

1968: 11). Williams' work was fundamental to these developments. But more than this, it was fundamental to the development of cultural studies.

This chapter has hopefully demonstrated the importance of Williams' concept of culture as a realized signifying system for the development of cultural studies. On the basis of Williams's redefinition of culture, cultural studies has gradually come to define culture as the production, circulation and consumption of meanings; meanings that are always entangled in questions of culture and power.<sup>6</sup> To paraphrase what Williams (1989a: 22–3) said about communication systems in 'Communications and community', we cannot think of culture as a realized signifying system as something which happens after reality has occurred, because it is through culture as a realized signifying system that the reality of ourselves, the reality of our society, forms and is interpreted.<sup>7</sup>

## Notes

- 1 What Williams actually says is 'thinking with it rather than under it' (Williams 1981b: 185).
- 2 See Storey 2009a.
- 3 The Four Tops, 'It's the same old song', *Four Tops Motown Greatest Hits*, Motown Record Company.
- 4 For a discussion of the ways in which the 'biological' is always already cultural, see Butler 1999.
- 5 For example, over the last four years I have been doing research on opera. Not opera as a body of texts and practices but opera as a shifting network of meanings (i.e. the culture of opera); how in certain times and spaces opera is articulated as 'popular culture' and in others it is articulated as 'high culture'. What I try to do (Storey 2002, 2009b) is to track the development of opera as a signifying system: the construction of a particular discourse on opera. A discourse which enabled, constrained and constituted the meaning of opera and opera going. Opera's changing meaning is a question of culture and power.
- 6 When I describe the media as the dominant signifying institution I am thinking of the media in terms of Williams' (1980a) insistence on the need to recognize the existence of dominant, emergent, residual meanings. In other words, I am describing dominant meanings; there will always be emergent and residual meanings.
- 7 What Williams actually says is this: 'we cannot think of communication as secondary. We cannot think of it as marginal; or as something that happens after reality has occurred; because it is through the communication systems that the reality of ourselves, the reality of our society, forms and is interpreted' (Williams 1989a: 22–3).

# The perspectives of radical democracy: Raymond Williams' work and its significance for a critical social theory

Rainer Winter

Translated by Ilke Krumholz

## 1. Introduction

The following contribution deals with the significance of Raymond Williams' works for a critical social theory. Like Jean-Paul Sartre, to whom he has been compared frequently, or Pierre Bourdieu, Williams also does not live up to the cliché that a young radical usually turns into a reactionary as they grow older. Not only did all three of them remain true to their ideals, but both their social critique and their political involvement increased during the course of their lives. At first, Williams was committed to a left-wing reformism but his ideas became more radical towards the end of the 1960s. He showed his solidarity with both the student movement and the protest against the Vietnam War, he emphasized the dangers of the nuclear threat and reflected on a socialist democracy. Having belonged to the left wing in the tradition of Leavis first, he developed a cultural materialism after a long-lasting critical analysis of Marx's ideas. Science and politics merged in his works, which followed the intention of 'making hope practical, rather than despair convincing' (Williams 1989h).

It is the aim of a critical social theory to understand and to transform the socio-historic context of the (global) society (see Pensky 2005) along with its power dynamics and forms of social injustice by asking questions which are necessary for a thorough analysis and by searching for answers and solutions which establish social and economic justice and contribute to a radicalization of democracy (see Kellner 1989). However, critical theory must not be considered as a completed project with ultimate knowledge and ultimate answers. It is altered by the confrontation with new social circumstances as well as by the formation and the development of new theoretical insight and interpretations (see Winter and Zima 2007). According to Paolo Freire's oppositional pedagogy, it is sustained by the idea of a transformative dialogue, of the mutual creation and the sharing of meanings, knowledge and values which are supposed to contribute to living together in a constructive way, to altering power structures, to an 'empowerment' and to emancipation (see Hardt 1992; Fiske 1993; Denzin 2003; Kincheloe and McLaren 2005).

