

Teurlings, Jan, University of Amsterdam, Netherlands

The Hard Road to Renewal: A Proposal for Cultural Studies in a New Decade

In this paper, I analyse and contextualise the structuralist-Gramscian cultural studies project of the 1970s and 1980s as a response to a particular political situation, namely the rise and ascendancy of neoliberalism and the authoritarian populist style that enabled the latter. “Cultural Studies” was the result of a difficult balancing act between a critique of Marxism and its relentless denouncement of popular culture, and an attempt to grasp how the conservative movement had become hegemonic. Indeed, it was precisely the concept of hegemony that served as a bridge between both aspects of the cultural studies project.

Contemporary cultural studies has no such ambitions, although the tasks at hand are urgent. After 40 years neoliberalism seems to have lost its stronghold on the public imagination, yet no coherent answer has come from cultural studies scholars to answer that primordial question of all intellectual activity: what is going on? In this paper, I argue that cultural studies should renew its commitment to Marxism if it wants to get a grip on the nexus between politics and contemporary media culture. More specifically, I argue that a renewed attention to questions of political economy is an important resource for a renewed cultural studies project in the new millennium.