

---

# Faculty of Humanities of CU invites Professor Lisa Duggan to the Queer Film Festival

---

## Gender, Justice and Neoliberalism: Faculty of Humanities of CU invites Professor Lisa Duggan to the Queer Film Festival

During November, Mezipatra's *Queer Film Festival* came to 10 different cities across the Czech Republic to commemorate a hundred ranking films on lesbian, bisexual, transsexual and queer themes, to celebrate the LGBT community, investigate their representation in media, and to educate, debate and spread awareness of gender studies and topics. Mezipatra changed the popular event's name to Queer Film Festival after a "new decade with a change in the attribute – from gay and lesbian festival to a queer film festival. With this attribute name change we manifested what we desired since the beginnings of the festival; not to be a gay and lesbian festival only for gays and lesbians. The term queer embraces all who find the traditional gender categories too tight."

Their website claims that over ten thousand attend the festival each year: "we did not assume that it would have become the biggest queer event in the Czech Republic in few years... [Mezipatra](#) has become a natural constituent of the social dialogue concerning human diversity... It succeeded to provide the most prioritised value of all the enlightenment, openness and balance; various people meet in one space, so there is no room left for a one-sided discussion in a kind of a homoghetto". As an active feminist and allie to the LGBT movement, with an avid fascination of the boundaries and dimensions of gender and sexuality, I was keen to go along to the numerous exhibitions, workshops, lectures and films the festival had to offer when it arrived in Prague. My favourite of them all was [Professor Lisa Duggan](#)'s (New York University) eye-opening lecture entitled [Gender, Justice and Neoliberalism](#), co-organised by Faculty of Humanities of CU, which focused on her research in queer theory, the history and politics of gender, sexuality and race and the nitty-gritty of these against the backdrop of modern neoliberal society.



Duggan was funny and modest, and began by briefly explaining her work, which includes numerous acclaimed titles like *The Twilight of Equality? : Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (2003) and *Sapphic Slashers: Sex, Violence and American Modernity* (2000). Her research and subsequent lectures contribute to a momentum of worry over modern capitalism and its peaking strain on those who fall outside of the straight, white, able-bodied male model, who she says, benefits almost entirely from the current system in place. I was apprehensive that Duggan's lecture on neoliberalism's impact on equality would be similar to one I've listened to before (which was a two hour ramble on Karl Marx) but she captured the audience with a talent of being radical but balanced, using clear-cut, relatable examples, and with a progressive and analytical attitude towards change without jumping on the anarchist bandwagon.

She defined neoliberal political systems as correlative to the late 1970s/early 1980s and somewhat later (1989) in the Czech Republic; going hand in hand with the Velvet Revolution of Czechoslovakia, fall of communism and establishment of the Czech Republic. The commonality between countries practicing or experimenting with neoliberal politics during this time was modernity; post-war individualist thought that focused on civil liberties, the outright rejection of socialism after its stagnating reign over Europe, and the strong presence of conservative leaders such as Thatcher. When Duggan brought her up, I was apprehensive that she would begin an anti-Thatcher crusade in the room (in Britain I am accustomed to a fierce divide of either fanatical admiration or fanatical hatred whenever her name is uttered, and I've received the most confused looks from Brits when I explain that I'm somewhat in between) but she was refreshingly balanced and

analytical, which makes a change from being a bystander to politics students hurling abuse at each other for hours on end (tip – don't mention Thatcher at a British pub). Duggan enlightened us to the key neoliberal scholars from the 1930s onwards, the most prominent being Ayn Rand, who hit fame after the publication of *The Fountainhead* (1943) and *Atlas Shrugged* (1957), two novels that were largely responsible for making neoliberalism fashionable – she is also a heroine for atheists, rationalists, libertarians and entrepreneurs alike and was a leader in this new egotist economic philosophy and its fellowship up until its practical implementation in the late 70's. This isn't surprising seeing as her work nearly surpassed the Bible in global book sales.

