Introduction: Performance and Politics

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Introduction: Performance and left populism

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The twenty-first century has brought with it an upsurge in populism. *Podemos* in Spain, *Alternative for Germany* (AfD), *Servant of the People* in Ukraine, *kirchnerismo* in Argentina, the presidential campaigns of Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders in the United States, Evo Morales in Bolivia and Janez Janša in Slovenia, the list is long and growing. All of the above are associated with populist movements, political parties with populist elements and populist leadership. But what exactly is this phenomenon? Populism remains one of the greatest enigmas of contemporary political theory. Among political theorists conceiving of it as the most dangerous threat to liberal democracy (Urbinati 1998; Müller 2016), others framing it as the only viable strategy for progressive politics to challenge the neoliberal hegemony (Mouffe 2018) and scholars believing it is nothing but conceptual hype concealing the increasing mainstreaming of the far right (Mondon and Glynos 2016), populism poses both a conceptual and normative challenge to politics. With the flourishing of populism, its already plethoric literature has grown dramatically, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Although the emerging field of populism studies is maturing, it still suffers from significant blind spots. This volume singles out and draws the reader's attention to two in particular: the lack of engagement with the embodied and performative dimensions of populism, and the excessive attention dedicated to the interaction between the radical right and populism which leaves progressive forms of populism underexplored.

The task undertaken by this book is twofold. First, it seeks to provide innovative theoretical insights into the links between populism and performance. The connection between populism and performance has increasingly been taken seriously in the literature (Moffitt 2016; Sorensen 2021; Ostiguy, Panizza and Moffitt 2021a) but remains underdeveloped in political science debates. The specificity of our contribution is that it engages not only with civic performances taking place in an electoral or a strictly political context (grassroots, civil movements, political speeches, state policies, media campaigns …) but also with artistic practices (theatre, dance, music, artistic activism …). More than this, this volume is proudly interdisciplinary. It brings together essays at the intersection of political science and performance studies following in the footsteps of earlier trailblazing volumes like Siegmund and Hölscher (2013), Edkins and Kear (2013), Rai and Reinelt (2015), Cvejić and Vujanović (2019) and more recently Rai et al. (2021) which made the case for an interdisciplinary dialogue between performance and politics. The volume offers scholars and practitioners of the two disciplines a thought-provoking analysis of the ways in which performance can be viewed politically as a social practice capable of mobilizing alternative ways of living together and invigorating democracy.

Second, in contradistinction to most scholars of populism studies who focus primarily or exclusively on the connections between populism, nativism and reactionary politics, this volume discusses the role of populism in progressive politics. Often pursuing the post-Marxist perspective developed by Laclau and Mouffe (1985), contributors to this volume examine the connections between radical forms of left-wing politics, including socialism, feminism, antiracism, political ecology, and others. What sets apart their engagement with progressive politics from other recent contributions (Mouffe 2018; Prentoulis 2021) however, is its aforementioned interdisciplinarity, an engagement with politics understood in a wider, performative sense that integrates both real and imaginary perspectives. Without minimizing the threat caused by the way radical right forces adopt the strategy and aesthetics

of populism for their discriminating, xenophobic and reactionary agenda, the editors argue that it is equally important to understand how progressive political actors make use of populism to tackle crucial political issues like the hegemony of neoliberalism, the flaws in democratic representation and the increasing institutionalization of far-right movements, politics and authoritarian regimes. It is important to note that contributors to this volume are not naively preaching the gospel of populism as the one and only panacea to the contemporary crisis of democratic politics; they assess the potentials and limits of the new forms of left populism from a critical perspective.

This Introduction is divided into six sections. First, we will conduct a brief literature review on the concept of populism from its historical roots to the current state of populism studies. Second, we will assess the way earlier political theorists have engaged with this fundamental dimension of populism. Third, through an engagement with key authors and concepts in performance studies, we will make the case for an interdisciplinary perspective on populism at the crossroads of politics and performance, focusing particularly on the embodiment of populism through acts of saying, bodily actions and affects. Fourth, we will observe how performance scholars have, to date, formulated the performative dimension of populism. Fifth, we will discuss the structure of this edited volume and summarize the arguments of our contributors. Finally, we will conclude with a discussion of the significance of this book for the study of populism and, briefly, future perspectives of populism and populism research.

