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The Structure of Feeling of Raymond Williams

Seán Matthews

Although the status of Raymond Williams as a key figure in the historical development of cultural and literary studies is assured, what is much less certain these days is the continuing significance of his work. Recent studies, even those designed as tributes, have been fraught with ambivalent statements. Thus Dennis L. Dworkin, for example, concludes;

> As we enter a world in which the traditional basis for radical transformation has been undermined, we might respect how much Raymond Williams has helped us to grapple with this new situation. But though he has only been dead for less than five years, he is already part of a different political age.[1]

John Higgins observes a trend in many posthumous accounts of Williams;

> To remember Williams in this way, as the last of the Enlightenment thinkers, amounts to little more than an invitation to forget his work by consigning it to vaults of memory dusty enough never to be opened again.[2]

Fred Inglis's recent biography, explicitly presented as a tribute but itself shot through with disabling uncertainty, was a further occasion of ambivalent expressions of respect for Williams. In his review, Frank Kermode noted 'the confict between admiration and disappointment' which marks Inglis's text.[3] The world, it seems, is so vastly changed since Williams's death, in 1988, that while there is recurring praise for his intellectual and political integrity and for the stubborn consistency of his example, such appreciation is invariably combined with doubt as to the contemporary importance of much of the detail, and most of the theory, methodology and language of his writing. At the time of writing, the most recent

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1 Dennis L. Dworkin, 'Cultural Studies and the Crisis in British Radical Thought', in Dennis L. Dworkin, Leslie G. Roman, eds., *Views beyond the Border Country: Raymond Williams and Cultural Politics* (London: Routledge, 1993) p54.

2 John Higgins, 'Forgetting Williams' in Chris Prendergast, ed., *Cultural Materialism: On Raymond Williams* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995) p119.

3 Fred Inglis, *Raymond Williams* (London: Routledge, 1995); Frank Kermode, 'Distinguishing Marx', in *The Observer*, 29 October, 1995.

book on Williams, suggestively entitled *Raymond Williams Now: Knowledge, Limits and the Future*, opens with the question,

> How far was, or is, Williams's humanism out of step with postmodernity and the new and complex political and intellectual configurations it calls for? How far does his representation of a literal and metaphorical room of one's own for intellectual work need defending, and how far does it require modification in the light of fast-changing pressures and circumstances.[4]

The temporal uncertainty — 'was, or is,' but not 'will be' — is more than an introductory figure, its recurrence marks a substantial doubt over Williams's place.

At one level, of course, this is the altogether necessary and healthy process of intellectual evolution; new lines of thought are generated from (and in opposition to) his contribution, new research deepens, develops, or disproves his observations. At another level, though, the suggestion is strong that Williams has been rendered obsolete or irrelevant by accelerating change.

Against the pressure to supercede and superadd it is often necessary to pause and to restate, to recover elements which may have been overlooked or misplaced — as Williams himself might have put it, to challenge a dominant emphasis. This seems to me particularly apt in this case, because Williams was above all committed to developing an analysis of change. His work, famously, derived from an intense personal experience of changes which he strongly argued were representative of his time and society. Williams's career, in one sense, was quite simply an effort to articulate his understanding of that process of change. This is put most starkly, perhaps, by Morgan Rosser in the novel *Border Country*. In discussion with Matthew Price, who left their small Welsh village of Glynmawr to study, then live and work, at the university in London, and who has now returned to visit his ailing father but found himself struggling to connect the two parts of his life, Rosser asks,

> 'The work you've been telling me about. Never mind the actual inquiry. What is it you're really asking? You're asking what change does to people, change from the outside, the big movements. You're asking about him and about yourself.'[5]

Williams's attention turned insistently to such moments, when change is felt as challenge or disruption. From the beginning, in his analysis, culture — which became such a dominant and central concern — is precisely coterminous with change;

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4 Jeff Wallace, Rod Jones, Sophie Neald, eds., *Raymond Williams Now: Knowledge, Limits and the Future* (New York; St Martin's Press, 1997) p8.

5 Raymond Williams, *Border Country* (London; Hogarth Press, 1988, c1960) p286.

> The word which had indicated a process of training within a more assured society became in the nineteenth century the focus of a deeply significant response to a society in the throes of a radical and painful change. The idea of culture, it seems to me, is best studied as a response of this kind; the response of certain men, attached to certain values, in the face of change and the consequences of change.[6]

In *Culture and Society* the word 'change' occurs a dozen times in the first three paragraphs, reiterating strongly Williams's emphasis. Considering the word 'Revolution' as used in 'Industrial Revolution', he remarks;

> As [the French Revolution] had transformed France, so this has transformed England; the means of change are different, but the change is comparable in kind: it has produced, by a pattern of change, a new society.[7]

The attention here to 'means of change' is significant; change is at once what happens to us, but also that which we effect, what we do. The conclusion to the volume begins, 'the history of the idea of culture is a record of our reactions, in thought and feeling, to the changed conditions of our common life.'[8] Williams's work consistently refused forms of cultural determinism (in the disciplines of linguistics and economics, and generally, theoretically, in all formalist or structuralist guises). It would be a peculiar irony if these central emphases, the insights he provided into the nature and form of cultural change and the methodology of its study, should be lost on account of a conviction that too much has changed for him to be of any further use.