Duggan made an intriguing case that oppressed groups of people were surprisingly drawn to Randianism, which she argued thoroughly and articulately, to be failing modern challenges and the needy of society, and resulting in the greatest fiscal and social inequalities ever. She presented how neoliberalism glorifies the individual, which was upheld and romanticised by Rand's writing and notorious interview personality. Duggan showed us clips of her, where she spoke inspiringly and wrote poetically of success, heroism, fantasy, rebellion, creativity- and even made neoliberalism sexy in the Hollywood film adaption of *The Fountainhead*, which grossed 2.1 Million Dollars. Despite her hardline ways, the movement inevitably attracted young people, women and members of the LGBT community, which Duggan put down to Rand's demonisation of the state and focus on anti-normality. In context, I understood this. Rand was fresh, loud, different, a breakthrough in circular politics and it's common for people to turn to such movements or outside political parties as a protest tactic. Yet, in reality, Randian neoliberalism is a masculine political alternative that Duggan claimed to be "a brutal oppression of the needy... presenting greed as a social good and depicting people as either makers or takers" and her critique of this kind of "stand-on-your-own-two-feet", anti-nanny state dogma was put perfectly, with witty metaphors: "people have been sacrificed for the fiscal sanity of neoliberal politicians, who are zombies with their socially suicidal politics. Capitalism has been historically and in its nature, immune to issues of sex, race, gender, colonialism and justice".

Duggan used relatable, recent instances of European austerity measures to justify this – cuts to women's and social services, mass privatisation, deregulation and reduced taxation of corporations, education cuts. She discussed the cross-country impact of these and referred to the daily news for us to observe the global precedence of these actions; Europe has suffered from extensive cuts and the people have responded with ongoing disorder and blame.

I agreed with her perspective on the sociological naivety and victim-blaming nature of this kind of black and white politics from my experience in the UK, where the impacts of neoliberalism are continual and largely ignored by both Labour and the Conservatives, the two leading political parties in Westminster who dominate UK stateship in a pendulum manner, wastefully spending debate time on reckless attacks at each other, thus losing scope on the crucial issues – how our privatised travel and heating are increasingly extortionate, previously free services such as mental health counselors now rely on patient's donations, youth unemployment is at an all-time high, small family-run businesses cease to exist in many areas, charities and services are financially choking, the high street is crushed by transnational corporations and drastic cuts have been imposed on councils, the police and NHS, causing them to be understaffed and overworked. Enormous privatisation measures have taken hold of services (most recently being our Royal Mail) and frighteningly on our educational institutions too. Student fees have been trebled and meanwhile, there's dwindling electoral turnout and participation yet frequent protests and occasional unrest (the most devastating being the 2011 London riots) plus flourishing Islamophobia and xenophobia stemming somewhat from the tabloids tendency to scapegoat migrants and Muslims for it all. Furthermore, Duggan highlighted, it is the needy of society who have suffering the brunt of this and it is neoliberalism's insistency on the individual and rejection of society that ignores the diversity and hierarchy of it; therefore failing to facilitate special rights and representation, and failing again to recognise any importance in them at all.

Duggan concluded this failure of neoliberal governments to be the driving cause for lack of mainstream political interest, with people's political energy instead being channeled into "outside" organisations like *Occupy*, protests, liberation movements like feminism and LGBT rights, which provide in their nature, radical democracy and an alternative voice – and I cling to her final motivating point that these organisations of misrepresented people are the real driving force of pressure, justice, activity and change.

During the question and answer session that followed, the audience was lively, diverse and inquisitive with their questions to Duggan, which I found to be a refreshing change from the dialogue you'll come across when discussing liberation topics in a non-specified setting – my favourite being "what about men's rights" from my experience as a woman who likes to talk about women's rights. Similarly, you'll find sentences like "what about Straight Pride" coming out of people's mouths in 2013 (sigh). So what I enjoyed so thoroughly and notably during her lecture was the openness and safeness of the environment that allowed us to delve deep into the core fundamentals of gender and sexuality. In other words – the things that so desperately need to be said but often aren't and which can be such surprisingly touchy and divisive topics in everyday public and political discourse that you have to normally sugarcoat them in order for anyone to willingly taste what it's all about. Here, there was a comfortable and unified atmosphere, and an amazing energy of change.

All in all, the festival was an outstanding, well organised success with all credit going to the dedicated volunteers, organisers and lecturers, who accomplished a broad debate, unifying many different people with revolutionary ideas. Lisa Duggan's enlightening lecture exemplified just why such events are so meaningful and necessary, and if you turn on the news, I hope you'll agree.

**Poppy Gerrard-Abbott** is an Erasmus student studying BA Humanities at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University and her home university is the University of Essex in England. She chose to write for the iForum to build on her journalism skills and meet other aspiring journalists; to grow closer to the social and creative life of Charles University and to learn more about Czech



culture and life in Prague through attending local events and researching Czech issues and current affairs.

Poppy saw the iForum as an exciting opportunity to pursue her interests in politics, culture and history whilst meeting other Erasmus students. She thinks it's a very worthwhile and fun experience that has brought some exciting opportunities her way, extended her writing skills and her knowledge of the Czech Republic, and hopes Charles University continues to offer such placements to future students.