The contentious concept of populism

Before the early twenty-first century was described as 'the populist moment' (Mouffe 2018) and populism itself framed as the contemporary '*zeitgeist*' (Mudde 2004), the very notion of populism emerged in the late nineteenth century. Historically, the first mentions of the concept of populism are two political movements claiming a special affinity

with 'the people', the *Narodniks* (народники) in Russia and the People's Party in the United States. The former was a group of intellectuals in the 1860s promoting a kind of agrarian socialism by attempting to convince the *narod* (народ), the people or the folk, that revolution against the Russian Tsar would come from the peasantry. The latter was an agrarian party which emerged in the 1890s to contest the hegemonic duel between the Democratic and Republican parties by promoting the economic interest of farmers who they claimed were misrepresented by the leading parties. Excluding their narrow focus on agrarian issues, the common thread linking these historical examples to contemporary forms of populism lay in their focus on the people as the leading actor fostering democratic change and challenging the current political elites. These two foundational elements, later dubbed 'people-centrism' and 'anti-elitism' (Stavrakakis 2017), are now commonly seen as the nucleus of the phenomenon of populism.

Particularly in the American context, the concept adopted other, typically pejorative, connotations throughout the twentieth century. Following the end of the Second World War, the word 'populism' underwent a significant 'semantic drift' (Jäger 2017). From its initial positive or neutral understanding, it took on a negative connotation as something associated with demagoguery, nationalism and xenophobia. Indeed, some scholars have indicated that it is impossible to study populism without engaging with the anti-populist reaction of the mainstream politics (Stavrakakis et al. 2017). The divide between those who see populism as a positive force driving democratic change or at the very least an ideologically neutral phenomenon and the majority of authors who condemn populism because of its alleged anti-pluralism or personalistic nature, persists in contemporary literature on populism. On the one hand, the latter implicit criticism of populism is particularly present in the mainstream work of authors who define populism as a strategy (Weyland 2001) or as an ideology (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017), including followers of similar perspectives ascribing a specific ideational content to populism (Müller 2016; Norris and Inglehart 2019). On the other, a more sympathetic or normatively

neutral perspective on populism appears in the work of the critical scholars inspired, notably, by the works of Margaret Canovan (1981, 2005) and Ernesto Laclau (2005). The specific way authors from this critical perspective define populism varies widely: a political logic (Laclau 2005), a figure (Rancière 2016), a political style (Moffitt 2016), a discursive frame (Aslanidis 2016), an agonistic strategy (Mouffe 2018), a *pharmakon* (Tormey 2018) and so on.

Apart from a few rare exceptions that will be discussed in the next section, a common blind spot of both mainstream and critical literatures is that they rely excessively on text and fail to take into account the embodied and performative components of populism. Even those adopting Laclau's (2005) poststructural path typically overlook that in the context of populism words are not mere linguistic markers; they are discourses that are performed at the point of intersection between linguistic and extralinguistic, that is languages, practices and institutions which are embodying the people in a particular context and at a particular moment. Similarly, the mainstream and critical literature on populism pays scant attention to the role of affects in embodying the people despite the important role that the affective dimension plays in constructing collective forms of identification (Laclau 2005; Mouffe 2018).

Performance in populism studies

Performing Left Populism addresses the lack of focus on embodiment and on the performative dimension of populism. As the emerging field of populism studies took shape, the plethora of competing definitions paved the way for a broad consensus regarding the core feature of populism: the divide between people and elite. As such, when it comes to exploring the links between populism and performance in political theory, scholars have taken one of two main routes: they either focus on the performativity inherent to the articulation of the antagonism between people and elite or they explore performative elements outside of people-centrism and anti-elitism.

The first strategy was famously introduced in the work of Ernesto Laclau (2005) and was further developed by scholars extending his legacy (Panizza and Stavrakakis 2021). The foundation of that argument is that both people and elite are discursive constructions with no pre-existing materiality – to use Laclau's words; they are empty signifiers – which means that they only become meaningful through the performative practice of naming. What Laclau calls the process of 'naming' (Laclau 2005: 118) implies a shift from seeing populism as a phenomenon that exists *a priori* towards something being done, embodied and enacted (Laclau 2005: 103). This leads to a focus on the actors conducting the performative process of naming, thus opening the path for work on power, (dis)identification and embodiment.

