

Bernard Eric Jensen  
Katherine O'Doherty Jensen

CULTURAL MATERIALISM AS SOCIAL THEORY

A discussion paper

Oplæg til et flerfagligt seminar om  
Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 1977  
ved Københavns Universitet, Amager, 1979.

To understand Marxism and Literature and to appropriate its many insights is in no way an easy task. We fear that many an interested reader may well give up the endeavour to come to terms with this book because of its condensed style, lexicographical structure and intricate lines of argument. Nonetheless, it is such a stimulating and fascinating study that there are many good reasons, in our judgement, for making a serious effort to analyse its contents in depth. We admire, for instance, the whole intellectual style of work which Raymond Williams displays in this study. It is a style in which rather definite political and intellectual commitments are blended with a deliberate effort to maintain an open and explorative frame of mind with regard to the fundamental issues at stake. He is extremely critical at times of other available positions. Yet, he generally seeks to indicate the social conditions of the emergence of such positions in order to point out how they represent defensible, or at least plausible, viewpoints under specific historical circumstances. Nor does this openness result in the kind of unprincipled thinking that seeks an easy compromise rather than face the unresolved tensions which are usually involved in prolonged controversy. As an intellectual he distances himself from the social and intellectual attitudes of 'the elect and saved' so often prevalent on the Left and instead demonstrates a willingness to make himself vulnerable by engaging in serious debate with those who hold positions which radically diverge from his own. Another good reason for studying Marxism and Literature is that it represents the culmination of a painstaking and determined effort to work out a new and more adequate theory of culture. This project has been under way since, at least, the early 50's. It has been guided by both scholarly and political commitments. On the one hand, it was considered crucial that a theoretical account of cultural process would be able to do justice to his own accumulated experiences as a scholar engaged in empirical historical research. On the other, a vital moving force behind the project was the idea that a new and better theory of culture could be of practical assistance to those who wanted to intervene actively in the cultural production and cultural politics of contemporary society.

Marxism and Literature is a text which certainly demands detailed interpretative analysis. The exposition of concepts is made largely by way of commentary upon the history of their usage. To pin down the meaning of a particular concept, therefore, calls for the re-reading of a chapter rather than reference to some systematic statement

in which an argument is summarised. Furthermore, the argument moves forward throughout the book such that later chapters provide a context for grasping the fuller implications of earlier arguments. When one reaches the exposition of 'hegemony', for instance, the tenth chapter in a series of key concepts, one realises that the concept has been employed in an indirect manner in earlier chapters. The lexicographical structure supplied by the table of contents therefore can be misleading in an initial reading of the book. Furthermore, the argument itself is condensed and does not include much exemplification. The reader interested in exemplification of particular concepts is referred to Williams' earlier works. Our reading and re-reading of Marxism and Literature has generated a conflicting set of reactions and responses, from enthusiasm to frustration, dominated perhaps by a sense of puzzlement. We have found his critique of alternative positions and many of his innovatory insights both inspiring and worthwhile. Yet, at the same time, we have found it most difficult to identify some essential structuring core in Williams' position or, to locate his position in relation to other available approaches to social theory. Surveying the debate that Williams' theory of culture has generated, we have found that we are far from alone in having these difficulties. So, since our analysis has been inspired positively as well as negatively by this debate, we will begin with a short summing up of the main viewpoints in this ongoing debate.

One of the major contributions to this debate was E. P. Thompson's review of The Long Revolution (1961), a study that continues to play a central role in the discussion of Williams' cultural theory. Although he named Williams our best man in the New Left and saluted his courage, the main part of the review was devoted to a strongly worded and detailed criticism of the conceptions of history and culture that Williams had put forward. The central ambiguity in this cultural theory was seen as concerning two radically different and conflicting conceptions of historical process. Williams had not, Thompson claimed, finally resolved whether one should say: history happened like that (de-personalisation of social forces), or, men have made history in this way (active process). The ambiguity was seen as stemming in part from a crucial weakness in his definition of culture. Williams had defined culture as a whole way of life and not, as Thompson wanted, as a whole way of struggle. This had led to an overemphasis on common meanings and values, historical process

being conceived consequently mainly in growth terms. It was not able to account adequately, therefore, for the deep-rooted conflicts and class divisions in society, nor for the actual functions of power and ideology in social life (1). A somewhat modified version of this line of criticism re-appeared in Michael Green's study, 1974. Williams was presented here as more or less the founder of cultural studies in Britain. Yet, the main contention of this study was: there is real uncertainty about his theory of culture because it is marred by inconsistencies and actually oscillates between a liberal (co-existence) and a Marxist (conflict) model of society. This ambiguity and weakness was seen mainly as stemming from William's attempt to make a theory of communications the pivotal foundation of his theory of social relationships.

The debate was then continued in New Left Review. In 1976 Terry Eagleton, one of Williams' former students and collaborators, published a very harshly worded and astringent critique, writing now from a position associated with an anti-humanist (Althusserian) marxism. He interpreted Williams' cultural theory as being closely interlinked with his reformist populism in politics. His theoretical work was criticised moreover for relying on personal and lived experience and for resulting in an idealist and over-subjectivised conception of society and politics. Williams had placed human meaning and values on a par with material production, it was claimed, and the consequences were a conflation of productive modes, social relations and ideology as well as the abolition of any hierarchy of priorities in social process. In a rejoinder Anthony Barnett, a member of the editorial board of New Left Review, seriously queried central points in Eagleton's political and theoretical critique. To view Williams as an exponent of reformist populism, Barnett argued, was not at all justified, rather it represented an expression of political over-confidence on Eagleton's part. Instead, his politics were to be understood as a form of culturalism - a strategy of socialist politics parallel to economism. With regard to his theory, Barnett pointed out that there was no available standard against which to judge Williams. In contrast to Eagleton, he gave positive emphasis to the fact that Williams had produced unparalleled materialist analyses of actual cultural practices. On this background, his main conclusion was that Williams' cultural theory represented a rather unique combination of idealist-subjectivist and materialist approaches. (2) An assessment very different from the aforementioned was put forward

in Michael Merrill's recent article in Radical History Review. According to Merrill, Williams is the key figure of the English marxist tradition and has succeeded in developing a genuinely alternative marxist position. Merrill sought to clarify the nature of this position by contrasting it with structuralist forms of marxism and liberal forms of empiricism. Williams' main achievements were seen in terms of his having thoroughly broken away from the subject-object dichotomy as well as from conceptions of consciousness and material production as relatively autonomous. This had resulted in a new understanding of the indissoluble unity of conscious and material reality. Moreover, in his treatment of social and historical process equal emphasis was now being given to the constitutive actions of individuals and to the trans-individual properties of the constituted process. (3)

It is no straightforward task, as the ongoing debate clearly indicates, to identify the nature or type of cultural theory that Williams is in the course of developing. Perhaps the only point on which agreement has been reached is the importance of Williams' work. The frames of reference within which his critics have assessed this work have differed, and not all of them in our view have constituted fruitful points of departure. Eagleton's and Barnett's use of the idealist-materialist dichotomy as their central frame of reference has not furthered fruitful debate in that neither of them have made any attempt to define or defend what they understand by these terms. It is likely, moreover, that if either of them did explicate what they understand by materialism in the context of social theory, Williams would challenge their positions on the grounds that their understanding of social and cultural process is not sufficiently materialist (Cf. NMB, 88-89). To make this point does not in itself imply a rejection of the need to analyse Williams' understanding of materialism. On the contrary, it merely acknowledges as historical fact the absence of any fixed authoritative norm for judging the nature of materialism. Nor does the use of the conflict versus consensus models of society as a frame of reference, such as Thompson and Green have employed, constitute an adequate starting point for the characterisation of Williams' position. In our judgment, this is a frame of reference that can highlight some but not all of the central dimensions of his cultural theory. In contrast to these assessments of Williams' work, our starting point assumes that cultural materialism is not a position that can be fitted with any ease into available classifications of social theory. As an alternative strategy,

we will attempt, firstly, to encircle Williams' position by identifying some of its most central underlying guide-lines (Leitfaden). Secondly, we will then attempt to locate this position in relation to available classifications of some central conflicting tendencies in social theory. Finally, the strengths as well as limitations of cultural materialism will be taken up for discussion.