One clear problem with Williams has always been his relation to contemporaneous disciplines and discourses. His distance from the idioms and conventions of structuralism, poststructuralism, deconstruction, postmodernism, even Marxism (to name but a few), has perhaps served to emphasize his position as an anachronistic figure in current debates. Although it is equally fair to say that he consistently and coherently problematized those disciplines and discourses, that he saw his function as a necessary questioning of dominant intellectual frameworks from what we would now call an interdisciplinary perspective, nevertheless the language and conceptual framework he developed can seem idiosyncratic, and frequently even perversely tangential to available currents of thought and debate. However, if Williams's work is properly contextualized, replaced in the specific

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6 Raymond Williams, 'The Idea of Culture', in *Essays in Criticism* 3, 3, July 1953; reprinted J. McIlroy and Sallie Westwood, eds., *Border Country: Raymond Williams in Adult Education* (Leicester: NAICE, p60. 1993)

7 Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963 c1958), p14.

8 *Culture and Society*, p285.

— and changing — intellectual history within which it developed, many of these difficulties dissolve. As Christopher Norris remarks in a discussion of *Keywords;*

> So what I'm saying is that Williams in many ways negotiated his way with extraordinary tenacity and resilience among these various tempting positions and counterpositions. I think this happened for various reasons, partly contingent, partly because he was born into a time when it was virtually impossible to adopt a position or even to write and continue producing creative and critical work without taking a stance on these various issues.[9]

This submerged context of intensive intellectual exchange is evident in all Williams's work, and must be recovered in order properly to understand his contribution. In defending *Culture and Society* against the interviewers in *Politics and Letters,* Williams makes just the point that it was an oppositional work that was later co-opted as a foundational one, with some unfortunate consequences.[10] Much of his writing about language and culture is explicitly concerned with such changing moments and patterns of exchange.

Williams fought particularly against three tendencies in critical work: first, towards conceptual reification, the movement from artificially separating elements in a situation, for analysis, to assuming that such elements, independently, exist and are fixed or finished; second, towards the assumption of neutral and objective analytic positions, which he saw as inevitably complicit with dominant practices and conventions; third, towards the reactionary positions of cultural nostalgia, the unhistorical conviction of decline, of the falling off from some earlier Golden Age. He demanded instead the articulation of methods and concepts, a critical voice, sensitive to processes of change, to the unfinished, evolving, contradictory character of language and culture, and also, crucially, that critics explicitly acknowledge and relate their own position within that process. Questions of morality, politics and values were all expressly bound up with criticism. Again, a fictional character(here Peter Owen in *Second Generation*) expresses the point most clearly; 'What I shall try to do, here, is a new kind of inquiry, with ourselves involved in it. And for our own understanding, not just for report.'[11] As Williams later remarked, of the period 1958-61;

> It was a time, on the contrary, when the real need was to contrast very rapidly changing social relations with the prevailing formulations which were helpless before them.[12]

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9 Christopher Norris, '*Keywords,* Ideology and Critical Theory', in Wallace et al, *Raymond Williams Now,* p36.

10 Raymond Williams, *Politics and Letters: Interviews with the 'New Left Review'* (London: Verso/New Left Books, 1979) p106/7.

11 Raymond Williams, *Second Generation* (London: Hogarth Press, 1988, c1963) p344.

12 Raymond Williams, *Politics and Letters,* p173.

In this context, of a principled refusal of concepts and positions which distorted his viewpoint and seemed inadequate to articulate his experience, the asymptotic development of Williams's work becomes less surprising or problematic. The early period of his work was one in which those 'rapidly changing social relations' were figured in many kinds of formal, critical, theoretical and disciplinary ferment — culminating publicly in the furore around D. H. Lawrence and the 'Chatterley Trial'(1960), and in the formation of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies(1964), but consisting equally forcefully in myraid contexts of intellectual exchange. The importance of Williams's work is in its sustained, multiple focus: he provided not only an analysis of the historical and contemporary scenes, in such a way as to reveal connections and continuities even through large periods and changes, reflecting a whole range of debate and exchange, but also a continuing, self-reflexive reconsideration of the terms in which any such analysis could take place.