Raymond Williams' manifold, complex and inventive works offer a variety of starting points, ideas and conceptions for a project such as this. He has made very important and fundamental contributions to various areas such as the history of ideas, literary sociology, cultural studies, cultural sociology and media studies. No matter how Williams' work has been judged or classified in retrospect, he himself did not consider it as the isolated action of an academic but as a part of democratizing our entire way of living, as a historical project to which he dedicated his intellectual and political life. Williams was convinced that serious theoretical work is both important and relevant. He wanted to contribute to understanding the social reality in a critical and transformative way and to intervene in the current social struggles and conflicts. Williams aimed for a radically democratic and popular kind of socialism which realizes the idea of a common culture (see Milner 2002: 105).

Williams, much like the Frankfurt School in the 1930s or Pierre Bourdieu, represented a socially committed interventionist conception of science which connected the academic world with everyday life. He considered his work in the context of political movements which fight for a just and democratic society in a 'long revolution'. Williams' studies, which essentially influenced the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in Birmingham (see Winter 2001), aimed at analysing the social order, which influences and regulates the lives of the people, beyond discipline borders. Furthermore, he wanted to create knowledge which could be used for solving urgent social, political and economic problems. He wanted this knowledge to be introduced into the cultural and political reflections of groups which fight against social injustice and for a transformation of the existent. Williams called this kind of collectivization 'knowable communities'. A current example is the 'social justice' movement which is fighting for an alternative globalization and radical democracy (see Leistyna 2005; Neate and Platt 2006). According to Williams, culture can be understood as a slow, yet steadily continuing process of active and creative generation of shared meanings. In this chapter, we will discuss central theoretical considerations and conceptions of Williams which are of significance for a critical social theory.

## 2. Culture and a democratic society

According to Williams, his most famous and most successful book *Culture and Society* ([1958] 1963a) has to be understood as an oppositional piece of work (Williams 1979d: 98). On the one hand Williams reconstructs the development of the idea of culture by means of a 'close reading' of several texts from the 'English' tradition, which developed in a critical opposition to utilitarian thinking. Ever since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, this term has been connected to a social idea which describes and

interprets the novel experiences of the social transformation. Cultural texts express the kind of experience of life which can only be accessed through texts. Furthermore, they allow for sophisticated insight and contain utopian possibilities which have not been implemented yet. Williams deals with visions of the 'Noch-Nicht-Sein' (Ernst Bloch). Tendencies towards this concept can be found in cultural texts. Williams frames those hopeful moments which suggest a change, even though it is not clear what this change might look like. His immanent analysis also resembles the approach of ideology criticism of the Frankfurt School, which has complained that the emancipatory promises of ideologies, like the civil ideal of democracy and justice, have not been implemented thus far (see Jones 2004: 62ff.).<sup>1</sup> Just as Williams does in *Culture and Society*, Jürgen Habermas (1963) also proceeds methodologically in the lines of historic semantics in *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*.

On the other hand, Williams aimed at developing a critical and emancipatory version of culture in order to disassociate the term from the elitist, conservative tradition of Leavis and Eliot, who regarded culture as 'common intellectual property' which belongs to a 'minority elite' and which needs to be defended by it. Williams attacked this position, which uses the term 'culture' in opposition to the working class, to democracy or to socialism and, in doing so, has significantly shaped the contemporary way of thinking (Williams 1979d: 98). But, his project was set out not just to be reconstructive but deconstructive as well. For it aimed at presenting the complexity and the significance of the 'culture and society' tradition, criticizing the selective use of the term culture and replacing it with a democratically coined understanding of culture which rejects hierarchic classifications such as minorities or masses.

At the end of *Culture and Society* and after analysing Leavis's idea of a 'mass civilization' Williams concludes: 'There are in fact no masses, there are only ways of seeing people as masses' (Williams [1958] 1963a: 289). Whereas both Leavis and Eliot do not just relate culture to art but to an entire way of living, Williams goes even further by including a society's collective democratic institutions such as labour unions, associations or the political party of the working class into his idea of culture (Williams [1958] 1963a: 327). For Williams, their culture, which is founded on solidarity and helped create these institutions, represents the idea of social cohabiting which he opposed to the bourgeois-individualistic conception of society.

