

British Marxism and Cultural Studies Today

Call for Contributions

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In our field of cultural studies – especially as practised in Germany – there has been a long trend of foregrounding issues of fictional or media representation, of charting diverse discursive formations, of bringing into view and validating more and more plural and conflicting identities. Arguably, there is, as Graeme Turner puts it in his *What's Become of Cultural Studies?*, a preponderance of “sophisticated textual analyses in the service of identity politics”. While producing important and valuable results, such a persistent focus may come at the expense of more material concerns of inquiry, analyses of the elements of ‘production’ and ‘regulation’ in what Paul du Gay *et al.* call the “circuit of culture”; investigations into the distribution of economic resources, of who owns and controls the institutions of economy, society, and culture; and of how such control might work in detail. This might be especially problematic given the ever-growing gap between the rich and the poor in British society, increasing social injustice and economic (self)exploitation, the exclusion of working-class perspectives and political alternatives to capitalism from mainstream politics and media. After Thatcher, New Labour, the ‘Financial Crisis’, Austerity – and looking at the current predilections within our field – we feel that it is high time to engage with material conditions, issues of class and social inequality again, and return to some of the Marx, Marxism, and political economy that informed cultural studies at its inception.

In a special issue of *JSBC*, we suggest doing so by turning to some prominent thoughts and thinkers of 20th-century British Marxism, like E.P. Thompson, Ralph Miliband and others, asking about their continuing relevance (or otherwise), in theoretical as well as practical terms, for 21st-century analyses of capitalist culture and anti-capitalist political protest and projects. Are Thompson’s aim of rescuing ordinary people’s political agency from middle-class bias and the ‘condescension of posterity’ and Miliband’s analysis of the limits of parliamentary socialism in the straitjacket of the (British) capitalist state still helpful for leftwing political-academic work today? Both thinkers emphasised the potential of people’s collective agency to disturb the business of politics understood and practised merely as the administration of what is.

While their considerations on political agency beyond institutional politics have been taken up by others and transferred and adapted to new areas such as feminism, anti-racism, environmentalism, (sub)cultural politics, in this issue of *JSBC*, we would like to keep a particular focus on class politics, identifying and discussing examples and models of collective agency that confront and have the potential to transform political processes, organisations, institutions, and power structures in the UK (and beyond).

This is a tentative (and far from exhaustive) list of possible topics for contributions:

- state theory, political economy, and political agency

- levers of change in (historical or contemporary) conjunctures of capitalist crises
- prefigurative politics and their transformative potential
- the relationship of social movements and political parties
- the relationship of social movements and the 'broader public'/'ordinary people'
- social movements and class (and gender, sexuality, ethnicity)
- the relevant 'legacies' of Marxist thinkers such as E.P. Thompson, Ralph Miliband, Mary McIntosh, A. Sivanandan, Ted Benton etc.
- the relationship of 20th-century British Marxism and current forms of black Marxism, Marxist environmentalism, Marxist feminism etc.
- the current place of Marxism in cultural studies
- reflections on 'the state' and/or on social history in cultural studies
- politics, social movements, and cultural studies

Please submit abstracts of 400-500 words to Sebastian Berg (sebastian.berg@rub.de) and/or Claus-Ulrich Viol (claus-ulrich.viol@rub.de) by 17 July 2024. Finished articles (5,000 words) will be due by 1 November 2024.