Another way that scholars in political science have sought to examine the performative dimension of populism is to look beyond the people/elite divide. Indeed, while the articulation of the antagonism between people and elite is the only constitutive element of populism for Laclauian scholars, other scholars have shown that their strictly discursive perspective remained excessively logocentric and did not capture the aesthetic, cultural and performative facets of populism. One of the most prominent authors developing this argument is Pierre Ostiguy (2009) who has argued that populism is first and foremost characterized by its 'flaunting of the low'. His 'sociocultural approach to populism' (Ostiguy 2017) started from the premise that the traditional left–right axis was too limited to capture the appeal of political actors and thus needed to be complemented by another orthogonal axis: the high–low axis. This new axis refers to 'ways of being and acting in politics … ways of relating to people' (Ostiguy 2009: 5). In a nutshell, the high is characterized by being sophisticated, educated and procedural while the low is conversely characterized by being vulgar, uneducated and personalistic. Ostiguy's claim is that the 'essential and noncontroversial defining feature of populism' (Ostiguy 2009: 23) is that it proceeds to perform, or in his words, 'flaunt' the low. By and large, challenges to his argument that the flaunting of the low was the only core feature of populism fall into one of two camps. Laclauian scholars expressed concern with the lack of

explicit engagement with the people/elite antagonism – partly addressed by Ostiguy's reframing of his definition of populism as 'the antagonistic, mobilizational flaunting of the "low"' (Ostiguy 2017: 84). Others criticized the concept of 'the low' for being too narrow and normatively connotated, suggesting instead the concept of 'transgression' as a wider concept more in line with Laclau's insights (Aiolfi 2022).

Ostiguy's claims struck a chord in the literature and brought to the forefront the need for the critical scholarship to expand beyond a narrow focus on the people and the elite. Benjamin Moffitt (2016) was the first to heed that call by synthesizing Laclau's focus on the performativity of populism and Ostiguy's sociocultural perspective. Arguing that these two facets were more complementary than opposed, he developed an approach to populism as a political style that synthetically included three features: the performative articulation of the antagonism between people and elite based on Laclau, the use of what he called 'bad manners' (Moffitt 2016: 55) based on Ostiguy and his own original contribution to the argument that populism relies on the symbolic performance of crisis (Moffitt 2015). Through his reclaiming of the notion of style and his adoption of concepts like actor, audience and performance, Moffitt emphasized the theatricality of populism far more explicitly than had previous authors.

The conceptual synthesis operated by Moffitt found an echo in the discipline and was later formalized in a collaborative volume co-edited by Ostiguy, Panizza and Moffitt (2021) which introduced the 'discursive-performative' approach to populism. The editors laid bare their syncretic ambitions in the Introduction: 'Theoretically and conceptually, the volume brings together the Laclauian school and the socio-cultural and performative approaches to populism – a convergence that should be of consequence in the field' (Ostiguy, Panizza and Moffitt 2021: 4). Describing their approach to populism as 'post-Laclauian' because it expands, challenges and interrogates Laclau's work, they also break from a theoretical approach to populism to one that focuses on practical research and is 'down-to-earth, concrete, and "immanent"' (Ostiguy, Panizza and Moffitt 2021: 2).

The research we introduce in this volume broadly follows this lineage as it makes use of both the formal perspective of discourse theory heralded by Laclau and the sociocultural and performative approaches of Ostiguy and Moffitt. What distinguishes this book most sharply, however, is its explicitly interdisciplinary lens at the crossroads of politics and performance. Indeed, while the trailblazing contribution of Ostiguy, Panizza and Moffitt opens new ground for the study of populism, we contend that they are limited by their disciplinary anchor which remains primarily tied to political science and adjacent disciplines. This all-but-exclusive grounding in political science is present in their volume and in similar recent contributions that engage with the performative dimension of populism (Sorensen 2021; Diehl 2022).