Reading Marxism and Literature it soon becomes apparent that Williams has been guided by definite ideas about what he wished to avoid and to achieve while working out his conception of cultural materialism. On the one hand, he wanted to avoid what he judged to be a series of pitfalls in available theory: objectivism, subjectivism, reductionism, economism, reflection theory, to mention only the most obvious. On the other hand, his proposed cultural theory has also sought to achieve a set of positive goals in the sense of taking account of and doing justice to: the constitutive nature of consciousness and language, the material and social nature of practice, the sociality, individuality and creativity of man, the specificity, complexity and objectivity of social process, and the forms of subordination and domination in social life. In singling out the main guide-lines we are only attempting to identify his most decisive ideas and principles as a way of encircling the core of his position.

### Notion of material

Since Williams defines his own position as cultural materialism and sees it as an attempt to develop and transform the materialist tradition, his notion of 'material' must be considered one of the most central guide-lines informing his approach to cultural theory. It may be helpful initially to note his general relationship to existing materialist traditions. Whereas his position has been worked out in explicit opposition to central tenets of mechanical, reductive and dialectical materialism, he understands his own work as a development of historical materialism. Yet, this allegiance is not to historical materialism conceived as a relatively fixed system of categories or as a general system of explanation. As far as Williams is concerned, historical materialism can only claim to be "a body of demonstrable theory and practice, of method and evidence" (PM, 16). However, when one seeks to determine precisely what he means by the term 'material', interpretative difficulties arise. He does not employ this term and its derivatives 'materialism', 'materiality' and 'materialization' in a wholly univocal way.

When he speaks of language (signification) as a practical material activity (ML, 38), of the materiality of works of art (ML, 162) or of art work as a material process (PM, 10), the terms 'material' and 'materiality' serve a definite function. They are used to underscore some specific and related points. In the case of language, he wants to emphasise that its physical dimensions, the creation and re-production of sounds, movements, shapes, as well as the formal component signs are inherent and constitutive elements of language use. In the case of art, he wants to emphasise first, that it is always, although in different ways, an immediate material process in the sense of working on and with physical material and, second, that rhythms, colours and shapes in art are to be understood as intrinsically related to biological processes. Moreover, he also wants to point to the fundamental importance of the process of objectification (materialization) in language and art - that is, the manner in which human consciousness and experience achieves a relatively durable material organization (Cf. ML, 62). In these instances the term 'material' and its derivatives are used as synonyms for 'physical' and/or 'biological'. This usage accords fully with his general contention that the inherent physical and biological conditions of human life

should be understood as central and decisive elements in any fully materialist mode of analysis (PM, 7).

However, it is also clear that Williams by no means would want to commit himself to the reductive view that a fully materialist account of cultural and social process regards no more than the physical and biological properties of these processes. When, for instance, he speaks of consciousness as an integral and inseparable part of human material social process (ML, 59-62), of the material production of social, political and cultural order/hegemony (ML, 93, 110), or, of his own position as cultural materialism, it is quite clear that the term 'material' and its derivatives in these cases are employed in some far more inclusive sense than the physical and biological. It is not easy, however, to determine their precise meaning. There can be little doubt that one of his central concerns is to reject the various attempts which have been made to understand human consciousness and signification as mere epiphenomena of physical-biological processes or social and cultural order as a mere reflection of existing real relations of economic production. In the first of these cases therefore, he wants to assert that human consciousness and signification are real intervening activities in historical process - activities that, although conditioned by physical and physiological processes, are not reducible to such processes. In the second case, he wants to emphasise that it is the hegemony understood as a whole body of practices and expectations which shapes in intricate ways the lived system of meanings and values and hence both the sense of reality for most people living in a society as well as the actual type of society which thereby is maintained. In these instances, therefore the term 'material' and its derivatives are employed to emphasise that some of the central objects of analysis (consciousness, language, hegemony) are in no way mere epiphenomena but have a full reality status.

Williams appears to be engaged in a difficult struggle to find precise and adequate terms that can express his insights into the shortcomings of traditional materialist terminologies and, at the same time, enable him to avoid an actual break with this tradition. On occasions, he seeks to resolve this difficulty in ways that seem to beg the question. Since the reference of the term 'material' is to physical-biological properties on the one hand, and to reality on the other, he can opt for constructions where he speaks of degrees of

materiality without wanting thereby to imply that degrees of materiality are the equivalent of degrees of real. Complex human activities such as interaction, imagination, emotion and abstract thought are for instance classified as material, yet of a less manifestly material kind (ML, 165). Here, he is obviously avoiding the alternative, disjunctive terminology of spiritual in contrast to material (ML, 162). This avoidance is justified in itself. Yet, the general implication is that he can only describe what he considers to be many of the most intense and significant forms of human experience in a reductive way because, so far, he has not found or invented a general term to describe what, so to speak, there is more of in the less manifestly material human activities.

Although it cannot be said that Williams' notion of material has been fully clarified as yet, its central functions in his present cultural and social theory are nonetheless clear. In Marxism and Literature the primary function of the term 'material' in its reference to the 'physical' is to achieve a fairly radical shift of emphasis in the understanding of language and art. It is worth noting here that the insight into cultural production as itself being inherently material (physical) first became wholly thematic for Williams at a relatively late stage (PL, 139). When cultural production - with a key phrase of Marxism and Literature - is called material social practice, Williams now wants to emphasise as strongly as possible that cultural analysis must never leave the fact out of account that cultural production always involves, though in different ways, work on and with physical objects. Consequently, to grasp the inherent physical dimensions of cultural production is not to be viewed as a secondary affair; it represents one of the fundamental tasks of any adequate forms of cultural theory and cultural history.

The notion of material, however, also serves another important function. In questioning the adequacy of many traditional tenets of materialism, Williams has recently pointed to the need to acknowledge what he has called "the changing materialist content of materialism" (PM, 17). It is also very important, in our judgement, to understand Marxism and Literature in this perspective. When the term 'material' is employed with the more extended meaning of 'not epiphenomenal, but real', it should probably be interpreted as his deliberate attempt to contribute to changes in the reality definitions of materialism. To a significant extent, this contribution consists in an attempt to make insights, emphases and perspectives, that from

traditional materialist positions are often considered either 'anti-materialist' or 'idealist', integral elements in his own conception of cultural materialism. He can do so because he is neither employing the distinction of essence and appearance nor operating with traditional materialist notions of primacy (matter over mind, economy over politics and culture) but is mainly working with a notion of constitutive.

### Notion of constitutive

Although the concepts 'appearance' and 'essence' are not employed as technical terms in Williams' cultural theory, a central meaning of essence is retained through the use of the term 'constitutive'. This term plays a decisive role in the key lines of argument in Marxism and Literature but it is never fully clarified by way of explicit definition. For this reason we think it is necessary to analyse and explicate the meaning of 'constitutive' prior to an exposition of its central functions in Williams' cultural materialism. To understand 'constitutive' in its full sense two distinct, yet interrelated meanings of the verb 'constitute' have to be grasped. First, to constitute states that something is a necessary part or an integral component of something else, and its noun form is then 'constituent'. In this sense the term 'constitutive' is a relational one. Relations are constitutive precisely insofar as they are essential dimensions of the entities/activities which they relate, whereas non-constitutive relations can undergo change without this involving changes in the related entities/activities. This meaning of constitutive can also be expressed through the use of such terms as indissoluble, inseparable, inherent, essential, intrinsic. Second, to constitute also means to make, form, construct, and its noun form is then 'constitution'. In this sense 'constitutive' refers to activity and its meaning is very similar to generative, productive. It is especially in the analysis of activity and process that the two meanings of 'constitutive' are brought together in the dual sense of a necessary component and a generative principle. For instance, to assert that language is constitutive of social relations means that the set of activities which can be described as language-use are integral components of, as well as generative of, human social relations. To assert that language and social relations are reciprocally constitutive is to further state that social relations are integral components of situations of language-use as well as being generative of the product, a particular language. The notion 'constitutive' serves two interrelated functions in Williams' theory. It provides the grounds for his criticism of a particular type of fundamental error in social theory. It also provides the grounds for certain of the key notion in

his own position, in particular relation of practice and process.