Thus, Williams used the term 'culture' in a critical and radically democratic way. In distinction from traditional conservative points of view on the one side and modernist vanguard opinions on the other, he postulated the assumption that 'culture is ordinary' in an early essay, first published in 1958, like *Culture and Society*.

Every human society has its own shape, its own purposes, its own meanings. Every human society expresses these, in institutions, and in

arts and learning. The making of a society is the finding of common meanings and directions, and its growth is an active debate and amendment under the pressures of experience, contact, and discovery, writing themselves into the land.

(Williams [1958] 1989b: 4)

Williams' thinking revolved around the idea of a 'common culture'. Admittedly, it has only been implemented rudimentarily in a society which is marked by inequality, exclusion and subordination. It rather presents the normative ideal of a radically democratic society in which the central economic, political and cultural institutions are organized according to democratic principles. This ideal enabled Williams to criticize the existing social reality, to present (utopian) latencies and to show the necessity of a cultural and social transformation.<sup>2</sup> 'We need a common culture, not for the sake of an abstraction, but because we shall not survive without it' (Williams [1958] 1963a: 304).

Thus, for Williams, speaking of a common culture included criticizing the division and the fragmenting of the present culture and finding creative ways to overcome it. It is supposed to be generated and constructed by a community during its life process.

A common culture is not the general extension of what a minority mean and believe, but the creation of a condition in which the people as a whole participate in the articulation of meanings and values, and in the consequent decisions between this meaning and that, this value and that.

(Williams [1968] 1989d: 36)

Hence, for Williams, a common culture was closely related to the idea of a creative democracy in which every member of the society participates and can develop and learn. Both artistic and medial practices play an important role in this process.

Based on Great Britain's social situation at the beginning of the 1960s, Williams further developed his theoretical concepts about the relationship between culture and society and about the character of the cultural process in *The Long Revolution* (1961c), which was first meant to be published as *Essays and Principles in the Theory of Culture*. The 'long revolution', which, according to him, marks the beginning of the modern society, arose from the interaction of three processes, namely the Industrial Revolution, the democratic revolution and the cultural revolution. Since modern society is defined by manifold interactions between these processes like, for example, interactions between industry and democracy (Williams 1961c: XI), these processes cannot be considered independently from one another. Expanding and intensifying the communication leads to a profound cultural revolution.

We speak of a cultural revolution, and we must certainly see the aspiration to extend the active process of learning, with the skills of literacy and other advanced communication, to all people rather than to limited groups, as comparable in importance to the growth of democracy and the rise of scientific industry.

(Williams 1961c: xi)

Williams' sociological approach helped him develop two concepts which he had already used in earlier works. On the one hand, he shows that, as long as there is no common culture, a literary and cultural tradition is based on selections which are made in the present and which are shaped by value decisions and power interests. In doing so, Williams deconstructed the idea that the truth is inherent in a literary tradition (see Milner 2002: 70). Thus, for Leavis and his supporters a literary or cultural tradition was still an objective development of a nation's consciousness, the expression of an organic community. Milner rightly points out (ibid.) that Williams anticipates poststructuralist presumptions such as the idea that the production of knowledge is based on a social foundation and that cultural texts have manifold meanings (see Gergen 1999). On the other hand, based on the level of experience, Williams examines how forms or structures develop and can be defined.

The most difficult thing to get hold of, in studying any past period, is this felt sense of the quality of life at a particular place and time: a sense of the ways in which the particular activities combined into a way of thinking and living.

(Williams [1958] 1963a: 47)

In this case, Williams emphasizes the social nature of experiences which are embedded in communities or social relationships and he suggests the term 'structure of feeling' for the analysis. 'In one sense, this structure of feeling is the culture of a period: it is the particular living result of all the elements in the general organization' (Williams [1958] 1963a: 48). At the same time he points out that a 'structure of feeling' may not be equated with an ideology since it is neither specific to a class nor universal. This term, which rather emphasizes the dimension of the experience, also ties in with Leavis. So, in an interview with *New Left Review* at the end of the 1970s, Williams stated the following:

Yes, 'experience' was a term I took over from *Scrutiny*. But you must remember that I was all the time working on historical changes in literary conventions and forms. Leavis's strength was in reproducing and interpreting what he called 'the living content of a work' ... The notion of a structure of feeling was designed to focus a mode of historical and

social relations which was yet quite internal to the work, rather than deducible from it or supplied by some external placing or classification. (Williams 1979d: 163f.)

