

NYU-PKU-Univ. of Tokyo-ANU Winter Institute, Jan 6-10, 2020 New York

## **Beyond Identity Politics: Global Challenges and Humanistic Responses**

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### **Preamble**

The organizers of the NYU Winter Institute 2020 seek to critically examine our current global cultural-political situation by plainly and provocatively characterizing it in the following way: The presumptions of a stable, even foundational Subject—say, of reason and public discourse—are now often challenged on two fronts: On the one hand, one witnesses the continued and progressive development of identitarian politics played out along the lines of demands for equal rights, recognition, and respect by minorities vis-à-vis the social-cultural mainstream of advanced, cosmopolitan civil society. On the other hand, the entire world as a whole seems to be rapidly sucked into and divided by rising or resurging "group politics" of racial, class, religious, tribal or "civilizational" or varieties. We are interested in exploring an intellectual and discursive path out of this dilemma by striving to think "beyond identity politics"—not by escaping from it, but by confronting the deep-seated and more complex issues that often cause "identity politics" as we know it, at both micro- and macro-levels, to arrive at ideological impasses and discursive dead-ends that can render it an unproductive and even uninteresting vehicle for analysis and expression.

To that end, and to take advantage of the truly international and multi-disciplinary platform offered by the Winter Institute, we would like to call on colleagues and students to participate in a week-long discussion this January at NYU's Washington Square Campus. We hope to bring together different perspectives, voices and concerns resulting from different experiences, expertise, and institutional frames to converge on a sustained critical reflection on identity and identity politics as a cultural, representational, and ideological complex of realities and symptoms. Our shared common points of departure are humanistic in nature, referring not only to the central disciplines in the humanities that have been undergoing intensified attack or marginalization, but also to the very concept of the human as it is rooted in different social norms, cultural imaginations, and collective experiences. These inevitably inform a necessarily critical and antagonistic stance toward the status quo and its rhetorical reinforcements often found in the main players in the global ideological arena, such as liberalism, nationalism, conservatism, radicalism, religious fundamentalism, and so forth. We may all agree that the underpinning questions and challenges posed to us as humanists at this juncture appear to be global and existential in nature, having to do with the twin forces of the capitalist market and the persistent nation-state, as well as with the accelerating advancement of technology threatening to bring about a point of no return. It appears sensible to us to start with reexamining the logic of the intensity of human groupings and divisions around the more particular phenomenon of identity formation as we embark on rethinking and reformulating the question of "what it is to be human" vis-à-vis the new planetary conditions of possibility and impasse.