The continuing, changing aspect to Williams's own formulations must also be kept in mind. He writes in one of his first published pieces, an editorial note to the journal *Politics and Letters* (1947);

> ... though it seems to be impossible directly to relate the highly specific experiences of a work of art to any more general qualities of living in the society in which it is provided, we must attempt to plot the social and intellectual background of the present time.[13]

The assertion here is curiously vague. It reveals the pressure to find a form through which to broaden the critical approach so as more properly to explore the relation of art to society, but as yet the terms of such an approach remain seemingly 'impossible', the 'social and intellectual' environment of the art-work still but 'background'. By 1953, however, Williams writes differently;

> An idea can be assigned to a man or a book, and the history of ideas to a series of isolated men or groups. But we need a more ordinary awareness of that pressure of active and general life which is misrepresented entirely by description as 'background'. There are no backgrounds in society; there are only relations of acts and forces.[14]

Already the text/context/background issue is becoming controversial, and Williams is changing, moving away from his earlier, 'fanatical' attachment to the 'Cambridge

13 Editorial Note, 'For Continuity in Change', in *Politics and Letters* 1, 1, 1947, p5. Reprinted, McIlroy and Westwood, *Border Country* p33.

14 Raymond Williams, 'The Idea of Culture', McIlroy and Westwood, *Border Country* p61.

method' of practical criticism.[15] This debate over methods and priorities intensified as the decade progressed — 'The Idea of Culture' was contemporaneous, for instance, with the exchange between F. R. Leavis and F. W. Bateson over just these issues — and Williams's work through the period is an index to these pressing concerns.

This is most evident in Williams's invention, or rather gradual, accretive formulation, of the concept of 'structure of feeling', an important element for his understanding of social and cultural change. The term has come in for some severe criticism, even total bemusement, but his perseverance with it — refining and redefining from its first appearance in *A Preface to Film* (1954), through the lengthy definition in *Marxism and Literature* (1976), and in the cautious justifications of *Politics and Letters* (1979), Williams insisted it was a necessary term — suggests it was centrally important to his work, and that any assessment of his significance to the intellectual history of the period should account for it. In the remainder of this article I review the development of the concept, particularly tracing its origins in his early work whilst a tutor in Adult Education, consider the problems inherent in it, and make suggestions as to its continuing usefulness.

The 'structure of feeling' developed in Williams's early work as a conceptual focus within his distinctive method of thinking about language and society, a theory and practice later defined as historical semantics, and still later evolving into cultural materialism.[16] It helped Williams approach forms of evidence he felt were unavailable to traditional textual or linguistic analysis, and to move beyond the deadlock of 'left-Leavisism', the uneasy conjunction of Marxist and Leavisian ideas which perplexed him for much of the 1950s.[17] Above all, the structure of feeling ennabled him to focus directly on difficult areas in the process of change.

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15 J.R.Williams, review of *Drama from Ibsen to Eliot* in *The Tutors' Bulletin of Adult Education* 91, June 1953, p20 'a fanatical overstatement of a by no means negligible case. The review, and Williams's response, are reprinted in McIlroy and Westwood, eds., *Border Country* pp193-7.

16 'Historical semantics' is the term used to describe the work typified in *Keywords*, see *Politics and Letters* p175. The interviewers refer to 'historical philology'. In the Introduction to *Keywords*, (Glasgow: Fontana, 1976) p11, Williams notes that, 'It was not easy then, and it is not much easier now, to describe this work in terms of a particular academic subject. [*Culture and Society*] has been classified under headings as various as cultural history. historical semantics, history of ideas, social criticism, literary history and sociology.'

17 'Left-Leavisism' was the term applied to the project of the short-lived journal, *Politics and Letters*, which Williams edited with Clifford Collins and Wolf Mankowitz from 1947-8. In 'Culture is Ordinary', Williams's polemical contribution to N. Mackenzie, ed., *Conviction* (London; MacGibbon and Kee, 1958) pp74-92, he asserted his distance from both currents, 'When I got to Cambridge, I encountered two serious influences,, which have left a very deep impression on my mind. The first was Marxism, the second the teaching of Leavis. Through all subsequent disagreements I retain my respect for both.'