Williams returns again and again to the point that social theorists frequently employ distinctions in a manner which implies that the objects referred to by their concepts are concretely separable. It must be said of course that many object of cultural analysis are concretely separate. They are, in other words, temporally and/or spatially distinct as opposed to merely conceptually distinct objects. A book is not a painting. Williams is not at all concerned to take issue with the existence of concretely separate objects. Nor is he, on the whole, concerned to take issue with the view that conceptual distinctions are real distinctions that grasp real differences. The point is that some real distinctions do not refer to concretely separate or separable objects. If in such instances this crucial point is missed or forgotten, terms of analysis are taken to be terms of substantial description with the result that conceptual distinctions rest on a reified or hypostatized understanding of their object of reference, the position that Williams terms objectivism. In his view, this is the type of error which has often occurred in marxist cultural and social theory. It may creep in through the use of metaphor (base/superstructure) or analogy (homology), when the metaphorical or analogous status of the concepts at issue are forgotten or overlooked. Williams, however, specially emphasised the frequency with which this error has occurred in the later developments of marxist theory through having uncritically taken over bourgeois categories of thought. In particular, it is the manner in which traditional dichotomies of idealist social and philosophical theory have exerted their influence on marxism that Williams is especially concerned to explicate in order to overcome them.

Williams criticism often takes the form: when abstract conceptual distinctions are understood as substantial descriptions, it results in a denial of reciprocally constitutive relations and leads to the employment of false dichotomies. This line of criticism is used with regard to (i) traditional marxist theory of language because it assumes a world/language dichotomy; (ii) the theory of base-superstructure because it implies a separation of consciousness and material production; (iii) structuralist marxism because it makes structures primary at the expense of constitutive human practice; and (iv) traditional marxist theories of the social because

they radically separate the personal and subjective from the social and objective (K, 256-59; ML, 28-30, 78, 88-89, 123-30). At the core of these critiques is a rejection of a classical idealist as well as materialist dichotomy: the radical separation of subject and object, of consciousness and reality. In Marxism and Literature Williams is following through in detail the argument he originally developed in The Long Revolution. Here, it was asserted that "the view of human activity we are seeking to grasp rejects this duality of subject and object: the consciousness is part of the reality and the reality is part of the consciousness, in the whole process of our living organization" (LR, 39). But there is also an important shift. In contrast to earlier he now sees <sup>this</sup> position as congruent with Marx' rejection of a subject-object dualism. His critique is not directed therefore at Marx but only at those manifold ways in which the separation of consciousness and reality have continued to shape marxist approaches: determination in the last instance, reflection theory, overdetermination, mediation, etc., all of which are more or less plausible accounts of the relations between entities which are presumed to be separate (Cf. ML, 28-30, 58-62, 84-89, 99-107).

The notion of 'constitutive' is central to Williams' attempt to work out a theoretical position on this issue which neither assumes a dichotomy nor results in hypostatization. A crucial element here is the re-definition of the concept 'reality' which, in social theory, usually is rendered either as 'social' or as 'material'. Instead, he formulates the key concepts of 'material social practice' and 'material social process'. Furthermore, he differentiates the available concept of 'consciousness' such that one form of consciousness at least, that which he terms 'practical consciousness', is understood as being constitutive of material social practice and process. Having earlier introduced the notion of 'constitutive' we can now try to pin down what Williams understands by these terms and their relations. First, in using the adjective 'social', he wants to admit the insight that men constitute their own history in the sense of being agents in the construction of this reality (Cf. ML, 16-19). At the same time, he wants to avoid the idealist variants of this view which presume either, that this construction is freely created in a manner unburdened by the pressures and limits of existing social conditions or, that it is the

product of pre-social 'individuals' the relations between whom are subsequently conceived in terms of cooperation, interaction or whatever. Second, in using the adjective 'material', he wants to admit what he understands to be the core insight of historical materialism: that the reproduction of human life is an essential part of any actual historical process, such that 'man' and 'nature' cannot be understood independently of each other (Cf. ML, 60-63; PM, 8-10). Williams, it seems, would prefer to extend this definition such that the reproduction of, as well as the construction of and intervention in, "ways of life" were all understood as intrinsic to historical process. At any rate, in his use of the term 'material', he makes it abundantly clear that he wants to avoid what he calls the increasing specialization of material process within marxist tradition to 'labour', narrowly conceived. There are two points at issue here. One is a rejection of the assumption that labour (in the narrow sense) is the only form of human activity that involves working on physical objects, the other is the related view that all other forms of human activity are, by contrast, secondary, epiphenomenal, in effect, immaterial (Cf. ML, 33, 90-94).

The term 'practice' is used by Williams as an inclusive term for all forms of human activity. Moreover, material, social, linguistic components as well as consciousness are seen as constitutive of practice. In the social scientific literature there are several terms that refer to the objectified results of human practice: social order, system, formation, structure. Williams, however, opts for the term 'process' with its emphasis on something ongoing and dynamic. Social material process is understood not as something which preceeds or succeeds practice but as the product constituted by the varieties of material social practices (Cf. ML, 87). In the light of this re-definition of terms, it becomes easier to appreciate Williams' insistence of the constitutive nature of practical consciousness. Indeed, he makes a very clear case within the stronghold of his opponents by pointing to the constitutive role of consciousness in the labour process itself. Imagination is a constitutive element of labour, language of associated labour, thoughts and ideas of forms of social relations which become actualised (Cf. ML, 59-64). A consciousness-reality dualism when employed in the manner of a dichotomy is untenable, or, results in an idealization of forms of consciousness when they are relegated to a

superstructure which is then conceived as more or less removed from, distant to, higher than, although dialectically related to, a base where really material processes are presumed to occur.

Marxism and Literature can be understood as Williams' attempt to explore the ramifications for cultural and social theory generated by the thesis that consciousness, language, materiality and sociality are constitutive of all practice.

### Tacit dimensions of experience and meaning

Reading Marxism and Literature one cannot but be struck by the importance Williams attributes to the more tacit levels of experience as well as tacit forms of meaning. We are of course thinking of his interest in what he has termed 'structures of feeling'. This interest goes at least as far back as The Long Revolution (1961) and since then the analysis of structures of feeling has constituted a central recurrent concern in his writings. This in itself is sufficient to justify the view that the problem-complex associated with structures of feeling should be seen as one of the central guidelines in the working out of his cultural theory. Although there can be little doubt about the centrality of this theme, it is nonetheless very difficult to determine Williams' object of analysis precisely. One reason for this is that no adequate general term is available in present-day vocabulary, a point he himself has recently noted (PL, 168). Yet, one can seek to encircle his object of analysis by enumerating some of its most decisive aspects: the type of experience at issue, its mode of articulation and its role in human activity.

Firstly, as far as the type is concerned, the main focus is on lived and living experience; it is the type of experience that operates in the deepest, most delicate and least tangible part of human activity. The core of this experience is emotion, personal feeling. It is not human affection in contradistinction to thought but precisely the mixture or intermingling of feeling and thought. As a level of experience it has been described as a pattern of impulses, restraints, tones - a pattern that is shaped through

social life without having been learned in any formal sense. Secondly, this type of living experience is characterised by not being directly or, at least, not fully articulated. It is therefore to be understood as a more or less tacit and underlying pattern in human experience that frequently manifests itself in negative rather than positive ways: as tension, unease, stress or displacement (4). A basic reason for this is that none of the available explicit and fixed notations or symbols adequately express or communicate this living experience. When it does become articulated indirectly, it is a special sense of presence and immediacy that is expressed and communicated. Thirdly, although we are here dealing with what is predominantly tacit levels of experience and meaning, their role in human activity/practice is far from secondary when compared to that of more explicit and fixed forms of meaning. It is a central contention of Williams' that it is on this more tacit level that the way of seeing ourselves and our world as well as our whole manner of response is patterned and formed. It is, therefore, on this level of human experience that one has to seek the ground of the deep starting-points and conclusions in works of art (Cf. LR, 63-66; DIB, 8-12; ML, 128-35; PL, 156-74).

