CULTURE AND MATERIALISM:
RAYMOND WILLIAMS AND THE MARXIST DEBATE

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis represents a study of Raymond Williams's work in the sociology of culture. It attempts to critically interrogate and assess Williams's theory of "cultural materialism". The argument put forth is that Williams's work, though not unproblematic, represents a significant reconstruction of Marxist theory. The focus of the study includes: tracing the genealogy of the Marxist problematic; an analysis of Williams's intervention into the Marxian materialist debate; an extended discussion of Marxist cultural theory and Williams's relationship to issues raised in the literature; the development, as an extension of insights gained from cultural materialism, of a critical theory of culture that attempts to theorize a specific cultural form --- the urban crime-drama cinema of the 1970's --- within the actual historical conditions of its production.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: RAYMOND WILLIAMS AND MARXIST THEORY

> This is not a good time to be a historical materialist.
>
> Bryan D. Palmer (1990:11)

While it is often true that social scientists are prone to exaggerate the long-term significance of short-term social phenomena, Palmer's rather bleak assessment of the current legitimacy of Marxist theory is bound to strike a nerve with even the most diehard working class "warrior". The past decade has seen, in the West, the success of radical conservative politics, and, in the East, the victory of market forces over state socialism. With newspaper headlines proclaiming the death of communism and the triumph of a new anti-socialist consensus politics, Marxism seems in retreat. Indeed, it does appear that these are not good days for historical materialists.

Over the past twenty years or so, and especially now against this backdrop of "defeat", a number of writers, once firmly located within the Marxist tradition, have migrated to a number of different and diffuse positions and have formed a determined interrogation of the most basic assumptions of Marxist theory. Most notably, though not exclusively, has been the long and often awkward stride from Marx to Nietzsche that has borne witness to the emergence of a school of "post-Marxism". Expressing a concern with the discursive and all-encompassing character of power, the constitution of subjectivity, and the production and reproduction of values, post-Marxists clearly reveal their "Nietzschean" influence. [1] One of the results of this theoretical confrontation is that, as Paul Smith (1988: 3) notes, even the most orthodox Marxist thinker, however reluctantly, has been forced to acknowledge the contributions to social theory offered by structuralism, post-structuralism, and radical social science. With this said, however, it is also important to recognize that some more antagonistic versions of post-Marxist thought are perhaps too quick to pounce upon their old mentor and denounce Marx's philosophy as a reductive and economistic class-centred theory that purports to offer an "absolute knowledge" of social history. [2]

Debate is always welcome, but not always productive. For while the recent objections to Marxism hold some sway, they do so largely against the classical or orthodox school of thought.[3] That is, some post-Marxist challenges hold their force largely against the vulgar economism of the Second International and the dominant strains of institutionalized Soviet Marxism. Indeed, if there is any unifying feature of contemporary Western Marxist theory, it is in its rejection of reductive and economistic tendencies. As a school of thought, Marxism is too rich and diverse to dismiss in one quick stroke of the pen. There is not one Marxism, but many Marxisms.

Now, if we accept the post-Marxist deconstruction of categories such as class and determination, and assert with some pride that history is subject-less, turning our primary attention away from the economy to the discursive play of signs, what then do we do? In deconstructing Marxism, in emphasizing difference as against the supposed unifying and totalizing feature of Marx's thought, post-Marxists seem to suggest that all social practices are nothing more than free-floating signifiers. Historical social formations are converted into random fields of discourse, discursive constructs free of any material basis[4] We are left with something that is very much unlike historical materialism, but strikingly similar to idealism. As such, it carries with it all the unwanted baggage of that tradition.

Thus, as Richard Gruneau notes (1988: 26), there is a significant danger embedded within the "new revisionism"; one can quite quickly lose sight of the importance of the political economic features of capitalist social formations and revel in the endless play of difference. On the other hand, it has been the Marxist emphasis upon the material determination of social practices that has constituted, arguably, one of its greatest strengths. The point, I think, is not to end an analysis of Marxism with a sweeping deconstruction of its supposed class and economic reductionism, but to identify and interrogate the contradictions and inconsistencies that exist within Marxist thought and attempt to move beyond these tensions through a reconstruction of historical materialism.

It is within this context that the work of Raymond Williams represents a significant contribution to Marxist theory. Williams's project is highlighted by the development of what he terms "cultural materialism", the "analysis of all forms of signification, and quite centrally writing, within the actual means and conditions of their practice," (1979a: 340). It is the assertion that cultural practices are forms of material production. Williams's intervention into the Marxist debate is thus twofold: he is concerned with interrogating and reconstructing Marxist theories of materialism, and with extending this analysis into the realm of culture. This thesis seeks to explicate and critically engage William's theory of cultural materialism.

Scope and Organization of the Study

Until his untimely death in 1988, Raymond Williams[5] proved himself to be a prodigious and versatile intellectual. His works range from literary and cultural criticism, to

Marxist theory, fictional texts, media analysis, and communication theory. He has also proved to be a highly influential theorist whose ideas have contributed to the work of Terry Eagleton, Edward Said, Frederic Jameson, and Stuart Hall to name but a few. And yet, very little academic writing exists that attempts to investigate, on a sustained and critical level, the unique contribution to the study of culture that Williams has offered.

For the purpose of analysis, Williams's work can be divided into two main periods. In the first, Williams is concerned with an exploration of "official" English culture. Williams's earlier work is thus very much a critique of the conservatism of such English thinkers as T.S. Eliot and F.R. Leavis. Out of this period Williams produces Culture and Society (1958), The Long Revolution (1961), and Communications (1962). These texts provide a general statement of Williams's concern with the struggle for a shared and communal culture. He argues that such a culture will be made possible, however gradually, by the democratic extension of cultural production to those groups within society who had been traditionally shut out by the elitist nature of official English culture. These early discussions, for the most part, remain outside the Marxist tradition.

In the second period, Williams becomes much more firmly entrenched within Marxist theories of culture. Arguing against what he perceives as the idealist tendencies of some

Marxist analyses, Williams asserts the necessity for a historical and materialist examination of culture. Marxism and Literature (1977), Politics and Letters (1979), Problems in Materialism and Culture (1980), The Sociology of Culture (1981), and Keywords (1984) represent a group of works from this period which signal a growing engagement with Marxist cultural theory. The writing of Lukacs, Gramsci, Adorno, and Benjamin are integrated into Williams's work at this time. However, even in this "break", Williams continues to develop and renew the cultural debate begun in Culture and Society and The Long Revolution.

It is in the latter period of Williams's work that the theory of cultural materialism is most fully developed. Since this study is primarily concerned with Williams's intervention into the Marxist debate and his development of a critical cultural theory, I have drawn most heavily upon Williams's most recent work. This thesis thus seeks to trace the underlying assumptions of Williams's theory and to locate its development within the Marxist debate on materialism and culture. It also attempts to engage and explore the criticisms that have been raised from a number of schools of thought concerning Williams's reconstruction of Marxist theory. Recognizing the weaknesses of cultural materialism --- most notably, its "culturalist" and "evolutionist" bias --- I attempt to develop a framework for the analysis of cultural practices.

This study is organized in the following way: Chapter Two explores the debates and controversies that have arisen over the materialist interpretation of history. It is argued that tensions within Marx's own writings have led to many one-sided interpretations of Marxian materialism. Williams's work on materialism is shown to be crucial, for it works to locate these tensions and inconsistencies within Marx and attempts to resolve them.

In Chapter Three, I deal more specifically with Williams's cultural theory. Having outlined his understanding of materialism, I show how Williams effectively challenges both idealist and various Marxian materialist conceptions of culture by emphasizing the manner in which cultural practices are forms of material production.

Chapter Four is a review of the major issues in the critical literature on Williams. The critique of cultural materialism is organized in three parts. The first identifies arguments made against Williams's early work, criticisms that focus upon his idealist heritage. Secondly, I also point to structuralist objections to Williams's epistemology. Finally, the poststructuralist critique of "totality" is elucidated in relation to the theory of cultural materialism.

In Chapter Five, I attempt to gather insights gleaned from the previous discussions in order to develop a working critical theory of culture. I am not concerned with conducting an empirical test of Williams's "model". Instead, I wish to examine the emergence in the early 1970's of a cycle of urban "crime-drama" films produced by Hollywood. The cultural materialist analysis that follows stresses the way in which very specific cultural practices are related to economic and political practices. The emphasis is upon the way in which these films both constituted and were constituted by the emergence of the hegemony of neo-conservatism.

Chapter Six summarizes Williams's intervention into the Marxist debate and attempts to outline some directions that can be taken in developing a critical theory of culture in general and the cinema in particular. Realizing that there is much work to be done in this area, I try to show the way in which the popular cinema can be one of many sites in which an alternative socialist hegemony can arise.

Throughout the entire discussion, I hope that the reader will find this study important in a number of ways. I try to provide a much needed contribution to the critical literature on Williams by explicating Williams's analysis of materialism and culture. What follows is also an attempt to contribute to the development of a critical theory of culture through the analysis of a specific cultural practice. Ultimately, this work seeks to discuss and assess Williams's unique contribution to the study of culture.

NOTES

1. For examples of "post-Marxist" thought, see Laclau and Mouffe (1985), Baudrillard (1975), and Smith (1988).

2. Norman Geras (1990) provides an excellent discussion of these well-worn critiques of Marxism. He points out that many recent poststructuralist challenges often casually dispense Marxism without offering any serious proof to support the critique.

3. The charge that Marxism is essentially and indefensibly reductive is not a recent accusation. Benedetto Croce, near the turn of this century, criticized historical materialism for according sole primacy to the economy and treating the "ethico-political" sphere as a mere phenomenal superstructure passively erected upon economic activity. In response, Antonio Gramsci criticizes Croce's mistaken identification of all Marxism with this reductive and economistic position. For Gramsci, Marxism does not simply exclude ethico-political history; rather, certain significant developments within Marxist theory recognize the importance of cultural activities as well as economic and political struggles in securing a socialist hegemony. For Gramsci, therefore, one cannot so easily dismiss historical materialism as reductive for to do so would be to ignore the differences and debates within the Marxist interpretation of history and human society. See Gramsci, 1985: 106-107.

4. For a defense of this argument, see Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 113).

5. For detailed biographies of Williams, see Ward (1981), Gorak (1988), and O'Connor (1989).

CHAPTER TWO

PROBLEMS IN MATERIALISM

In its broadest sense, the philosophy of materialism as it has developed both within and outside of Marxism is the belief that everything that exists, including "mind" or consciousness, depends upon matter. According to Lenin, "the fundamental premise of materialism is the recognition of the external world, of the existence of things outside and independent of the mind," (Lenin, 1982: 78). More recently, Sebastiano Timpanaro has defined materialism as such:

> By materialism we understand above all acknowledgement of the priority of nature over "mind", or if you like, of the physical level over the biological level, and of the biological level over the socio-economic and cultural level. (Timpanaro, 1975: 34)

The belief that matter is primary to "mind", therefore, seems to be the central unifying feature of Marxian materialism. However, beyond this most basic and general proposition controversies and debates have arisen within Marxist theory over the specific character of materialism as posited by Marx and Engels. In essence, a crucial but often ill-defined split has occurred that has borne witness to the emergence of at least two distinct schools of thought each offering a very different account of materialism.

On one side of the debate there are those who favour a reading of Marx that supports a rigid and systematic interpretation generally refered to as dialectical materialism, a term interestingly enough that Marx himself never used. Most commonly associated with the later work of Engels and further developed by Lenin, Plekhanov, Kautsky, and Stalin, dialectical materialism is offered as a scientific method whereby the supposedly universal laws governing the growth and evolutionary development of both human society and nature may be uncovered. It is this interpretation of Marxian materialism that has come to be recognized as orthodox or classical Marxism and has been the object of much criticism from both Marxists and non-Marxists alike.[1]

On the other side of the debate are those who argue that Marx's materialism is primarily of a practical nature. Practical materialism, as opposed to the apparent determinism and human passivity evident within classical Marxist theory, asserts the central role of human praxis in the production and reproduction of the material life process. Rejecting the existence or primacy of objective universal laws governing human behaviour, practical materialists stress the primacy of men's and women's ability as a species to actively change their circumstances and in so doing to change themselves. Taken to an extreme, however, this interpretation can come perilously close to a version of pure voluntarism, the view that men and women are complete masters of their own fate, free to act as they wish regardless of the historically specific forms of material activities present under given conditions of their social existence.[2]

This rupture within Marxist theory has for many years created an impasse in the further development of materialist philosophy. Many of the debates between the two interpretative claims have proved highly unproductive. Marxist thinkers from both sides, like pious scholars scouring their sacred texts, have searched long and hard through the "authoritative" writings of Marx to ponder some overlooked phrase, locate some secluded sentence, or resurrect some long forgotten marginal note in order to determine, once and for all, what Marx "really meant". However, such instrumental readings are doomed to fail from the start. The fact is that Marx's work is riddled with contradictions and tensions. Passages may be plucked out at will that can support either version of materialism. It is undeniable that at times Marx does present a very deterministic and scientific conception of materialism. At other times, however, he stresses the practical and transformative role of human beings in the construction of their history and their material productive activity.

To move beyond this impasse, as Jorge Larrain (1986: 12) has suggested, a productive and valuable reconsideration of Marxian materialism should begin with the recognition of those tensions that exist within Marx's own work. The point, therefore, is not to wage debates over what Marx "really meant", but to locate the contradictions and inconsistencies that appear within Marx's conception of materialism and attempt to resolve them.

It is within this context that Raymond Williams's intervention into the materialist debate proves its value. Williams's work in this area represents an attempt to identify and critically engage the problems that have developed and remained unresolved within Marxian materialism. Through his discussion of the base/superstructure metaphor and his reconsideration of the concept of "determination", Williams is able to offer a substantial challenge to more traditional interpretations of historical materialism. While even the most cursory analysis of Williams's materialism reveals it is primarily of a practical nature, his interpretation is not a simple defence of established theories of practical materialism. On the contrary, Williams's entire intellectual project is concerned with deconstructing popularly perceived dualistic categories such as culture and society, country and city, and the individual and the social. Williams's work on materialism is no different. In entering the debate, Williams has challenged the separation of categories such as base and superstructure, determination and practical activity, and consciousness and matter. In its place, Williams has constructed a materialism that is integrative and holistic.

The Tensions Within Historical Materialism

As suggested above, materialism is an ontological thesis about the nature of reality. However, it is certainly not an unchallenged thesis. Materialism's philosophical opposite is Idealism, the view that the most basic element of reality is "mind" or spirit and that matter, in the last analysis, is dependent upon the operations of "mind" (Novack, 1965: 5-6). In its most extreme form, philosophical idealism suggests that matter is nothing more than an illusion, a construction of the human mind. It is this supposition that Marx and Engels ridiculed:

> Once upon a time a valiant fellow had the idea that men were drowned in water only because they were possessed with the _idea of gravity._ If they were to get this notion out of their heads, say by avowing it to be a superstitious, a religious concept, they would sublimely be proof against any danger from water. His whole life long he fought against the illusion of gravity, of whose harmful consequences all statistics brought new and manifold evidence. (Marx and Engels, 1976: 30)

The passage represents a crafty and somewhat lighthearted argument against the idealist belief that thought is primary to matter. Marx and Engels stress that even if the "idea" of something that has material existence is expurgated from the mind, it will continue to have existence. For materialists, matter exists independently of "mind" but not _vice versa_ .

However, Marx's critique of idealism does not end here. The central argument that Marx raises with defenders of idealism concerns the interpretation of history. According to idealists such as Hegel, thought and ideas, the activities of the "mind" or "Spirit" if you like, create history, give it meaning, and determine its form:

> It is only an inference from the history of the World, that its development has been a rational process; that the history in question has constituted the rational necessary course of the World-Spirit --- that Spirit whose nature is always one and the same, but which unfolds this its own nature in the phenomena of the World's existence. This must, as before stated, present itself as the ultimate result of History. (Hegel, 1957: 350)

For Hegel, therefore, ideas exist independently of the material environment of history and indeed represent the shaping force, the "essence" of history and the social life process.

For Marx, however, the picture is just the other way around. Hegel, Marx argues, must be stood on his feet. Ideas do not shape history; what gives meaning to history is the real activity of men and women within their material environment:

> The premises from which we begin are not arbitrary ones, not dogmas, but real premises from which abstraction can only be made in the imagination. They are the real individuals, their activity and the material conditions of their life, both those which they find already existing and those produced by their activity. (Marx and Engels, 1976: 36)

It is the active physical engagement of human beings with their material circumstances that creates history. Ideas do not exist independently of history but are, according to Marx, embedded within the very material nature of history:

> My inquiry led me to the conclusion that neither legal relations nor political forms could be comprehended whether by themselves or on the basis of a so-called general development of the human mind, but that on the contrary they orginate in the material conditions of life.... In the social production of their existence men [sic] inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men [sic] that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness. (Marx, 1984b: 20-21)

Marx's materialist conception of history, therefore, suggests that ideas, consciousness, or "mind" are in the first instance produced and generated within a particular social material setting, conditioned by a specific mode of production. Thought does not manufacture history but is itself conditioned or determined by the production and reproduction of material life.