Significantly, many political theorists studying the performative aspects of populism have limited their research to the individual performances of right-wing leaders (Ostiguy and Roberts 2016; Geva 2020; Mendonça and Caetano 2021). Understood this way, populism becomes synonymous with personalistic leadership, demagoguery and authoritarian ways of constructing 'a people'. In this view, the leader is one who claims to embody the people and mobilizes them around regressive, exclusionary forms of collectivity based on nationalism, racism, xenophobia or other forms of intolerance. Other analyses focused on performances of various political agents, such as leaders, parties and civil movements on the political left (Stavrakakis 2017; Mouffe 2018; Prentoulis 2021). These authors demonstrate that populism can be synonymous with relational, inclusive and coalescing forms of constructing 'a people'. In this perspective, the leader is one who embodies the demands of the people to mobilize progressive forms of collectivity based on tolerance, cultural difference and democratic elements of equality and popular sovereignty. We have chosen to showcase the way populism can be a powerful, although not flawless, tool for progressive politics. This approach resonates particularly well with our interdisciplinary perspective guided by performance studies. Indeed, the discipline of performance studies has always been

affectionate and paid particular attention to the excluded, the avant-garde, the marginal, the minoritarian, the subversive, the queer, people of colour and the formerly colonized (Schechner 2013).

Performance as embodying practice

Established in 1979/80 in the United States, Performance Studies is a relatively new academic discipline. The main objective of performance studies is to examine performance understood as 'a "broad spectrum" or "continuum" of human actions' (Schechner 2020: 1) seen as symbolically loaded (Goffman 1956) ranging from rituals, games, sports, grassroots protests, politics, everyday life performances, work, the performing arts, the enactment of sex, class, race and gender, among others. The methodology of performance studies thus combines practice, theory and critical engagement. It evolves at the point of interconnection between (i) practical knowledge rooted in embodied experience, orality and a view of place as an itinerary and (ii) objective knowledge rooted in written text, theory and a view of place as a fixed point thereby enabling performance scholars to critically engage with disciplinary boundaries by bridging differently valued knowledges (Conquergood 2002).

One of the generative disciplines of performance studies, anthropology, suggests that all human acts, actions and interactions consist of ritualized performances, that is, movements, gestures and sounds that have already been done and said before. To perform a ritual thus means to move through the material which is meaningful, symbolically constructed and has historicity (Schechner 2020). The theatrical dynamics of ritual manifest through the liminal phase of any ritual (Van Gennep 1909) which designates a period of time in which persons undertaking a group experience are 'betwixt and between' (Turner 1964: 49), transgressing existing social structures. But, as some stressed the importance of challenging a ritual recitation of the facts of the event, the focus of performance studies transitioned from the question 'what does performance do?' to 'what are the consequences

of doing performance'? Lacan's observations of social interactions and that 'the speech included in discourse is revealed thanks to the law of associations by which it is put in doubt' (Lacan 1991: 271) prompted a view of performance as a practice that places doubt on existing discursive representations (Phelan 1993). Such a view emphasizes the political, polemical or agonistic aspects of performance (Petrović Lotina 2021a) and raises concerns about the reproduction of power through the ritualized performativity of knowledge (McKenzie 2001), including corporeal epistemes (Leigh Foster 2011). The most important task for performance studies is to examine how dominant discourses of power and legacies of performative constraints can be interfered with, contested or challenged (Phelan 1993; Martin 1998; Taylor 2014), thereby envisaging performative strategies for constructing alternative subjectivities, communities and collectivities (Kelleher 2009; Gluhović 2013; Lepecki 2013; Balme 2014; Kunst 2015; Petrović Lotina 2021a).

Performing Left Populism examines how the dominant performative constraints that exclude, marginalize and exploit are contested through left-wing populism. It examines (left-)populism from the interdisciplinary perspective of performance studies providing insights from performance theory and political theory. The volume retains a focus on the construction of collective political subjectivities from political theory with a particular focus on the political left. From performance theory, this volume pursues a view of the construction of collective political subjectivities in terms of performativity as an embodying production or process. The editors' understanding of embodying processes draws upon founding concepts of Performance Studies including performance, performative, performativity and embodiment. Our contention is that embodiment takes place at the nexus of bodily actions (Goffman 1956) and speech acts (Austin 1962) through attributive meaning-making operations (Butler 1997; Laclau 2005) and affective investment (Laclau 2005; Mouffe 2018). In short, the collective, populist body is an indissociable articulation or embodiment of signifying and affective dimensions that manifest through performance.