In *Marxism and Literature* (1976), Williams offered his achieved definition of the term, and subsequent accounts have drawn essentially on this version.[18] The structure of feeling is a 'cultural hypothesis' which is distinct from, though may include or be evident in, other more rigid conceptualizations of elements of society (such as, for instance, 'belief system', 'world view', 'ideology', 'institution'). It describes an area of feeling and thought, of experience, that has not achieved articulation, which is at the limit of coherence and comprehension;

> It is a kind of feeling and thinking which is indeed social and material, but each in an embryonic phase before it can become fully articulate and defined exchange. Its relations with the already articulate and defined are then exceptionally complex.[19]

Williams insisted on the changing, processual nature of this area, giving extra emphasis by his careful use of the continuous forms ('feeling... thinking'), refusing the 'conversion of experience into finished products'(in the nouns, 'emotion', 'thought').[20] He argued that the structure of feeling involved;

> social experiences *in solution*, as distinct from other social semantic formations which have been *precipitated* and are more evidently and more immediately available.[21]

As such, the experience he sought to elucidate was available only in fragmentary, dispersed and impressionistic forms, often evident as 'an unease, a stress, a displacement, a latency'.[22] It could be found frequently in texts which might be considered artistic failures, since the pressure of a structure of feeling is an emergent element, even a formal confusion, which authors are not fully able to articulate. It could, though, also be found in texts considered artistic successes, at the level of experiences which are described but not fully integrated or understood or formulated. Williams stressed that although 'feelings' are not clearly articulable, belonging to the fluid regions of the affective consciousness, they are nonetheless part of a public, 'structured formation', representing 'living processes [which] are much more widely experienced'. Thus the concept figured at the level of theory one of Williams's strong themes, a refusal of Romantic or existentialist notions of the isolated artist, and of that broader separation and opposition of

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18 See for instance, Joseph Childers and Gary Hentzi, eds., *Columbia Dictionary of Modern Literary and Cultural Criticism* (New York: Columbia UP, 1995) p288; also Jeremy Hawthorn, *A Concise Glossary of Conteporary Literary Theory* (London: Edward Arnold, 1992) pp177-8.

19 Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford : OUP, 1977) p131.

20 *Marxism and Literature* p128.

21 *Marxism and Literature* p134.

22 *Marxism and Literature,* p130.

individual to society upon which these were based. He gives as an example the structure of feelimg evident in Dickens and Emily Bronte, who began, hesitantly, to develop forms and styles to write about 'exposure caused by poverty or by debt or by illegitimacy' as a '*general* condition' relating to the social structure, rather than, as was still commonly the case, 'individual social failure or deviation.'[23] As such, a new structure of feeling emerged in the disjunction between received modes of thought and feeling and the next generation's new experience;

> It is that we are concerned with meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt, and the relations between these and formal or systematic beliefs are in practice variable (including historically variable), over a range from formal assent with private dissent to the more nuanced interaction between selected and interpreted beliefs and acted and justified experiences.[24]

The process of articulation of this alternative position was a function which structure of feeling, at once firm and generalized as a structure and fluid as feeling, sought to open up. As such, the term is a part of the conceptualisations of dominant, emergent and residual elements in ideology, further elements in Williams's insistence on the necessarily diachronic nature of criticism.

The definition Williams offered in *Marxism and Literature* was the product of thirty years' work, though much of that articulation repeats formulations in *The Long Revolution* (see below p13). The characterisation of the term as figuring a 'cultural hypothesis' is suggestive; there is, in its development, a strong, even indexical, indication of the movement of Williams's thinking about the dynamics of cultural criticism as a whole. The formation of the hypothesis of the structure of feeling is an area of uncertainty, interest and inarticulacy in Williams's work — part of what he called the 'slow reach again for control' — between 1947 and 1962. It hovers at the edge of full articulation or understanding. Its evolution bears significantly on that major current of work emerging in the 1950s, in which Williams so strongly figured, focussing attention to marginalized areas of British culture and history, particularly exploring methods for the recovery and articulation of working class consciousness and experience. The structure of feeling of the period is, precisely, evidenced in Williams's gradual conceptualisation of the 'structure of feeling'.

Throughout the 1950s, in the pressure of his thinking about the study of culture and social change, Williams circled around problems of how to integrate literary criticism with historical awareness and a political commitment to socialism. Above all, these problems were focussed in his work as a tutor in the Adult

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23 *Marxism and Literature*, p134.

24 *Marxism and Literature*, p132.

Education movement. When he moved from the Oxford Extra-Mural Delegacy to his lectureship at Cambridge, in 1961, his valedictory 'Open Letter' to the WEA made clear the determinant influence of that context;

> Of course the tutor knows his own discipline better, but he may not know the gap between academic thinking and actual experience among many people; he may not know when, in the pressure of experience, a new discipline has to be created.[25]

The importance of the extra-mural context for the development of much important work at this time(Hoggart and E.P. Thompson were also tutors), has been convincingly presented by John McIlroy, gently revising Williams's assertion of the isolated and uncollaborative nature of his work in the period;

> Whilst he was insulated from wider political activity and discussion his 'exceptional isolation' in the years since 1948 should not be exaggerated. It was isolation from active political involvement but Williams was heavily committed in adult education.[26]

Williams's writing then, in articles, and in class reports and proposals he sent to his superiors in Oxford, shows quite how fully the extra-mural context ennabled his articulation of distinctive positions.