This then immediately raises a central problem in Marxian materialism. Does the materialist interpretation, with its stress upon economic production, reduce all elements of the superstructure, including consciousness, to a mere reflex or echo of the economic base? Is Marx guilty of economic determinism? Facing just such criticism, Engels responded:

> According to the materialist conception of history, the _ultimately_ determining factor in history is the production and reproduction of real life. Neither Marx nor I have asserted more than this. Hence if somebody twists this into saying that the economic factor is the _only_ determining one, he [sic] transforms that proposition into a meaningless, abstract, absurd phrase. The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure...also exercise their influence upon the course of the historical struggles and in many cases determine their _form_ in particular. There is an interaction of all these elements in which...the economic movement is finally bound to assert itself. (Engels, 1980: 10)

The model of base/superstructure, though not unproblematic, suggests primarily that the mode of production is the principal agent of history and that, against Hegel's assertion, pure consciousness is not. However, as the passage suggests, Engels does not mean that economic forces alone completely shape the course of human history even if he and Marx were perhaps not entirely clear on this. Elements of the superstructure interact with elements of the economic base such that any attempt to "read off" the superstructure from the mode of production will prove fruitless. Various elements of the superstructure can be determining. However, ultimately the economic structure of any society can be said to the primary factor that guides historical movement.

Engels's intervention into the debate certainly does not resolve the matter. While Engels is very quick to discount an economistic reading of Marxian materialism, his insistence upon the ultimately determining nature of the economic base does imply, in the last analysis, that elements of the superstructure are relatively passive expressions of economic movements. Attempts to clarify or move beyond the base/superstructure metaphor have occupied a large portion of Marxist theory. Louis Althusser, for example, has argued that in simply "inverting" Hegel in the base/superstructure metaphor Marx has maintained an Hegelian model of historical development in which the base represents the "essence" of history and the superstructure is relegated to a secondary phenomena or expression of this essence (Althusser, 1969: 111). Drawing largely upon Engels's letter to Bloch, Althusser supports a notion of determination in the last instance, an instance which strangely enough never comes. Althusser, borrowing a term from Freud, calls this structuralist re-mapping of the base/superstructure metaphor "overdetermination". In this model, elements of the superstructure have "an existence largely specific and autonomous, and therefore irreducible to a pure phenomenon," (Althusser, 1969: 113). However, as Anthony Giddens has pointed out, the meaning of determination in the last instance remains vague in Althusser; it is by no means clear how the mode of production exerts its determinant influence (Giddens, 1979: 159). Similarly, Cutler, Hindess, Hirst and Hussain have effectively argued that Althusser's conception of a correspondance in the last instance suggests that the essential features of the superstructure can be deduced directly from the economic base, a conclusion that threatens to lead Althusser into economism (Cutler, et. al., 1977: 207-209).

Faced with these difficulties, other authors have attempted to dispose of the base/superstructure metaphor altogether. Jürgen Habermas (1979) has argued that Marx's materialism gives priority to economic activity (instrumental action) at the expense of communicative interaction. In Habermas's model, communication plays a key role in social and historical evolution. While Marx's materialism explained social change in terms of changes in the mode of production, Habermas asserts the central role of communicative action in constructing new forms of social organization (Habermas, 1979: 154-155). Habermas thus attempts to move beyond the alleged economism of Marxian materialism by developing a whole new theory of communication and social evolution in which communicative interaction is not reduced to a reflection of the economic base but follows its own logic. The difficulty, however, is that Habermas's theory thus tends to reduce the importance of class conflicts that arise out of material production and replaces them with ideas of "distorted communication", (Larrain, 1986: 9). Habermas's radical attempt to reconstruct historical materialism, I think, tends to bend the stick too far in the other direction towards idealism by introducing a very general unhistorical concept of "communicative interaction" as a theoretical principle of historical materialism.

More recently, "post-Marxist" theories have also sought to challenge the supposed economism of Marxian materialism and the base/superstructure metaphor. Baudrillard (1975) has argued that Marx remained firmly mired within a bourgeois productivist ideology by placing priority upon production at the expense of an analysis of capitalist consumption. For Jean Baudrillard, Marx has constructued a model of society in which all elements of the superstructure are posited merely as a "mirror of production". Similarly, Ernesto Laclau and Chantel Mouffe (1985), in their overall critique of Marx's "realist" epistemology, have charged Marx with a blind faith in the law-like causal relation between base and superstructure which leads Marx to subsume all social phenomena to the single principle of economic production.

I think these criticisms, though intriguing, fail on two accounts. First, the authors tend to conflate Marx with what has become orthodox or institutionalized Marxism; their criticism would be best directed not at Marx but at those Marxists who read the base/superstructure metaphor in a reductive and economistic way. To say that all Marxism is economistic and reductionist is to ignore those attempts within the tradition to move beyond the often mechanistic thinking of Engels, Plekhanov, Kautsky, Lenin, and Stalin.[3]

Secondly, what is often overlooked in criticisms of the base/superstructure metaphor is the complex nature of the economic base. An investigation into this area will show that the base is no simple economic category. According to Marx, the economic base is composed of two distinct but inter-related activities: forces of production and relations of production. Forces of production refer to a society's means of material reproduction, its resources, techniques, and productive skills. The relations of production designate the social organization of forces of production, the manner in which the forces of production are allocated and utilized. As Robert Heilbroner (1980: 64-65) and Louis Dupre (1983: 85-86) have at different moments convincingly argued, it can be seen right away that neither the forces nor relations of production are strictly economic concepts. Imbedded within the forces of production of any society is a recognition of that society's cultural and technical heritage, the culturally specific manner in which production takes place. Similarly, relations of production by definition must embody political, legal, and social elements that guide and enforce the manner in which production is organized. As Engels asserted in his letter to Bloch, the materialist view of history suggests only that the necessity of production proves to be a determining element in the establishment of superstructural forms, not that economic activities alone directly dictate the specific forms superstructural elements take. The economic base is posited by Marx as an abstract and analytical tool that permits an analysis of social formations. However, this analysis must be complemented with a concrete and historical examination of specific social forms. Marx is suggesting only that elements of the superstructure, such as political and legal relations, have no independent existence but are related to economic and material activities; areas of "thought" and "activity" cannot be separated (Williams, 1977: 77).

Marx's historical materialist method, I would argue, does not seek to reduce all social phenomena to some reflected or mediated expression of the economic base, but rather attempts to locate all of social life within a complex inter-related whole or totality.[4] In this regard, in recognizing the complex web of relationships in which all factors are interconnected, there does not appear to be any glaring economism within the base/superstructure model.

However, a less often examined issue equally vital to an understanding of historical materialism is raised in the "Preface" to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy that points to a tension that runs throughout the work of Marx and Engels. If we examine more closely the proposition that it is social existence that determines men's and women's consciousness then we are immediately confronted with a very serious dilemma. Is Marx suggesting, along with traditional philosophical materialism, that consciousness is simply a reflection of an already constituted material reality? There is indeed a tendency within Marx to regard human consciousness in such a passive manner:

> My dialectic method is not only different from the Hegelian, but is its direct opposite. To Hegel, the life-process of the human brain, i.e., the process of thinking, which, under the name of "the Idea," he even transforms into an independent subject, is the demiurgos of the real world, and the real world is only the external, phenomenal form of "the Idea." With me, on the contrary, the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought. (Marx, 1984a: 29)

This reflection theory of consciousness appears in earlier texts as well. Both Marx and Engels speak of ideas and consciousness as "ideological reflexes and echoes of this life-process" and as "sublimates of their life-process, which is empirically verifiable and bound to material premises" (Marx and Engels, 1976: 42). In this view, consciousness is ascribed no active role but is a passive reproduction of an external reality constructed independently of consciousness.

On the other hand, other passages from Marx and Engels reveal a much more active conception of human consciousness in the production and reproduction of the material life process. In Capital Marx suggests that human consciousness, as distinguished from that of animals, does not simply reflect a pre-given reality but rather works to construct and modify the material world:

> A spider conducts operations that resemble those of a weaver, and a bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of her cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is that the architect raises his [sic] structure in imagination before he erects it in reality. At the end of every labour-process, we get a result that already existed in the imagination of the labourer at its commencement. (Marx, 1984a: 174)

It is this anticipatory and practical nature of human consciousness that distinguishes our species from other creatures. According to Marx, the failure of traditional philosophical materialism was its inability to recognize this practical element of human existence: "The chief defect of all previous materialism...is that objects (Gegenstand), reality, sensuousness are conceived only in the form of the object, or of contemplation, but not as sensuous human activity, practice, not subjectively," (Marx, 1976: 615).

This tension within Marx and Engels can in part be seen to arise from an attempt to synthezise and build upon two seemingly incompatible philosophical schools of thought. On the one hand, historical materialism is developed as a challenge to some of the most fundamental premises of philosphical Idealism by asserting that it is matter, and not "mind", that is the primary element of the universe. On the other hand, Marx and Engels are quick to distinguish their view from the traditional mechanical materialism of Bacon, Hobbes, Holbach, Hume, Locke and Feuerbach who all, to one degree or another, tended to read off social relationships from natural laws and ignored the subjective elements of human activity in transforming the objective world (Williams, 1983: 199-200). The tensions that surround the descriptions of consciousness as they appear in the work of Marx and Engels is derived from the often awkward integration of the passive models of philosophical materialism with the active models of philosophical idealism (Larrain, 1986: 18).

The Orthodox Interpretation

In the transition from Marx to Marxism, the base/superstructure metaphor and the materialist conception of consciousness were read in a much more rigid form. This is not necessarily because later Marxist writers simply misunderstood what Marx "really meant". Rather the disjunctures and inconsistencies in Marx's analysis created a space in which many one-sided accounts of the base/superstructure model could develop. The tension between anticipatory consciousness and consciousness as reflection continued to haunt those who followed in the tracks of historical materialism but the matter was eventually "resolved" in orthodox Marxism by a reduction of consciousness to a passive reflection of economic and social conditions.

While Engels struggled against such a reductive and deterministic reading, he at the same time unwittingly laid down the foundation for the orthodox interpretation by failing to adequately address the contradictions that surrounded the descriptions of consciousness. In many ways, Engels simply restated the problem. In his own later work, for example, he suggests that human beings may be distinguished from other creatures of the animal kingdom in that people act purposively within the world:

> With men [sic] we enter history. Animals also have a history, that of their derivation and gradual evolution to their present condition. This history, however, is made for them, and in so far as they themselves take part in it, this occurs without their knowledge or desire. On the other hand, the more that human beings become removed from the animals in the narrower sense of the word, the more they make their own history consciously.... (Engels: 1979: 18)

Engels argues that human beings possess the ability to anticipate ends and work to achieve those ends.

However, a passive and deterministic view of consciousness is much more prevalent in Engels's influential Anti-Duhring: "All ideas are taken from experience, are reflections --- true or distorted --- of reality," (Engels, 1978: 407). Under this reflection theory, human consciousness is conceived as a mirror of the external world, "the external world, in its turn, is either nature or society," (Engels, 1978: 407). Hence, social and historical change occurs outside of human intention: "[C]hange...forces itself upon them [human beings] without their being conscious of it or desiring it," (Engels, 1978: 417-418). Engels has failed to fully come to terms with the Marxian problematic of consciousness, arguing for both intentionality and reflection.

With Plekhanov, the base/superstructure metaphor and the theory of consciousness as reflection become more rigidly defined, but tensions remain. Plekhanov does try to steer clear of economic reductionism and, like Engels, he does criticize those who suggest that the economy is the only causal factor in the social formation:

> Everything hitherto said by "critics" of Marx concerning the supposed one-sidedness of Marxism and its alleged disregard of all other "factors" of social development but the economic, has been prompted by a failure to understand the role assigned by Marx and Engels to the _interaction_ between "basis" and "superstructure". (Plekhanov, 1976: 155)

Plekhanov is willing to assign a certain causal effectivity to elements of the superstructure, but only because they are in the first instance reflections of the economic basis: "Political relations indubitably influence the economic movement, but it is also indisputable that _before they influence that movement they are created by it,"_ (Plekhanov, 1976: 156). This assertion is very much like Engels's argument that economic factors are "ultimately" determining. Political and ideological superstructures correspond to the economic base but they can retain a certain level of autonomy and in turn act upon the economic mode of production. However, this relationship between basis and superstructure by no means tells us what precise forms elements of the superstructure will take: "Try to give a bluntly economic explanation of the David school of painting in eighteenth-century France: nothing will come of your attempt except ridiculous and dull nonsense," (Plekhanov, 1976: 162). Thus, while economic factors play a key role in social development, they alone cannot explain the movement of society. Plekhanov, arguing against the deterministic views of Eleutheropoulos, recognizes the anticipatory role of human consciousness in the construction of the material social world: "The fundamental thesis of historical materialism, as I have repeated more than once, is that history is made by men [sic]," (Plekhanov, 1976: 165).

Yet on the other hand, Plekhanov proceeds to develop a very mechanistic interpretation of the base/superstructure metaphor that posits the productive forces as the prime cause of all social phenomena, including human consciousness. For Plekhanov the relationship between the base and the superstructure is a sequential one that is constructed as follows:

> (1) the state of productive forces;
> (2) the economic relations these forces condition;
> (3) the socio-political system that has developed on the given economic "basis";

> (4) the mentality of social man [sic], which is determined in part directly by the economic conditions obtaining, and in part by the entire socio-political system that has arisen on that foundation;
> (5) the various ideologies that reflect the properties of that mentality. (Plekhanov, 1976: 167-168)

By viewing these various elements as sequential, Plekhanov has set out a description of the base/superstructure model that suggests the productive forces determine economic relations which in turn determine political systems. Political structures then condition simple forms of consciousness that together determine more abstract forms of consciousness. In this manner, consciousness is simply a reflection of other economic and social activities. This stands in stark contrast to Plekhanov's earlier assertion that human beings, by actively and purposively changing the world, at the same time change their own nature, (Plekhanov, 1976: 128). Plekhanov has exhibited the same paradox as Engels; a seemingly incompatible mixture of anti-reductionism and reflection theory.

With Kautsky, the orthodox description of consciousness takes on a more reductionist and functionalist tone. Kautsky argues that specific forms of consciousness arise out of social needs. In other words, all forms of consciousness, and especially moral rules, are a reflection of the needs of a certain mode of social existence:

> [T]he connection between the tenets of morals

> and the social needs has been already proved by so many practical examples, that we can accept it as a general rule. If, however, this connection exists then an alteration of society must necessitate an alteration in many moral precepts. Their change is thus not only nothing strange, it would be much more strange if with the change of the cause the effect did not also change. These changes are necessary, for that very reason necessary because every form of society requires certain moral precepts suited to its condition. (Kautsky, 1918: 179-180)

However, while Kautsky's description of consciousness is reductionist, it is not purely economistic. Like Engels and Plekhanov, Kautsky asserts that there is a reciprocal interaction between the economic base and the superstructure:

> It is with the principles of morality as with the rest of the complicated sociological superstructure which raises itself on the method of production. It can break away from its foundation and lead an independent life for a time....Morality thus reacts on the social life. But that only holds good so long as it is independent from the latter, as it meets the social needs from which it sprang. (Kautsky, 1918: 184-186)

Consciousness, according to Kautsky, does not determine social development but is also not strictly conditioned by an economic mode of production. Moral codes can detach themselves from the base. Through "habit" or "custom" moral ideas can persist through a transition from one mode of production to another and exert an independent influence upon social life. Kautsky gives the example of "Esquimaux" culture in which the killing of the old and the sick could be justified on the grounds of fulfilling the needs of a specific mode of production (primitive communism) that produced a limited food supply (Kautsky, 1918: 180-184). A change in the mode of production would in turn create new needs to which definite forms of consciousness would arise but this would not necessarily happen automatically. The specific practice of euthanasia could persist for some time even though it may no longer be a social need under new arrangements of production. Kautsky is suggesting that consciousness, as represented in morality, is not a reflection of the economic base in the strict sense, but is a response to the needs generated by the base. Consciousness, however, is not anticipatory in nature but is a direct consequence of social material needs.

With Lenin, the contradiction surrounding the materialist conception of consciousness is again brought to the forefront of Marxist discussion. In his polemical treatise against the Machians, Lenin asserts that consciousness is a secondary phenomenon, an echo of an already constituted material reality: "The idea that knowledge can 'create' universal forms, replace the primeval chaos by order, etc., is the idea of idealist philosophy. The world is matter moving in conformity to law, and our knowledge, being the highest product of nature, is in a position only to reflect this conformity to law," (Lenin, 1982: 170). Ideas and consciousness are nothing more than the external world "printed" in the human brain: "Matter is a philosophical category denoting the objective reality which is given to man [sic] and which is copied, photographed and reflected by our sensations, while existing independently of them," (Lenin, 1982: 127). However, in his Philosophical Notebooks Lenin states that "man's [sic] consciousness not only reflects the objective world but creates it," (Lenin, 1972: 211).

