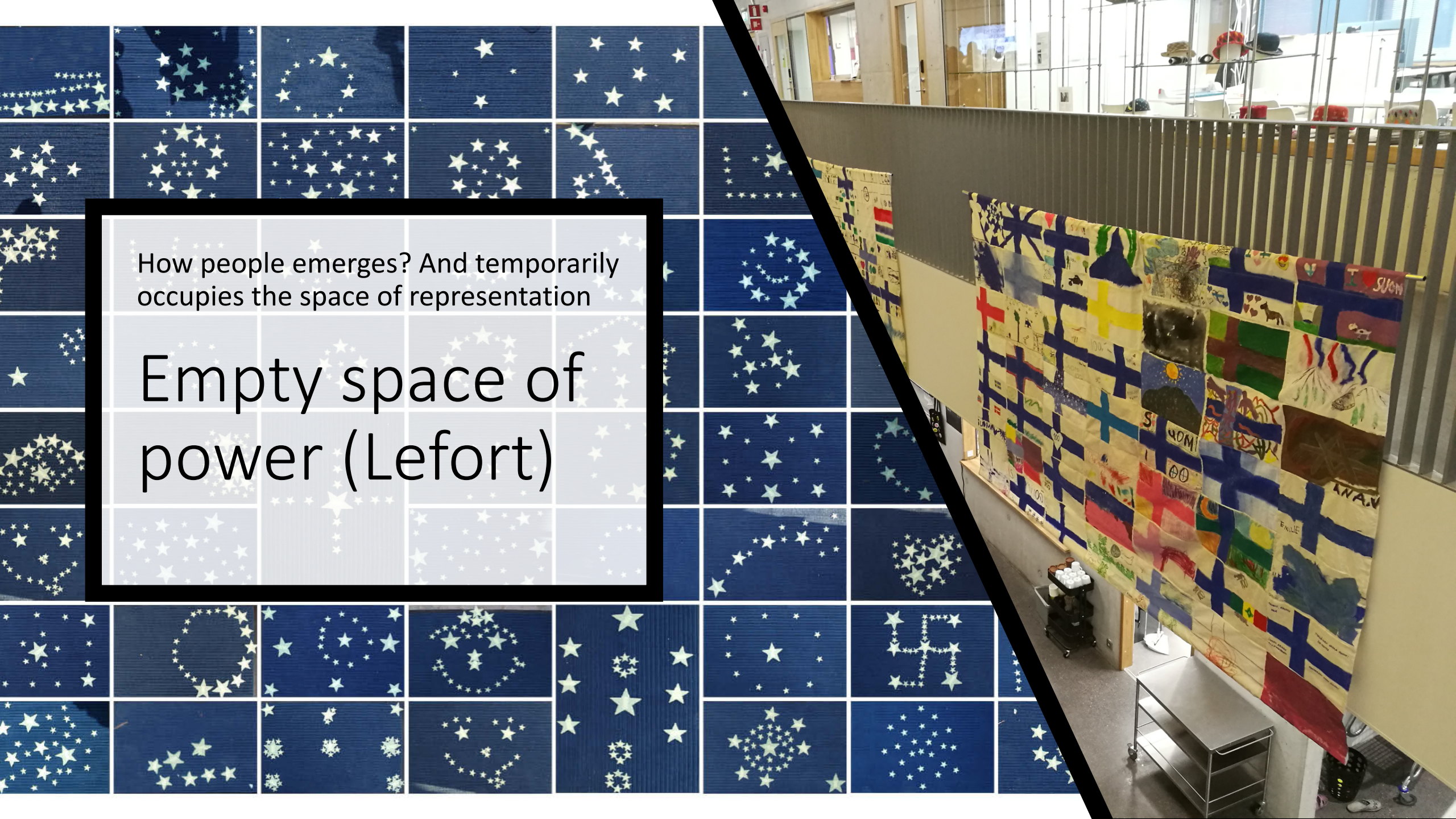
- essentialist understandings of political cleavages, voter-groups etc.
- Already existing demo taken more seriously than graphy
- Rational, meanings in politics are given and measurable
- Full

Democracy

- process of meaning-making where the political “us” is not pre-given
- Irrational, affective, politics is a process of meaning making
- Incomplete (searching for temporary fullness)

How people emerges? And temporarily occupies the space of representation

Empty space of power (Lefort)



Representation

Democracy

- Constitutive
- Representation as a process
- Vote through an imagined connection through demands
- Political parties are mobilising movements
- Performativity

Demography

- Given
- Essential relations
- Socio-economic groups
- Interest representation (rather than demand)
- Vote for someone "like" me
- Political parties are institutions
- Categorisation