In July 1950, Williams organised a week-long conference for adult education tutors, 'Literature in Relation to History 1850-1870'. In his report, he notes his colleagues' eagerness to work 'unlimited by subject boundaries, which has been a traditional demand and objective in adult education.'[27] Their interdisciplinary momentum, however, was upset by the lack of methodological agreement between historians, literary critics and sociologists. As a conclusion, Williams suggests one way beyond the impasse;

> I should like, for emphasis, to indicate one of [literary criticism's] elements, which is the study of language. By this I do not mean linguistics, or linguistic history. Semantics, in so far as the study of semantics is definable, is rather nearer to what I have in mind. But the particular method which is available is that of literary criticism and analysis. One is looking for changes in the use of language, what Mr House has called, 'the idiom of the period': not changes in spelling or grammar or punctuation, but

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25 Raymond Williams, 'An Open Letter to WEA Tutors', published by WEA, 1961, reprinted in McIlroy and Westwood, eds., *Border Country*, p222-3.

26 John McIlroy, 'The Unknown Raymond Williams' and 'Border Country: Raymond Williams in Adult Education', in McIlroy and Westwood, *Border Country*, pp3-23, and pp269-323. Quotation from p301; 'exceptional isolation' was Williams's description, in *Marxism and Literature*, p2.

27 Raymond Williams, 'Literature in Relation to History, 1850-75' in *Rewley House Papers*, III, I, 1949-50, pp36-40. Reprinted in McIlroy and Westwood, *Border Country* p170.

> rather the changes in language as a medium of expression, changes which reflect subtle and often unconscious changes of assumption and mental and emotional process. The change and continuity of language, often seen most clearly in its use in literature, forms a record of vitally important changes and developments in human personality. It is as much the record of the history of a people as political institutions and religious and philosophical modes.[28]

This is an early statement of what was to become Williams's distinctive project, though as yet without methodological specificity. By 1953, there is again a more confident tone;

> The history of a word is in the series of meanings which a dictionary defines; the relevance of the word is the common language. The dictionary indicates a contemporary scheme of the past; the active word, in speech or in writing, indicates all that has become present. To distinguish the interaction is to distinguish a tradition — a mode of history; and then in experience we set a value on the tradition — a mode of criticism. The continuing process, and the consequent decisions, are then the matter of action in society.[29]

Here, elements of the *Marxism and Literature* definition are beginning to coalesce: the necessary comparison between lived experience and the received definition; the insistence on the communal nature of language; the evaluative, moral and political force of decisions and emphases in definition.

The distinctive elements which form the 'cultural hypothesis' of the structure of feeling evolved between 1948 and 1962, when the term becomes fully articulate in *The Long Revolution*. Accounts of the term have tended to consider only Williams's books, but in fact much of the work came out of his classes and was first articulated in adult education and literary journals.[30] The refusal of the conventional distinction between feeling and thought, for instance, which he believes determines historians' refusal of certain kinds of literary evidence, is questioned at the 'Literature in Relation to History' conference;

> The whole distinction between thought and feeling, or between 'hard fact' and experience seemed to me another simply historical phenomenon.[31]

The appeal to accept the relevance of 'imaginative consciousness' as a distinctive form is combined here with a readiness to historicize the contemporary, to view

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28 Raymond Williams, 'Literature in Relation to History', p172.

29 Raymond Williams, 'The Idea of Culture'; quoted from reprint in McIlroy and Westwood, *Border Country*, p59.

30 See below p14 for these accounts.

31 Raymond Williams, 'Literature in Relation to History', in McIlroy and Westwood, *Border Country* p170.

historically and critically the 'phenomenon' of that 'whole distinction'. The difficulties Williams locates in his report on the conference are the matter of his own development.

The recurrent comparison between received and lived forms, which is at the heart both of the experience which is figured in the structure of feeling and of the method of analysis Williams was developing, become a central emphasis in the period. It is bound up with the question of evidence, of what is representative of cultural change, historical and contemporary. In the programmatic essay 'Culture is Ordinary'(1958), he argues;

> The making of a mind is, first, the slow learning of shapes, purposes, and meanings, so that work, observation and communication are possible. Then, second, but equal in importance, is the testing of these in experience, the making of new observations, comparisons, meanings.[32]

In *Culture and Society*, the presence of this tension of comparison has become a key element in the evaluation of an author. Thus Williams writes of D.H. Lawrence;