It is in Stalin's work that the reflection theory of consciousness is explicitly articulated and defended as part of the official doctrine of Soviet Marxism. Drawing largely upon Lenin's Materialism and Empirio-Criticism as the definitive statement on the method of dialectical materialism, Stalin draws the following conclusions:

> Contrary to idealism which asserts that only our mind really exists and that the material world, being, nature, exists only in our mind, in our sensations, ideas, and perceptions, the Marxist materialist philosophy holds that matter, nature, being, is an objective reality existing outside and independent of our mind; that matter is primary, since it is the source of sensations, ideas, mind, and that mind is secondary, derivative, since it is a reflection of being.... (Stalin, 1940: 15-16)

The tension surrounding the conception of human consciousness in Marxist philosophy is thus "resolved". Stalin argues in favour of the reflection theory and reduces consciousness solely to a passive and secondary phenomenon. Stalin's rigid codification of dialectical materialism and his iron-fisted control over the Soviet Party apparatus effectively curtailed any further discussion on the subject within Soviet Marxism. Subsequent theoretical work on materialism largely remained mired in reductionist accounts of consciousness and simply echoed Stalin's thought.[5]

Outside of the orbit of the Soviet Union, attempts have been made to defend the reflection theory of consciousness. Cohen (1978) has resurrected the functionalist argument of Kautsky by suggesting that the economic base needs a superstructure, thus positing that any economic mode of production requires certain forms of consciousness. Ruben (1977) and Hoffman (1975) have also argued in favour of the reflection theory of consciousness suggesting that a theoretical rejection of the direct correspondance between the external world and our minds would imply that the world is ultimately unintelligible for human subjects. While all defenders of the classical tradition emphasize the fact, and rightly so, that social consciousness is produced within the context of real material practices, I do not think that it necessarily follows from this that consciousness is a mere reflection of an objective reality. Indeed, I think that the reflection theory of consciousness is fundamentally flawed and must be seriously assessed.

I do not think, for instance, that the functionalist argument of Kautsky and Cohen can suffice. Functionalism tends to define society as a system that has needs. By identifying the ways in which these needs are met, functionalists argue, one can thus explain why certain social processes are as they are, (Giddens, 1981: 16). Both Kautsky and Cohen suggest that the economic base has "needs" to which elements of the superstructure, including consciousness, must necessarily correspond. The major problem with this line of reasoning is that while it seeks to provide an explanation of the existence of specific social elements it fails to answer the question of how these social forms arise historically, (Giddens, 1981:18; 1984: 293-297). To say that the economic base needs certain forms of consciousness does not tell us how consciousness develops in he first instance.

While the orthodox interpretation is correct in asserting that nature has preceded and continues to exist independently of consciousness, it does not necessarily follow that consciousness is a simple reflection of the objective world. The reflection theory is nothing more than a version of the mechanical materialism of Feuerbach that Marx and Engels strongly criticized: "Feuerbach wants sensuous objects, really distinct from conceptual objects, but he does not conceive of human activity itself as objective activity," (Marx and Engels, 1976: 618). Consciousness reacts upon the world and cannot, in this view, be a passive reflection of objective reality. Further, the reflection theory of consciousness is highly simplistic in that it fails to recognize how the "mind" often resorts to abstract conceptions --- conceptions that have no immediate empirical referent --- to explain the external world, (Larrain, 1986: 68). Hence, the theory of reflection, as it exists within the orthodox tradition, cannot suffice.

Against the Orthodox Interpretation: Marxist Humanism

Faced with the rigid codification of dialectical materialism within Soviet Marxism, a group of Marxist theoreticians emerged in the 1920's and 1930's to challenge the orthodox interpretation. Lukacs, Korsch, and Gramsci, among others, tilted Marxist analysis away from political economy in the strict sense to broader questions of the state, culture, art, and philosophy. This theoretical shift, which came to be known later as the tradition of Western Marxism (Anderson, 1978), had as its central unifying feature an emphasis upon the subjective categories of consciousness, alienation, and ideology rather than the supposed objective economic laws of historical development. Returning to the Hegelian roots of Marx and his earlier writings, Western Marxists concluded that the fundamental element of Marxian materialism was the theory of praxis, the recognition of the self-creative activity of human beings in the world. Rejecting the reflection theory of consciousness, the new "humanist" tradition stressed the anticipatory nature of human consciousness in the material life process.

Lukacs, for example, sharply criticized the reflection theory of consciousness as itself a product of bourgeois ideology. For Lukacs, the capitalist production process by its very nature works to fragment the subject of labour from the object of labour and thus tears asunder the dialectical unity of subject and object (Lukacs, 1971: 89, 135). In reflection theory, consciousness is seen as separated from and dependent upon matter but Lukacs argues that this view is merely a product of "reified" consciousness in which the social material world as a whole appears to its creators, human beings, as a force beyond their control. Emphasizing the anticipatory character of consciousness, Lukacs asserts that "the emergence of [revolutionary] consciousness must become the decisive step which the historical process must take towards its proper end," (Lukacs, 1971: 2). The force of historical change, therefore, does not rest with objective economic laws nor with the development of a "vanguard" but with the emergence of revolutionary class consciousness among the proletariate.

If Lukacs's analysis ended here, then he could quite justly be accused of idealism insofar as he locates historical change within something that is abstract and without concrete existence --- namely, consciousness. However, Lukacs does attempt to provide a materialist theory of consciousness by suggesting that consciousness is "imputed" upon subjects in relation to the position they occupy within the structure of class relationships, (Lukacs, 1971: 51). This is not a wholly satisfactory response. Lukacs leans towards economism in that he sees economic roles as completely determining forms of consciousness, (Bennett, 1982: 49-50; Larrain, 1986: 76). This is precisely the point that Labriola criticized, arguing that human beings are at once "author and consequence" of the material world and that it is never possible to reduce consciousness to class position (Labriola, 1904: 210-211). In seeing consciousness as "imputed", Lukacs tends to reduce subjects solely to "consequences" and ignore concrete and historical forms of practice.

In dealing with the problems offered by the orthodox interpretation of the base/superstructure model, Lukacs puts forth the notion of "totality". Lukacs asserts that all social practices form a concrete social whole and that all these practices, recognized independently, dialectically interact and combine in very complicated and complex ways, (Lukacs, 1971: 10-15). While Lukacs's formulation of totality manages to steer clear of the more crude interpretations of the base/superstructure model it is unclear how valuable this development is. For if the concept of totality is taken to be merely the acknowledgement of the existence of a various number of co-existing and relatively autonomous social practices, then it is unclear how these practices are organized and structured, how they are materially "determined".

Korsch's intervention into the debate against the orthodox interpretation also centers on questions of consciousness and the dialectic. Korsch argues that the "vulgar" Marxism of Lenin and Stalin continues in the tradition of bourgeois philosophy to "draw a sharp line of division between consciousness and its object," (Korsch, 1970: 86-87). According to Korsch's analysis, both Marx and Engels were very far from posing such a dualistic and metaphysical conception of the relationship of consciousness to reality. Instead, Korsch suggests that historical materialism asserts a "coincidence" between or unity of consciousness and reality, (Korsch, 1970: 88). Consciousness does not exist in opposition to reality but is an actual and real part of the natural, historical, and social world, (Jakubowski, 1990: 78). Korsch lamented the fact that the orthodox Marxism dominating the Second International had completely misunderstood the essence of Marxism --- the practical interpretation of human consciousness. For Korsch, consciousness is not a mere reflection of the world, but an active expression of that world, (Kolakowski, 1978: 310-311).

Hence, for Korsch Marxism is a negation of all previous materialism and idealism. Consciousness is not an abstract entity unto its own, nor is it a dependent reflection of the real material process of social development. On the contrary, consciousness is a constitutive element of reality itself. In asserting this, Korsch emphasizes the dialectical unity of subject and object which had been occluded in the Second International.

Gramsci presents perhaps one of the most developed critiques of classical Marxism. Arguing against both reflection theory and economism, Gramsci suggests that the major flaw that exists in both approaches "consists in reducing a conception of the world to a mechanical formula which gives the impression of holding the whole of history in the palm of its hand," (Gramsci, 1971: 427-428). In devising a theory of the essential laws of historical movement as well as developing a mechanical and passive theory of consciousness, orthodox Marxism ignores the role of human praxis. The mechanical and reductive interpretation of historical materialism, in its search for essential and prime "causes", cannot possibly foresee or account for the concrete moments of historical struggle undertaken by social actors, (Gramsci, 1971: 438). What classical Marxism has forgotten, argues Gramsci, is that it is people who change circumstances. This is not to suggest that human beings are totally free to alter the world, for we are all to some extent prisoners of historical circumstance. Rather, praxis itself as the necesary production and reproduction of the material social world, creates the possibility of change because practical activity is always real activity, always a unity of subject and object, and always an historical activity.[6]

Gramsci was thus able to significantly counter the prevailing mechanistic interpretations of the base/superstructure metaphor by placing special emphasis upon the role of praxis. For Gramsci, no social change is ever an "inevitable" consequence of alterations in the mode of production. On the contrary, history is made by human beings and progress must be actively won. In order to change their circumstances, human beings must change not just their economic relations, but their political and cultural relations as well (Gramsci, 1985: 106). Superstructures do not merely reflect the struggles and conflicts within the economic structure of capitalist society, asserts Gramsci, but can become sites of class struggle themselves.

Thus, Western Marxists concur, to varying degrees, that as the philosophy of praxis, the unity of theory and activity, Marxism by its very nature cannot rely on the automatic engine of "historical laws" as the agent of social change. On the contrary, they argue, it is human beings who make history. Thus, Western Marxism effectively shifted the focus of study from objective and scientific "laws" to more subjective and humanistic concerns.[7] Hence, the greatest legacy offered by Western Marxists lies in the recognition of the anticipatory role of human consciousness in conceiving change and working, at a practical and material level, to bring about change.

Raymond Williams: Reconstructing Historical Materialism

Williams can be located within the tradition of Western Marxism, but in no simple fashion. For Williams's reconstruction of historical materialism is both an holistic project that builds upon the strengths of the two traditions, and an attempt to move beyond the limitations imposed by both schools of Marxist thought. In order to achieve this goal, Williams seeks to fundamentally challenge many of the dualistic constructions of Marxist materialism. In essence, Williams attempts to reconstruct historical materialism by critically interrogating what he feels are the abstract distinctions constructed between determination and praxis, human beings and nature (consciousness and matter) and the base and superstructure. In many ways, Williams's materialism is clearly linked to Marx's own project as the radical critique of those schools of thought that separated areas of thought from activity, consciousness from material production, and imposed upon real human actvities abstract categories that lacked any specific content.

The most crucial theoretical discovery of Marxism, argues Williams, is the notion of determination. The question of determination no doubt plays a central and controversial role in Marxist theory. It is often seen by critics as the fundamental weakness of Marxism, as a category that necessarily leads to reductionism and economism of the most simplistic kind. Althusser's important but ambiguous formulation of "overdetermination" and the post-Marxist complete turn away from the "dogmatic" notion of determination can both be seen as crucial responses to this problem. In different ways, however, these revisions have often failed to grasp the sheer complexity and ultimate necessity of a concept of determination within Marxist theory.

For Williams, the problem of determination plays an immensely crucial role in Marxist cultural analysis. From very early in his career he was concerned with this question:

> There is then an interaction [between base and superstructure], but this cannot be positively understood unless the organizing force of the economic element is recognized. A Marxist theory of culture will recognize diversity and complexity, will take account of continuity within change, will allow for chance and certain limited autonomies, but, with these reservations, will take the facts of the economic structure and the consequent social relations as the guiding string on which a culture is woven, and by following which a culture is to be understood. (Williams, 1987: 269)

Accepting the argument of an interaction between base and superstructure, Williams suggests that determination remains an important and vital element of Marxian materialism. The difficulties that have arisen over the precise nature of determination in Marxist theory can in part be seen to stem from a confusion over meaning. Determination, Williams argues, should not be viewed in the solely abstract sense of controlling or deciding the outcome of a process independent of the desires of social actors. Marx's meaning of determination was of a more inherent or scientific sense; determination refers to the essential and relatively fixed characteristic of a process that can be discovered and thus changed by social agents, (Williams, 1977: 84). The first meaning of determination has its roots in the Western theological tradition of philosophers like Augustine and Aquinas who were concerned with the search for the "prime cause" that totally controls and prefigures subsequent events. The second interpretation, argues Williams, is far less rigid and much more difficult to grasp, but can be seen as the setting of limits and exertion of pressures, (Williams, 1980: 32). While the first definition implies a powerlessness and passivity, the second meaning of determination presupposes a sense of human agency within the confines of real limits and pressures.

Williams thus understands determination in two key ways. Negatively, determination implies the setting of limits, a process that contains or constrains existing social relations under a particular mode of production (Williams, 1977: 86). Particular elements of a social formation limit the actions and practical consciousness of social agents. Positively, determination is also the exertion of pressures, pressures derived from a given mode of social existence, (Williams, 1977: 87). Pressures refer to compulsions and incentives that guide social subjects to act in a certain way, either against the limits imposed or within the momentum of a given social formation. The problem with the purely objective interpretation of determination, as evidenced in the orthodox reflection theory and even in Althusser's notion of structural causality, is that "society" is abstracted as a purely negative force that contains and constrains the wills and intentions of human beings. In its isolation of "structure" or "object", this objective view shifts attention away from real human practice and activity. Thus, argues Williams, the objective view of determination on its own is a bourgeois version of society in which individuals are conceived as "pre-social," (Williams, 1977: 87). That is, it is an essentialist view that conceives of consciousness as pre-existing or even existing outside of the social formation and acted upon unconsciously by external social forces.

While the classical Marxist theory of determination edged toward a one-to-one causal relationship between the economic base and other levels of the social formation, Williams describes determination only as the setting of limits and the exertion of pressures. Elements of the superstructure are not pre-formed and pre-figured in a separate economic realm of activity, but are to some degree relatively autonomous of the base. Williams thus attempts to overcome the limitations of a unilinear model of causal conection between base and superstructure by granting other levels of the social formation a relative autonomy while at the same time remain committed to a theory of determination. But is this not, as some have suggested, logically inconsistent to assert both determination and relative autonomy?[8] Norman Geras (1987) has supplied an interesting metaphor to support Williams's position. Geras has us imagine a man chained to a stake. The chain sets certain limits on what the man can do, but it can also pressure or guide him to take positive actions, such as adjusting the manacle on his ankle or tugging at the stake, (49). What is most interesting about this model is the recognition of the chained man's relative autonomy within the real material limits and pressures of his existence; as Geras notes, the man can stand, sit, read or sing aloud but "cannot play a decent game of table tennis, and cannot attend social functions or political meetings at all," (Geras, 1987: 49). In this regard, relative autonomy and determination do not necessarily create an incompatible couplet.

Nevertheless, does the reconstruction of determination offered by Williams overcome the fundamental limitations of more traditional interpretations and still retain a materialist sense of determination? If one takes the concept of determination solely to mean the setting of limits and the exertion of pressures, then a problem immediately arises. Williams seems to suggest that a certain structural framework provides the conditions within which certain ideas develop and practical activities are undertaken. In such a case, however, we have no real understanding of why certain options are followed but others, equally possible under those conditions, are not, (Larrain, 1986: 113). One is led, perhaps, back to an idealist conception of consciousness --- or at the very least, a voluntarist position --- wherein certain ideas develop on their own accord regardless of the specific material conditions present within a given society.

Williams would indeed be guilty of idealism if his investigation into determination ended here. However, Williams is quick to point out that any notion of social determination must be understood within the context of praxis. Consciousness is, according to Williams, not a mere reflection of the social and natural world but is from the beginning an active and integral component of the human material social process, (Williams, 1977: 59). For Williams, consciousness and ideas are from the start the material expression of practice:

> [W]hat this [orthodox] version of Marxism especially overlooks is that "thinking" and "imagining" are from the beginning social processes (of course including that capacity for "internalization" which is a necessary part of any social process between actual individuals) and that they become accessible only in unarguably physical and material ways: in voices, in

> sounds made by instruments, in penned or printed writing, in arranged pigments on canvas or plaster, in worked marble or stone. (Williams, 1977: 62)

Williams suggests that consciousness cannot be understood as the passive contemplation of a world already given but as an active material process that anticipates ends. Marx and Engels expressed this view as follows:

> [T]he production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men [sic] --- the language of real life. Conceiving, thinking, the mental intercourse of men at this stage still appears as the direct efflux of their material behaviour.... Men are the producers of their conceptions, ideas, etc. that is, real, active men, as they are conditioned by a definite development of their productive forces and to the intercourse corresponding to these, up to its furthest forms. Consciousness can never be anything else than conscious being...men developing their material production and their material intercourse, alter, along with this actual world, also their thinking and the products of their thinking. (Marx and Engels, 1976: 42)

This identification of consciousness with material practice allows Williams to explain the social determination of consciousness in a rather different manner than allowed by the traditional reading of the base/superstructure model. All ideas are produced in practice and are an active articulation of the social and natural world. While the economic structure may impose certain limits and exert specific pressures, it is only the concrete social and material practices that develop that determine the ideas and thoughts of human beings. For example, I do not think that Williams would deny that the economic structure of society places limits and exerts pressures on the ideas and practices of the working class. However, there is no automatic "response" from this economic structure that would translate into the necessary development of revolutionary class consciousness. Rather, as Larrain has lucidly demonstrated, whether or not the working class does develop revolutionary ideas depends upon the character of its political and economic practice, on the forms of struggle and organization in which it is involved, (Larrain, 1986: 113).