Goffman redeployed the notion of performance in a way that has haunted performance scholars ever since. He famously stated that performance occurs through interaction, during an encounter of individuals on any occasion. Accordingly, performance refers to all the activity of an individual before another individual, the audiences, observers or co-participants. During these processes, performers dramatize actions by infusing them with signs to make the invisible visible. They thus highlight the message they wish to convey by means of symbolic representation. Goffman's view suggests that the everyday performance resembles actions performed on a theatre stage. It employs dramaturgical elements, such as symbolization, the setting, personal front, frame and dramatic realization. Although the presentation of self in everyday life implies an analysis of both non-verbal and verbal actions understood as performances, Goffman's perspective on verbal actions remains reduced to the anthropological invariant, to the facts of language that enable social interaction.

Austin's study of social interactions focused precisely on verbal actions, complicating the former view of performance. He suggested that to utter a sentence is not to describe an action of doing, but to 'do' an action. Austin calls this type of utterance or sentence 'performative'. If, 'the issuing of utterance is the performing of an action' (Austin 1981: 6), then, 'performance' must be seen as 'the object of the utterance' (Austin 1981: 8). Not only can acts of saying and bodily actions *not* be entirely separated, they produce effects and consequences through interaction.

In providing an alternative perspective on the acts of saying and bodily actions, Butler expands Austin's view of notions of the performative and performance. She asserts that the speech act on its own is to a certain extent unknowing about what it 'performs' because it 'emerges precisely through the act that the body performs in the speaking the act' (Butler 1997: 11). Conversely, the body cannot always know what it is speaking and hence performs both in excess of what is said and 'in and through' what is said. It follows, then, that the relationship between speech and the body is inseparable and incongruous. This is most obvious in the

interaction between the speaking body and the other body. If the one who speaks is formed in and through language, one is positioned as both already named in language and capable of naming the other through language. This implies that subjects are reversibly constructed on the nominal level and, by the same mechanism, corporeally constituted, valued and exchanged. To say that one's speech act is 'performative' is to recognize that one produces a series of *effects* in attributing a name to the other. It is through the attribution of names that one is interpellated, constructed and embodied.

Butler stresses that names have historicity, a sedimented history which has become internal to a name through repetition. Accordingly, performatives must be seen as historical, reiterative ceremonial acts or rituals of naming. They entail a view of performativity as a constant repetition of constraining norms (Butler 1993) such as heterosexuality, racial purity and religious belonging. The ritual exercise of performativity demonstrates how the bodies have been classified over time through the attribution of names whether in terms of gender, race, or class. It emphasizes the historical legacy of corporeal epistemes 'that participate in the production of knowledge and the structuring of power' (Leigh Foster 2011: 13). The exercise of power through performativity thus materializes the subject by means of subordination to dominant norms, constituting the other as an actor/a performer who construes the effects of the performative ritual by means of performance. This way, the subject/actor enacts and reproduces power relations through the repetition of norms. The iterability of performatives implies that '"performance" is not a singular "act" or event, but a ritualized production, a ritual reiterated under and through constraint' (Butler 1993: 60).

Laclau examined interaction through the attributive-performative discursive steps, too, but to the indissociable link between acts of saying and bodily actions he adds affects. This is most obvious in his view of populism which requires the constitution of an equivalential chain that unites a set of dissimilar social grievances in a particular hegemony. This operation requires a symbolic unity of isolated, heterogeneous

and particular social demands in a global, popular and universal demand. Popular unity is formed on the discursive level through 'a performative operation' of naming that attributes the source of a set of social grievances, of broad injustice, to the 'oligarchy' or the elite. It is by means of attribution that one is thus performing a signifying operation of 'constituting "the people" by finding the common identity of a set of social claims' (Laclau 2005: 97). In other words, embodying 'the people' through the performative operation of signification involves the formation of political frontiers between the people and the oligarchy, between the 'we' and the 'they', and the 'construction of power as an antagonistic force' (Laclau 2005: 110).