Whereas there are significant difficulties in determining more precisely the level of experience on which a structure of feeling is presumed to operate, it is relatively easy to identify some of its central functions in Williams' cultural and social theory. At the most general level, he wants to re-direct the focus of attention of students of culture and society. In no way does he wish to suggest that they simply should cease studying explicit and fixed forms of meaning (world-views, ideologies). But he does want to draw attention to the inherent limitations of such analyses and to emphasise the need to engage in the far more difficult and complex modes of analysis that are required if the tacit dimensions of human experience and meaning are to be uncovered. This is done because he is convinced of their pivotal importance for any specific and concrete understanding of material social process. Tacit levels of experience and meaning have a crucial position in Williams' whole cultural and social theory because the power relations of domination and subordination in a hegemonic order are seen as being maintained more effectively, the extent to which they operate on these tacit levels rather than on the level of openly recognised and ar-

articulated constraint. In this context, the concept 'incorporation' has been formulated in contra-distinction to the bland term 'socialization'. While the latter is assumed to be a process that applies in equal measure to all members of a society, incorporation is designed to express the power relations of a hegemony as well as their mode of operation. Consequently, a serious attempt to determine the actual extent as well as the effective limit of a given hegemonic order requires detailed study of the range of tacit experiences and meanings in a given society (BS, 8-11; K, 117-18; ML, 110-11, 117-20, 124-27).

Apart from this general function, it is predominantly in the study of art that Williams' interest in structures of feeling has manifested itself. This field of study, as he views it, has a special importance in cultural analysis because it is in artistic production that one can frequently detect the early stages of an emerging structure of feeling (DIB, 10-11; ML, 126-27, 133-35). Moreover, although the earliest articulations of a new structure of feeling appear to the artists concerned to be expressions of strictly personal and individual experiences, it is a central contention of Williams' that even on these more tacit levels one can still show how the personal and individual has its own specific social dimension (sociality). His concept of structures of feeling was specifically developed to handle the apparent contradiction between individuality and collectivity in the context of artistic production and to specify one of the levels on which the individual and the social reciprocally constitute each other. Or, with an apt phrase of his own, to discover the truly social in the individual and the truly individual in the social. An important implication of this is that he finds it justified in regard to these tacit levels to work with a notion of the trans-individual, a point to which we shall later return (DIB, 8-9; ML, 194-97).

### Determinism versus voluntarism

In characterising Williams' present cultural and social theory it is important to make an attempt, however preliminary, to locate his position with regard to those conflicting tendencies in social thought that are indicated by the terms: determinism versus voluntarism. Yet, such an endeavour is rather difficult for several reasons. Various forms of determinism have been proposed during the last few centuries: environmental, psychological, cultural, economic as well as more complex notions of multi-factorial determination. Moreover, variants of both determinist and voluntarist positions are found in marxist as well as non-marxist traditions of social theory (5). For the purpose of the following it can suffice to summarise the conflict between determinist and voluntarist positions as a conflict between, on the one hand, conceptions of social process as governed by general laws, implying that men are essentially victims of history and society and, on the other, conceptions in which the decisions and interventions of men are viewed as crucial moments in history (6).

Until relatively recently there would have been no apparent need to locate Williams' position on a determinist-voluntarist scale since one of its most pivotal features was a decisive rejection of determinist approaches, especially the available variants of economic determinism. So decisive was this opposition that it accounts to a large extent for his explicit distancing from the marxist tradition in Culture and Society (1958). This opposition was further advanced in The Long Revolution, in his attempt to outline an alternative approach to the base-superstructure model of cultural analysis - an alternative moreover in which the existentialist emphasis on human choice and commitment played a central role (Cf. CS, 258 - 75; LR, 61 - 63, 102 - 05). From the beginning of the 70's, however, having identified his earlier argument as an argument with one school of thought within the marxist tradition, he moved increasingly closer to an explicit identification with the marxist tradition more broadly conceived. At the same time he tried to work out a way in which the modes of social determination of human consciousness and practice could be made an integral part of his cultural theory without this implying a return to some variant of the base-superstructure model (Cf. LS, 9 - 12; BS, 3 - 7). The culmination of this development to date is found in Marxism and Literature where he declares: "A Marxism without some concept of determination is in effect worthless. A Marxism with many of the concepts of determination it now has is quite radically disabled" (ML, 83).

In a discussion of Williams' present position it should be noted at the outset that he has in no way abandoned the core of his earlier voluntarist position. The idea of man as agent is maintained and the possibility of individual autonomy and of commitment as open, active and conscious choice is explicitly defended. The analysis of specific situations is seen as basic since human choice and commitment always take place in concrete and highly variable situations. His present position can be said therefore to be based on a conception in which effective human freedom is considered a real possibility, but it should be added that this conception has not been specified in any detail (Cf. ML, 85, 154 - 57, 193 - 94, 200). Consequently, he has only been able to move closer to a more determinist stance by radically challenging the central core of traditional conceptions of determination, in which socio-historical process was seen as governed by inherent laws and final outcomes as essentially inevitable. It is typical for Williams' whole approach that this challenge does not take the form of a systematic argument but of a commentary upon the history of the central terms and, through this, a recovery of an earlier meaning of the verb 'determine': the setting of limits. This shift in the meaning of determination, from inherent general laws to the setting of limits, is extremely crucial because it is this that opens the possibility of combining a voluntarist and a determinist approach. Since many, though not all, manifest limits in socio-historical process are specific contingent limits, they are in principle open to change through human intervention, even though this may be extremely difficult concretely or even impossible in given situations (7). Yet, Williams has also gone beyond the more negative notion of determination in which concrete people are conceived as living and acting in situations constituted by inherent as well as contingent limits. He has combined the negative with a positive notion to reach what he occasionally calls genuine determination. The positive notion is equally as crucial as the negative one. It is defined as the exertion of pressures whereby his account of determination comes to include a specifically voluntarist dimension: acts of will and purpose as determining influences in history. But as human volitions can be employed both to support and to oppose a specific social order, this account of determination can be combined with the equally important concept of hegemony. The process of incorporation into a hegemonic order is precisely the exertion of those pressures that shape individual wills by generating an experience of compulsion through which a specific hegemonic order is maintained and renewed. The exertion of these pressures is in part

the result of open and conscious choice by members of a society but, as emphasised earlier, the maintenance of a hegemony is also constituted by processes that operate on more tacit and therefore non-volitional levels of human experience (Cf. BS, 7 - 8; K, 87 - 91; ML, 85 - 88, 110 - 11).