Similarly, as consciousness cannot be seen as a simple reflection of the economic structure of society, it is also not a pure reflection of the natural world. It is been explored how the orthodox interpretation of consciousness moved towards an understanding of human thoughts and ideas as relatively passive reflexes or copies of the external world. For Williams, this view does not stand up to our experience as a species. While the natural world unarguably exerts certain pressures and sets specific limits upon human experience, this does not mean that human consciousness is but a "photograph" of the material world. It is, for example, an often sad reality of our physical existence as men and women that we are confronted with old age, disease, and ultimately death. While mortality is no doubt a limit imposed upon our existence, the various ways in which we respond to that physical limitation --- through fatalism or solidarity and love --- cannot be accounted for within a theory of reflection. Williams asserts that our relationship with the natural world is not passive but constitutive, (Williams, 1980: 108-109). Forces of nature undoubtedly do condition our existence as a species, but in turn human beings work to constitute the physical universe through alternate responses that perceive, select, and interpret the conditions of physical existence and survival.

For Williams, traditional Marxist materialism has ignored this real constitutive relationship between human beings and the natural physical world. Separating men and women from nature, Marxism simply re-iterated the most vulgar forms of triumphalism represented by the "conquest of nature", a dominant ideology of both capitalism and imperialism, (Williams, 1980: 110). Williams argues that Marxism failed to carry through the full implications of its own materialist emphasis and recognize the human being/nature relationship not as "human beings versus nature" but as "human beings in nature": "In the world of a properly materialist theory there is no room for the separated abstract categories of 'nature' and 'man' [sic]," (Williams, 1980: 111). The dualistic conception of human beings and nature, consciousness and matter, fails to recognize that human beings are material creatures of flesh and blood who exist in a constitutive relationship with the physical world.

The final major element of Williams's reconstruction of historical materialism concerns the nature of the economic base. In the more rigid interpretations of the base/superstructure metaphor, argues Williams, the economic base is more often than not granted the status of a fixed state of affairs. For Williams, on the contrary, a specific mode of production is never uniform or static: "It is one of the central propositions of Marx's sense of history, for example, that in actual development there are deep contradictions in the relationships of production and in the consequent social relationships," (Williams, 1977: 82). The base should thus be seen, not as an abstract state of activity, but as a dynamic process of activities of men and women in real social and economic relationships which contain fundamental contradictions, (Williams, 1980: 34). In constituting the base as a category of "productive forces" that is self-subsistent, classical Marxists tended to animate and reify the base, ignoring the specific activities and relationships of human beings in this contradictory process. Hence, Williams argues, one cannot ascribe to the base a set of fixed properties or relationships that are then reflected, in an unproblematic fashion, onto the superstructure, (Williams, 1980: 34).

Orthodox Marxism was not "too materialist", Williams subsequently states; rather it was not materialist enough. In describing the base as a static and self-subsistent order, classical Marxism subordinated all human activity to the logic and laws of capitalist economic production. Economic production became the primary or basic element of human society, all other activities reduced to secondary expressions of the base and located in the relatively enclosed category of "superstructure". This is not, ironically, an historical materialist argument, for Marx had directed much of his life's project against such a separation of areas of thought and activity, (Williams, 1977: 78). Both the abstraction of the "base" and "superstructure" and the reflection theory of consciousness separate consciousness from direct material activity, seeing the former as a distinct realm that is completely and passively prefigured by economic production and conditions.

This conclusion reached by classical Marxism, suggests Williams, stems in part from a selective reading of the nature of productive forces. There does exist a tension within Marx's materialism concerning the precise meaning of productive forces. On one hand, as Williams notes, productive forces refer to any and all of the means of the production and reproduction of real material life, (Williams, 1977: 91). Hence, productive forces can signify a particular kind of production --- agricultural or industrial, for example --- as well as specific forms of social co-operation and organization that guide economic production, such as political and cultural formations. On the other hand, there is a tendency both within Marx and those who followed in his name to limit the understanding of productive forces to mean only economic production, the direct production of commodities in the case of capitalism, (Williams, 1977: 92-93). The result has been that other kinds of production, in the first narrower sense of the term, have been seen as reflexes or reflections of material economic production rather than direct forms of material production themselves:

> What is most often supressed [in classical Marxism] is the direct material production of "politics". Yet any ruling class devotes a significant part of material production to establishing a political order. The social and political order which maintains a capitalist market, like the social and political struggles which created it, is necessarily a material production. From castles and palaces and churches to prisons and workhouses and schools; from weapons of war to a controlled press: any ruling class, in variable ways though always materially, produces a social and political order. These are never superstructural activities. They are the necessary material production within which an apparently self-subsistent mode of production can alone be carried on. The complexity of this process is especially remarkable in advanced capitalist societies, where it is wholly beside the point to isolate "production" and "industry" from the comparably material production of "defence", "law and order", "welfare", "entertainment", and "public opinion". In failing to grasp the material character of the production of a social and political order, this specialized (and bourgeois) materialism failed also, but even more conspicuously, to understand the material character of the production of a cultural order. (Williams, 1977: 93)

The orthodox interpretation of the base/superstructure metaphor, argues Williams, created an unnecessary division of material-social activities into rigid and fixed categories of "base" and "superstructure". What a reconstruction of historical materialism must seek, according to Williams, is a recognition of the complex relations among differently situated and differently deployed sets of material-social practices.

At first glance, then, it appears that Williams has completely collapsed the base/superstructure model into a notion of "totality" that echoes Lukacs's earlier attempts at revision. However, the matter is not quite as simple as that. If one completely dismisses the base/superstructure metaphor, Williams asserts, then although one has moved beyond some of the most crude models of Marxist analysis, one has also lost a sense of social structure and social intention --- in a word, determination, (Williams, 1980: 36). While it is correct to view any society as a complex whole of material-social practices, it is also true than any society has a specific structure and apparatus that organizes such practices and that relates to the intentions of the rule of a specific class. While it is difficult to locate certain processes of thought exclusively within the superstructure, Williams notes that it is precisely the claims of certain laws and intellectual movements as universally valid and/or natural that can be seen, in the last instance, to be expressions of the domination of a particular class, (Williams, 1980: 36-37). The problem then is how to conceive of the organization of material-social practices beyond the limitations of the traditional spatial metaphor and yet retain the notion of class domination which informs the very heart of classical Marxist theory.

Gramsci's notion of hegemony forms the key by which Williams is able to unlock himself from this apparent impasse. Williams's reading of Gramsci emphasizes the "wholeness" of the process of social organization. Hegemony is, according to Williams, "the whole lived process as practically organized by specific dominant meanings and values," (Williams, 1977: 109). Unlike the reflection theory which sees forms of consciousness as direct expessions of an already formed social, material, and economic formation, hegemony recognizes the crucial role that consciousness plays in that formation itself, (Williams, 1977: 111). Hegemony implies a critical realization that ideas and values are lived as real material practices and are therefore not simple reflections or secondary reflexes of economic production, (Williams, 1977: 110). This notion of praxis is central to an understanding of Williams's reading of Gramsci; within the context of real limits and pressures, thoughts and ideas are practically realized in structures of domination and subordination.

For Williams, therefore, the separation and static description of categories like the base and superstructure, human beings and nature, and determination and praxis is problematic. Such thinking is not only not dialectical, it is arguably not materialist either. What a reconstruction of historical materialism must aim for, according to Williams, is a recognition of the complex meaning of determination as the setting of limits and the exertion of pressures. In this way, one can still recognize the critical importance of the economic structure and yet grant other elements of the social formation varying degrees of autonomy. Williams also asserts that consciousness and its products are, from the very start, material in nature, a proposition that underlines the vital role that praxis plays in the production and reproduction of material life.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have been concerned with tracing out the tensions that appear in Marx's historical materialism and with mapping out the manner in which these tensions have led to more reductive and economistic interpretations. In particular, I have attempted to reveal how human consciousness was described paradoxically by Marx and Engels as both a reflection of an already constructed material world and as constitutive of that material existence. In the orthodox interpretation, the active anticipatory nature of consciousness was gradually obscured under the official Stalinist position of consciousness as passive reflection. As a result of the inherent theoretical problems with reflection theory, Western Marxists sought to re-emphasize the role of human praxis in the production and reproduction of men's and women's social existence. Lukacs, Korsch, and Gramsci all moved away from the "objective" nature of Soviet Marxism and in so doing underlined the subjective elements of Marx's historical materialism.

Williams's intervention into the materialist debate represents an attempt to build a more unified materialism, a materialism that radically deconstructs the abstract categories that have contaminated much thinking on the subject. Williams's ideas are challenging and will need to be critically assessed. For now, however, an understanding of Williams's materialism will prove essential for our next area of inquiry --- culture.

NOTES

1. See, for example, Plekhanov (1976: 115-183) who attempts to reveal the link between discoveries in the natural sciences and Marx's social theory. Plekhanov is the writer most often credited with developing the phrase "dialectical materialism" in association with Marxism.

2. For a prolonged and often polemical critique of the theory of praxis, see Hoffman (1975). Hoffman seeks to defend the orthodox interpretation of materialism by arguing that practical materialists have accorded too much emphasis to Marx's immature and underdeveloped work and, conversely, have ignored the later more scientific developments. This view is echoed, though less vehemently, by Maurice Cornforth (1962; 1963). On the other hand, Markus (1986) asserts that Marx maintains a fundamental commitment to practical materialism throughout his life's work.

3. See Norman Geras (1990) for a critique of the "amazing reductions" he sees being made by post-structuralists in their charicature Marxist theory. It does seem true that in painting all Marxism as reductive, many thinkers have tended to underplay some significant tendencies within Marxist theory that challenge many of the fundamental tenets of classical Marxism. For example, Karl Korsch in his _Marxism and Philosophy_ (1970) rendered both a critical and historical account of Marxism itself. Georgy Lukacs in _History and Class Consciousness_ (1971) attempted to recover the Hegelian orgins and humanistic concerns of Marx in the face of ever increasing attempts to codify Marxism into a scientific discourse. Similarly, Antonio Gramsci (1971), in response to Plekhanov, Kautsky, and Bukharin, argued that all forms of reductionism necessarily lead to idealist metaphysics.

4. For a critical discussion of "totality", see Chapter 4.

5. For an example of the Stalinist position as it has been echoed in Soviet Marxism, see I. Andreyev et. al. (1967).

6. See Sue Golding (1988: 550-558) for a much more detailed analysis of Gramsci's theory of practice.

7. It is thus somehwat ironic that many who followed in the tradition of Western Marxism painted a most pessimistic portrait of capitalist society in which ruling class ideology had completely penetrated the human psyche, thus eliminating even the possibility of revolutionary activity. See

Horkheimer (1974: 128-143), Horkheimer and Adorno (1972), and Marcuse (1966).

8. For example, see Paul Hirst's (1979) critique of the Althusserian idea of relative autonomy.

CHAPTER THREE

CULTURE AND MATERIALISM: CULTURE AS PRAXIS

As Dick Hebdige has noted, the unyielding ambiguity of "culture" is notorious (1979: 5). The word has passed through centuries of usage in which a number of different and sometimes contradictory meanings have been attached to it. Culture has been defined in such diverse ways as a standard of aesthetic excellence, a harmonious perfection and superior reality, and, more generally, as a set of values and beliefs implicit in a particular way of life.

Much of the confusion and contradiction that surrounds our understanding of culture can in part be seen to arise from the differences between the two interpretive claims of idealism and materialism outlined in the previous chapter. As philosophical differences have arisen over the interpretation of history, similar debates between materialism and idealism have surfaced concerning the nature of culture. Certain idealist theories have conceived of culture as a purely autonomous realm of human endeavour, free from the material world of work and politics. In this view, culture represents a higher "Truth", a superior reality which can be glimpsed only by a gifted few. Culture is the conscious expression and representation of universal truths, a separate realm of ideas and values with its own intrinsic logic.

Within Marxist materialism, culture, as conscious existence, is conceived in two, seemingly paradoxical ways. On the one hand, culture is often portrayed as a propagandistic "instrument" or weapon of the vanguard that makes possible the development of revolutionary consciousness (see Lenin, 1970). More commonly, however, culture is conceived within Marxist theory as the condition that militates against the development of revolutionary consciousness by expressing or reflecting the interests of a certain mode of production. It is not surprising, in light of historical circumstance, that the instrumentalist vision of culture has been much more prevalent in Soviet Marxism, while Western Marxism has focussed almost entirely on the latter view of culture.

Consciousness, therefore, is intricately tied to questions of culture within the Marxist tradition. This in turn has brought several problems to the field of Marxist cultural theory. Too often culture has been conceived as a secondary activity, a reflection or expression of an already constituted sphere of production. "Real material" activity --- for example, economic production --- is said to create the condition upon which culture arises. The base/superstructure metaphor, as applied to the theory of consciousness as reflection, has also been applied to the theory of culture. There has been a tendency within Marxist cultural theory to suggest that all social phenomena, including culture, can be in one form or another reduced to manifestations of the economic base.

While Western Marxists have on the whole attempted to move beyond this simple economism, they have also tended to work within the base/superstructure model. While such work is a definite improvement over crude reflection theories of culture, the separation of the economy and the symbolic continues to imply a theoretical priority given to the "base".

In the last chapter I noted Williams's argument that such a tendency ought not to be criticized for being too materialist; on the contrary, it is not materialist enough. Marxist theory failed, argues Williams, in not recognizing culture as a form of material production. By separating culture from material production, Marxists merely reproduced the philosophical dualism inherent within Idealism; a dualism of essence and appearance. The economy was, to varying degress, portrayed as embodying the essence of all social phenomena which was then made manifest or expressed in the cultural realm. Williams's notion of cultural materialism, therefore, suggests that culture cannot be separated from the social material process but must be seen as part of that very process itself.

However, just as Williams's reconstruction of materialism was informed by both idealist and Marxist materialist traditions, so too does his work on culture draw from both philosophical systems. Williams's theory of cultural materialism is, above all else, a unified theory that attempts to integrate such categories as subjectivism and objectivism through an emphasis upon the "lived" and constitutive nature of cultural practices. In order to understand this approach, we must then be prepared to trace out the theories of culture that have influenced Williams's work.

Idealist Theories of Culture

There are many traditions within the idealist school of thought that address the place of culture in human affairs.[1] Idealist conceptions of culture are widely rich and varied, but one of the most significant strands of idealist thought that Williams takes issue with expresses and shares a common concern with Truth as the ultimate purpose of artistic cultural production. Truth, or Essential Reality, is not a socially constructed or historically contingent category in this view, but is posited as a "given", an immutable essence that exists above and beyond history, society, and politics. This timeless reality, this permanent truth embedded within the very fabric of human existence, can be perceived and expressed only by a select and chosen few.

This particular idealist theory of culture can trace its roots to the time of the Ancient Greeks and the concern with the "universals" or "permanent realities" that exist outside of the plane of normal existence. By the Nineteenth Century, the Romantic movement succeeded in codifying this type of idealist approach to culture into a relatively organized creed of expressive realism. It was believed by prominent Romantics such as Wordsworth and Ruskin that, drawing from an Aristotelian tradition, art should imitate or faithfully reflect reality. But more than this, they argued from a deeply felt conviction that art and culture should also express the perceptions and emotions of a person who is by nature possessed of more than usual sensibility, who is able to glean and communicate to others the essential and immutable truths in reality that he or she can perceive (Belsey, 1980: 7-8). While the connection may at first seem to some people to be a distant one, it is the belief in the function of art to express and represent an Essential Reality that unites such seemingly disparate movements as Classicism and Romanticism:

> The tendency of Romanticism is towards a vehement rejection of dogmas of method in art, but it is also, very clearly, towards a claim which all good classical theory would have recognized: the claim that the artist's business is to "read the open secret of the universe". A "romantic" critic like Ruskin, for example, bases his whole theory of art on just this "classicist" doctrine. The artist perceives and represents Essential Reality, and he does so by virtue of his faculty Imagination. In fact, the doctrine of "the genius" (the autonomous creative artist) and of the "superior reality of art"

> (penetration to a sphere of universal truth) were in Romantic thinking two sides of the same claim. Both Romanticism and Classicism are in this sense idealist theories of art. (Williams, 1987: 39)

This theory of art and culture as the expression of an ultimate Truth persists into our own century. In his Notes Towards a Definition of Culture, for example, T.S. Eliot maintains that the struggle for truth is the final and desired aim of valuable art and culture:

> As in the relation between the social classes, and as in the relation of several regions of a country to each other and to the central power; it would seem that a constant struggle between the centripetal and centrifugal forces is desirable...there should be an endless conflict between ideas --- for it is only by struggle against constantly appearing false ideas that truth is enlarged and clarifed, and in the conflict with heresy that orthodoxy is developed to meet the needs of the time. (Eliot, 1948: 82)

Even those challenges to the tenets of expressive realism --- New Criticism, archetypal criticism, and reader-power --- never successfully questioned the philosophical foundations of this earlier theory of culture. All these schools of thought were united in the belief, to one degree or another, that valuable cultural texts are ones that transcend history and ideology and stand as living testaments to the timeless essence of an unchanging human nature (Belsey, 1980: 15-36).