Given that the popular unity of all antagonism stands for an impossible fullness, then the embodied entity of 'the people' is possible thanks only to the radical investment which belongs to the order of affects. Laclau suggests that '[a]ffect is not something which exists on its own, independently of language' (Laclau 2005: 111). Affect relates to a differential cathexis that is the emotional investment in the idea, the body or the object embodied through naming. This implies that the body, including the collective, populist body is constructed both on the discursive level through the attributive meaning-making operations provided by linguistic and extralinguistic means, and on the affective level through the investment of a mythical fullness or impossible universality in a part. On the one hand, this means that the collective, populist body is an indissociable articulation of signifying and affective dimensions. On the other hand, this means that affects play an important role in constructing collective forms of identification, and that artistic practices participate in these processes (Mouffe 2013).

Embodying populism

Laclau's view of populism inspired performance scholars to envisage the relationship between populism and performance from the interdisciplinary perspective of performance studies melding together

insights from performance theory and political philosophy. Angela Marino, for example, reflects on the Bolivarian revolution of Venezuela (1999–) initiated by then President Hugo Chavez (1999–2013) and examines the formation of a collective body through the performative practice of naming. She asserts that populism is mediated by performance and presents 'a unifying strategy of collective identification […] through embodied acts' (Marino 2018: 10). And yet reducing identification to participation in performance, Marino does not account for the collective unifying bonds on the nominal level. What she calls the collective body stands for the multiplicity of dispersed, rupturing actions that do not allow for identification through some sort of emotional tie or leadership. This may be so because Marino overlooks that naming in Laclau is an embodying practice that enables identification through affective investment and because her view of 'popular power' relates more to anarchism than it does to populism.

Inspired by Laclau's notion of 'the chain of equivalence', Janelle Reinelt observes how recent performances engage with the formation of a left-wing collective political subject. She inscribes her reflection within the context of right-wing populism in the United States under former president Donald Trump's administration (2017–21). Reinelt suggests that past movements for racial justice in the United States (The Black Panthers) can inspire left-wing populist aesthetics both in the street (Black Lives Matter movement) and on the stage (*Party People* by UNIVERSES Theatre Company). It is through renewal of the past that these performances, although organized around injustice to African Americans, 'can help fuel the need to build collective subjectivities that can claim the political space of "We the people"', through the performance of 'recalling, reconstructing and creating the subjects that can articulate as equivalential in Laclau's sense of the term' (Reinelt 2019: 68). Nevertheless, Reinelt leaves us asking whether performances of constructing collective subjectivities could operate on the phenomenological or affective level in a way that would create a bond between various differences.

Exploring recent left-wing populist movements in Europe and drawing upon Laclau, Mouffe and Stavrakakis, Goran Petrović Lotina envisages populism as a choreographic practice that articulates the multitude of democratic identities, such as workers, women, and immigrants, in a form of an inclusive, popular collectivity (Petrović Lotina 2021a, 2021b). The choreographing practice of articulation requires collective forms of identification that evolve around shared ethico-political values such as justice and civic engagement and that rely on the performative practices of naming that govern particular affects. This view implies that identification embodies a constitutive tension between the signifying and affective dimensions. Acknowledging that artistic performances are informed by civic performances and thus provide sites for reassessing ways of constructing the people, Petrović Lotina shows that this same form of tension enables the performing body to mobilize opinion formation through a dramatized encounter with the audience. It is through this agonistic encounter with the audience that the artistic performance exposes the historical legacy of affective corporeal epistemes and challenges sedimented spectatorial codes calling for the contesting of existing politics and articulating alternative ways of living together.

Overview of chapters

The book is divided into four sections engaging with the relationship between performance and populism primarily in Europe, the United States and South America. The first part, **Performance and Populism Theories**, introduces theoretical reflections that assess the relevance of performance studies for populism studies, particularly for the analysis of left-wing politics. In Chapter 1, *The Stylistic Approach to Populism: From Early Definitions to Interdisciplinary Hybridization*, Théo Aiolfi frames the definitional debate on populism through the wider discussion on the interaction between form and substance. Arguing that populism is best seen as a political form, a mode of articulation

