

Europe and Beyond:
Boundaries, Barriers and Belonging



Abstract Book

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The Artistic Precariat: Commodification and Counter- Movements

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The paper investigates the formation of an 'artistic precariat' in Portugal and Brazil, through the analysis of the double movement of work commodification in the artistic sector and the struggles for decommodification through different dynamics of collective organization and action, inspired by Polanyi's seminal work (1944) and by Wright's emancipatory social science (2010). The research design involved the comparative analysis of theatre collectives in Portugal and Brazil based on historical, statistical and documentary sources in order to contextualize the artistic work in both countries; conducting a survey of theatre collectives in order to map their working conditions, organizational structure and collective action dynamics; interviews and participant observation to deepen two empirical cases. The research results corroborate the literature that highlights the artistic work as precursor of contemporary forms of work hyper-flexibilization. However, despite their strong precariousness and lack of representation in traditional forms of workers' collective organization (unions), the research has also identified multiple resistances among artist-workers who envisage other forms of collective action and utopian visions for making a better world. On the one hand, the counter-movements of the artistic precariat are restrained by the submission of national regimes to the constraints of global capitalism. On the other hand, it is possible to observe experiences where they join forces in their social struggles that perhaps are not enough to make a new 'great transformation', but contain elements of resistance with a transformative potential.

Spain: One Decade Through the Looking Glass

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Spain went into the global financial crisis as the posterchild of European neoliberalism and came out on the other side as one of its most resounding failures. For a decade now, the country has been afflicted by multiple convulsive crises. After the implosion of the most destructive property bubble to date, the working class has been ravaged by the highest levels of unemployment in the continent and by brutal austerity cuts. The political class has been tormented by permanent corruption scandals that have resulted in the break-up of the old party system. The constitutional order inaugurated by the death of Franco has undergone a severe legitimacy crisis, under fire by radical anti-austerity movements and by regional separatism in Catalonia. Until recently, Spain was the only major European country to escape the spectre of the far right

– not anymore. The point of this paper is to make sense of this events from a Marxist political economy perspective, charting how the political turbulence of the last decade is traversed by the crisis of Spanish neoliberal capitalism. The paper traces how the collapse of a financialised residential apparatus, underpinned by the now familiar trade-off between mortgage-backed debt and asset-price speculation, has brought down two central pillars of the Spanish social order: (1) the clientelist symbiosis between the political elite and construction capital, and (2) the ideological consensus of 1978, which had previously succeeded in suspending the historic tension between a revolutionary left and a reactionary right.

RN06_10 | The Political Economy of Neoliberal Transformations

Theorizing Cities and Neoliberalism: Accounting for Systemic vs. Contingent Aspects of Neoliberal Transformations

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Over the past several decades, a great deal of urban studies and political geography research has touched upon the different ways in which cities have been impacted by and reconfigured under neoliberalization. A number of endeavors, particularly in recent years, have also tackled specific aspects of urban neoliberalization from an IPE perspective. This has produced a rich and diverse body of scholarship that has immensely advanced our understanding of present-day urban transformations. At the same time, this literature has made it increasingly difficult to speak of neoliberalism in a unified sense, due to the very diverse ways in which it is manifested. I argue that, in order to establish a comprehensive, comparative understanding of neoliberalization of cities, it is necessary to account both for the systemic and the contingent ways in which neoliberalism is articulated. In this paper, I therefore focus on the theoretical and methodological aspects of studying the neoliberalization of cities. I build on existing contributions in critical IPE literature to expand the understanding of neoliberalism as a process, to situate its various stages in time and to investigate the role of cities in its articulation. In particular, I draw on the French Regulation school and its understanding of institutions, which I embed within Margaret Archer's morphogenetic approach and its conception of the dynamic interplay between structure and agency. In this way, I argue that it becomes possible to identify both the systemic aspects of neoliberalism (that allow us to talk about it as a unified mechanism) and the contingencies that arise depending on the city (based on various path-dependencies and geographical and institutional specificities).

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