While idealism's quest for "essences" has assumed a great many forms beyond those of expressive realism, the discussion above indicates the general tendency within the idealist tradition to view culture as the expression of a transcendent truth or innate spirituality. However, once one suggests that culture should more properly be taken to be socially and historically located, then idealistically conceived categories fall into severe question. Culture defined as an autonmous realm of intellectual activity is the first casuality. For if cultural texts can be legitimately understood only in terms of an analysis which places them within the material historical setting of a particular society, then there can be no appeal to the idea that cultural significance is derived from the immutable "open secrets of the universe". Essentialism must give way to historically contingent aesthetic judgements. Insofar as culture is the expression of ideas, these ideas do not exist independently of history and the material world, but are on the contrary embedded within historically specific social formations.

Once the significance and value of culture is taken to be historically and socially located, then the inherently elitist theories of art implicit within many forms of cultural idealism is also seriously challenged. An artist is no longer defined as one possessing an inherently superior mind. Cultural values are recognized as socially constructed and the artist's claim to Truth is effectively contested. What an artist perceives as valuable and truthful, what an elite minority of cultural guardians promote as an objective and universal aesthetic, is quickly implicated within the social, political, and economic structure of a society. And very quickly then, one is confronted with something very different than that proposed by the most elitist strands of cultural idealism. For what we now recognize is something much like cultural power, the ability of certain social groups and individuals to define and inform a sense of what constitutes culture, of what is valuable and what is desired. As for Truth, it is now seen as mutable, a construction of human beings in specific historical and material conditions.

This is not to suggest that there is nothing of value worth salvaging from this tradition of thought. I cannot hope to do justice to the complexity and richness of cultural idealism here. With this reservation in mind, suffice it to say that while idealist theories have failed and continue to fail in recognizing the relationship between culture and society --- and indeed often oppose these two terms against each other --- it is important to recognize the lasting significance of something like expressive realism. In conceiving cultural production not simply as mimesis, as a truthful reflection of the world, but more importantly as an active articulation and expression of the world, expressive realism emphasizes the anticipatory and active role of human consciousness in the production and reproduction of culture.

Culture and Materialism: The Marxist Intervention

A Marxist materialist perspective on culture, against the essentialism and elitism of extreme versions of cultural idealism, would seek to locate cultural forms and cultural practices within historically specific social, economic, and political structures. This said, it is obvious from even the most cursory analysis of Marxist cultural theory that such a theoretical reformulation of the subject has in practice proven to be much more problematic than one would first suspect. For if we are to theorize culture both historically and materially, then where precisely should we begin our analysis?

Part of the difficulty lies in the fact that nowhere did Marx develop an extended theory of culture. This is not to suggest that Marx ignored questions of culture. For example, in Grundrisse Marx makes the following critical note concerning the uneven development of material production relative to artistic or cultural production:

> In the case of the arts, it is well known that certain periods of their flowering are out of all proportion to the general development of society, hence also to the material foundation, the skeletal structure as it were, of its organization. (Marx, 1973: 110)

What Marx seems to suggest here, and in his brief discussion of ancient Greek culture that follows in the text, is that within the concrete formation of culture and the economy, simple relations of direct correspondance or reflection do not necessarily follow. Beyond this, however, controversies and debates remain. For example, Robert D'Amico has suggested that the observation that there is no necessary correspondance between culture and material organization makes it very hard to accuse Marx of constructing an economistic model of culture (1981: 1-15). On the other hand, John Brenkman has argued that Marx's theory of culture remains economistic insofar as it posits culture as an estranged form of "real material" practices soley located in the economic base (1987: 71-72).

The problems that have faced Marxist cultural theory are a unique manifestation of the broader problems of Marxist materialism discussed in the previous chapter. The tensions and contradictions that characterize Marx's own work as well as the lack of any developed theory of culture in his published texts, has contributed significantly to past and present debates within the ranks of Marxist theory. The problems raised by traditional readings of the base/superstructure metaphor as well as the theory of reflection continue to weigh heavily upon the minds of Marxist thinkers.

Nevertheless, it would be a gross exaggeration to suggest that Marxist cultural theory can be easily categorized as reductive and mechanistic. The tradition is much more complex than this and much more difficult to assess in such a sweeping manner. Indeed, few serious Marxists have ever suggested that, through the simple application of the base/superstructure metaphor, culture may be seen as a direct and unproblematic reflection of historically specific modes of economic activity. Such a supposition could not be seriously defended. However, while more obvious forms of economism are absent in most Marxist analyses of culture, there is a tendency within the work of such people as Plekhanov, Lukacs, Marcuse, and Goldmann to grant varying degrees of priority to structures of economic production. Whether or not this approach can be formally called economism may be a moot point. What is clear, however, is that in every case all these authors, to one extent or another, tend to see culture as a secondary and derivative social practice.

Even though Plekhanov, for example, vehemently rejects reductionist theories that envisage culture as a pure reflection of a society's economic structure, he at times does seem to be drawn into a variant of this very argument. In discussing the nature of primitive dance, Plekhanov states that such cultural forms "often merely imitate the process of production," (Plekhanov, 1976: 160). Knowledge of the economic base may prove most useful when approaching "primitive" cultural forms, argues Plekhanov, but in more advanced societies he adds that "it is absolutely insufficient to have a knowledge of the economy" (Plekhanov, 1976: 160) if one hopes to interpret cultural practices. Hence, Marxist cultural theorists must recognize the complexity of cultural forms in capitalist societies; if one wants to analyze dance in modern cultures, Plekhanov suggests, no theory of direct reflection will suffice:

> Here we have to do with a dance expressive of the *psychology of a non-productive class.* A psychology of *this kind* accounts for the vast majority of the "customs and conventions" of a so-called good society. Consequently, in this case the *economic* "factor" is second to the *psychological.* It should, however, not be forgotten that the appearance of non-productive classes in a society is a product of the latter's economic development. Hence, the economic "factor" preserves its predominant significance even when it is second to others. Moreover, it is then that it determines the *possibility and the limits of the influence of other "factors".* (Plekhanov, 1976: 160)

Plekhanov's comments suggest a distinct improvement over a direct reflection theory of culture, though his earlier analysis of "primitive" culture should strike the reader as rather vulgar. However, the economy remains by Plekhanov's account the primary motor of society, exerting its determining influence directly or indirectly over other social practices. Culture is thus conceived as somehow secondary to the "real" material process of economic production. Plekhanov's theory of culture may best be described as one of *indirect* reflection; the economic base maintains a predominant significance in the social formation even if its influence is indirectly felt.

As Williams has argued, reflection theory, expressed directly or indirectly, is untenable on a number of grounds. The first flaw can be seen to originate in the initial conceptualization of the economic base. Various versions of the reflection theory of culture portray the base as a static and readily identifiable object of inquiry. This would seem to run completely contrary to Marx's own analysis of capitalist production in which the economic structure is conceived as a process that cannot be known as an object. Thus, to say that culture reflects the economic organization of a society is to ignore the process of production (Williams, 1977: 96; 1980:34).

Secondly, it may be argued that the reflection theory of culture inappropriately conceives of culture as a relatively passive process. What is ignored is the actual work done on material --- the social material process --- that constitutes the production of cultural forms. If culture is merely a manifestation of economic production, then any examination of cultural production would appear to be unnecessary (Williams, 1977: 97).

A major challenge to the thesis of reflection theory has been offered by the various members associated with the so-called Frankfurt School. The Frankfurt Institute for Social Research and its members have been credited with forming a substantial break with Marxist orthodoxy and have often been identified with a rejection of the base/superstructure metaphor and a subsequent refusal to reduce culture soley to an analysis of economic structure (Held, 1980: 79-80). For key theorists from the Institute such as Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse, culture is conceived as relatively automonous, though in work they have done on mass or commercial culture they suggest that such forms can be directly implicated within capitalist relations of production; culture thus loses any autonomy and critical capablility.[2] However, the major point here seems to be a recognition of the complex dialectical character of culture in the bourgeois age, a culture that at once affirms and negates the human desire for emancipation.

For Herbert Marcuse, bourgeois culture --- what one might properly conceive as High Culture --- has an "affirmative" character:

> By affirmative culture is meant that culture of the bourgeois epoch which led in the course of its own development to the segregation from civilization of the mental and spiritual world as an independent realm of value that is also considered superior to civilization. Its decisive characteristic is the assertion of a universally obligatory, eternally better and more valuable world that must be unconditionally affirmed: a world essentially different from the factual world of the daily struggle for existence, yet realizable by every individual for himself [sic] "from within" without any transformation of the state of fact. (Marcuse, 1968: 95)

What Marcuse has identified is the idealism embodied within bourgeois culture, an idealism that emphasizes the complete autonomy of culture from other social activities. For Marcuse, this separation of culture from other realms of activity creates a kind of tension or contradiction that is transcribed directly into concrete cultural forms. Affirmative culture, argues Marcuse, both affirms and negates historical demands for a general social, cultural, political, and economic liberation. The music of Bach and the paintings of Renoir, to take two examples, promise the establishment of a rational and just world but, argues Marcuse, posit this goal only as an ideal unrealizable in practice. Only in the soul of each human being can these values and truths be attained. Hence, Marcuse is led to conclude that "culture affirms and conceals the new conditions of social life," (Marcuse, 1968: 96). Affirmative culture "contains not only the justification of the established form of existence, but also the pain of its establishment: not only quiescence about what is, but remembrance of what could be," (Marcuse, 1968: 98).

Culture is not, within Marcuse's framework of understanding, a simple and passive reflection of the economic structure of bourgeois society. On the contrary, culture is assigned an active process in justifying the existing state of affairs while at the same time holding out the hope of transforming the material world. Culture is thus conceived as a "mediation" between capitalist economic forces and specific forms of consciousness that seek to transcend those forces. The mediating role that culture takes is that of militating against the development of revolutionary consciousness by diverting and re-directing those potentially explosive ideas onto an idealist abstraction of the "soul" and away from the material world of production and exploitation.

For Marcuse, then, the economic factor is "hidden" within cultural forms. The task of a critical cultural theory will be to recover the economic influence that guides cultural production. For example, Marcuse attempts to analyze what he perceives within idealist conceptions of culture as the abstraction and separation of the human "soul" from the material and social environment of human beings. What Marcuse seeks to explore is the material explanation that one may offer to account for such conceptions of the soul. In order to analyze this element of cultural idealism, Marcuse is drawn back to an examination of capitalist relations of production. He argues that hidden within artistic expressions of the abstract soul is an indicator of an economic system in which the human soul or essence is alienated. The concrete labour of human beings is transformed into abstract labour; individuality and human worth appear lost. The idealist conception of the soul and its glorification within affirmative culture, argues Marcuse, is a response to the dehumanization of the capitalist mode of production (Marcuse, 1968: 106-107).

Marcuse's argument is indeed very interesting and does represent a significant move beyond the limitations of crude reflection theory. Nevertheless, problems do remain. Marcuse's analysis shares with reflection theories of culture an insistence upon a basic dualism of culture and the economy. This separation of the symbolic from the economic perpetuates the assumption that one sphere of activity is primary to the other.

Representing a slightly different trend in Marxist cultural theory is Lukacs. Lukacs was able to counter the prevailing orthodoxy within Marxism through an emphasis upon the notion of totality and the dialectic. The concept of totality, taken from the Hegelian tradition, represents for Lukacs a primacy of the whole over the abstraction of the parts. Immediately, then, Lukacs would seem to challenge the more vulgar interpretations of culture based upon the base/superstructure metaphor. The concept of the totality would appear to resist a separation or abstraction of either culture or the economy as distinct parts of a social formation. Lukacs's dialectical thinking seeks to overcome dichotomies of any kind.

The concept of totality is central to Lukacs's cultural analysis. Cultural texts are to be investigated according to the real social foundations out of which they rise and the real social forces under the influence of which the creator of the text developed. Through these first steps, argues Lukacs, the cultural critic will be able to understand what the work represents (Lukacs, 1964: 16). However, Lukacs's approach is not simply one of socio-historical analysis. The social content of a text must be recognized but this content is then located within a whole range of social experience (Dupre, 1983: 274). In this sense, therefore, Lukacs attempts to integrate both intrinsic elements of the cultural text (what the work states) with extrinsic elements (how the work is embedded within the social totality).

To explain this connection between the intrinsic and extrinsic elements of a cultural text, Lukacs develops a theory of mediation and typification. Cultural texts find their origin in experience but artists then attempt to symbolically represent the "type" or "universal" that exists in particular pheneomena and that reveals the whole. This process of typification suggests that an artist is able to transform individual experiences into "types" that hold a universal but historically specific validity through which social individuals may perceive the social whole or totality (Kolakowski, 1978: 290-291). "Good" art, argues Lukacs, presents images and symbols that integrate the individual phenomenon and the universal within a state of unity and wholeness.

In many ways, Lukacs's analysis re-states the basic dualism evident within Marxist theories centred on reflection or mediation. The demand that art should reflect "totality" presupposes a distinction between a knowable and abstracted social reality and a specific cultural form. Like proponents of reflection theory, Lukacs seems to suggest that social material processes may be abstracted and analyzed as static formations. This assertion can only be maintained if human actions and social processes are conceived as an object. To see the social whole as a process would immediately complicate this model of typification.

Another variation of materialist theories of culture is best expressed by the work of Lucien Goldmann. Heavily influenced by the work of Lukacs, Goldmann maintains a strong sense of totality as the starting point of his cultural analysis:

> I set out from the fundamental principle of dialectical materialism, that the knowledge of empirical facts remains abstract and superficial so long as it is not made concrete by its integration into a whole....I thus maintain that the ideas and work of an author cannot be understood as long as we remain on the level of what he [sic] wrote, or even of what he read and what influenced him. (Goldmann, 1964: 7)

Individual texts, according to Goldmann, are seen to express or correspond to a specific world vision, what Goldmann terms the "vision du monde" of a particular social group. Moreover, this world vision corresponds to the social, political, and economic life of the group.

Goldmann's theory of correspondance --- or what is perhaps more properly termed "homology" --- consists in a recognition of three elements of cultural production. To begin, Goldmann emphasizes that cultural texts are the symbolic expression of a world vision of a particular group, where a "world vision" is understood as ensembles of mental categories which form coherent structures (Goldmann, 1976: 76). Secondly, there is a recognition that a particular world vision constitutes the whole intellectual and social life of the group. Finally, the vision du monde is an expression of the economic and social life of a specific group (Goldmann, 1964: 99). Hence, seemingly disconnected things --- an author, a text, social and economic classes --- are brought together, through a recognition of correspondances, into a concrete whole.

For Goldmann, therefore, culture is not merely reflective of reality. Cultural texts correspond to a particular world vision which in turn corresponds to particular forms of social and economic life. Goldmann expresses this understanding of culture as "genetic structuralism", the recognition of a correspondance or homology between a social order, its ideology or social consciousness, and its cultural forms (Goldmann, 1976: 77).

The difficulties that arise from Goldmann's genetic structuralism can be expressed in two ways. Goldmann's analysis is, in practice, a selective one. When analyzing specific works such as those by Pascal and Racine (Goldmann, 1964), Goldmann tends to present only the cultural evidence that fits the homology (Williams, 1977: 106-107). Other texts are neglected. Secondly, in attempting to trace out the correspondance between cultural texts and the social order, this social order is given a structured and abstract form (Williams, 1977: 106-107). Like Lukacs, Goldmann tends to ignore active practices and processes that comprise any social order. Hence, Goldmann's theory depends ultimately upon a known history, known structures, and known products, a situation that in reality is nothing more than an abstraction of social processes. Goldmann has, as Frederic Jameson (1981: 43-44) argues, created a rather simplistic model in which it is suggested that at the abstract level of a "structure" the three quite different elements of economic situation, ideological position, and cultural practice are essentially the same.

Raymond Williams: Reconstructing Cultural Materialism

While Williams's work represents an attempt to say something very much against the grain of both the dominant idealist and orthodox Marxist tradition of cultural theory, it is important to recognize that Williams has also been significantly influenced by both trends of thought. Williams's theory of cultural materialism represents both a challenge to the two dominant traditions and also, and perhaps most importantly, an attempt to integrate these two traditions.

In his engagement with idealism , Williams has accepted a number of ideas associated with such thinkers as Eliot, Richards, and Leavis (Williams, 1987: 227-252). Despite concerns about their elitism, Williams does take from these thinkers an understanding of culture as a whole way of life. Culture is no longer seen simply as literature, painting, sculpture, and classical music --- all of the so-called "fine" arts --- but embodies many more experiences and practices than this. Culture extends into the everyday realm of social life:

> [Culture] includes all the characteristic activities and interests of a people: Derby Day, Henley Regatta, Cowes the twelfth of August, a cup final, the dog races, the pin table, the dart board, Wensleydale cheese, boiled cabbage cut into sections, beetroot in vinegar, nineteenth-century Gothic churches, and the music of Elgar. (Eliot: 1948: 31)

Against the aesthetic and Romantic isolation and fragmentation of culture as a specialized area of activity, Eliot proposes a more organic and holistic vision of culture, even though he looked upon the elements of "popular" or "mass" culture with disdain. However Eliot does recognize that culture is not just Art, but includes all the elements of a particular way of life of a people.