> The outstanding value of Lawrence's development is that he was in a position to know the living process as a matter of common rather than special experience... The tragedy of Lawrence, the working-class boy, is that he did not live to come home. It is a tragedy, moreover, common enough in its incidence to exempt him from the impertinences of personal blame.[33]

Similarly, he notes of Orwell;

> I maintain, against others who have criticized Orwell, that as a man he was brave, generous, frank, and good, and that the paradox which is the total effect of his work should not be understood in solely personal terms, but in terms of the pressures of a whole situation.[34]

This approach is reproduced in consideration of his own and his contemporaries' experience. As early as 1949 he commented, in an account of his teaching practice, 'Because some of my experience would seem, by the sign of public discussion, to

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32 Raymond Williams, 'Culture is Ordinary'; in McIlroy and Westwood, eds., *Border Country*, p90.

33 Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society*, p203, 212.

34 Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society*, p284. This is echoed in the later book, *Orwell* (London: Fontana, 1991) p90; 'But it is therefore more than an individual history, Nobody who shared or overlapped with his epoch can, in good faith, reduce his crisis to a personal development. There were important personal factors in his successes and in his failures, but some of the deepest contradictions are part of a shared history, and we cannot set ourselves above it, as if he were an abstract critical problem.'

be representative, the account may have some general relevance.'[35] The conviction of the importance of experiences he felt were representative of his generation is above all evident in his early assessment of Hoggart ;

> The distinctive world of writers of Richard Hoggart's generation is a complex of critical habit, recording ability, and imaginative impulse. This is, I think, the current mainstream of English writing, and one which is likely to broaden and deepen. The effect it is having on the forms of contemporary writing has not yet been assessed, although the symptoms have been noticed... the attempts to express and articulate this particular complex of interests and pressures are in fact the vital contemporary mainstream. The gaucheness and posing are not always failures of integrity; sometimes, at least, they are the by-products of the most honest attempts we have to communicate new feelings in a new situation.[36]

The whole process, of troubled articulation and of conflict of form and material, Williams here calls the 'complex of feeling'.[37] Similarly, in a more general account of contemporary fiction, he notes the modern breakdown of earlier conventions of realism, 'under new pressures of particular experience' because of 'some deep crisis in experience.'[38] Williams's articulation of the tension as it appears, is lived, in the contemporary scene is both a critical assessment of the structure of feeling and an exemplification of its working.

Although the structure of feeling is developed within this wide range of concerns, Williams was nonetheless making a specific emphasis. The particularity of the structure of feeling depends on a discrimination of some positive, emergent element in the work in question. The representative, evidential status of other work is explicit in a consideration of Colin Wilson, but it is clearly distinct from the emphasis traced in the structure of feeling;

> We look, in each generation, not only for those works of original thought or imagination by which our immediate literary tradition will be formed, but also for works of an inferior kind which by their very lack of individual quality are in a sense characteristic: novels which consolidate an achieved territory or exploit a registered feeling; general works which represent the

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35 Raymond Williams, 'Some Experiments in Literature Teaching' from *Rewley House Papers*, 11, X, 1948-9, pp9-15; quoted from reprint in McIlroy and Westwood, *Border Country*, p146.

36 Raymond Williams, 'Fiction and the Writing Public' in *Essays in Criticism*, 7, iv, 1957, p423-4.

37 Raymond Williams, 'Fiction and the Writing Public' p428.

38 Raymond Williams, 'Realism and the Contemporary Novel'; in *The Long Revolution* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963 c1962) p305, p312. The article originally appeared in *Universities and Left Review* 4(1958). For a full discussion, see my 'Terms of growth: A Study of Raymond Williams's "Realism and the Contemporary Novel" ', in *The Kyushu Review*, 2, October 1997, pp59-76.

> impact, on an ordinary articulate mind, of the medley of contemporary voices.[39]

The representative status of works which show evidence of the structure of feeling is not as mere evidence, but as an appreciable effort of struggle, of articulation.

It is in *The Long Revolution* that the structure of feeling is given extended theoretical definition, within Williams's articulation of his proposal of a method for the study of culture.[40] The elements and emphases of the previous decade here coalesce, and the explanation points forward to *Marxism and Literature*, which repeats some of these formulations word for word. Contrasting the study of past societies and cultures with analysis of the present, he argues;

> We learn each element [of the past] as a precipitate, but in the living experience of the time every element was in solution, an inseparable part of a complex whole. The most difficult thing to get hold of, in studying any past period, is this felt sense of the quality of life...[41]

It is again in this distinctive area of feeling, above all present in literature, that he traces the presence of the structure of feeling. He distinguishes this from other formulations, such as Fromm's 'social character' and Benedict's 'pattern of culture', on the grounds of the comparative element within the structure of feeling, which makes it both so difficult to trace but also specific in its attention to the process of change; [42]

> One generation may train its successor, with reasonable success, in the social character or the general cultural pattern, but the new generation will have its own structure of feeling, which will not appear to have come 'from' anywhere. For here, most distinctly, the changing organisation is enacted in the organism: the new generation responds in its own ways to the unique world it is inheriting, taking up many continuities, that can be traced, and reproducing many aspects of the organization, which can be separately described, yet feeling its whole life in certain ways differently, and shaping its creative response into a new structure of feeling.[43]

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39 Raymond Williams, 'The New Party Line? ' in *Essays in Criticism*, 7, 1, 1957, p68.