In his later works Williams (1977) defines 'structure of feeling' as the tension between a consciously taken ideological position and a newly emerging experience. It indicates cultural and social changes, which can be counter-hegemonic.

### 3. The challenges of hegemony

Throughout his entire life Williams kept developing his cultural theory and, at the same time, continually specified and modified the meanings of terms which he had already applied in his early works. For instance, the main features of his attitude towards cultural materialism, which he convincingly elaborated in *Marxism and Literature* (1977), can already be found in his early culturalistic works. Hoping for a socialist society which is both organized democratically and popularly anchored has remained a fundamental motive of his entire work. During the 1960s and 1970s he occupied himself with studying translations about Western Marxism in *New Left Review*. Antonio Gramsci's research began to take a central role. This is especially true for his concept of hegemony, which significantly changed the CCCS's analysis of culture (see Winter 2001) but does not remain confined to the realm of culture. For it refers to the whole social process and how it is embedded into structures of power and authority.

To say that 'men' define and shape their whole lives is true only in abstraction. In any actual society there are specific inequalities in means and therefore in capacity to realize this process ... What is decisive is not only the conscious system of ideas and beliefs, but the whole lived social process as practically organized by specific and dominant meanings and values.

(Williams 1977: 108f.)

A ruling class has succeeded in establishing a hegemony if their ideas of values and concepts have become generally binding for the entire society. This process is characterized by the dominance and the subordination of certain classes, as the example of common sense shows. Common sense appears to be a natural concept, but it has been constructed in accordance with those in power. However, constructing and preserving a dominant or hegemonic culture is an active process. Hegemony is neither ultimate nor unassailable, and it is prone to being challenged by alternative social powers.

This idea of Gramsci's became the centre of Williams' critical social theory. For he elaborated the idea that the dominant culture does not

include the lived culture as a whole. In doing so, he opposed both Althusser's ideology theory, which was prevalent in British thinking at that time, as well as the 'dominant ideology thesis', which was accepted in sociology.

What has really to be said ... is that no mode of production and therefore no dominant social order and therefore no dominant culture ever in reality includes or exhausts all human practice, human energy, and human intention.

(Williams 1977: 125)

Choosing from the possibilities of human practice, every ruling regime establishes a central system of practices, meanings and values which is dominant and excludes other practices, meanings and values.

The incorporation, which is a constitutive practice executed by every hegemony, deeply penetrates the opinions and values of a society. For instance, a hegemonic culture selectively absorbs meanings and values which are an alternative to the dominant culture. According to Williams ([1973] 1980a), however, this is what also makes it vulnerable. In contrast to Stuart Hall's 'encoding-decoding' model (Hall 1973), he emphasizes that counter-hegemonic possibilities do not only exist in the realm of consumption or decoding but in the area of production as well.<sup>3</sup> That way, independently produced forms can be incorporated by the culture industry (Williams 1974) and still present possibilities for an oppositional or alternative 'encoding'.

### 4. Practices and agency

The attempt to appropriately theorize the concept of culture led Williams both to becoming intensively involved with the significance of culture for Karl Marx as well as to a new conceptual design of the Base-Superstructure-Model. According to him, it is Marx's opinion, 'to insist that all cultural processes were initiated by humans themselves, and, second, to argue that none of them could be fully understood unless they were seen in the context of human activities as a whole' (Williams [1983] 1989e: 201). Williams tied in with Marx's concept of the totality of social processes, which demands the examination of the interaction between those various forms of practices in a society. That way the material production is embedded in more extensive social ways of life.

In addition, Williams explained that the 'productive forces of "mental labour" have in themselves, an inescapable material and thus social history' (ibid.: 211). As he showed in a differentiated analysis of Marx's writings, cultural practices may not be understood as secondary in relationship to the material production but that they are part of the totality of the social-material processes. Since the superstructure itself has a material structure,

Williams demanded abandoning the opinion that only some of our productive practices are material. According to Williams, cultural practices in the realm of art, philosophy, aesthetic or ideology needed to be understood as 'real practices' (Williams 1977: 94) as 'elements of a whole material social process; not as a realm or a world or a superstructure, but many and variable productive practices, with specific conditions and intentions' (ibid.).