While Eliot's holistic vision of culture is, in

Williams's mind, a definite improvement over earlier definitions, a major difficulty remains. Eliot's definition of culture as a totality of social practices is in essence an empty totality. That is, it is lacking any notion of determination. How is culture organized and structured? How do we explain cultural change? What is the role of human agency in creating culture?

For Williams, the concept of "structures of feeling" serves as the organizing principle for a "whole way of life". A structure of feeling describes, at a very general level, a particular pattern of social experience as it is lived:

> [W]e find here a particular sense of life, a particular community of experience hardly needing expression through which the characteristics of our way of life that an external analyst could describe are in some way passed, giving them a particular and characteristic colour....The term I would suggest to describe it is structure of feeling: it is firm and definite as "structure" suggests, yet it operates in the most delicate and least tangible parts of our activity. 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, 1961: 48)

A structure of feeling describes, somewhat nebulously, both the formal and informal expressions of the social and material world. These expressions or "feelings" are structured in the sense that they constitute formally held and systematically articulated beliefs; they form structures of signification. However, these expressions and feelings are, Williams asserts, actively lived and felt (Williams, 1977: 132). Hence, structures of feeling refer to both the formal organization of culture and the manner in which culture is lived and felt.

In this manner, there is a clear link between Williams's notion of a structure of feeling and Lukacs's totality as well as Goldmann's theory of genetic structuralism. As in the case of the latter two writers, Williams's emphasis upon culture as a whole way of life, by definition, privileges the whole over the parts. Specific cultural forms and practices are to be analyzed not on their own but within the context of a whole social formation. Hence, in practice, when Williams approaches the study of specific cultural forms his analysis invariably begins with a detailed historical survey that attempts to trace out and identify specific structures of feeling in which cultural texts and movements appear.[3] A structure of feeling then, not unlike Goldmann's _vision du monde,_ represents a theoretical tool whereby Williams attempts to link cultural forms to specific social formations.

On closer examination, the concept of structure of feeling seems to contain both an idealist and materialist emphasis. The phrase suggests a link with idealist descriptions of culture with its insistence upon the crucial role of expressive forces and feelings that define and grant meaning to experience. The heritage that Williams's owes to

Romanticism with its passionate celebration of the expressive and creative power of human beings is clear here. However, Williams is quick to reject the elitist implications inherent in the idea of the "naturally gifted" artist who is able to perceive and express reality in ways that most cannot; he convincingly argues that cultural communication is representative of a general human creativity and shared capacity to express and interpret the external world (Williams, 1961: 8-40). Further, Williams insists that culture cannot be understood in isolation, but must be considered as part of a material and social order. Williams's formulation of "structures of feeling", therefore, represents an attempt to integrate objectivist and subjectivist notions of culture; culture both expresses and illuminates the ideas of social subjects and articulates with objective social structures.

This integrative approach to an analysis of culture that seeks to bridge the dichotomies of subject and object represents a significant continuity within Williams's work. This theme is best illustrated by Williams's discussion of the materiality of language that appears almost sixteen years after he developed the notion of structures of feeling. When one speaks of the material nature of language, Williams argues, one is implying first that language is historical and second that language is a practical constitutive activity (1977: 21). To emphasize and support this argument Williams mentions the work of two Marxist linguists, Rossi-Landi and Volosinov.

Both Williams and Rossi-Landi share a sense of language as practical activity. For Rossi-Landi speech is an element of human activity that cannot be separated from the social totality; there is a homology between linguistic production and material production such that a sentence corresponds to a tool in economic production (O'Connor, 1989: 110). While Williams would agree with Rossi-Landi's attempt to situate language within a whole system of social structures and practices, he would most certainly disagree with Rossi-Landi's reduction of all practical activity to "work" in a narrow economic sense. Moreover, the problems surrounding the analytical tool of homology throw a wrench into Rossi-Landi's theory. By setting out to develop a semiotic homology for the discourses of linguistics and Marxist economics, Rossi-Landi presupposes that it is possible to trace out a theory of one activity (language) in relation to the "known" properties of what is conceptualized as a static object (economic production).

It is within the work of Volosinov that Williams finds his main inspiration on the question of language. Volosinov rejects both theories of subjective expressionism and objective abstractions of language as a formal system.[4] For Volosinov, the connection between the base and superstructure in Marxist theory is not to be found in Plekhanov's "social psychology", but in verbal interaction (Volosinov, 1973: 19). For Plekhanov, social psychology or forms of social consciousness are indirect reflections of the economic base; language is thus conceived as the product of this economically determined consciousness. On the other hand, Volosinov argues that language is an activity, not a reflection of material reality, but an active social process of signifying the world. Language is not the product of forms of consciousness determined in the economic sphere but is the producer of consciousness. Thus, language is both social and part of a verbally constituted consciousness. Language is objective in the sense that it pre-exists individuals, but it is also subjective, constituting consciousness that then allows individuals to use language of their own initiative. Hence, Volosinov rejects objectivist and mechanical theories of language that allow no individual initiative as well as subjectivist notions that emphasize the primacy of individual expression at the expense of the recognition of the social content of language (Williams, 1977: 40-41; Volosinov, 1973: 17-24; Bennett, 1982: 50-51).

It remains to be seen, however, whether Williams's proposed integration of idealism and materialism, subjectivism and objectivism, is theoretically consistent. E.P. Thompson (1961), for example, has argued that the idealist emphasis remains too strong within Williams's concept of "structure of feeling". Thompson suggests that there is a tendency within Williams's work to conceive of structures of feeling as all-encompassing. This view obviously stems from the initial conception of culture as a whole way of life. For Thompson, however, to describe culture as a whole way of life ignores the social and historical reality of the struggles and confrontations that occur between opposing ways of life. In essence, Thompson suggests that Williams cannot adequately account for the way in which culture is structured in relations of dominance and subordination (Thompson, 1961: 24-33). Like idealist theories of culture, Williams's notion of "structure of feeling" appears to mask over questions of cultural power and determination.

It is partly because of such critiques that Williams has sought to move beyond the limitations revealed within the concept of structure of feeling. Williams's introduction of "hegemony" into his analysis should be understood as replacing that of the earlier term. Hegemony is used to elucidate the way in which culture as part of a totality is structured. That is, with the use of hegemony, Williams begins to conceive of determination as the setting of limits and the exertion of pressures which in turn implies a sense of constitutive power that was missing from earlier descriptions of structures of feeling.

Hegemony is a complex but vitally important concept that Williams has borrowed from Gramsci. According to Gramsci, hegemony is something that must be distinguished from direct and sole political rule and coercion. It extends far beyond political leadership to include a whole range of processes --- moral, political, and intellectual --- through which dominant social groups extend their influence over all social practices (Mouffe, 1979: 183). Hegemony is not forced upon subordinate groups but is fashioned and refashioned as "'spontaneous' consent [is] given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental groups," (Gramsci, 1971: 12). Thus, hegemony represents the manner in which dominant social groups are able to win consent for the structure and system of social relations which maintain and support their dominant position (Hall et. al., 1977: 48-49)

According to Williams's reading of Gramsci, hegemony is something that deeply saturates all elements of society:

> It is a whole body of practices and expectations; our assignments of energy, our ordinary understanding of the nature of man [sic] and his world. It is a set of meanings and values which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming. It thus constitutes a sense of reality for most people in the society, a sense of absolute because experienced reality beyond which it is very difficult for most members of society to move, in most areas of their lives. (1980: 38)

Williams's understanding of hegemony not only focuses on a system of beliefs and values, but also recognizes that the whole social process is practically organized by dominant meanings and values which are lived and experienced (Williams, 1977: 109). Hegemony represents an attempt to theorize culture in both objective and subjective terms; it at once forms a structure that is organized according to specific and dominant meanings, and at the same moment includes the more traditionally conceived subjective elements of everyday practice and experience.

However, no dominant hegemonic formation can ever be total or exclusive. This is not to suggest that singular "creative minds" work to form alternative or oppositional cultural practices. Such metaphysical explanations, argues Williams, are unnecessary and mistaken. Emergent and alternative --- even oppositional --- practices are possible because no dominant culture can exhaust the entire range of human cultural activity. Similarly, residual cultural practices that have been formed in the past may persist on the margins of dominant practices or be selectively incorporated into the dominant. Hence, the dominant culture must select from a very large range of cultural practices over which it seeks a hegemonic control. In this sense, therefore, hegemony is never complete; it continually has to be renewed in the face of challenges that contest the dominant culture (Williams, 1980: 40-41).

Hegemony, in Williams's hands, becomes a means whereby he attempts to overcome the difficulties encountered by theories of reflection, mediation, typification, and homology. These latter concepts were developed by Marxist cultural theorists to "bridge the gap" between the base and suprstructure so that culture could be analyzed within historically specific social structures. However, such theories tend to portray culture as a secondary activity to material production and construct dualistic abstractions of a fully "known" social reality and a particular pheneomenon. With the introduction of hegemony, Williams has questioned the very foundation of all these theories:

> Cultural work and activity are not now, in any ordinary sense, a superstructure: not only because of the depth and thoroughness at which cultural hegemony is lived, but because cultural traditions and practices are seen as much more than superstructural expressions --- reflections, mediations, or typifications --- of a formed social and economic structure. On the contrary, they are among the basic processes of the formation itself and, further, related to a much wider area of reality than the abstractions of "social" and "economic" experience. (Williams, 1977: 111)

Culture as Praxis

For Williams, the concept of hegemony thus succeeds in expanding the analysis of culture within a Marxist framework. Traditional Marxist analysis, as Brenkman has argued, tends to preceive cultural forms as expressions of consciousness estranged from the "real material" world of production (1987: 72-74). Culture is thus defined as a special realm of activity and expression separate from, yet ultimately determined by economic production. Culture is not recognized as a social-material practice, but is seen as derivative of other primary activities.

The strength of Williams's analysis lies in his ability to conceptualize culture and other forms of social activity as interrelated material-social practices. Williams's understanding of hegemony underlines the manner in which culture is to be understood as practical activity. Theories of reflection, typicality, mediation, and homology all work, to one degree or another, to repeat the central error expressed in classical interpretations of the base/superstructure model; each separate society and culture categorically wherein the theoretical image of the former takes precedence over the latter. Culture becomes a secondary realm of activity divorced from but dependent upon real material activity. In such readings, culture is often reduced to solely a "reproductive" function, generating forms of consciousness and ideologies that work to legitimate already existing forms of social and material organization.

With the introduction of hegemony, Williams refuses to view culture in such simple terms of "reproduction". Culture itself is seen as a material-social activity and not an "effect" of the material life process. Along with political practices, economic practices, and other social practices, culture is an active element in defining and organizing the social world. Rather than conceiving of culture in terms of reproduction, argues Williams, a truly materialist prespective would recognize culture as production. For within Williams's work, ultimately, one finds an understanding of culture as practical activity. It is a practice that involves the transformation of raw materials through the use of specific means of production by human labour into specific products (Williams, 1981: 185-205). Culture does not simply reflect the world, but is an active process of signification, a way in which human beings in definite social relations signify and represent the world in particular ways (see Markus, 1986: 42).

This materialist theory of culture as elucidated by Williams presents one with a number of developments. First, Williams's cultural materialism, above all else, realizes the historically contingent nature of cultural production and all forms of signification. In this, Williams does not differ significantly from earlier materialist attempts to define the nature of culture. However, by positing culture as practical activity this historical understanding is radically transformed. For if culture can no longer be conceived as a reflection or expression of primary forms of material activity, then processes of signification no longer passively depend upon "how things are"; rather the social world is actively and selectively "re-presented" by various social groups in very specific ways (see Hall, 1982: 77). Hence, cultural forms are not simple functional reproductions or reflections of the world and do not flow from a pre-given reality, because the same events can be signified in radically different ways. Instead, signification itself is understood as a social practice that involves specific relations and forces of production. There is thus a social struggle over processes of signification and cultural production, a struggle among various groups over the manner in which the world is to be understood and represented.

NOTES

1. For a more detailed and complex treatment of idealist theories of culture, see Zygmunt Bauman (1973: 6-17).

2. The classic example of this line of reasoning is seen in the seminal essay on the culture industries in Horkheimer and Adorno (1972).

3. For an excellent example of such a reading of a particular cultural formation, see Williams (1961: 72-122).

4. In rejecting subjective expressionism, Volosinov appears to be taking issue with those idealist theories of language that view language as a creative practice of abstract individuals separate from material social practice. On the other hand, Volosoniv also seems to challenge objective accounts of language (as in Saussure) that see language as an objective system that exists largely beyond the living speech of human beings. See Williams, 1977: 27-28; 31-32.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE CRITIQUE OF CULTURAL MATERIALISM

Until the late 1970's there existed a conspicuous lack of any scholarly debate around Raymond Williams's work. As one author has suggested (Zinman, 1984: 22), a large part of this silence can be put to the fact that Williams's work on cultural materialism strides across many traditional academic boundaries: philosophy, sociology, history, literary theory, and linguistics to name but a few.

However, Williams's early work did not go entirely unchallenged. After the publication of Culture and Society and The Long Revolution a number of authors emerged to question the fledgling theory of cultural materialism. These early engagements tended to focus on what was rightly perceived as a significant lack of discussion of class conflict and power in Williams's analysis of historical and contemporary British culture. These early critiques may have in the end prompted Williams to reconsider his initial understanding of culture and drawn him more closely into the Marxist debate.

However, if one theme stands out in the critical literature surrounding Williams it is the problem of determination. Williams's struggle to re-work and yet retain a Marxist sense of determination is something with which critics have continually taken issue.[1] The most common challenge raised has been that Williams, in his deconstruction of the base/superstructure model has in effect failed to reconstruct any clear sense of material determination. Even when Williams, later in his career, more directly approached the issues of class, power and ideology, critics would still challenge his understanding of determination.

A number of these challenges to Williams's rethinking of determination have come from Marxists situated within the Althusserian structuralist school of thought. They argue that Williams's "culturalism" is the major weakness of his theory for it binds him to an idealist and Hegelian theory of social determination based upon expressive causality, the belief that all social phenomena are manifestations of one central contradiction. Further, it is argued that the experiential base of Williams's definition of culture threatens to draw him into a position characterized as "vulgar" empiricism. It is here that one of the weaknesses of Williams's work becomes apparent: he lacks a theory of the subject.

More recently, post-structuralist critical theory has challenged several ideas that are central to cultural materialism. Rejecting any "grand narrative" or universal theory as a master discourse that reduces difference to one code, post-structuralists suggest that the Marxist category of totality is idealist and ideological. Indeed, even the idea of a "dominant" culture may be ahistorical and metaphysical. The poststructuralist critique of "totality" as set against the celebration of difference, flux, and hetereogeneity is, I will argue, highly problematic. For in the end, what a certain current of poststructuralism draws us to is a radical pluralism that threatens to overemphasize disunity, autonomy, and indeterminancy.

The Early Critique: Class, Power and Determination

With the publication of Culture and Society and The Long Revolution, Williams did manage to stir the interest of a handful of thinkers. V.G. Kiernan (1959), E.P. Thompson (1961), C.L.R. James (1980), and Arnold Kettle (1961) represent the first major critical assessment of Williams's early writings on cultural theory. While each author finds various difficulties arising within Williams's first texts, each also expresses similiar concerns over Williams's apparent idealist heritage and his re-thinking of the historical materialist thesis of determination.

Kiernan's review (1959) of Culture and Society argues that Williams tends to ignore the social context in which the writers he analyzes lived and produced their texts. While the book presents a detailed and valuable textual account of the substance of numerous British authors who have written on the subjects of culture and society, Kiernan suggests that the omission of any social and historical contextualization of these authors occludes questions of social class and social antagonism (78). That is, Williams has failed, in Kiernan's terms, to recognize the underlying class struggle that informs and constitutes particular ways of thinking about culture. Further, Kiernan suggests that this silence in Williams's project is related to his failure to adequately conceptualize the historical moment of capitalism. Kiernan argues that Williams tends to read the ills of society in a manner that revives the thinking of the Romantics; industrialization as a way of life, not capitalism as an exploitative form of economic and social relations, is made to bear the brunt of the blame for all that ails culture and society. Hence, questions of power and class are effectively displaced by Williams.

In his review of The Long Revolution, Thompson (1961) similarly takes Williams to task over the apparent exclusion of questions of class and power. As noted above, Thompson's critique of Williams's definition of culture as a whole way of life is centred on the premise that such a conceptualization of culture ignores the existence of competing ways of life; in essence, Thompson suggests that Williams has missed the central importance of class struggle and class power in constituting cultural forms. Moreover, Thompson suggests, Williams tends to use terms that mask this real social conflict that lies at the basis of all capitalist social formations. Williams strategically employs concepts such as systems of decision, systems of maintenance, systems of communication, and systems of nurturing to describe the four co-equal elements of society. For Thompson, however, these terms do nothing but stand in for and displace the more critically grounded concepts of power, property, exploitation and ideology. Further, by presenting these terms as co-equal, Williams has also constructed an empty totality, one free of any clear notion of causal determination (31).