40 Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* ch.2, 'The Analysis of Culture'.

41 Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution*, p63.

42 Erich Fromm, Frankfurt School sociologist and cultural theorist, author of a number of books conjoining Marxist and Freudian interpretations of culture; Ruth Benedict, author of *Patterns of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1934) a book Williams singled out specifically for recommendation in his reading lists for adult education classes, see Raymond Williams, 'Books for teaching "Culture and Environment" ', in *The Use of English*, 1, 3, 1950, pp134-40, quoted from reprint in McIlroy and Westwood, *Border Country*, p178. I intend to consider the origins of Williams's method — in these authors and in Empson, I.A. Richards and the Leavises — in a later piece.

43 Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution*, p65

At this theoretical level, Williams has articulated the hypothesis which had been emerging in his work for a decade. The structure of feeling within which, as a solution, he had lived and worked since 1947, was in effect now a precipitate. As he remarked in his Introduction to *The Long Revolution;*

> With this book and *Culture and Society,* and with my novel *Border Country* which I believe to have, in a particular and quite different way, an essential relevance to the two general books, I have completed a body of work which I set myself to do ten years ago. Other work will necessaily follow from this, but it feels like the completion of a particular stage in one's life, and while this need not interest anybody else, it is perhaps worth recording.[44]

These lines, at once confessional, defensive and apologetic ('this need not interest anyone else'), emphasising that the 'body of work' has come out of specific, individual concerns, nevertheless present the conviction that the project is of public, representative importance ('it is perhaps worth recording'). Although some critics have found the manner overly self-regarding, Williams works within the conviction of the critical principles he was presenting; the individual struggle for articulation, in Orwell, in Lawrence, or in Williams, was evidence within a whole analysis. There is a risk of folding Williams tautologically into his own concepts here, but in the passage from the writing of the late 1940s, to this felt sense of achievement ('I have completed a body of work'), the whole hypothesis which he eventually labelled the structure of feeling is clearly revealed.

Although, as David Simpson points out, 'it has not proved to be an exportable concept', there have nonetheless been a number of attempts theoretically to explicate the structure of feeling, to locate it in relation to Williams's oeuvre, and even to make use of it, though primarily reflexively in analyses of Williams's own work.[45] A pattern of recurring problems emerges across these analyses. First, it is argued that the structure of feeling depends too closely on notions of subjectivity and experience, of voice and writing, that have since been substantially contested, notably in Derrida's critique of 'presence', but also in the Marxist/structuralist/

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44 *The Long Revolution,* p15.

45 The main analyses are: David Simpson, 'Feeling for Structures, Voicing "History" ' in Christopher Prendergast, ed., *Cultural Materialism: On Raymond Williams* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995) p36 ; Peter Middleton, 'Why Structure Feeling? ' in *News from Nowhere* 6, February 1989, pp50-57; Alan O'Connor, *Raymond Williams: Writing, Culture, Politics* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989) pp83-5; Mick Wallis, 'Structure of Feeling and Higher Education Drama' in W. John Morgan and Peter Preston, eds., *Raymond Williams: Politics, Education, Letters* (London: St.Martin's Press, 1993) pp129-162; Laura di Michealis 'Autobiography and the "Structure of Feeling" in *Border Country*' in Dennis L. Dworkin and Leslie G. Roman, eds., *Views Beyond the Border Country: Raymond Williams and Cultural Politics* (London: Routledge, 1993) pp21-37.

post-structuralist assault on the category of 'experience' in the 1960s and 1970s.[46] Second, 'structure of feeling' is found generally to have an uncertain role even within Williams's own framework, and thus not even to be coherent enough to transpose. As such an indelibly idiosyncratic formulation, it has no ultimate use-value. Its implication in the whole, complexly eclectic system of Williams's thought about language and society makes it difficult to extract or define precisely. Third, it is argued that it has in any case been superceded by more precise terms of analysis; the concept seems too indeterminate and elliptical to be ultimately workable, not least because it can easily be replaced, at different points, with a variety of more or less effective synonyms. Ultimately, for most critics, the 'structure of feeling' is at best a transitional term, figuring precisely a crisis of definition and analysis but, in Eagleton's phrase, 'The solution it tenders was thus, precisely, the problem.'[47]

There is some justice in these criticisms, but for reasons of space and focus I cannot here confront the large questions they leave open, though I intend to do so elsewhere. In considering the structure of feeling there is an intriguing sense that difficulties with the term are indexical, focussing in one symptom problems which many critics then diagnose as systemic. Writers in the recent renewal of attention to the 1950s have struggled to collate the range of material with which they are faced, as critical debates over accounts of the New Left milieu show.[48] It is my feeling that attending to the structure of feeling is a suggestive, effective and sensitive method — or hypothesis.

