

Neoliberalism, spirituality and personal development

The first series of classes will focus on the concept of neoliberalism. In doing so, we will start by placing it in the larger debates around ideology which will map the most relevant perspectives on ideological processes while also providing a new analytical distinction to approach them. Being often used and misunderstood in part because of its vagueness, neoliberalism will be defined not only as an explicit ideological construct usually combining liberal (like the superiority of free markets over state intervention) and conservative ideas (like the emphasis put on “law and order”), but also as an implicit one shaping the level of our common-sense beliefs (including our own subjectivity, or our relationship with the outer world). During these presentations, we will also look at the way neoliberalism has been implemented in Central and Eastern Europe after 1989 by investigating the impact of neoliberal ideas on economic, cultural, and political policies and/or discourses. This case study will be supplemented by a more in-depth analysis of the progressive imposition of neoliberalism in Romanian society after the collapse of the communist regime. In the last part of this series of presentations, we will also discuss the growing signs (state intervention into economy, rising populist movements etc.) of a post-neoliberal world with examples being mostly provided from Central and Eastern European countries.

The second series of classes focus on the booming field of personal and spiritual development programs that are becoming very popular within the emerging middle class from Romania. We analyze the various forms of alternative spiritualities and their embedding in different professional fields in relation to the structural transformation of the labor market taking place in Romania after the financial crisis of 2008/2009. We are interested in the transformations taking place in the fitness industry, medicine, psychotherapy and management where we can see the articulation of a new paradigm centered on the inner power of the self. We argue that this generates the proximities for the formation of a radical entrepreneurial subjectivity that is tuned to the recent capitalist transformations of an economic environment centered on competitiveness, creative work and flexibility. Special attention will be given to the changes in industrial relations and labor market in Romania during the past two decades and we will explore the neoliberal socialization devices that have emerged after the economic crisis and the way they offer plausibility and legitimacy to the vast economic transformations that took place in this region. By using the 'Varieties of Capitalism' approach we will analyze the specific forms of disembedded neoliberalism that has been institutionalized in Romania and the precarisation of the workforce through labor market deregulations, short-term contracts and emphasis on flexibility and employability of workers. Our presentations will look at how within these programs innovative technologies of the self are developed that emphasize creativity, wellbeing and a new understanding of subjective interiority that discovers in itself the resources needed to live within a spiritualized ontology of the present. We argue that this produces the required proximities for the formation of a radical neoliberal entrepreneurial subjectivity that is tuned to the recent capitalist transformations of an economic environment centered on competitiveness, creative work and enhanced productivity. In this context we will analyze different emancipatory politics and alternatives to neo-liberalism when it comes to socializing the self.