Williams did not exclusively assign the term 'productive forces' to the realm of economy but rather included every activity of the social process. It was not until capitalism that the idea of production in general was reduced to the production of goods, that is, the production in particular (see Williams 1977: 90ff.). Williams joins Lukács for whom the predominance of the economy was not a general characteristic of human life but a specific characteristic of the capitalistic economy (ibid.: 141).

Having dealt with Volosinov's language philosophy in a sophisticated way, he also identifies language as a material and social practice.

Signification, the social creation of meanings through the use of formal signs, is then a practical material activity; it is indeed, literally, a means of production. It is a specific form of that practical consciousness which is inseparable from all social material activity.

(Williams 1977: 38)

Williams resolutely rejects both subjectivistic and objectivistic theories of language. He especially criticizes Saussure's idea of language as an objective system which is based on the abstract binary distinction between 'langue' and 'parole' and the arbitrariness of the sign.<sup>4</sup> Following Volosinov's conception of the multi-accentuality he points out that the ambiguous meanings of signs depend on the social situation in which they are used. Using them in a creative way can result in novel accentuations and shifted meanings. Here, Williams anticipated opinions like the ones held in the approach of Gergen (1999) points out that the playful and sometimes subversive process of signification, the 'différance', which Derrida postulates, is not unlimited and endless, because the possible ambiguity of signs is limited by a given social-historic situation. Ways of life and interpersonal relationships create, reproduce and stabilize meanings. Finally, Williams defined language as a 'constitutive human faculty: exerting pressures and setting limits' (Williams 1977: 43). It is a material practice of human sociality.

By critically dealing with Marx's thinking, Williams' cultural materialism approach succeeds in creating a 'radically novel theoretical position' (Milner 2002: 105) which assumes that practices are socially determined but still holds on to the idea of 'agency'. That way the potentials of practices which are neither derived nor autonomous, are fathomed and their imminent potential is presented. Practices constitute the social process. Thus,

some extent, Williams anticipates the current 'practice turn' in social and cultural studies.

## 5. Raymond Williams today

Our reason for explaining and discussing important concepts and perspectives in Raymond Williams' work is its significance for a critical social theory. Thus, relating his works, which deal with specific historic constellations, to the present, rereading them and readopting them in the face of current (global) relationships, is a necessary step. In our opinion, Williams' theoretical positions are of enormous relevance for the twenty-first century as well. They show a strong affinity to the perspectives of the new social movements.

For both Stuart Hall and Williams, theoretical work in the realm of culture did not replace political activism, which greatly distinguishes them from Adorno and Horkheimer. Williams aimed at supporting and promoting radically democratic movements with the help of his intellectual work. Furthermore, in the realm of adult education and the university, he wanted to represent positions which corresponded to his own political experiences and analyses and displayed counter-hegemonic perspectives. Thus, the university-based implementation of the Cultural Studies-project, which originated from adult education (see Winter 2005), created 'a certain significant intellectual difference in the university' (Williams [1986] 1989c: 155). Democratic ideals were introduced to the realms of learning and education in order to make culture accessible to everybody. Williams owes his radically democratic perspectives to his socialist ideals. They correlated with respective positions in the British working class (see Gilbert 2006: 184). Both *Towards 2000* (1983f) and *Resources of Hope* (1989h) show that Williams felt obliged to the democratic political movements of his time, supported them and, in dealing with them, he developed critical positions which were supposed to promote a creative, democratic culture.