Despite the difficulties, there is some attachment to the term among critics. Peter Middleton, for instance, also argues that attention to the 'structure of feeling' of a social formation is a distinctive and revealing critical approach, allowing overdue analysis of the place of emotion in social theory and art. It facilitates consideration of inadequate, confused or failed articulation;

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46 Interestingly, given the explicit Derridean assault on the category of 'presence', Williams closes the *Marxism and Literature* discussion of the structure of feeling with the assertion, 'Any of these examples requires detailed substantiation, but what is now in question, theoretically, is the hypothesis of a mode of social formation, explicit and recognizable in specific forms of art, which is distinguishable from other social and semantic formations by its articulation of *Presence.*' (his italics) Since Derrida's work was available by this time -- not least through the effort Williams's colleague and friend at Jesus College, Cambridge, Stephen Heath -- it is tempting to wonder to what extent this is an explicit facing down of post-structuralist arguments.

47 Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary Theory* (London: Verso, 1976) p27.

48 See Lin Chun, *The British New Left* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Up, 1993); Michael Kenny, *The First New Left* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1995); Nick Stevenson, *Culture, Ideology and Socialism: Raymond Williams and E. P. Thompson* (Aldershot: Avebury, 1995); discussion of these interpretations particularly in *New Left Review*, 215 and 219.

> Structure of feeling is an attempt to analyze social change, based on the recognition that to do so adequately from the standpoint of the emergent group, it is necessary to recognize that the group cannot know or articulate itself wholly within the available cultural resources of the social order it is challenging, and nor can it be comprehended from the apparently complete cultural knowledge that the dominant order has articulated.[49]

David Simpson, whilst accepting Williams's effort 'to integrate a general theory of human creativity into an account of the interrelation of cultural and political revolution,' sees the term rather as hortatory and suggestive than analytically or theoretically incisive;

> The emphasis on the voice, and on the feeling that redesigns the structure, does not in may view produce methodologically precise paradigms for literary or cultural analysis... The primary appeal is to the conscience, and to the possibility of a future method, always to be rendered within specific place and time.[50]

The elements which Middleton and Simpson isolate are certainly appropriate, but repeat the ambivalence noted at the beginning of this article. The value, I would contend, of 'structure of feeling' is in just this provisional and suggestive character.

Williams acknowledged frankly, if under the disconcerting pressure of the *New Left Review* interviewers, that the concept 'structure of feeling' was vulnerable.[51] He was tolerant(inevitably, I would argue, given the whole direction of his thinking about cultural change) of the subsequent search for other methodologies and idioms ;

> Because of the need to engage with the dominant interpretation, my language was very different from that in which I had written between 1939 and 1941. I am not surprised that in the next phase of the arguments people felt they had to move to a quite alternative terminology, because they thought the existing vocabulary confused the emergence of a different position too much.[52]

However, he insisted on its importance, as we have seen, because he wished to defend the area of experience, because it was a tool to open up an analytic perspective otherwise unavailable, and because it brought together elements in an

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49 Peter Middleton, 'Why structure feeling?' in T.Pinkney, ed., *News from Nowhere* 6, February 1989, pp53/4.

50 David Simpson, 'Feeling for Structures, Voicing History' in C.Prendergast, ed., *Cultural Materialism: On Raymond Williams* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995) p46/7.

51 For an account of quite how disturbing Williams found the lomg interview process, see F. Inglis, *Raymond Williams* (London; Verso, 1996) pp259-264.

52 Raymond Williams, *Politics and Letters*, p156.

analysis that were otherwise kept separate.

Ultimately, the adoption or otherwise of Williams's methods by subsequent generations is not the question. As E.P. Thompson wrote,

> Our only criterion of judgement should not be whether or not a man's actions are justified in the light of subsequent evolution.[53]

The 'structure of feeling' seems a concept precisely generated from Williams's own crisis of articulation, which was a crisis broadly evident in the 1950s. It is, in a curious doubling, a suggestive element of the structure of feeling of the period, evidence of the pressures it was devised to define.

Kyushu University, December 1997.

53 E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968 c1963) p12.