By conceiving determination both as the setting of limits and as the exertion of pressures Williams has transcended in a remarkable way the framework of the classical determinism-voluntarism debate in social theory. Yet, although this approach, to our minds, is a notable achievement that seems to promise an outline of more adequate ways of understanding the determinants of material social process, it nonetheless should be emphasised that as a theory of determination it is far from fully clarified or developed. For instance, it is not very clear what essentially distinguishes the setting of limits from the exertion of pressures since the pressures exerted by a hegemony may well be conceived by both the victims and analysts of the pressures as some of the more decisive limits in a specific situation. Furthermore, he has made no attempt so far to work out even a preliminary classification of the various types of limits and pressures operating in material social process. This is a notable absence since any refined application of his concept of determination in empirical historical research would require clarification of this point. Moreover, to judge from Marxism and Literature Williams rejects any notion of a fixed hierarchy of determinants in order to stress that material social process is indissoluble and highly variable; this, however, may not be a wholly adequate formulation of his actual position. His recent discussions with New Left Review show that although the traditional notions of the primacy of the economic and of determination in the last instance are rejected, he does acknowledge the production of food, shelter and clothing as primary in material social life. His central concern is to reject that such a notion of primacy can in any way function as a general and fixed framework for causal explanation in history. Because of the amounts of human energy invested in basic physical survival and reproduction is historically highly variable, he argues, its general impact and therefore the hierarchy of determinants must also be seen as variable (Cf. PL, 137 - 51, 350 - 58). Yet, it should be added here that he does exclude the possibility of complete and total determination. It is a crucial feature of his account of hegemony that no dominant order can effectively incorporate and thereby control the full range of human practice, energy and intention. Consequently, the emergence of alternative and oppositional forms of practice has been and always will be possible. While it is not clear whether this assertion claims to be a fun-

damental axiom or is a mere historical generalisation, it certainly adds a decisive note of hope and optimism to a theory of the intricate and determining forms of subordination and domination in history (Cf. BS, 12 - 13; ML, 124 - 27).

### Individualism versus holism

Another important dividing-line in traditional social theory regards the conflict between methodological individualism and methodological holism (collectivism). Since the debate on these conflicting approaches has been both extended and complicated, no short summary can do justice to the many variations in the positions actually taken. Moreover, significant divergence exists between how individualists and holists respectively define the opposed position. For individualists, holist assumptions always lead to some mode of hypostatized thinking that implies the existence of a suprahuman or collective agent in historical process. For holists, methodological individualism implies that society is a mere aggregate of separate individuals, leading to an atomized conception of the social. However, it is important to distinguish at least between the main ontological and methodological assertions made by individualists and holists respectively. On the ontological level, the individualists claim that only individuals really exist and statements about society are therefore to be understood as mere conceptual constructions, whereas holists insist that society although composed of individuals is also to be understood as an entity sui generis, that is, not reducible to individuals. On the methodological level, the individualists assert that social events are to be explained in terms of the laws/regularities and situations of individual actions, whereas the holists insist that there exists social laws or regularities specifically related to society as a totality and which, therefore, are not reducible to the actions of individuals (8). A further complication should be noted here. It concerns the location of the marxist tradition in this controversy. Some marxists as well as non-marxists understand marxism as a clear-cut case of the holist position. But there are also those / assert that marxism represents a form of non-psychological individualism, or that it is ontologically individualist on the one hand and methodologically non-reductionist on the other, or, again, that the position of Marx in important respects transcends these distinctions (9).

On the basis of this short outline it can be seen that Williams' position includes individualist as well as holist points of emphasis.

Like methodological individualists, he is radically opposed to those modes of thought that result in forms of hypostatization. This is at the core of his critique of objectivist materialism and positivism, of abstract objectivity and totalizing abstraction and of neo-classical theories of form in which terms of analysis, wittingly or unwittingly, are taken to be terms of substance (Cf. ML, 29, 85 - 87, 112, 187). He stresses emphatically, therefore, that material social process is constituted by human practices. Consequently, it is only through the maintenance of specific kinds of practice that productive forces of a specific kind, for instance, can be said to exist concretely. Similarly, it is recurrently emphasised that specific practices need to be understood in relation to the concrete situations in which they take place rather than as the product of some social system, the properties of which can be grasped independently (Cf. ML, 41, 90 - 91, 129, 154 - 57, 197 - 98). On the other hand, the holist stress on totality is also a crucial feature of his cultural theory. The wholeness and complex interrelatedness of social process is stressed and any attempt to understand the social as a mere aggregate of separate individuals is rejected (Cf. LR, 13, 39, 63; LS, 10 - 12; BS, 7 - 8; ML, 80, 108 - 13). Yet, the main difficulty in locating Williams is of different kind. Whereas both individualists and holists operate in one way or another within the framework of the now classical individual/society dichotomy, one of Williams' most decisive intellectual commitments is that of thoroughly overcoming the fallacies and limitations generated by the employment of this dichotomy.

In order to overcome the individual/society dichotomy Williams mainly seeks to work out new ways of understanding sociality or what he also terms the full sense of the social. In contrast to dominant tendencies in marxist thought, he wants to get beyond the notion of the social as the fixed and explicit - known relationships, institutions, formations - a notion that results in a disjunction of the personal and the social and which implies a disvaluation of the subjective and personal or a conception of them as epiphenomenal. In contrast to dominant tendencies in bourgeois thinking, that also disjoin the personal and social while evaluating them differently, he wants to demonstrate the inherent sociality of all the activities undertaken by concrete individuals. Consequently, Williams argues for a sense in which all human consciousness is social being, even on the level of inner speech and in tacit dimensions of experience and meaning (Cf. ML, 36, 40 - 42, 128 - 32, 193 - 95). Yet, the classical marxist formulation that all human consciousness is social being gains a refined, if not new, meaning. Since the social is not

understood as the external and fixed in contrast to the internal and personal, this formulation does not imply the traditional notion of man as primarily a victim of social process, but is equally compatible with an agent conception (10). Moreover, it is this radical extension of the reference of the term 'social' that lies behind his key phrase: material social practice. When this understanding is integrated with the idea of material social process as constituted by individual activities, Williams' position can be seen as a further specification of Marx' dialectical conception: that social relations do not exist independently of social actions but only in and through them (11).

Besides extending the meaning of the term 'social', Williams operates with a notion of degrees or levels of sociality. At times, this may be a source of confusion; for instance, when he equates social with collective or uses the phrase 'the truly social' (Cf. ML, 187, 197). However, the notion of degrees of sociality is used by Williams to handle the problem of the relationship of the collective and the individual. His anti-hypostatization stance is maintained in the treatment of the term 'collective', where he rejects the conception of the individual as a mere carrier of social structure (Cf. ML, 194). Nor does he employ the terms 'collective' and 'individual' as antonyms to distinguish between the general and the specific. Both in the noun and the adjective form 'individual' refers to single, concrete persons and their activities. Whereas the central meaning of the term 'collective' is that which is common to or shared by a majority of individuals in a given society. Common meanings and language are collective in this sense, as are common forms of response and recognition, mores, styles of life, etc. The collective has the character of being relatively stable and fixed, being actively reproduced through such types of activities as communication, participation, cooperation, common acceptance and recognition of meanings and conditions. The collective, therefore, represents the dominant as one end of a social continuum of degrees of incorporation of human activity. What is opposed to the collective is not 'the individual' but types of human activity that are residual, alternative or oppositional as well as radically innovative. Williams employs the term 'trans-individual' to describe the level of sociality that is expressed in innovatory activity that are opposed to collective activities as the opposite ends of a continuum. The difficult term 'trans-individual' does not refer, therefore, to some new conception of a concrete being but to a specific kind of sociality in specific kinds of human activity. Williams has specified the nature of this sociality

in the context of artistic production in an attempt to conceptualise what it is that occurs when innovatory works that are similar make their appearance on the public scene. What is initially greeted as strange and unique later turns out to have been an instance of an emerging style, form or genre. The level of sociality involved is not that of participation or cooperation on the part of the producers, but lie at the level of shared tacit meaning and experience in the early stages of its articulation. There is no reason why this concept could not be further specified and more broadly applied to analysis of emergence is social living more generally conceived, and, to the specific problem of multiple discoveries in science, but Williams has not done so yet.

### Consensus versus conflict

One line in the debate generated by Williams' cultural theory concerns the extent to which it represents a 'consensus' or a 'conflict' model of society. The point has been made that Williams' work is inconsistent insofar as it includes elements of both models. Williams himself would be perhaps the last person to sympathise with those frustrations of his critics which are generated by the fact that his work does not neatly satisfy the either/or criteria of available positions. However, we think that the position that Williams now terms 'cultural materialism' can be clarified by reviewing it in the light of the so-called consensus versus conflict issue.

