

Can the Precariat Sing? Standing in Lotman's Light of Cultural Semiotics

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Abstract

In 2016, Standing already realizes that what he considered a class-in-the-making in 2011, 'the precariat', is already showing signs of class consolidation, which is the precondition of political activism. The question that Standing's observation raises is, has the precariat then finally been able to identify itself as a cultural unit? This paper is a theoretical reflection on that possibility. Has the Indian precariat assented on its signs, identified its forms, concentrated its expressions? In other words, is there any way for a semiotic identification of a 'precariat culture'. To answer this question, the article brings Standing in play with Yuri Lotman's idea of the cultural 'semiosphere', which has grown to be the most widely accepted proposition from the Tartu-Moscow school of semiotics because of its trans-disciplinary significance. After theorizing the possibility of a precariat semiosphere, the article looks at how the state and the corporate bodies try to appropriate precariat voice by importing materials from external semiotic spaces, creating a cultural constraint. Yet, culture also being a liberation, we see how new forms are being used by the precariat to define its cultural identity and demarcate the threshold of its semiosphere. Indian rap music is specifically presented as one of the many possible ways through which the precariat is successfully expressing itself culturally.

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