Categories to dynamics

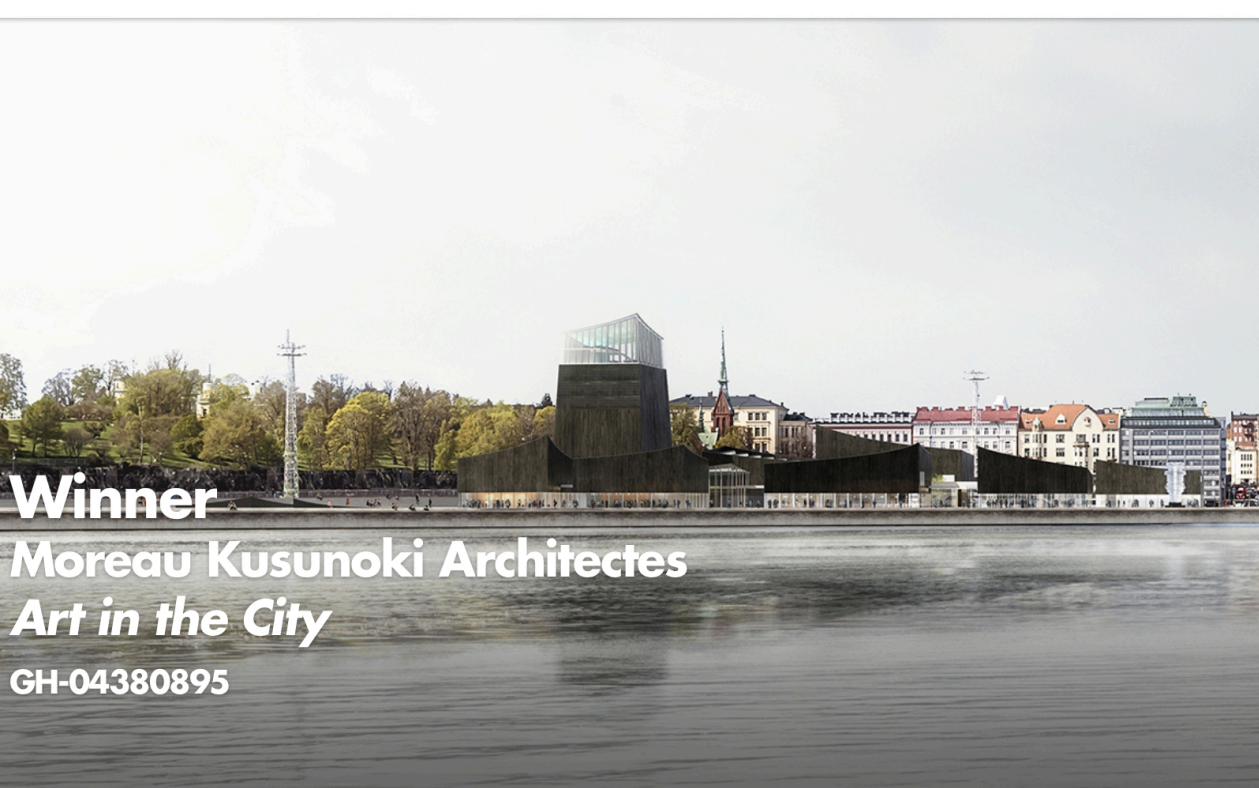
Something constitutive or even performative in political meaning-making in the populist way

... let's look at rhetoric to for concepts that could capture this?

Rhetorical moves or tropes?

Dynamics or moves, emerging and sedimenting dichotomies!

These can be found anywhere where debates polarise?



Winner
Moreau Kusunoki Architectes
Art in the City
GH-04380895

Design Concept

Cultural populism could be read as a contradiction in terms: populism refers to the people – and quite often the masses, antipode to the elite. In the early 1990s, Jim McGuigan (1992) used the term cultural populism to refer to the focus of cultural theorists on culture outside the high culture: sports, TV, films for mass consumption. McGuigan sought to demonstrate that the favouring of popular culture over high culture had already turned into a widespread praxis, a routine. ‘In the academic context, discussed here, ‘cultural populism’ refers to *diffuse political sentiments associated routinely* with certain analytical *protocols* rather than the kind of *dispassionate* scientificity claimed by a ‘paradigm’,’ McGuigan argues, contrasting passions and routines in his critique of his colleagues (McGuigan 1992, 2, my emph.).

Although this notion, developed in the 1980s, does not encapsulate the notion of ‘cultural populism’ employed here, two things remain of it: the dichotomous frontier and the routine. This under-

Helsinki Guggenheim Museum as case of populism

(Palonen in *Populism on the Loose*)

We Can Do It



Contributions to populism research and theory

- The post-foundational (Marchart 2007) element: constitutive of the “us”
- Rhetoric-performative approach
- Representation
- From categories to dynamics and moves
- Nationalism theory <-> equally Janus-faced populism

- What is democracy? For us and for them..?
- Who are we and how it needs to be articulated?
- Why?

For democracy

If democracy is possible, it is because the universal has no necessary body and no necessary content; different groups, instead, compete between themselves to temporarily give their particularisms a function of universal representation. (Laclau 1995, 106.)