The first assumption to be cleared out of the way, an assumption which frequently crops up in the discussion of this issue, is that consensus and conflict models of society respectively represent bourgeois and marxist variants of social theory. In fact there are several variants of conflict theory, including those that stem from social darwinism, which cannot be claimed to be marxist in any sense. What can be said is that no self-declared marxist variants of conflict theory accept the central premises of the consensus model of society: that societies are relatively stable and integrated structures and that stability and integration are secured by means of normative consensus among members of a society. Conflict theorists in the marxist tradition, by contrast, generally share the view that stability and integration insofar as they persist are historically specific states of affairs and are maintained by such means as coercion, dominance, repression, force and exploitation. The second assumption which need to be called in question is that consensus and conflict

models of society are mutually exclusive viewpoints in the sense that elements which are given emphasis from the one viewpoint are not recognised by the other. For instance, Dahrendorf in his classical attack on consensus theory, introduces the conflict model of society by recognising the fact that one cannot expect conflict between groups that do not share any common frame of reference in the first place (11). Just as there is no problematic of integration to be conceptualised by a consensus theory unless one assumes in the first place some divergence of interests as between members of a society. To take the more recent concerns of marxist theory, it is precisely the capacity of capitalist formations to re-produce themselves which has led to the recognition of the need for a marxist account of socialisation. One such account, for example, suggests that the central problematic of socialisation theory concerns the question: why does the working class not protest ? (12). From this point of view, a central concern in contemporary marxist analysis of class regards the absence of conflict. It does not seem to us, on this background, that a clarification of cultural materialism is furthered if Williams' work is assumed to be inconsistent insofar as it includes a recognition of the elements associated with both viewpoints.

An emphasis on social conflict has never been absent or secondary in Williams' work but in crucial respects the emphasis has become more manifestly clear in recent years. The change can be seen in the fact that he has now selected the concept of 'hegemony' rather than 'culture' as a central structuring concept in his work with the specific intention of breaking with the liberal view of social process that is suggested by the term 'culture' (ML, 108 - 09, 112). The latter term expressed the notion of a whole way of life or of a whole social process within which people, each in their own way, define and shape their lives. As Williams notes it carries the suggestion of an equality of means as between the people who contribute to this process. Nevertheless, it should be stressed in the present context that Williams' interest in describing and conceptualising the normative elements of human action which were formerly expressed by the term 'culture' is retained in his use of the concept of 'hegemony'. Consequently, there is an overlap of concern as well as object of investigation with the elements conceptualised by consensus theory. According to the consensus model of social process, the production and maintenance of social order is conditioned by the establishment of normative consensus, that is, shared definitions of reality on the level of expectations, meanings and values. The maintenance of a

hegemony is similarly dependent upon securing normative consensus if not by way of active definition then at least by way of resigned silence. It is the ruling class that contribute definitions to the production of a hegemony, social relations of dominance and subordination that are at issue, and the resulting social organisation insofar as it is lived out in practice by the members of a society that constitute 'the dominant' in a given society. The types of activity that are labelled deviant by consensus theorists, and are seen as representing breakdowns in the socialisation process as well as threats to the maintenance of social equilibrium, are, for Williams, alternative or oppositional practices that limit or weaken an established hegemony. These are some of the differences in the theoretic frameworks of cultural materialism on the one hand and the consensus model of society on the other that lie behind Williams' preference for the term 'incorporation' as a substitute for the term 'socialisation' (BS, 8 - 10; K, 117 - 18; ML, 108 - 13). For Williams then, the concept of hegemony serves two functions in this context. It allows him to retain all his former convictions about the importance of shared meaning and value in social life, formerly expressed by the concept 'culture', at the same time as giving clear expression to his radical opposition to the political values associated with consensus theory.

By using the concept of hegemony Williams has also been able to define his own position more precisely in regard to a particular point of criticism from the marxist side. One of the reasons why he has never accepted Thompson's suggestion about re-defining culture as 'a whole way of struggle' is that it blurs the distinction between 'class conflict' and 'class struggle'. As Williams understands these terms, class conflict refers to the conflict of interests that is located in the socio-economic order of a given society, whereas class struggle is a formation constituted by the emergence of class-consciousness in social groups, in such a way that awareness of underlying conflicts of interest leads to active opposition. To re-define culture, therefore, as a 'whole way of struggle' is to over-estimate the part played by active opposition in the actual history of particular societies. Given the concept of hegemony, Williams is also able to argue that this suggestion under-estimates the power and subtlety of the manner in which the process of incorporation operates. One of the important implications, therefore, of substituting the concept of hegemony for the concept of culture in his own work is that he is able to emphasise the existence of inequality, domination and power in society, without implying that these factors necessarily lead to manifest forms of class struggle. It should be noted that Williams' work has almost ex-

clusively focused on class as formation in his account of the dynamics of historical change, an account that conceptualises this process in terms of the contents and relations of the residual, the dominant and the emergent (13). In contrast to many variants of marxist theory, he does not assert that all significant historical change is to be understood in terms of changes in class relations including, of course, the emergence of a new class. In line with his emphasis on understanding the specificities of historical process, as opposed to its epochal shifts, he sees what is called 'excluded human areas' as a significant source of emerging historical process. That is to say, areas of experience and meaning that are unrecognised by the dominant at a given point in time (Cf. K, 51 - 59; ML, 125 - 26, 131 - 32; PL, 134 - 36).

### Cultural materialism as theory

In the debate generated by Williams' work he has often been criticised for his emphasis on lived experience and for his critical, at times negative, attitude towards abstract concepts and systematic theory. Against the background of his interest in exploring the dimensions of common experiences, and especially in the light of the objective of Culture and Society as the detailed historical exploration of the words and the sequences of words that particular men and women have used in trying to give meaning to their experiences, it does seem remarkable that Williams has also set himself the task of working out a general, i.e. trans-epochal, theory of cultural production. Yet this is what he has attempted both in The Long Revolution and in Marxism and Literature. There is very little explicit statement in these works regarding his understanding of the objective and nature of such a theory. His account of cultural production is not one that includes any account of theoretic production. His remarks about theory usually serve to clarify his reasons for rejecting certain types of theory, rather than to clarify his own objective and the manner of achieving it. What we do have is evidence of the latter as objectified in his work: an exposition of key concepts. In order to clarify Williams' understanding of theory and to raise for discussion some of the problems that remain unresolved in the available exposition of cultural materialism, it is necessary to consider in some detail Williams' approach to the exposition of concepts as such.

One of the distinguishing characteristics of Williams' work that has been widely commented upon is precisely his approach to the exposition of concepts. Generally speaking, these expositions meet two self-imposed and explicit criteria. First, the exposition of concepts

must seek to "recover the substance from which their forms were cast" (ML, 11). Second, since the meaning of concepts changes in the course of social-historical experience, a materialist analysis of their content is necessarily historical (PM, 14). Both of these criteria are stringently applied in Williams' exposition of those key concepts of available cultural theory to which successive chapters of Marxism and Literature are devoted. Behind this stringent application of the interpretive procedures of historical semantics lies some deeply held convictions. What Williams has sought to demonstrate again and again in his exposition of concepts is the idea that, while the formal component of a concept, the actual word or notation employed, may subsist through centuries of usage, its meaning changes and the variation in the meaning or meanings expressed articulate varieties of specific historical and social experience. The recovery of substance, therefore, includes both the recovery of specific meanings in particular contexts of usage and the recovery of the specific experiences that thereby become articulated. The former exercise is perhaps most clearly exemplified as a task independently undertaken in Keywords (1976), the latter in Modern Tragedy (1966), while both concerns inform the exposition of concepts in Marxism and Literature.

