

# Marxism and Literature

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RAYMOND WILLIAMS

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which have been precipitated and are more evidently and more immediately available. Not all art, by any means, relates to a contemporary structure of feeling. The effective formations of most actual art relate to already manifest social formations, dominant or residual, and it is primarily to emergent formations (though often in the form of modification or disturbance in older forms) that the structure of feeling, as *solution*, relates. Yet this specific solution is never mere flux. It is a structured formation which, because it is at the very edge of semantic availability, has many of the characteristics of a pre-formation, until specific articulations—new semantic figures—are discovered in material practice: often, as it happens, in relatively isolated ways, which are only later seen to compose a significant (often in fact minority) generation; this often, in turn, the generation that substantially connects to its successors. It is thus a specific structure of particular linkages, particular emphases and suppressions, and, in what are often its most recognizable forms, particular deep starting-points and conclusions. Early Victorian ideology, for example, specified the exposure caused by poverty or by debt or by illegitimacy as social failure or deviation; the contemporary structure of feeling, meanwhile, in the new semantic figures of Dickens, of Emily Brontë, and others, specified exposure and isolation as a *general* condition, and poverty, debt, or illegitimacy as its connecting instances. An alternative ideology, relating such exposure to the nature of the social order, was only later generally formed: offering explanations but now at a reduced tension: the social explanation fully admitted, the intensity of experienced fear and shame now dispersed and generalized.

The example reminds us, finally, of the complex relation of differentiated structures of feeling to differentiated classes. This is historically very variable. In England between 1660 and 1690, for example, two structures of feeling (among the defeated Puritans and in the restored Court) can be readily distinguished, though neither, in its literature and elsewhere, is reducible to the ideologies of these groups or to their formal (in fact complex) class relations. At times the emergence of a new structure of feeling is best related to the rise of a class (England, 1700-60); at other times to contradiction, fracture, or mutation within a class (England, 1780-1830 or 1890-1930), when a formation appears to break away from its class norms, though it retains its

substantial affiliation, and the tension is at once lived and articulated in radically new semantic figures. 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 kinds of art, which is distinguishable from other social and semantic formations by its articulation of presence.

## 10. The Sociology of Culture

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Many of the procedures of sociology have been limited or distorted by reduced and reductive concepts of society and the social. This is particularly evident in the sociology of culture. Within the radical empiricist tradition, often practically associated with Marxism, there has been important work on institutions. The major modern communications systems are now so evidently key institutions in advanced capitalist societies that they require the same kind of attention, at least initially, that is given to the institutions of industrial production and distribution. Studies of the ownership and control of the capitalist press, the capitalist cinema, and capitalist and state-capitalist radio and television interlock, historically and theoretically, with wider analyses of capitalist society, capitalist economy, and the neo-capitalist state. Further, many of the same institutions require analysis in the context of modern imperialism and neo-colonialism, to which they are crucially relevant (see Schiller (1969)).

Over and above their empirical results, these analyses force theoretical revision of the formula of base and superstructure and of the definition of productive forces, in a social area in which large-scale capitalist economic activity and cultural production are now inseparable. Unless this theoretical revision is made, even the best work of the radical and anti-capitalist empiricists is in the end overlaid or absorbed by the specific theoretical structures of bourgeois cultural sociology. The bourgeois concept of 'mass communications' and the tied radical concept of 'mass manipulation' are alike inadequate to the true sociology of these central and varying institutions. Even at an early stage of analysis these undifferentiated and blocking concepts need to be replaced by the motivating and specifying terms of hegemony. What both bourgeois and radical-empiricist cultural theory have achieved is the social *neutralization* of such institutions: the concept of the 'mass' replacing and neutralizing specific class structures; the concept of 'manipulation' (an operative strategy in capitalist advertising and politics) replacing and neutralizing the complex interactions of control, selection, incorporation, and the phases of social

consciousness which correspond to real social situations and relations.

This neutralizing element has been particularly evident in the study of 'effects' which has preoccupied empirical bourgeois sociology. Here the analysis and even the recognition of 'effects' are predetermined by the assumption of norms which are either, like 'socialization', abstract and mystifying (since it is precisely the historical and class variations of 'socialization' which need to be studied) or, as in the studies of effects on politics or on 'violence', are themselves 'effects' of a whole active social order, which is not analysed but simply taken as background or as an empirical 'control'. The complex sociology of actual audiences, and of the real conditions of reception and response in these highly variable systems (the cinema audience, the newspaper readership, and the television audience being highly distinct social structures), is overlaid by bourgeois norms of 'cultural producers' and 'the mass public', with the additional effect that the complex sociology of these producers, as managers and agents within capitalist systems, is itself not developed.

A further effect of this kind of concentration on 'mass communications' is that analysis is not normally extended to institutions where these norms appear to be absent: for example, book publishing, which is now undergoing a critical phase of capitalist reorganization with cultural effects which are often not seen as a problem because they are not a 'mass' problem. There has been frequent and often justified complaint against 'vulgar Marxism', but the increasing penetration of small-scale capitalist institutions—which had carried the liberal ideology of 'true' cultural production (as distinct from 'mass culture')—by large-scale international investment and integration with many other forms of production is at once an economic and a cultural fact.

