Workshop Description and Evaluation

The workshop was held on 2 April at the Hilton Union Square in San Francisco. Rather than adopt a traditional paper presentation format, we sought to encourage a more engaged and reflective approach to the state of the art in the field.

This involved two innovations.

The first was to request that participants draft short (1-2K word maximum) position papers on a topic of their own choosing related to the state of the art within popular culture and world politics. These were collected and distributed in advance of the workshop. We can provide these on request.

The paper length meant that they were not too onerous for participants. We believe this greatly helped us to achieve a 100% submission rate in advance of our deadline. It also facilitated the reading of the entire collection of papers by each participant and encouraged a more direct presentation of central arguments than is often the case in longer formats. These were all conducive to generating a vibrant discussion on the day.

The second was to adopt a 'Question Time' panel format. Rather than have individual paper presentations, participants were grouped together based on the themes within their individual short papers. They were then given a set of questions (in advance) that were posed by a moderator on the day (either Nick Robinson or Kyle Grayson). Please note that we did not deliberately give the panels titles in order to encourage participants to make their own connections. Please see the appendix for panel compositions.

The questions posed by the moderators related to the general themes running across the papers on the panel as well as particular positions taken in individual papers. There was one common question for each panel (how did you come to popular culture?) with all of the other questions being bespoke. For a list of questions, please see the appendix.

Each question was open to commentary from the floor, including asking different questions based on the conversation taking place. We felt this proved to be a very successful way of running the workshop, indicated by the way in which it kept the discussion flowing throughout the day. It also allowed for a more organic and inclusive discussion to take place—conversations in panels often went in productive directions that could not have been anticipated in advance. It also meant that participants (both on panels and in the audience) could converse with one another about the field in ways that standard presentation formats can hinder. For most panels, we usually were not able to get through more than three of prepared questions before participants and panellists were able to direct the conversation into areas that they were most interested in discussing. Feedback we received was universally positive, with participants appreciative of both the flexibility of our approach as well as having the knowledge that should the discussion falter, there were a set of questions that could be mobilised to move the conversation forward.

The workshop ended with an excellent meal attended by all of the participants.

Plans for future publications

There are three sets of outputs from the workshop that are planned, with participants committed to deliver on these. The first is a series of blog posts based on the short papers that were prepared for the workshop. These, in both form and tone, are already in good shape (as participants merely need to make minor tweaks to their initial submission) and will be posted on the 'Popular Culture and IR' blog (https://www.e-ir.info/category/blogs/saunders/) hosted at e-ir.info. We believe that this is a good venue to reach out the global IR community, including students and members of the general public. The timeline for the collection of short papers to be posted is 3-6 months.

The second planned output is to develop 1-2 forums targeting ISA journals (specifically IPS and ISP). Based on discussions at the workshop, two areas of focus were raised. The first was to redress the present predominance of work on popular culture and world politics from scholars based in the global north which, perhaps inevitably, looks at artefacts from the global north—in essence this would be a forum about 'decolonising' popular culture and world politics research. The second theme was to examine how popular culture and world politics research can better incorporate audience reception, particularly the study of affect and emotion. The timeline for an initial proposal(s) is 6 months with the aim of at least one forum submission within 24 months.

The third planned output is a book called 'Popular Culture Matters!' This would draw from both workshop participants and the larger pool of researchers working in the area. We envision the collection serving as a text suitable for colleagues interested in researching popular culture and world politics or who are teaching in the area. It would address questions of why, when, where, and how popular culture matters. With one of the workshop organisers and two participants co-editing a book series on popular culture and world politics, and with a publisher keen for such a volume to be produced, we are confident that this has the structural supports to come together. Given the potential size of this undertaking, our timeline is 36-48 months to print.

Appendix

Workshop Programme

9.00-9.15 Welcome and Introductions

9:15-10:45: Panel 1 (Moderator Kyle Grayson)

Debbie Lisle, Laura Shepherd, Patrick Jackson, Galia Press-Barnathan, Will Clapton

10.45-11.15 Coffee and Comfort Break

11.15-12.45: Panel 2 (Moderator Nick Robinson)

David Mutimer, Mike Shapiro, Robert Saunders, Annika Bergman-Rosamond

12.45-13.30: Lunch

13.30-15.00: Panel 3 (Moderator: Nick Robinson)

Katie Brennan, Sandra Yao, Matt Davies, Carolina Futuro

15.30-17.00 Panel 4 (Moderator: Kyle Grayson)

Penny Griffin, Mark Salter, Gabi Schlag, Jutta Weldes

17.00-17.15 Wrap Up and Next Steps?

Panel Questions

Panel 1

How did you come to (popular) culture?

What understandings of politics do you see motivating work in the area?

What are the key methodological challenges in examining popular culture and world politics?

What do you see as current strengths of work in the area?

What do you see as current weaknesses?

Where are their opportunities to advance?

Panel 2

How did you come to (popular) culture?

What challenges (ethical, political, methodological) does populism raise with respect to popular culture?

What are the configurations of distributions of the sensible through which the populist turn, particularly the right populist turn, is being normalised? And what use is made of time?

What can we learn from your research in terms of the ethical questions raised about how past traumas circulate through popular culture?

What about the production of selves--are we reaching a point in contemporary world politics where there are qualitative differences to these processes that need to be analysed and accounted for?

Artefact selection--what is your process?

Relationships amongst popular culture, politics, and ISMs (e.g., antisemitism, militarism, colonialism, nationalism, fascism)--how can we best capture those that move beyond the straight-forwardly textual?

Panel 3

How did you come to (popular) culture?

Digital worlds--do they challenge our traditional understandings of what (world) politics might be?

How might we unpack those difficult relationships conjoining bodies and *bodies politik* through popular culture? How can we get at differences amongst reflex, perception, and reflection?

The everyday--what is it and what does it do in relation to popular culture and world politics?

How can we best identify those elements of the mundane/everyday which hide in plain sight yet help to establish the conditions of possibility for (world) politics?

Global audiences are differentiated--but is there also a need to more closely examine those communities/dynamics where producers/consumers are blurred?

What scalar relationships (i.e., in terms of geographical scale) does your work suggest are important and that require further investigation?

Panel 4

How did you come to (popular) culture?

Penny extends on the 'never meet your heroes' adage with perhaps never analyse the pop culture that you like. Nevertheless, it raises an important questions about what we select, why we select it, and for what purposes? Discuss.

In what ways does being attentive to relations of gender, race, (and class) productively complicate our understandings of popular culture and world politics?

Similarly, if IR is a field dominated by the preoccupations of the Euro-Atlantic corridor what opportunities are there to displace this in PCWP?

In what ways can we address the privilege question?

Is there any role for strategic essentialism in PCWP?

How then might PCWP help to deepen more general understandings of violence?

What are we (still) missing in PCWP?