It is clear that Williams understands this interpretive exercise as intrinsic to materialist analysis insofar as concepts themselves are constitutive of material social process. In this sense, experience meaning and concept undergo a process of materialisation in the measure that they are objectified in language and practice, which again are conceived as constitutive of ongoing material social process. This notion of materialisation may be the key to understanding Williams' more baffling formulations in regard to the dimensions of human activity and the types of human activity that are more or less manifestly material: not all experiences become articulated, not all ideas are realised in practice. At any rate, in regard to the terms that crop up in any discussion of the interpretive exercise itself, experience, meaning, word, Williams has had most to say about the reference of the term 'experience' and about the notion of word as form. He rejects any naive realist account of the relation of these terms in which word or sign represents the link between an available and given 'reality' on the one hand and this independently constituted reality as presented to sense experience on the other. For Williams, 'word' is never 'fixed form' in the sense of having invariant reference and 'experience' is by no means reducible to sense experience (ML, chap. 2; LR, chap. 1). Experience is the practical experience of living. It is what differentiates a generation that

have survived a war, including perhaps the loss of husbands, fathers or brothers, from a generation that read about a period of upheaval in their history books. The response in both cases to talk of 'war' is different, and the difference insofar as it is a shared as well as a specific pattern of experiences is a difference in structures of feeling. The link between word or notation on the one hand and lived experience on the other is, what Williams has called, an effective nucleus of meaning (ML, 39). All signifying elements in a concrete language must have some nucleus of meaning if they are to be effective for the purpose of communication. In practice, however, such a nucleus includes a variable range of meanings corresponding to the variety of situations in which a word is used, and over time this nucleus can become modified or changed. Any particular nucleus of meaning represents, therefore, some level of abstraction from the total range of experiences which it serves to articulate at a given point in time. There is always the suspicion, as well as the actual possibility, that the man who has lost his family in a fire and the academic literary critic who has classified the forms of dramatic art are not "speaking the same language" when they speak of 'tragedy' (Cf. MT, 13 - 15). One of Williams' deeply felt concerns, therefore, in recovering the substance of the available concepts of academic discourse has been to bridge the gap between academic and, what he calls, 'normal' discourse, indeed to explore the extent to which a gap is there to be bridged.

In an important sense, Williams can be said to have maintained that particular objective of his work which was outlined in the introduction to Culture and Society. In that context, however, he not only made clear his interest in the recovery of the meaning and experience that lay behind specific usages and statements, he also declared that by temperament and training he found more meaning in that kind of approach than in any "system of significant abstractions" (CS, 18). Nevertheless, neither temperament nor training have prevented him from seriously engaging in a prolonged effort to work out a more adequate cultural theory, a project that has necessarily involved him in the formulation of a series of abstract concepts. The exposition of concepts in Marxism and Literature freely shifts between reviewing the meaning of concepts in ordinary usage as against academic texts. As often as not, Williams seems to have found a clue to the analysis of a problem in the usage of a concept peculiar to the ordinary usage of earlier times (K, 18). For this reason, differences of usage as between academic and ordinary discourse insofar as it is met is greeted by Williams as a resource rather than as an unbridge-

able gap. Certainly, the premises on which his theoretical project rests are fundamentally opposed to any notion of an 'epistemological break' as between the concepts of academic and ordinary discourse - expressed in Althusserian terms, of a break as between theory and ideology. This is the main reason why the evaluation of Williams' interest in the common experiences and meanings of ordinary living has been greeted, on structuralist marxist premises, as the "drastic limitation" of his theoretical work (Eagleton). If, however, Williams is to do more than rest content with the idea that cultural materialists and structuralist marxists simply do not "speak the same language", he will at some future time have to explicate and attempt to ground his understanding of the nature of theoretical concepts.

There is a suggestion in Marxism and Literature that the nucleus of meaning expressed by those concepts that qualify for inclusion in a theoretical account rest on a higher level of abstraction than the descriptive terms of ordinary usage (ML, 45 - 6). In this sense, Williams' implicit understanding of theory may be compatible with an account of the relation of theoretic and ordinary everyday concepts in terms of a continuum, differentiated by levels of abstraction. Vygotsky, whose work Williams has employed in his account of language as lived (ML, chap. 2) is one representative of this view. There is no evidence, however, that Williams has interested himself in Vygotsky's account of concepts at the higher levels of abstraction, and there are two indications that he has not. One indication is the frequency with which he uses the term 'abstraction' as a term of derogation. The other lies in Vygotsky's view that, while the meaning of everyday concepts can be settled by reference to common experiences, the meaning of theoretic concepts at a high level of abstraction is defined through their relation to other concepts at a similar level of abstraction. It is the latter type of account, therefore, that calls for a systematic mode of formulation and presentation of concepts and their relations, the mode that Williams has selected not to adopt. There is clear evidence as to what Williams means, however, when he predicates 'abstract' of positions that he rejects. When, for instance, he rejects what is called 'abstract objectivity' and an understanding of hegemony as a 'totalizing abstraction', what is being rejected is hypostatization, and not abstraction in the cognitive sense of abstracting from the concrete and specific in order to grasp the recurrent or invariable (ML, 85, 112). Williams' negative attitude towards abstraction is mainly grounded in his rejection of hypostatized theory, rather than his assumptions about the nature of theory as such.

While Williams has yet to explicate his position in regard to the latter issue, it is clear that his theoretical commitment is to the clarification of the nature and variations of human practice (Cf. ML, 212). Moreover, one of the distinguishing characteristics of his theoretical approach is the attempt to develop what can be termed a series of 'range concepts', that is, to formulate interrelated concepts that are able to deal adequately with the full range of human activities (practices) and their resultant products and processes. It is a basic premise of cultural materialism that its objects of investigation are to be understood as forming a continuum of various practices, products and processes. To say that its objects form a continuum is not to imply a denial of real differences. But it does mean that these objects should not be assumed to be neatly separable into distinct types and, moreover, that one should expect to find in any concrete analysis varying and intermediary degrees of the types of practice, product and process that are differentiated in a theoretical account. This emphasis on continuum or full range is a consequence of Williams' concern to acknowledge the concrete specificity of historical process, that is, the fact that concrete practices are guided by highly variable intentions and take place in highly variable situations (Cf. e.g. ML, 154 - 57, 187, 190, 198, 206 - 07). On the level of theory, the cultural analyst should avoid, therefore, the employment of concepts or categories that either introduce rigid and fixed separations or theoretically exclude some dimensions of the full range of variable intentions and situations. Again, the analyst cannot pre-judge, on the level of theory as such, what at a given time and place is the actual range of practices nor which of these have a dominant, residual or emergent position respectively. From the standpoint of the theoretician, therefore, there are many open questions, that is, questions that only can be answered on the basis of historical analysis of specific concrete situations (Cf. ML, 131, 197).

For Williams, cultural materialism as theory does not represent an attempt to disclose some hidden and operative essences, some underlying reality, behind the surfaces of lived experiences. Given his rejection of the classical ontological distinction of essence and appearance as well as his rejection of 'false consciousness' as a theoretical category, though not as a contingent matter of fact, it is all the more important for Williams to clarify the cognitional distinction (if any) between ordinary and theoretical levels of understanding. It is a clarification of this issue that is called for if the status of cultural materialism vis a vis a number of the

traditional marxist problematics is to be fully assessed. In the meantime it can be noted that Williams' own concepts are not all found in ordinary discourse ('hegemony', for instance), but it is his claim that all of his concepts can be in principle related back to lived experiences. This position does not amount to a denial of the possibility that ordinary discourse may distort one's understanding of lived experience. But, Williams sees this as being due to the fact that one has been incorporated into a specific hegemonic order. His entire approach to the formulation of his theory, however, rests on the assumption that, although it may be very difficult, it is possible to overcome such distortions through an engaged struggle at the roots of one's own mind (Cf. ML, 212). It is worth emphasising that it is not only the ordinary 'man in the street' who is conceived as faced with this problem, but that it holds in equal measure for any would-be theoretician. Consequently, for Williams, the theoretician cannot claim to possess a privileged position; the degree of one's success as a theoretician is largely made dependent upon having successfully engaged in appropriating the nature of the hegemony into which one has been incorporated. In summary, cultural materialism as theory is an attempt to develop a more adequate vocabulary for concrete analyses of society and culture through the formulation of a series of concepts concerning human practices, products and processes.