Arnold Kettle (1961) has also identified and interrogated these weaknesses in Williams's early works. Like Kiernan and Thompson, Kettle suggests that both Culture and Society and The Long Revolution provide the reader with no adequate recognition of class division and class power. For Kettle, Williams appears to be "more concerned with the meaning of words than with the struggles behind those meanings," (304). Kettle suggests that Williams's analysis remains firmly mired within the idealist tradition of thought; Williams by and large fails to materially ground the origins of different ways of conceptualizing culture within the concrete class struggles of capitalist society.

Kettle also challenges Williams's reconsideration of Marxist notions of determination that emerge from the base/superstructure model. In Culture and Society Williams clearly rejects the mechanical and reductive interpretation of a determining base and a determined superstructure and instead leans towards a reading that stresses the dialectical interaction of the two with some primacy allocated to the economy. With The Long Revolution, however, Williams posits the totality of four co-equal systems of the state, the economy, culture, and the family with no one system ultimately determining. For Kettle, Williams is correct to see the relationship between between such activities as art and the economy as a dialectical one, but Williams has stretched his analysis too far. While Williams's four systems no doubt dialectically interact, argues Kettle, it does not necessarily follow that they are co-equal; some forms of social activity can be more determining than others. By rejecting the base/superstructure metaphor out of hand, Williams has lost any sense of the historical and material determination of conscious existence. Hence, Kettle concludes that this error clouds Williams's analysis of cultural texts; there is no real sense in Williams's work how specific structures of feeling develop in the first instance (307). Kettle argues that Williams has failed to recognize the extent to which culture does not arise spontaneously but is constituted within specific historical material foundations.

In his rather polemical review of Culture and Society and The Long Revolution, C.L.R. James (1980) presses the issue of the lack of class analysis in Williams's early work to the extreme. James suggests that Williams's academic and "non-Marxist" approach to the study of culture fails to recognize the revolutionary potential of the working class. By ignoring class conflict, Williams substitutes a "revisionist" and "gradualist" notion of a "long revolution" for the historical and revolutionary project of the proletariate (115). For James, Williams has failed to recognize the liberating potential arising out of the class struggle. Thus, Williams's approach is not materialist; he does not ground the production of culture and ideas about culture within the concrete material context of the class struggle (119).

Williams's more recent work has dealt with questions of struggle, exploitation, and power in ways that answer many of these early objections to his work. The categories of dominant, residual, and emergent cultures emphasize the existence of competing "ways of life". Further, Williams's reading of hegemony quite clearly attempts to articulate a theory of culture and power. On the other hand, while Williams has attempted to reconstruct a Marxist and materialist sense of determination in his recent work, this area of cultural materialism remains problematic for many thinkers, most notably those proponents of Marxist structuralism.

The Structuralist Critique

It was not until the mid 1970's that any further significant discussion of Williams's work become publicized. Much of this renewed interest was spawned by Terry Eagleton. Working from a structuralist position, Eagleton provides the first sustained critique of Williams's cultural materialism. It is to Eagleton's credit that he challenges Williams not just in a cursory way, but questions the very epistemological and methodological base of Williams's theory.

Eagleton (1976a; 1976b) suggests that the central flaw in Williams's work is his "populism". Such a position, argues Eagleton, commits Williams to a belief in the ability of people to create new meanings and values out of their lived experience. However, this emphasis upon the centrality of experience creates a phenomenological dimension within Williams's analysis that steers perilously close to idealism. The category of "structure of feeling" as well as Williams's reading of hegemony as lived and felt places subjective experience at the core of any social formation. This, Eagleton suggests, tends to ignore the existence of objective social structures that work to constitute and shape consciousness, social structures that mediate experience and inform the way in which actors view their world. Hence, Eagleton argues, Williams is guilty of "over-subjectivising the social formation," (1976a: 32; 1976b: 15).

Eagleton's critique of the experiential element of Williams's cultural materialism is rooted within the work of the Marxist structuralist, Louis Althusser. For Althusser, the belief that subjects gain knowledge of their world through their direct experience is the ideological misconception of "socialist humanism". Althusser argues that to reduce something like culture, for example, to its "practico-social" or experiential effects is to fall into the trap of "vulgar empiricism" (McLennan, et. al., 1977: 84). Vulgar empiricism is the belief that given subjects gain their knowledge and consciousness of the world through their own experiences, experiences free of any structural determinations or influences, (Adlam, et. al., 1977: 15).

For Marxist structuralists, experience is always an inevitable misrecognition of real existence on the part of subjects. Experience is thus an ideological category: "[T]his recognition [experience] only gives us the consicousness of our incessant (eternal) practice of ideological recognition...but in no sense does it give us the (scientific) knowledge of the mechanism of this recognition," (Althusser, 1971: 49). Within the structuralist framework, therefore, "experience" is nothing more than ideology, "the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence," (Althusser, 1971: 153). The weakness in cultural materialism is, according to structuralists, the tendency to ignore or omit determinations that do not make themselves known in the experience of social actors (Johnson, 1979: 55).

Although I think Althusser is wrong to suggest that all experience is ideology, he is correct to question the belief that experience always provides an immediate and privileged knowledge of the world.[2] For Althusser, it is not through experience but through the production of concepts and scientific theories that we can apprehend reality. In one sense, I think Althusser is right, but in another sense he is quite clearly wrong. For example, as I write this I can look out my window and record that the sun is shining without having recourse to the complexities of metereology. In this case, my immediate experience has recorded a truth and Althusser's theory that all experience is misrecognition seems disproved. However, my immediate experience also tells me that as I have laboured in this room in which I write the sun has moved across the sky and is now about to set. In this case, experience has indeed fooled me for science reveals that the sun does not move around the earth but that it is the rotation of the earth that makes it appear as such. In this case, it is only through scientific concepts that I can perceive reality. Similarly, one cannot recognize the complexity of capital accumulation simply through our everyday experience in the marketplace (see Williams, 1979a: 168).

With this example in mind, I do not think that Williams can be neatly labelled a "vulgar empiricist" even as Althusser and Eagleton understand the term. While it is true that categories such as "experience" and the "lived" are central to Williams's work, I do not think that he is guilty of "over-subjectivising" the social formation or of grounding his epistemology solely within an experiential framework. As early as The Long Revolution Williams argues that there is no "natural" perception of the external world, no pristine contact with reality (1961: 16-19). By experience, therefore, Williams does not mean to suggest that there is an unmediated relationship between social actors and their world. What he does argue is that experience is a limited word, "for there are many kinds of knowledge it will never give us, in any of its ordinary senses," (1979a: 172). However, experience does provide human subjects with some knowledge. To claim that all experience is ideology is to ignore the significance of this insight.

The structuralist critique of Williams's epistemology is premised largely upon a theory of subjectivity developed by Althusser.[3] For Althusser, the subject is an ideological construct because "all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects," (1971: 162). Ideology thus transforms individuals into subjects to fulfill the function of reproducing existing relations of production. It is precisely this move to equate subjects solely with ideology that Williams attempts to resist. Williams argues that this objective view of human subjectivity and consciousness seems to imply that "individuals" are interpellated as "subjects" outside of any real human practice and activity; there is thus a problematic movement from an abstract presocial individual to an ideological and social subject (1977: 87). Althusser's argument is very much like the reflection theory of consciousness in that he views consciousness and subjectivity as an "effect" of already constituted structures and systems beyond the intentions of social actors.

The difficulty that arises for Williams, however, is how to counter the structuralist critique of the "experiential" subject without responding with a defense of pure voluntarism. In this regard, Williams is lacking a clear notion of subjectivity, a point brought to light in his interview with the editors of New Left Review. They point out that if hegemony is both lived and felt, and if it exerts pressures and sets limits upon human activity, then Williams continues to counterpose individual subjects with external social structures (Williams, 1979a: 356). Williams's response is to assert that subjects do act purposively in the world and are not mere victims of social manipulation. However, Williams has no theory of the subject to replace the structuralist model. While he can effectively challenge Althusser's theory of interpellation, Williams offers little in its place.

Nevertheless, I think there does exist within Williams's work the material from which the initial steps towards a theory of subjectivity could be made.[4] Althusser asserts that all subjects are interpellated by ideology and that this process is a complete transformation; once a subject always a subject. For Williams, subjects are not mere carriers of ideological structures, a fact made evident in his analysis in Keywords of the struggle and conflicts that arise around language. This reveals that language is not static but is modified and changed by human speakers. Althusser's theory of fixed subject positions does not fit well into Williams's observations. Indeed, what Williams's work on language seems to point to is a theory of what John Higgins (1986: 116) has called the "subject in process". Seeing the subject "in process" would recognize that subjectivity is contradictory (and not unified as Althusser seems to suggest) and that consciousness is an active material process that anticipates ends.

The structuralist emphasis upon the ideological determination of "subjectivity" and "experience" also raises questions about Williams's critique of the base/superstructure model. Eagleton offers perhaps the most sustained critique of cultural materialism by assessing the strengths and weaknesses of Williams's reconstruction of the base/superstructure metaphor. For Eagleton, there exists within Williams's later work the assumption that to label a phenomenon "superstructural" is somehow to assign it a lesser degree of "reality" than the economic mode of production. This, suggests Eagleton, is a blatant misreading of the base/superstructure metaphor:

> [T]he base/superstructure model is not in this sense an ontological thesis.... The specificity of the base/superstructure thesis lies not here, but in the question of determinations.... It is a conceptual instrument for the analysis of material determination in particular historical societies, for the ends of political practice. (1989: 168)

Williams's cultural materialism, argues Eagleton, misreads the base/superstructure model as an ontological thesis about the origins of elements of the superstructure, rather than as an explanatory or descriptive account of concrete social processes. As such, Eagleton suggests that cultural materialism threatens to return the Marxist debate to the purely philosophical stance of traditional materialists, like Feuerbach, who provided less an explanatory account of the social process than a polemical defense of an ontological thesis of reality (1989: 168). Rather than representing a new direction for Marxism, cultural materialism takes us back before Marx, to earlier debates between materialism and idealism.

Eagleton's assessment of Williams's reading of the base/superstructure metaphor proceeds to question the validity and practicality of what he sees Williams ultimately doing: collapsing the model altogether. While Eagleton praises Williams for extending Marx's analysis into the realm (culture) that has been traditionally most resistant to a materialist definition, Eagleton at the same time raises an immediate question: "For what, once you have demonstrated that language, culture, or even consciousness is 'material', do you then do? If everything is 'material', can the term logically retain any force?" (1989: 169). In deconstructing the distincton between base and superstructure, Williams reduces everything to the material; his analysis, argues Eagleton, is thus descriptive and not explanatory.

One immediate consequence of this rejection of the base and superstructure is that Williams may have fallen into a circular argument. Eagleton suggests that cultural materialism, with its reduction of all social activity to the "material", effectively shelves any notion of determination (1989: 171). If all the elements of the social, because they are material, are equally determining, then the very idea of "determination" is thrown into doubt. Does Williams mean that all elements of the social order are equal because they are all material? Williams does emphasize that cultural practices are forms of material production; this allows Williams to conceptualize these practices within their real social relations and to argue against cultural idealism ("spiritualized creativity") and orthodox Marxism ("culture as reflection"), (Williams, 1979a: 353). Nevertheless, it does appear that some forms of material production --- securing food and shelter, for example --- precede others. It could be argued that there is a causal hierarchy of material production.

The editors of New Left Review present Williams with this very argument. They suggest, contrary to cultural materialism, that there is a causal hierarchy of material activity. For example, if all novelists stopped writing, the results would be nowhere near the same order if all automobile workers withheld their labour; industrial production seems to have a greater determining influence upon society (Williams, 1979a: 354).

Williams accepts this argument but with the important caveat that it may prove very difficult to specifically categorize or "rate" each type of production (1979a: 355). Modern capitalism, argues Williams, represents a significant shift from the production of indispensable needs to the reproduction of dispensible services. In the United States in 1979, over fifty per cent of workers were employed in the information sector. Williams suggests that a strike in this sector of the economy would have the same catastrophic effect as a power workers strike (1979a: 355-356). The material production of information would seem then to have its own causal weight. Hence, it may prove unwise to suggest that industrial production forms the "base" of American society.

However, if we extend the analogy to cultural production, as Eagleton does, certain unique problems arise. When Williams states that he has great difficulty in conceiving culture as superstructural, Eagleton asserts that

Williams is both right and wrong. He is correct to view culture as a form of material production and therefore properly conceived as "infrastructural". On the other hand, Eagleton argues that if one defines the superstructure as a relational term that refers to particular aspects of a social practice or institution that support exploitation and oppression, then culture can be superstructural. Culture can serve the interests of the ruling class and legitimate particular forms of material exploitation. In Eagleton's view, cultural products are both infrastructural and superstructural insofar as they are material and also, at a less tangible level, supportive of further economic oppression (1989: 174).

Eagleton's critique raises some very important issues, but I do not think that his conclusions veer very far from what Williams is trying to establish. In re-thinking the base/superstructure model, Williams in the end asserts very much the same thing as Eagleton; culture is material and is also "superstructural" in cases where it can be seen as "expressing and ratifying the domination of a particular class," (Williams, 1980: 36-37). Williams's use of hegemony again emphasizes the manner in which culture can be seen as superstructural, not in the sense of being "immaterial" but as naturalizing and universalizing particular world-views. It may indeed be the case, as Eagleton suggests, that in reacting so strongly against the crude abuses of the base/superstructure metaphor Williams perhaps has moved at times too far in the other direction. However, I do not think that Williams completely collapses the base and superstructure together. Although it may appear that Williams has done so, as I noted in Chapter Two it is clear that Williams does recognize some kind of "superstructural" activities that relate to the intentions of a specific ruling class.

Anthony Barnett (1976) further challenges Eagleton's critique of cultural materialism on a number of grounds. First, Barnett suggests that Eagleton's reading of the categories of base and superstructure is not in fact an improvement over Williams. For Eagleton, argues Barnett, all culture, because it is all superstructural, is ideology; culture works to legitimate a particular economic mode of production (Barnett, 1976: 49). Hence, Eagleton threatens to return Marxist cultural theory to a functionalist and reductive analysis. Secondly, Eagleton has, in Barnett's view, failed to grasp the complexity of Williams's work because Eagleton addresses only a small portion of Williams's writing, treating each text in isolation rather than recognizing ongoing developments (1976: 54).

Barnett suggests that the major problem with Williams's cultural materialism does not stem from his populism or vulgar empiricism, nor his reassessment of the base/superstructure model, but with his "culturalism". By culturalism, Barnett means:

> [A] strategic vision of socialist politics in its way parallel to that of economism. Where economist strategies for socialism rely upon the spontaneous momentum of the industrial struggles to accomplish the overthrow of capital, Williams's early books contain a culturalist argument which is logically similar. He suggests that revolutionary change will be accomplished by the spontaneous intensification of cultural exchange, the deepening of free communication and the liberation of creative expression. This was the idealized process --- the "long revolution" --- for which Williams pleaded. (1976: 56)

Williams's discussion of culture implies that it is the cultural that is determining. As Barnett has observed, this is a parallel argument to economism. Under the latter, the economy is conceived as embodying the essence of all social phenomena. Within the culturalist framework, argues Barnett, culture is seen as embodying such an essence.[5]

Barnett's critical assessment of culturalism raises what I think to be another major flaw in Williams's work, something perhaps best described as his "evolutionism". As early as The Long Revolution Williams conceives of social change as a progressive democratization of the means of cultural production (1961: 293-355). As communication systems become more democratized and more accessible to the working class, Williams believes that new and progressive cultural formations --- a "shared culture" --- will emerge (1975: 135-152). One can quite clearly see the culturalist bent to this argument as well as a perhaps essentialist portrayal of the working class as the embodiment of this democratic cultural ideal. On another level, however, Williams is offering an "evolutionist" theory that posits a kind of gradual and progressive transformation of society. As Anthony Giddens (1981: 20-25; 1984: 236-243) has shown, evolutionary theories of social change often fail to recognize that societies can both progress and regress. Hence, there is no "necessary" evolution of societies. Therefore, Williams has no concrete reason to believe that existing cultural relations will be superseded by a democratic and shared culture.

Closely related to Barnett's critique of Williams's culturalism is Stuart Hall's challenge to Williams's use of "totality" and expressive causality. The latter term is taken from Althusser's Reading Capital where the author outlines his theory of structural causality as set against more traditional theories of determination. Althusser argues that the theory of expressive causality finds its roots in the philosophy of Hegel who posited that each of the elements of the social totality --- an element such as the State --- can be reducible to the expressions of an inner essence of the whole (Althusser, 1970: 186-187). Expressive causality is idealist, suggests Althusser, in that it creates a dichotomy of inner essence and outer phenomena. Hence, Hall argues that Williams is idealist because he tends to reduce all ideological and political contradictions to an expression of a central and essential contradiction, the contradiction of human experience: "[S]o long as 'experience' continues to play this all-embracing role, there will be an inevitable theoretical pull towards reading all structures as if they expressly correlated with one another: simultaneous in effect and determinancy because they are simultaneous in experience," (1989: 62). Hall does recognize that structuralism goes too far in granting the "structure" self-generating properties, but he argues that this is a significant improvement since it does point to the necessary irreducibilty of a structure and its complex --- rather than expressive --- unity and overdetermination (1980: 66-67).