Cultural effects need not always be indirect. It is in practice impossible to separate the development of the novel as a literary form from the highly specific economics of fiction publication. This has been true, with many negative effects, (often isolated and projected as simple changes of sensibility or technique) since at latest the 1890s, though directly negative effects are now much more evident. Analysis of the sociology of the novel has to include many factors, but always this directly economic factor which, for ideological reasons, is ordinarily excluded. The

insertion of economic determinations into cultural studies is of course the special contribution of Marxism, and there are times when its simple insertion is an evident advance. But in the end it can never be a simple insertion, since what is really required, beyond the limiting formulas, is restoration of the whole social material process, and specifically of cultural production as social and material. This is where analysis of institutions has to be extended to analysis of formations. The complex and variable sociology of those cultural formations which have no direct or exclusive or manifest institutional realization—literary and intellectual ‘movements’, for example—is especially important. Gramsci’s work on intellectuals and Benjamin’s work on ‘bohemians’ are encouraging models of an experimental Marxist kind.

A Marxist cultural sociology is then recognizable, in its simplest outlines, in studies of different types of institution and formation in cultural production and distribution, and in the linking of these within whole social material processes. Thus distribution, for example, is not limited to its technical definition and function within a capitalist market, but connected, specifically, to modes of production and then interpreted as the active formation of readerships and audiences, and of the characteristic social relations, including economic relations, within which particular forms of cultural activity are in practice carried out.

So much remains to be done, within this general outline, that it is tempting to rest on it. But we have seen, theoretically, as we learn again and again to see practically, that the reduction of social relations and social content to these explicit and manifest general forms is disabling. To these Marxist or other studies of institutions and formations it is crucially necessary to add studies of forms: not by way of illustration but, in many cases, as the most specific point of entry to certain kinds of formation. Here another and very different sociological tradition is relevant.

The sociology of consciousness, which was a seminal element in the period of classical sociology, and which led to a programmatic distinction of the ‘cultural sciences’, has remained influential and is well represented within the Marxist tradition by Lukács and Goldmann, and by the Frankfurt School. The general tendency, within bourgeois sociology, has been a reduc-

tion of the sociology of consciousness to the 'sociology of knowledge'. Within the empirical tradition there has been a further reduction to a sociology of the institutions of 'organized knowledge', such as education and religion, where a familiar kind of evidence, in consciously organized ideas and relationships, is more available. Within some Marxist tendencies, even, the understanding of 'consciousness' as 'knowledge'—perhaps primarily determined by positivism—has been especially weak in relation to important kinds of art and literature. For consciousness is not only knowledge, just as language is not only indication and naming. It is also what is elsewhere, and in this context necessarily, specialized as 'imagination'. In cultural production (and all consciousness is in this sense produced) the true range is from information and description, or naming and indication, to embodiment and *performance*. While the sociology of consciousness is limited to knowledge, all other real cultural processes are displaced from the social dimension in which, quite as evidently, they belong.

Thus a sociology of drama, already concerned with institutions (theatres and their predecessors and successors), with formations (groups of dramatists, dramatic and theatrical movements), with formed relationships (audiences, including the formation of audiences within theatres and their wider social formation), would go on to include forms, not only in the sense of their relations to world-views or structures of feeling but also in the more active sense of their whole performance (social methods of speaking, moving, representing, and so on). Indeed in many arts, while the manifest social content is evident in one way in institutions, formations, and communicative relationships, and in another way in forms which relate to specific selections of issues, specific kinds of interpretation and of course specifically reproduced content, an equally important and sometimes more fundamental social content can be found in the basic social means—historically variable and always active social forms of language and movement and representation—on which, ultimately, the more manifest social elements can be seen to depend.

Specific studies must often temporarily isolate this or that element. But the fundamental principle of a sociology of culture is the complex unity of the elements thus listed or separated. Indeed the most basic task of the sociology of culture is analysis

of the interrelationships within this complex unity: a task distinct from the reduced sociology of institutions, formations, and communicative relationships and yet, as a sociology, radically distinct also from the analysis of isolated forms. As so often, the two dominant tendencies of bourgeois cultural studies—the sociology of the reduced but explicit ‘society’ and the aesthetics of the excluded social remade as a specialized ‘art’—support and ratify each other in a significant division of labour. Everything can be known about a reading public, back to the economics of printing and publishing and the effects of an educational system, but what is read by that public is the neutralized abstraction ‘books’, or at best its catalogued categories. Meanwhile, but elsewhere, everything can be known about the books, back to their authors, to traditions and influences, and to periods, but these are finished objects before they go out into the dimension where ‘sociology’ is thought to be relevant: the reading public, the history of publishing. It is this division, now ratified by confident disciplines, which a sociology of culture has to overcome and supersede, insisting on what is always a whole and connected social material process. This is of course difficult, but great energy is now expended, and is often in effect trapped, in maintaining the abstract divisions and separations. Meanwhile in cultural practice and among cultural producers, before these received abstractions get to work, the process is inevitably known, if often indistinctly and unevenly, as whole and connected.

Specific methods of analysis will vary, in different areas of cultural activity. But one new method is now emerging, which can be felt as original in a number of fields. For if we have learned to see the relation of any cultural work to what we have learned to call a ‘sign-system’ (and this has been the important contribution of cultural semiotics), we can also come to see that a sign-system is itself a specific structure of social relationships: ‘internally’, in that the signs depend on, were formed in, relationships; ‘externally’, in that the system depends on, is formed in, the institutions which activate it (and which are then at once cultural and social and economic institutions); integrally, in that a ‘sign-system’, properly understood, is at once a specific cultural technology and a specific form of practical consciousness: those apparently diverse elements which are in fact unified in the material social process. Current work on the

photograph, on the film, on the book, on painting and its reproduction, and on the 'framed flow' of television, to take only the most immediate examples, is a sociology of culture in this new dimension, from which no aspect of a process is excluded and in which the active and formative relationships of a process, right through to its still active 'products', are specifically and structurally connected: at once a 'sociology' and an 'aesthetics'.