of politics that can give shape to any political content, he assesses the research of political theorists who defined populism as a style. Through his engagement with the groundbreaking work of Benjamin Moffitt, Aiolfi calls attention to some of the limitations of the stylistic approach to populism in terms of conceptual ambiguity and disciplinary bounds. He makes the case for an interdisciplinary hybridization of the stylistic approach through a sustained engagement with performance studies. Arguing that adopting this interdisciplinary perspective is the only way for the stylistic approach to fulfil its innovative potential, Aiolfi concludes with a discussion of what this revised definition of populism implies for the study of left populism. In Chapter 2, *American Paranoia: Trump, Sanders, and Theoretical Reflections on Researching Populism as Performance*, Reid Kleinberg offers a sophisticated criticism of any definition framing populism as a style or a repertoire of performances. Kleinberg alerts us to the risk for proponents of the stylistic approach to be disconnected from historical contingency and to conflate style and articulation. To make his case, he engages with Richard Hofstadter's concept of the 'paranoid style', often applied to Donald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign, and frames it as anachronistic. In his analysis of Democratic candidate Bernie Sanders's campaign, Kleinberg explores how a historically contextualized use of style can lead to a progressive 'coalition building'. He concludes with a call for a shift 'from an idiographic approach to populism that catalogues a set of defining features of a style to an analytical and integrated approach to populism that tries to explain the function of style in a broader attempt at articulating a populist movement'.

The second part of the book, **Performance and Populist Leadership**, looks into the ways populism is performed through leadership and how embodied performances of leaders contribute to the creation of left-wing discourses. In Chapter 3, *The Democratic Productivity of Populist Bodily Representation*, María Esperanza Casullo discusses the concept of populist performance representation as a combination of three complementary elements: a mirroring of the people's cultural characteristics, the inclusion of markers of exceptionality and the possession of markers of institutional power. Calling this hybrid form

of populist performance 'synecdochal representation', she relates it to concepts like identification, charisma, mobilization and performances of gender and ethnicity. Moving to an empirical application of her concepts, Casullo examines the performances of three left-wing leaders from South America: Evo Morales, former President of Bolivia, Alejandro Toledo, former President of Perú, and Pedro Castillo, current President of Perú. In Chapter 4, *Performing the People: Discourses and Performances of Pablo Iglesias and Volodymyr Zelensky*, Alina Mozolevska offers a comparative study of the performative practices of two progressive European politicians, Pablo Iglesias from *Podemos* in Spain and Volodymyr Zelensky from *Servant of the People* in Ukraine. Drawing upon Casullo's conceptualization of populist bodily performance and Laclau's discourse theory, Mozolevska focuses on 'the performance of political actions by [these] party leaders in the public sphere and on the role of political narratives, politainment and bodily performance strategies …'. Arguing that the electoral success of these political parties is deeply dependent on the character of their leaders, Mozolevska examines the way hybrid performances of ordinariness and extraordinariness from Iglesias and Zelensky were crucial in tapping into the electorate's disappointment with the political elite.

The third part of the book, **Performance, Populism and Artistic Practices**, draws attention to artistic performances which experimented with the creation of populism on the imaginary level. In Chapter 5, *The Last Peronist Spectacle: The Argentina Pavilion at the Expo 2015 World's Fair,* David M. K. Sheinin engages with the historical heritage of *kirchnerismo* (2003–15). He analyses its performance in relation to populist elements of historical Peronism and the visual and performative representations of the populist elements of Italian fascism. Shining a light on how *kirchnerismo* was performed at the Expo 2015 World Fair in terms of nation, identity and scientific advancement, Sheinin describes the Argentina pavilion at the fair as 'a final performative act of one of the preeminent leftist populist movements of the era'. In Chapter 6, *Joyful Festivities: Happenings as a Populist Strategy in the Work of Alex Mlynarčík*, Sam Čermák introduces the work of the Slovak artist Alex Mlynarčík. He focuses on Mlynarčík's large-scale performances

in public spaces in the 1970s that involved the participation of a large number of local inhabitants. Stressing that artistic practices can play an important role in the construction of subjectivity, Čermák argues that Mlynarčík's performances operate on the affective level through a shared feeling of joy, thus exercising the construction of a form of left-wing counter-hegemonic populist community. In Chapter 7, *Left Populism and the Revival of Demos through Performance: Four Tasks for Practicing Democracy*, Danae Theodoridou draws on a participatory performance project she created with ordinary citizens and performed in four countries in Europe over a period of two years (2019–21). The aim of the project was to examine the performative practice of public speaking as a democratic act capable of bringing *demos* back to the realm of politics. The project experimented with the construction of alternative public spaces and forms of the people, stressing the significance of affects for these practices. Readers of Theodoridou's chapter are invited to participate in the project.