By criticizing utilitarianism and carefully analysing anti-capitalist attitudes in Burke, Eliot or Caudwell, his book *Culture and Society* is also relevant for the emotional structure of today's generation. Furthermore, considering the predominance of neo-liberal beliefs and practices, which, bound to the ideological doctrines of a free market, preach and strive for an unregulated economic liberalization, it is alarmingly up to date as well. The global anti-capitalist movement, the 'movement of movements' which has emerged during the past couple of years, questions the hegemony by aligning with ideals of social justice and radical democracy and representing an emergent emotional structure in correspondence to Williams, which is both oriented as oppositional and an alternative way.<sup>5</sup>

On the one hand they offer resistance to the neo-liberal economy politics and its effects by protesting against it. Both the Zapatista uprisings in

Mexico, which, by using the Internet, received global support for their opposition against the Mexican government and the North American Free Trade Agreement, as well as the organized campaigns against the WTO's policies in Seattle in 1999, are outstanding example of this resistance (Starr 2005). Richard Kahn and Douglas Kellner (2005) show that many forms of oppositional politics and alternative cultures develop and enunciate via the Internet.

On the one hand, by referring to the human collectivity, both the privatization and the commercialization of collective goods (such as water, health, education or the traffic system), as practised by today's governments, is criticized. This idea shows a great affinity with Williams' ideal of a 'common culture' in which competitive individualism is contrasted with the formation of communities. Considering this background, Williams can also be considered a precursor of Agamben's, Nancy's or Hardt and Negri's current occupation with the topic of community (see Gilbert 2006: 191f.).

On the other hand, alternative forms of economizing, of operational organization (see Wall 2005) or of trading, as practised in the *Fair Trade* movement (see Grimes 2005), are being tested. This occupation with a radical form of ecology, as it can be found in Friends of the Earth, had already been anticipated by Williams who not only dealt with the conception of nature early on in his works (Williams [1972] 1980b) but who commented on questions concerning ecology as well (Williams 1983f). In doing so, he laid the basis for an ecological criticism of capitalism and called for both taking responsibility for the human ecology and creating a new idea of society (see Williams 1973c).

The novel meanings, values and practices, which have developed in the context of criticizing neo-liberal globalization, are aimed at the implementation of an actual alternative with a radically democratic orientation. This idea clearly reveals a resemblance to Williams' concept of a 'long revolution'. 'This anti-capitalism is therefore not a revolutionary utopianism, but just the kind of open-ended, pluralistic refusal to endorse the hegemony of contemporary capitalism that the New Left always argued for' (Gilbert 2006: 190). Instead, it is rather about a gradual implementation of a creative democracy.

The foundation of the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre in 2001, which represents a novel form of a democratic institution, is an example for this. On the one hand, it is a platform on which various social movements can cooperate. On the other, it is a forum of deliberative democracy, which promotes counter-hegemonic alternatives from below, which are based on solidarity, and contrasts them with the market's neo-liberal utopia. It strives to become a cosmopolitan place of critical utopia. Analogies to Raymond Williams' work are obvious here as well. His analysis of emergent meanings, perceptions and practices already partly anticipates the work of the World Social Forum. For instance, the Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos calls for a sociology of emergences.

The sociology of emergences is the enquiry into the alternatives that are contained in the horizon of concrete possibilities. It consists in undertaking a symbolic enlargement of knowledges, practices and agents in order to identify therein the tendencies of the future (the Not Yet) in which it is possible to intervene so as to maximize the probability of hope vis-à-vis the probability of frustration.

(De Sousa Santos 2006: 31)

Furthermore, Lawrence Grossberg (2007: 288) points out that the term 'structure of feeling' belongs to the realm of emergence and creativity in Williams' late work because it refers to the gap between the experience and the discursive, what is known and what could be known, the lived and the articulation. 'It is the event of the virtual!' (ibid.: 288). This is the starting point for the quest for other modernities, which Grossberg advocates.

It is only in the imagination of other ways of being modern that we can at least begin to re-imagine imagination itself. The virtual, unlike the possible, is grounded in the real, offering a different notion of imagination. Raymond Williams seems to have understood this, giving it substance in his concept of the structure of feeling.

(Grossberg 2007: 288)

The examples reveal how close the concepts and perspectives developed by Williams are to social movements and critical theory construction in the twenty-first century. His work itself is a reservoir of 'resources of hope', which, of course, need to be read and adapted in the context of today's social-historic situation. Thus, Steven Connor (1997: 175) is wrong when he believes that 'Raymond Williams's time is not our time'. We have tried to show that the work he has created is a work of and for the future of the twenty-first century. On this note: 'Towards 2050' (Milner 2002: 162ff.) along with Raymond Williams!

