

THE POPULIST SCREEN

THE PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION OF POLITICS IN CONTEMPORARY EUROPEAN FILM AND TV

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Urbino, Italy

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Conference organization: Stefania Antonioni, Giorgio Bottini, Paola Brembilla, Valerio Coladonato, Luana Fedele, Dom Holdaway & Matteo Marinello.

The aim of "The Populist Screen" is to think through the role of screen media in the contemporary wave of mainstream nationalist, often extreme-right-wing populist movements. Tied to the **PRIN 2022 project "Circulating Populist Sentiments in 21st Century Film and TV Fiction in Italy"**, the main focus of the conference will be on contemporary populist politics in Europe.

With the sweeping growth and electoral successes of nationalist movements over the past two decades, challenging the legacy of liberal democracies, populism is a consolidated reality of our times. The use of polarizing narratives of nationhood, leadership and the people by many European parties – from Fratelli d'Italia and Vox to Alternative für Deutschland, from Prawo i Sprawiedliwość to the Partij voor de Vrijheid and Reform UK – have consolidated the importance of these techniques, even in the toolbox of non-populist parties. Our aim is to unite studies of **how these political events interact with screen media cultures in general**, with a particular (but not exclusive) emphasis on fictional narratives within them.

While, quite understandably, much scholarship has been dedicated to the use of news and social media by populists, only a small (but growing) fraction of academic work has been dedicated to the influence of cultural narratives. This is all the more surprising, since populism relies on narratives to pose the alternative worldviews that it promises to deliver and since film, television and OTT series are among the most powerful and efficient vehicles of narratives.

During this conference, we seek to question where populism meets visual culture and the entertainment industry **in the present**. To what extent does screen narrative media fuel populist politicians, their campaigns and their ideas? What visual tools and grammars do film and television offer to political messages? How does screen media represent, fuel, challenge populist feeling? And what kinds of political histories can be traced in the production, distribution and circulation of audiovisual images?

For this event, we welcome papers that address these interrogatives from any perspective, within **the context of Europe and in relation to film, TV, (streaming) video or any other audiovisual screen media**. We are particularly interested in the **contemporary period**, though historical and especially comparative approaches are welcome.

What follows are the broad **areas of interest of the event**, though we are open to any other questions and methods and happy to talk through potential ideas (contact details below).

- Images of populist politics and politicians; the genres and visual grammars used to narrate populism; the role played by emotions; the characters and identities that are vehicles for these narratives.
- Theoretical studies of populist screens, for instance employing affect theory; theories of gender, race, queer or other identities; decolonial or postcolonial theory; cultural and media/mediatization theory; sociological, historical or philosophical studies.
- Studies of European politics, populist ideologies or broader populist discourses that intersect with film/tv cultures.
- Popular culture studies, and the potential overlaps and spaces between popular and populism.
- The role played by audiovisual culture (films, TV shows, characters, genres and registers) by political movements, as cultural references or as shared grammars that are pushed into political aims.
- Production and distribution studies and cultures, that trace the political dynamics behind the creation of culture; the role of funding bodies and of specific mandates and ideologies; the role of distribution strategy in the dissemination of political content.
- Reception studies: what audiences make of populist narratives, in physical and digital consumption spaces.

The main working language of the conference will be English, but speakers are also welcome to propose papers/panels in Italian.

We invite proposals in the form of max **350-word abstracts** (excluding any bibliography), together with a **50-word bio**. Please send these to popit.prin@gmail.com by **30 April 2025**. We will communicate the results of the selection by mid May. For any questions, please write to the above email address.