To our minds, the major strengths of cultural materialism are two-fold. First, Williams has exposed and criticised available variants of cultural theory which we also judge to be based on untenable assumptions. Second, he has made an attempt to work out a series of concepts for use in concrete historical analysis that do not pre-judge or exclude the complexity and variability of historical process. This does not mean that it is difficult to identify major limitations and unresolved problems in cultural materialism as it is presently formulated. Although the most central key term in Marxism and Literature is 'material social practice', Williams, in no sense can be said to have worked out a theory of practice. While he does clarify the meanings of 'material' and 'social', the term 'practice' remains largely unclarified. One of the reasons for this is, that although consciousness is said to be constitutive of practice, Williams has also very little to say by way of defining this term. A series of adjectives are appended to his use of the term 'consciousness: practical, mixed, confused, incomplete, general, physical, material, social. But it is virtually impossible to identify any criteria by which such distinctions are made. It is characteristic of Williams' non-systematic style of work that he can engage in an exposition and

argument without facing head-on the problems raised by some of his most basic concepts. Nor has he fully faced the implications of his criticisms of theoretical positions opposed to his own. Many of his points of criticism are based upon a rejection of available conceptions of cognition and science, but it cannot be said that he has explicated his own understanding of various forms of cognition. Furthermore, there is no detailed account of the dynamics of practice. As presently formulated, cultural materialism does not encompass a theory or outline of human needs and values. All of these limitations seem to stem from a common root: Williams has not resolved his position with regard to the notion of a human nature. Although he retains the notion of essence or nature through the use of the term 'constitutive', and explicitly speaks of the nature of practice, he fears that any notion of a human nature may not be compatible with his general position: that man is created and modified through a changing human history (Cf. PL, 183 - 4). Nevertheless, some assumptions in regard to invariant features of human activity would seem to be made in any theoretical project that is designed to account for cultural production in trans-epochal terms. As formulated, cultural materialism is a general theory in this sense, that is, it is not limited to the exposition of concepts relevant to the analysis of cultural production in a specific epoch (e.g. capitalism). In fact, the thrust of Williams' work is to emphasise the necessity to engage in what he terms historical as opposed to epochal analysis (Cf. ML, 121). This focus, however, raises the obverse problem: can cultural materialism account for epochal in contrast to historical change? So far, Williams does not seem to have faced the problem of specifying the conditions that would have to be met if one were to assert that specific historical changes are of a sufficiently fundamental kind that one is justified in speaking of a transition into a new epoch.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Raymond Williams

- BS "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory", New Left Review 82: 1973, 3-16.
- CS Culture and Society 1780 - 1950, rev.ed., 1963, (1958<sup>1</sup>).
- DIB Drama from Ibsen to Brecht, rev.ed., 1973, (1952<sup>1</sup>).
- K Keywords. A Vocabulary of Culture and Society, 1976.
- LR The Long Revolution, 1965, (1961<sup>1</sup>).
- LS "Literature and Sociology: in memory of Lucien Goldmann", New Left Review 67:1971, 3 - 18.
- ML Marxism and Literature, 1977.
- MT Modern Tragedy, 1979, (1966<sup>1</sup>).
- NBM "Notes on British Marxism since 1945", New Left Review 100: 1977, 81 - 94.
- PL Politics and Letters, 1979.
- PM "Problems of Materialism", New Left Review 109: 1978, 3 - 17.

Debate on Williams

- BARNETT, A. (1976) "Raymond Williams and Marxism", New Left Review 99: 1976, 47 - 64.
- EAGLETON, T. (1976) "Criticism and Politics: the Work of Raymond Williams", New Left Review 95: 1976, 3 - 23. (Reprinted in his book Criticism and Ideology).
- GREEN, M. (1974) "Raymond Williams and Cultural Studies", Cultural Studies 6: 1974, 31 - 48.
- JOHNSON, L. (1979) The Cultural Critics. From Matthew Arnold to Raymond Williams, 1979.
- MERRILL, M. (1978) "Raymond Williams and the Theory of English Marxism", Radical History Review 19: 1978/79, 9 - 31.
- THOMPSON, E.P. (1961) "The Long Revolution", New Left Review 9:1961, 24 - 33 & 10: 1961, 34 - 39.

Other Works

- ALTHUSSER, A. (1969) For Marx.
- BOURDIEU, P. (1971) "Intellectual Field and Creative Project", M.F.D. Young (ed.), Knowledge and Control, 161 - 88.
- " (1977) Outline of a Theory of Practice.
- BUKDAHL, J.K. (1976) "Realabstraktion, kapitallogik og metodologisk individualisme", Historievidenskab 5/6/7, 127 - 43.
- DRAY, W.H. (1967) "Determinism in History", Encyclopedia of Philosophy 2, 373 - 78.
- ISRAEL, J. (1971) "The Principle of Methodological Individualism and Marxian Epistemology", Acta Sociologica 14, 145 - 50.
- LORENZER, A. (1972) Materialistisk socialisationsteori.

- MERAN, J. (1979) "Individualismus oder Kollektivismus", Zeitschrift für allgemeine Wissenschaftstheorie 10, 37 - 53.
- O'NEILL, J. (1973) Modes of Individualism and Collectivism.
- SØRENSEN, C. (1976) Marxismen og den sociale orden, I + II.
- THOMPSON, E.P. (1976) "Romanticism, Utopianism and Moralism: the Case of William Morris", New Left Review 99, 83 - 111.
- " (1978) The Poverty of Theory.
- VYGOTSKY, L.S. (1962) Thought and Language.

## NOTES

- (1) It should be noted here that in contrast to the early 60's Williams and Thompson now represent a common front in the British debate, that of culturalist marxism. Williams specifically acknowledges Thompson in ML, and Thompson has both defended and uses ML in his own attack on structuralist marxism, see afternote of Thompson (1976) and title essay of Thompson (1978).
- (2) NMB is Williams' reply to the political criticisms of Eagleton and Barnett, whereas ML can be taken as his answer to their theoretical objections to his cultural theory.
- (3) Johnson (1979) is a valuable study in that it locates Williams' work in a larger historical setting. Her analysis of his position, however, does not add anything essentially new to the debate as its main points of criticism are taken from Eagleton.
- (4) The field of experience that Williams treats here is similar to what others would refer to as 'the unconscious'. See, for instance 'Bourdieu's concept of 'cultural unconscious' in Bourdieu (1971). Williams, however, deliberately avoids the term unconscious due to reservations about psychoanalysis (Cf. PL, 180 - 85).
- (5) For a short summary of variants of determinism see Dray (1967) and for the variants in marxism see Sørensen (1976).
- (6) We are here using the term 'voluntarism', not in its strict philosophical sense, where it means giving priority to will at the expense of intellect and feeling, but as it is normally used in social and political theory.
- (7) The term 'contingent' is here used not in its modern meaning of incidental, but in its classical meaning of the opposite of necessary, that is, that which is changeable.
- (8) For a short summary of what distinguishes individualism and holism see Meran (1979). The debate over individualism versus holism has to some extent also been a debate over political principles. For this aspect see O'Neill (1973).
- (9) See Bukdahl (1976), Israel (1971) and Sørensen (1976) respectively.
- (10) For a modern marxist instance of conception where the social is conceived as the external and fixed and which results in a conception of the subject as reducible to objective conditions see Lorenzer (1972). Williams' position seem much closer to that of Bourdieu who attempts to handle this problem through the concept of 'the habitus'. Cf. Bourdieu (1977).
- (11) This is how Sørensen defines the special position of Marx.

- (11a) See Darendorf, Class and Class Conflict in an Industrial Society, rev.ed., 1969.
- (12) See the exposition of H.-J. Krahls position in Schmidt, L.-H., "Socialisations og hegemoniapparater", Teori og praksis 6: 1977, 35 - 57.
- (13) Since class plays a major role in ML, it seems rather inconsistent that class is not presented as one of the key concepts of Williams' exposition of his cultural theory in ML.