

**Historical Materialism London 2022
10-13 November 2022 @ Central London**

CULTURE STREAM CFP

Deadline for abstracts: 1 August 2022

<https://conference.historicalmaterialism.org/>

In February 2022, Russia's invasion in Ukraine delivered multiple shocks to the cultural field that differed substantially from the impact of existing emergencies, including the many imperialist and extractivist wars in other parts of the world. Widely perceived as a war 'in Europe', this has been a war that challenged (a) the use of epistemological paradigms and conceptual tools that have intersected with Marxism in its analyses of states of acute emergencies defined by the loss of human life; (b) the notion of what counts as active solidarity with the oppressed and the role of culture in realising solidarity; (c) the idea that art (by which we mean practice and theory) can be 'present' during a conflict of such devastating scale, speed and trauma - a legacy of the avant-garde that had not been tested for some time.

Further challenges were observed:

The prevalence, in the 21st century, of dialogical and discursive methodologies of art making faced their limits of acceptance in a transnational art community where naïve ideas of liberalism and endless inclusivity clashed with the need to find oneself on a clearly articulated 'side'. Speaking about imperialism has been seen as too 'abstract' while the notion of the 'art community' became absurd in a context of extreme tension. Who funds art and culture - a question that had enriched cultural policy and critical theory discussions for many years - acquired new urgency but was not immune to the positionality of responses.

The interest in representational practices (photography, film, and language as such) became renewed as this was/is a war that was also executed through information, visibility and the art field's attachment to the politics of visibility - none of which escaped the power of that old thing: ideology. Likewise, an interest in non-representational practices (data, algorithms, protocols etc) has taken on a new importance as transnational digital monopolies constitute a radically new factor in this inter-imperial 'information war'.

The familiar 'fake news' and 'cancel culture' tropes that had marked the ascent of the alt right became habitual in state-led and transnational propaganda wars whereas 'fascism' and 'anti-fascism' have been appropriated and counter-appropriated in a remarkable spiralling of the subversion of political clarity. Accusations of who aestheticised what first have been flying, and even the idea of an 'aesthetics of displacement' felt like a practice of luxurious safety, given the intensity of displacement and the horrific upturning of lives. Nationalism and patriotism were speedily normalised (after decades of theoretically defended exclusion from the art world's critical internationalism). And, as expected, the necropolitical management of refugees and migrants from non-white 'cultures' has continued at the borders of the revived 'West' that believe they lead a crusade against 'evil'.

Who then owns the deadly idea of the 'clash of civilisations' and who benefits from its use and permanent resurrection? Art and culture have been led to believe that they can have an answer to everything, as the Rule No 1 of social engagement, but is this the case when it becomes impossible for the persecuted to discuss 'things' sitting in a circle of chairs safe from shelling? Is anti-communism a history or an active ideology that has shaped the art field's situated responses? What does it mean to speak *with* the persecuted rather than *for* them? Is truth positional? How to avoid a new 'left melancholy' in the sweeping counter-revolution expressed as the wreckage of commonalities? What are the lessons of a Marxist art history and of Marxist cultural critique that can prepare the resistance to the emerging status quo of tri-polar or multi-polar imperialism? What needs to be rescued and what should be left behind?

In terms of subjects and contents, the stream is open to any relevant proposal that approaches Culture (in broad and narrow terms) from Marxist perspectives. We suggest the following topics as orientations to the potential contributors, albeit this is not an exhaustive list:

- Culture in and against inter-imperialist conflict
- Political economy of the culture industry
- Propaganda, information and algorithms
- Communist and anti-fascist art practice
- Marxist art history on war and class struggle
- Liberalism in the arts

We welcome submissions for panels and individual papers. Abstracts should be under 250 word and be sent to the Historical Materialism call for papers (<https://conference.historicalmaterialism.org/>), indicating that it is a submission to the "Culture Stream". We stress that the conference will be in person. Panel chairs should be clearly indicated where appropriate.

Deadline for abstracts: 25 July 2022

For further information, any questions, or support with taking part, please email historicalmaterialism@soas.ac.uk

Please feel free to share this call with others you think might be interested in participating.

*****This year, the conference will be taking place in a particularly onerous financial context, due to an unprecedented 20,000 pound room rental rate. Thus, for this not to sink the journal and imperil any possibility of another conference in London in the future, we are calling on all comrades to be generous and to suggest any possible grant possibilities.*****