Book Review of Andy Knott (ed.) Populism and Time: Temporalities of a Disruptive Politics (Edinburgh University Press, 2024)

Andy Knott compiles a timely volume that examines populism through the lenses of space, identity, ideology, and the elusive and under-theorised dimension of time. The book is divided thematically into three parts: history, technology, and Latin American case studies. Overall, the book understands populism as not merely a reaction to crisis or institutional breakdown but as a temporal phenomenon that disrupts, reconfigures, and reimagines the pulses and expectations of democratic politics.

The edited volume begins with a conceptual and methodological introduction, setting the tone for the rest of the book. Knott rightly emphasises that populism has been extensively mapped spatially but rarely temporally. Knott argues that a deeper engagement with political temporality reframes and enriches the understanding of populism and political theory. This is one of the volume's clearest contributions as it shifts debate from what populist is to how populism organises political time.

The introduction ambitiously covers metaphor analysis, philosophical temporalities and contemporary ontologies by discussing, amongst others, the work of Heidegger, Rencière, and Machiavelli. Especially compelling is Knott's engagement with Heidegger and Rancière. On the one hand, Heidegger's concept of Dasein, is transposed to the political realm. On the other hand, Knott's invocation of Rancière's distinction between 'the police' and 'politics' creates a refreshing melange of philosophical analysis. At times, however, the theoretical density may limit accessibility for readers seeking clearer methodological signposting.

Part I: Populism, Politics, History includes a chapter by Clare Woodford that interrogates the "people problem" of democracy through impossible temporalities. The chapter argues that populism exploits the paradox of people being simultaneously absent and necessary by revealing competing constructions of the demos. This argument echoes Laclau's view of the people as an "empty signifier" that gathers heterogeneous demands under a singular political form.[1] Part I is strongest when it links abstract temporal concepts to concrete dilemmas of democratic representation.

---

[1] E. Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (Verso 2005); M. Canovan 'Trust the People! Populism and the Two Faces of Democracy' (1999) 47(1) Political Studies.

In her contribution in Part I, Adria Porta Caballe discusses Podemos, combining existential and political analytics. Drawing from Nietzsche and Heidegger, she argues that Podemos operates across ecstatic temporalities. Within this nostalgic, opportunistic, and utopian temporality, Podemos represents an internal contestation of time within left populism. This is a fine analysis for understanding intra-movement tensions as both temporal and ideological. Importantly, this chapter demonstrates that temporal conflict is not external to populism but internal to its organisational life.

Part II: Populism and Technology places populism within the technological environment. Simon Tormey's chapter argues that the effects of globalisation, the decline of authority, and the digitisation of the public sphere institutionalised the conditions for populism to thrive. I believe that Tormey's contribution moves beyond diagnoses and towards a systemic theory of post-representative politics. This is a persuasive intervention, especially where it treats populism as structurally normal within contemporary mediatized democracy rather than as a temporary deviation.[2]

Michaelangelo Anastasio examines how technological infrastructures shape populist temporality. He critiques the synchronic bias in most populism literature and offers a frame grounded in post-foundational political theory. He believes that populism's disruptive temporality emerges from a rupture with a sedimented historical sequence, which is equally elegant and provocative. The argument is conceptually sharp, though some claims would benefit from broader comparative empirical testing.

Part II closes with Jamie Ranger's contribution about populism, social media and the technospheric. He invokes Stiegler's "technospheric" concept to frame social media as a platform and a condition that compresses political time and amplifies populist immediacy. Taken together, Part II effectively shows that digital infrastructures do not merely transmit populism, they actively reformat its temporal logic.

Part III: Populism and Time in Latin America might be the strongest section of the volume, as the three chapters combine both historical and theoretical depth. The first chapter by Maria Esperanza Casullo draws examples from Argentina, Venezuela and Bolivia, portraying populism in Latin America as resilient, flexible and frequently institutionally corrective

---

[2] B. Moffit, *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style, and Representation* (Standford University Press 2016)

rooted. She provides an intellectual perception in rejecting the Global North's portrayal of populism as a transient deviation.[3]

Paula Biglieri and Gloria Perello's contribution on rupture and institutionalisation in Latin America adds a critical dimension to Part III by exploring populism's dual temporality. The author's attention to how populist governments reshape the public sphere complements the overall volume's temporal focus. This chapter is especially effective in showing how rupture and institutionalisation are not opposites, but mutually constitutive political processes.

Eleonora Mesquita Ceia's chapter on Brazil closes Part III. Ceia's contribution discusses the relationship between populism and constitutionalism and understands the concepts as coexisting in a complex, historically entrenched way. This provides a valuable challenge to accounts that treat populism and constitutional order as inherently incompatible.

The volume concludes with a chapter by the editor, Andy Knott, that addresses the core question of the volume: What is populism's temporal ontology? Since populism thrives in contingency, Knott left the question open. This open-ended conclusion is a strength rather that a weakness as it invites a research agenda rather than imposing a reductive synthesis.

While the volume does not extensively engage with non-Western examples, it does theorise populism and time in a rather ambitious and philosophically rich manner. Some chapters are difficult to parse without prior knowledge, as they are intellectually daring. However, that is understandable since the volume asks deep and often neglected questions beyond causes, consequences, or content, giving a chrono-political response to political disruption and democratic life, or the lack thereof. Overall, this is a significant and original edited collection whose main contribution lies in reorienting populism research towards temporality as a central analytic category.

---

[3] C. de la Torre, *The Promise and Perils of Populism: Global Perspectives* (Edinburgh University Press 2024)