The fourth part of the book, **Further Perspectives on Performance and Populism**, seeks to open new directions in populism studies. In Chapter 8, *Populism and Populism Research. A Conversation with Yannis Stavrakakis,* Goran Petrović Lotina asks Yannis Stavrakakis to reflect on some of the crucial topics relating to populism. They begin their conversation by discussing the emergence of populism at the turn of the twenty-first century and proceed to cover populism's influence on a wide range of theoretical and practical interests. Among them: discourse theory, populism and anti-populism, the performative aspect of populism, populism research and psychoanalytic political theory, populism as a choreography of representing the unrepresentable, inclusionary and exclusionary aspects of populist discourses on the left/right political divide, the role of emotions and affective states in populism and the potential of left populism for political change. Their conversation concludes with thoughts on the future of populism research.

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The contributors to this book investigate the relationship between populism and performance and place particular focus on performing left populism. They do so through critical engagement with various cultural performances that contain in themselves populist elements such as civic performances staged by political leaders and artistic performances created by artists, all the while demonstrating the relevance of an interdisciplinary lens to examine the links between populism and performance. What becomes clear is that performing a progressive form of populism requires the articulation or embodiment of a collective out of a multitude of democratic identities. This type of inclusionary unity is mobilized by affects that do not rely on the exclusion of an outgroup, as is the case in right-wing forms of populism, but foster identifications among disparate human associations around a common cause of struggle – the elite. This kind of (comm)unity is epitomized by a *concordia discors* (discordant harmony) 'that does not have unity as its point of departure but contains in itself the reason for a possible unity' (Gramsci 2007: 186).

By dividing the society into two camps, the people and the elite, populism calls for the return of the conflictual, ant/agonistic approach to politics (Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Laclau 2005; Mouffe 2018). As aforementioned, ant/agonism manifests through the performative practice of naming (Butler 1997; Laclau 2005). Although naming the elite is not necessarily antipluralist or a threat to democracy, this may be so in the case of right-wing populists accusing the current political elite of implementing immigration and integration policies that 'wreaked havoc on the welfare state' (Petrović Lotina 2021a: 20). Interestingly, left-wing populists designate the class of wealthy bankers and businessmen and corrupt politicians as the elite, blaming them for inducing the economic, immigration, health and environmental crises (Petrović Lotina 2021a). Embodying the elite as an adversary is thus the driving force with which populism seeks to affectively mobilize citizens arguing for the return of the popular sovereignty. As the right/left divide indicates, the division of the political field into two fundamentally opposed entities comes with its own limitations. It is the responsibility

of progressive political actors adopting a strategy relying on populism to ensure that this antagonism remains nuanced without stigmatizing a minority or advancing a conspiratorial vision of society.

In the previous decade, many radical leftist movements flourished in response to the 2008 global financial crisis which brought about a decrease in the standard of living. Among them are: Greek *Syriza*, the Coalition of the Radical Left – Progressive Alliance (2015), *La France Insoumise* / France Unbowed in France (2016), *Aufstehen* / Stand Up in Germany (2018) and the Croatian *Možemo* / We Can (2021). More recently, global movements like *Me Too* in 2017 or *Black Lives Matter* in 2020 emerged from the lack of institutional answers against systemic sexist and racist violence. With its synthesis of diverse political demands, populism can play a pivotal role in connecting these various struggles and turning them into unified progressive alternatives. Considering what is arguably the most threatening crisis for humankind, the climate emergency, the need for a united front is even more urgent, if not imperative. The global ecological movements, such as *Fridays for Future* and *Extinction Rebellion* that appeared in 2018, can play an important role in these processes. Here, too, the mobilizing power of populism has a role to play in providing an outlet for disempowered citizens to contest the apathetic global political and economic elites that have failed to consider the urgency of this existential crisis. For all its limitations, it would be a mistake to let conservative and reactionary politics hold a monopoly over the performative power of populism. It is time for progressive political actors to tap into that potential and to develop convincing counter-narratives that envision a more hopeful future.

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