## Notes

- 1 According to Williams, Herbert Marcuse's ([1937] 2004) essay 'Der affirmative Charakter der Kultur' published in *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* anticipated the ideas of *Culture and Society*. Culture preserves human values and needs which are suppressed by the current society and which create visions of a happy and free life (cf. Williams 1969b; Jones 2004: 64).
- 2 Refers to the conception of the ideal speech situation and the rational-critical public sphere by Jürgen Habermas, which Milner (2002: 163f) synthesized, can be found here. 'Both subscribed to a kind of radical-democratic anti-capitalism which takes its inspiration partly from Marxism, partly from Post-Romanticism, in Habermas's case that of Weber, in Williams' that of Leavis. Both were as enthusiastically sympathetic to the postmodern "new social movements" (Habermas 1981) as they were suspicious of postmodern theoretical relativism'

- (Milner 2002: 163). Admittedly, Habermas's theory of society is not oriented in an anti-capitalist way but it accepts the capitalist economic order.
- 3 Just like Walter Benjamin or Bertolt Brecht, Williams was interested in the emancipatory and democratic possibilities of new communication technologies. He wanted the public to be in possession of the means of communication (cf. Williams [1962] 1976a: 176ff.) and argued for a participatory use.
  - 4 In *Politics and Letters* Williams (1979d: 330) criticized de Saussure's conception of language. 'But to describe the sign as arbitrary or unmotivated prejudices the whole theoretical issue. I say it is not arbitrary but conventional, and that the convention is the result of a social process. If it has a history, then it is not arbitrary – it is the specific product of the people who have developed the language in question'.
  - 5 Cf. the documentation *We are Everywhere: The Irresistible Rise of Global Anticapitalism* (2003) edited by *Notes from Nowhere*.

## The 1968 May Day Manifesto

Stephen Woodhams

Raymond Williams' engagement in politics remains a lesser-known feature of his life, yet he came from a political household, his father Harry being a parish councillor and effectively running the Labour Party in Pandy (Smith 2008: 59–60). That Raymond himself was nearer the edge of the Labour Party may be appreciated from his participation in the local Left Book Club, his membership in the popular pre-war Communist Party at Cambridge and the 1980s when he joined with his friend Gwyn Alf Williams to become a member of Plaid Cymru (Williams, D. 2003). Placed in the context of these activities, the initiative of the *May Day Manifesto* may seem less exceptional. However, what marks out the years 1966 to 1969 was that Williams was pressed into a public role to which he rose and assumed the mantle of speaker and organizer. In what follows, the *Manifesto* is linked back to the New Left of the early 1960s, and out to the convulsive politics of the years, in particular the anger raised by the American presence in Vietnam. The main part of the essay is concerned with the organizing around the *Manifesto* leading to a National Convention of the Left, the *Bulletin* that accompanied activities and those who were drawn to its support.

The *May Day Manifesto* appeared in its popular form in 1968. The year has come down in public memory as a time of progressive revolt in forms ranging through music, demonstration, dress, violence and sex. Yet it was also the year when the state responded to a possible movement of 'Asian' British citizens from Kenya by introducing legislation effectively setting barriers to non-white peoples (Miles and Phizacklea 1984). These contradictory histories form a context for the *Manifesto* and informed correspondence in the *Bulletin*. The effects of the conflicts and allegiances emanating from the changes at the *New Left Review* in 1962 had caused considerable waves. In content, the *Review* embarked on an international path engaging with theoretical and political currents across the world. A group of editors and contributors centred on Perry Anderson caused rifts and dissension as they carried through the necessary task of establishing a journal that turned theoretical thinking into a political activity. Facilitating the change in direction, the new editorial group gained the support of Raymond Williams. An

# About Raymond Williams

---

Edited by  
Monika Seidl, Roman Horak,  
and Lawrence Grossberg

 **Routledge**  
Taylor & Francis Group  
LONDON AND NEW YORK