

**CENTRE FOR STUDIES IN SOCIAL SCIENCES, CALCUTTA,
R-1 BAISHNABGHATA PATULI,
KOLKATA 700094**

GENERAL SEMINAR

Stefan Jonsson

Professor of Ethnic studies, Institute for Research on Migration, Ethnicity and Society
(REMESO), Linköping University, Sweden

“Crowds and Democracy: Understanding the Shapelessness of German Collectives”

It is commonly held that the 1920s was the era of the crowd. While this is certainly true, it is usually not recognized that crowds were of differing kinds. The study of interwar ideas of ‘the masses’ has often been reduced to a study of fascism, just as fascism has often been explained as a crowd phenomenon. But to enter the cultural landscape of interwar Germany and Austria is to encounter competing representations of the people and the masses, and this indicates a lack of consensus concerning the right way to represent the social body. No single system of representation enjoys broad legitimacy. Hence the uncanny ambiguity of the Weimar masses. They are present in every pore of society but lack Gestalt. An understanding of this phenomenon cannot limit itself to the explicit theories of crowd behavior and mass society formulated in the period. Rather, it must mine the cultural and aesthetic sphere, in which the masses were addressed through the new “mass media,” and new forms of art, cinema, architecture, literature, and theater. This talk will propose a concept of representation (first developed in my previous book *A Brief History of the Masses*) that relates aesthetic representations of society to political ones. Such a perspective will demonstrate that ‘the masses’ reveal the eternal problem of democracy, as pertinent today as it was in interwar Europe. Buried inside each idea of the mass is not necessarily a fascist, communist, or totalitarian kernel, but simply an idea on how to *represent* society, how to channel socially significant passions into adequate political, cultural, and aesthetic forms. Some final remarks will relate this history to current emergences of democratic mass movements and social unrest.

Date: Monday, 24th April, 2017, 3 – 5 pm
Venue: CSSSC’s Seminar Room, Patuli Campus

Trina Nileena Banerjee
(Convener, Seminar Committee)

All are welcome to attend.