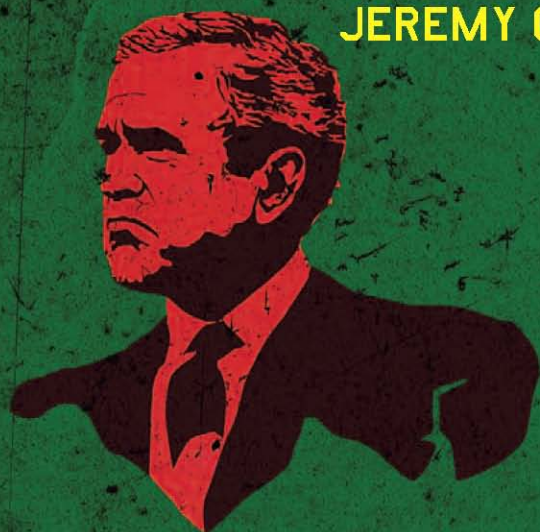




ANTICAPITALISM AND CULTURE

RADICAL THEORY AND
POPULAR POLITICS

JEREMY GILBERT



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Contents

Acknowledgements	vii
Introduction	1
1 A Political History of Cultural Studies, Part One: The Post-War Years	11
2 A Political History of Cultural Studies, Part Two: The Politics of Defeat	41
3 Another World is Possible: The Anti-Capitalist Movement	75
4 (Anti)Capitalism and Culture	107
5 Ideas in Action: Rhizomatics, Radical Democracy and the Power of the Multitude	135
6 Mapping the Territory: Prospects for Resistance in the Neoliberal Conjuncture	169
7 Beyond the Activist Imaginary: Nomadic Strategies for the New Partisans	203
Conclusion—Liberating the Collective	237
Bibliography	241
Index	255

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Introduction

This book tries to stage a dialogue between the histories, concerns and abstract ideas of cultural studies and of the anti-capitalist movement. By the anti-capitalist movement, I mean primarily the World Social Forum and the campaigns, projects, struggles and ideas connected to it.

There are good reasons for wanting to stage such a dialogue because cultural studies and the anti-capitalist movement have some deep affinities. The both have their intellectual and spiritual roots in the radical movements of the twentieth century, they both tend to be informed by egalitarian, pluralist and libertarian critiques of contemporary societies, and they are both interested in the multifarious forms of contemporary and historical power relationships.

Here is a brief outline of what follows.

The first two chapters of the book make up a partial, idiosyncratic, political history of cultural studies, whose argument runs something like this: cultural studies began life as a self-consciously radical discipline which was influenced by its proximity to, and its dynamic relationship with, the politics of the British labour movement. Cultural studies wasn't, in itself, a revolutionary political project or a substitute for any other kind of political activism, but it tried to look at issues like literature, social history, popular culture and political change as all connected to each other, and it attempted to look at them all from the point of view of an understanding of society and a set of values broadly derived from the traditions of the workers' movement. At the same time, it always sought to generate new insights into the present and historical workings of culture and power that might challenge or transform some of the received assumptions of the labour movement. In particular, cultural studies emerged from the concerns of one strand within that movement, the so-called New Left. As it evolved during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, most research in cultural studies continued to be engaged with those concerns. At the same time, the ideas and priorities of the New Left themselves also evolved. Most importantly, the emergence (or re-emergence) of movements such as feminism, anti-racism and gay liberation brought new sets of concerns and priorities. In particular, these movements brought to light new forms of power relationships which cultural studies scholars had to take into account in their various investigations, but they also brought new risks and problems for the political Left which many of those scholars sought to confront. These investigations within cultural studies intersected with a much wider theoretical interrogation of left thought, which the chapter outlines under the heading of the anti-essentialist turn.