However, I do not think that this is a completely fair characterization of Williams's work. It is certainly true that experience plays a central role in all of Williams's writing, but it may be mistaken to suggest that experience alone lies at the centre of his model of causality and determination. For it is also true that Williams does not ignore the existence of structural forces and constraints that mediate and to some degree shape human experience. He clearly emphasizes within his discussion of hegemony that certain limits and pressures are set and exerted upon human beings, their experience, and activity. Williams thus acknowledges the existence of meaningful human activity and structural constraint placed on that activity as different but interactive moments of the social totality. This, as Michael Green (1983: 212, 223) has identified, is made clear within Williams's definition of "structures of feeling"; the category represents a study of both subjective meanings and objective social structures. To say that Williams reduces the social totality to the one central element of experience ignores his analysis of "structures".

The Post-Structuralist Challenge: The Critique of Totality

More recently, critics of cultural materialism have not claimed that Williams lacks any clear notion of determination; on the contrary, they argue that Williams's work is too "totalizing" and deterministic. For example, in his Uncommon Cultures (1989), Jim Collins suggests that the entire project of cultural materialism, as developed by Williams, needs to be radically questioned. He suggests that in the culture of "postmodernity" the categories of dominant, oppositional and alternative may prove meaningless. For Collins, the idea of a dominant culture or a central system of meanings and values holds no ground in the face of contemporary popular culture which is best described as radically heterogeneous, pluralistic, contradictory, and de-centred. Williams's position, argues Collins, is premised upon the belief in a cohesive and recognizable dominant cultural formation that in the age of cultural diversity cannot possibly be defended (21-22; 92). By refering to texts such as popular detective novels, Collins attempts to illustrate the problems that arise when critics assign a univocal reading --- such as "dominant" --- to such cultural products:

> To locate the politics of detective fiction solely in regard to its vehiculation of the dominant ideology is to ignore the work of that discourse on those politics. The detective novel does not depoliticize socio-economic relations as much as it repoliticizes them according to its own discursive ideology. (35)

Collins thus presents a reading of the detective genre that celebrates, in Derrida's terms, differance against a "closed Marxist" reading. The stress is placed upon the contradictions and plurality of meanings expressed in the text, meanings that can not be properly termed "dominant".

Collins's argument is firmly situated within a post-structuralist critique of Marxist cultural theory.[6] Unlike classical Marxism, the central unifying feature of post-structuralism is to assume discontinuity and difference and to reject the very idea of a "totality" as a "violent" reduction of polysemic texts to some ideal underlying essence. Post-structuralism thus proceeds on the belief that all texts are fragmented and contradictory and that any attempt to efface this difference, as in the case of dialectical thought, reproduces the errors of "modernity". As Lyotard states:

> I will use the term "modern" to designate any science that legitimates itself with reference to a metadiscourse of this kind ["a discourse of legitimation", "a discourse called philosophy"] making an explicit appeal to some grand narrative, such as the dialectics of the Spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth. (1984: xxiii)

For post-structuralists, there is no systematic philosophical thought and no "grand narratives" or even general "theories". Any limitation of the radical play of difference is considered to be a repressive, ideological, and totalizing theory. This position is evident in Foucault's Archaelogy of Knowledge which deconstructs such metadiscourses as epoch, civilization and even history itself, in Roland Barthes's S/Z which dismantles Balzac's novella into a multiplicity of fragmented codes, and in Jean Baudrillard's The Mirror of Production which identifies the idealist and metaphysical code of "productivism" that lies at the heart of Marxism (see Best, 1989: 336-337).

Post-structuralist thought has emerged to challenge some of the most basic propositions of Marxist analysis. As Christopher Norris has stated, "[post-structuralism] is inimical to Marxist thought at the point where it questions the validity of any science or method set up in rigid separation from the play of textual meaning," (1982: 83). Marxism, it is argued, is fundamentally reductive and univocal.

At the centre of this critique is a rejection of the Marxist category of "totality" where totality refers to a structure comprised of parts constituted by the whole system. The critique of totality, therefore, has special significance in the context of this discussion. For Williams, the "social totality" refers to the way in which no one element of the social formation is completely autonomous or self-sustaining. It is thus an argument against certain currents in idealism which tend to posit some social practices, like culture for example, as autonomous from other activities.

Post-structuralists argue that the concept of totality is both idealist and reductive. It is an idealist category since it finds its origin in Hegel's description of the Absolute Spirit as the essential expression of historical development. With Marx, the economy simply takes the place of Hegel's Spirit (see Jameson, 1981: 50). Any theory based upon totality is also reductive because it suggests that all contradictions can be overcome, the duality of subject and object abolished, and difference obliterated. As such, the use of "totality" threatens to overemphasize unity and coherence and construct a closed system of analysis to which, then, cultural texts can be simply inserted (Best, 1989: 337-338).

It is unclear at best how the critique of totality can be effectively applied to Williams, since the arguments outlined above are problematic. As Henri Lefebvre (1986: 111) argues, a totality is not necessarily a bad thing. The critique offered by post-structuralism, suggests Lefebvre, is best applied to the closed totality associated with orthodox Marxism in which the social formation is conceived as largley predetermined, static, and finalized by the laws of economic movement. On the other hand, Lefebvre identifies an alternative conception of the totality, as in Lukacs and Gramsci, that is open and contingent, always in process. Ironically, what Lefebvre's argument suggests is that post-structuralist critiques of totality are themselves "totalizing" in that they fail to recognize the difference between various theories of totality.

Given Lefebvre's distinction between open and closed totalities, I think it is clear that Williams's model fits into the latter category. Williams's critique of classical Marxism is precisely a response to the static and closed nature of economism. Williams challenges the base/superstucture model in large part because it tends to represent the base as unified, coherent and knowable; this ignores process and contradiction. Similarly, Williams's categories of dominant, residual, and emergent, which Collins criticizes as "totalizing", are terms he develops to discriminate among different cultural forms.

Nevertheless, it is important that Williams recognizes that while there is diversity and difference, all elements of the social formation, including culture, are structured within relations of domination and subordination. Hegemony represents the unifying thread that holds together all social levels within the complex social totality. It is this category of a dominant or "hegemonic" culture that Collins claims holds no force in today's infinitely pluralistic culture. If we are to accept Collins's conclusion, the difficulty that directly arises is that the connection among various social levels is severed; we are left with a model of random difference and complete autonomy. Culture thus becomes a separate and disconnected realm of activity that follows only its own discursive logic. The critic is left to engage in some deconstructive jouissance that analyzes cultural forms in isolation from other social activity.

To sever culture from the (open) social totality --- and indeed from any material grounding at all --- surely cannot do. Such a theoretical slide returns us to a rigid separation of a cultural text from society as whole. Perhaps the greatest strength of Williams's work on culture has been his refusal to separate the intrinsic and extrinsic elements of a text. As Evan Watkins suggests, Williams's cultural analysis treats texts in a way that resists both placing them within an autonomous realm of activity and reducing them to a direct reflex of the social material world (1978: 145). For Williams, culture is a constitutive element of the social totality; hence dominant cultural forms are both constituted by and constitute a particular hegemonic formation.

Williams's category of the "dominant-hegemonic" is not, I think, unsympathetic to the plurality of postmodernity to which Collins refers. The dominant culture does represent a central system of meanings and values, but as Williams goes to great length to show, hegemony is never complete or total. It is always challenged, altered, and redefined. Hegemony is a process, not a static category. As such, alternative and oppositional formations do exist; this recognition would seem to challenge Collins's idea that Williams's theory presents a rigid definition of dominant culture.

Conclusion

There are a number of valuable critiques that question some of the fundamental assumptions underlying Williams's theory of cultural materialism. Although Williams has, in my opinion, effectively answered many of the reservations raised around his early work, the problem of determination, along with the related ideas of expressive causality and totality, has proven to be a central theme in the critical literature.

However, of all the critiques offered, Barnett's objection to Williams's "culturalism" and the related problem of "evolutionism" seem to me to be the most crucial. In order to avoid the "economistic logic" that underlines his materialist approach to culture, Williams need not however significantly alter his work. I think that the concept of hegemony can steer Williams clear of this error. If hegemony is understood as something that deeply saturates all levels of the social totality, it can then be inferred that hegemony must be won at a number of different points. While cultural activity is certainly one area in which dominant values can be lived out, there are a variety of inter-related activities and institutions that form an indissoluble social process --- political, economic, educational --- in which particular views strive to become dominant and universal. Culture is therefore not the only point of hegemonic struggle, but is only one area in which hegemony is won.

The democratization of the means of cultural production --- from book publishing to television production --- need not necessarily then lead to a restructuring of the social formation. Culture is only one site in which a counter-hegemony may emerge. This said, however, it is necessary to stress the important role that culture, as part of the complex social totality, plays in winning consent for a particular world view, a certain and selective way of signifying and representing the world. In the following chapter I will attempt to illustrate how a particular tendency in Hollywood cinema of the 1970's worked, as one instance, to universalize and naturalize a neo-conserative representation of the social world.

NOTES

1. For example, questions surrounding Williams's reconstruction of "determination" occupy a significant portion of a recent anthology of essays put together by Terry Eagleton. See Eagleton (1989).

2. For a critique of Althusser's epistemology see Smith (1988). In terms of a general critical assessment of Althusser's Marxist structuralism, I would refer the reader to Hirst (1979).

3. Althusser's theory of subjectivity has been the focus of numerous debates (see Smith, 1988). For an excellent summary of the argument as it relates to Williams's work, see Higgins (1986).

4. Such an attempt do draw out a theory of subjectivity from Williams's work has been undertaken by Higgins (1986). He argues that in place of vulgar empiricism, Williams, like Lockd and Hume, constructs an epistemology based upon radical empiricism, a position that questions the very nature of the knowing subject. While Higgins's essay is intriguing, the argument is left, unfortunately, somewhat underdeveloped.

5. In this context, see also Giddens (1982: 139-140).

6. For a review of many of the post-structuralist objections to Marxist theory, as well as a significant rejoinder to these criticisms, see Geras (1987; 1990) and Palmer (1990).

CHAPTER FIVE

HOLLYWOOD CRIME CINEMA OF THE 1970'S: A CULTURAL MATERIALIST PERSPECTIVE

At the centre of Williams's cultural materialism is a recognition that a dominant class maintains its hegemony, not merely through an "imposed ideology",[1] but through the living out of dominant values in a variety of institutions and social practices. In this manner, cultural production represents one of those practices through which hegemony is won or contested. What is important --- indeed, vital --- to recognize here is that dominant culture is conceived not as a reflection of an already constituted hegemonic formation, but as *actively* engaged in the process of winning consent for dominant values and beliefs. Culture can thus act as one of the sites in which hegemony is secured and struggled over.

Williams's work thus offers the cultural critic a unique way of examining cultural production. In this chapter, I will attempt to trace out, from a cultural materialist perspective, the relationship between certain trends within Hollywood cinema and the hegemony of neo-conservatism. I do not intend to empirically "test" Williams's model, but rather employ the central elements of his theory in the discussion of a certain "problematic" in the American cinema. Because of the great bulk of material available, I will focus my study more specifically upon the highly successful "crime-drama" genre of the 1970's to show how the symbolic construction of crime in the cinema of this period represented one moment in which consent was won for a neo-conservative hegemony.

Following Williams (1977: 139), I will examine these films from several viewpoints, each representing an element in the complex unity of cultural production. To begin, I will trace out the historically specific nature of Hollywood production. An examination of this cultural institution will also include an analysis of the formation of audiences and their relation to specific structures of feeling. Finally, I will look at the films themselves, selecting a sample of the most popular[2] paying particular attention to their specific selection of issues and their material signification of the world. Before proceeding, however, it may be necessary to say a brief word about cultural materialism's relationship with critical film theory.

Cultural Materialism and Film Theory

Cultural materialism is by no means inimical to the current thinking within film theory. Williams himself has pointed to the strong correlation between certain strands of "historical semiotics" and his own thinking on literature and language (1981b: 65). Nevertheless, I think that cultural materialism, to some degree, does challenge some of the more established or orthodox theories of film analysis. In particular, Williams's cultural theory radically questions those theories best described as "theories of consumption".

In suggesting that most forms of contemporary critical theory are theories of consumption, Williams means that they are concerned with studying an object or isolated text in such a way that its "meaning" can be properly consumed by readers or viewers (1980: 46). Williams objects to this approach on the grounds that the actual material practices of cultural production are overlooked. By training appreciative readers, theories of consumption, argues Williams, ignore the real social conditions of cultural production (1980:46). That is, these theories tend to focus solely upon the intrinsic meaning of a text and ignore its relationship to practices extrinsic to the aesthetic object.

This kind of thinking is perhaps best represented within film criticism by the auteur theory. The most vocal proponent of this approach in North America has been Andrew Sarris. Sarris's critical work is motivated by a desire to evaluate the American cinema by "ranking" directors within a hierarchical system of merit. For Sarris, some special directors endowed with unique talents are able to grant an "interior" meaning to film. Hence, Sarris argues that a "good" film is one generated by an individual with a gifted way of perceiving the world; superior films represent the "elan of the soul" of their creators (Sarris, 1981 64).

Sarris's analysis might rightly remind the reader of more traditional elitist and idealist definitions of culture. Sarris's evocation of the "creative genius" and his emphasis upon the intangible "interior meaning" of a film, tends to accord culture an almost transcendent and transhistorical quality; an "auteur" is some unique personality mysteriously able to breathe life into his or her work and communicate a truthful message to the audience. In reducing all meaning to the intention of an author, Sarris has largely isolated the cinema from other forms of inquiry. What this tends to occlude is the manner in which a film is not just an object, but a material practice as well.

In a similar vein, Kristin Thompson has recently promoted the merits of "neoformalist" film analysis. For Thompson, this approach is founded upon the recognition of the "aesthetic realm" as distinct from the "nonaesthetic realm" (1988: 9). Her theory is concerned with uncovering hidden textual meanings of selected films through an examination of the codes and conventions of the cinema: editing, camera angles, lighting, set design, etc. She employs this method of analysis with the expressed intention of sending "the reader back to it [the film] and to other films like it with a better set of viewing skills," (1988: 33).

Once again, we are confronted with a theoretical position that is concerned with developing within audiences a greater sense of visual literacy and filmic appreciation. The danger with Thompson's position is that it tends to lead her into an abstract game of interpretation that ignores the ideological, historical, and political context in which films are produced. As Bill Nichols (1981: 109) notes, such a position, if taken to an extreme, extols criticism-for-criticism's sake as the ultimate criterion of film analysis.

Such views are very far from that developed by the editors of Cahiers du Cinema and in particular their reading of John Ford's Young Mr. Lincoln (1985: 695-740). While there is often a tendency in their analysis to reduce the text to a reflex of other spheres of practice (the Hollywood studio system, the Depression, American ideology), there is also a very important attempt to rightly situate the cinema within a specific historical formation. It is this kind of analysis that I think comes closest to what Williams's cultural materialism is striving for:

> [The study of film and television] shouldn't simply be training more appreciative consumers, which is what film appreciation clubs did, or encouraging the "mystique of making" by giving people glimpses of the studio, but, within a more general body of cultural studies, admitting the social relations which have been excluded from education. (Williams, 1979c: 13)

For Williams, understanding the complexity of a particular cultural practice and the social relations that are embodied within that practice, means recognizing and tracing out the material production of culture.

Hollywood in the 1970's: Conglomeration and Diversification

For filmgoers, it is often difficult to recognize that films are produced by a highly organized and sophisticated industry. Part of this may be due to the fact that the products of the film industry seem so ephemeral, not quite a manufactured good in the traditional sense, but not a common service either (Gomery, 1986: 1). Nevertheless, it is essential to realize that the cinema is a capital-intensive industry, with an insatiable appetite for funds to cover costs of production and distribution. It is this aspect of the industry that has proven to be a central shaping force throughout its history.

As Douglas Gomery (1986) has noted, after a brief period of relative competition Hollywood was long controlled by eight corporations. Oligopoly control through ownership of production, distribution, and exhibition constituted what is now called the Hollywood studio system. However, the system proved so profitable that the studios were continually faced with the threat of anti-trust legislation. In 1949, the Supreme Court ruled that the separation of the studios from exhibition was a necessary remedy to end Hollywood's motion picture oligopoly. The studios complied with the ruling by 1954 and the once sound movie industry was tossed into economic uncertainty (Sklar, 1975: 273-274)

In the 1960's, Hollywood, still suffering poor financial health, faced other challenges. Television had significantly lured audiences away from theatres. In response, the studios began to finance the production of extravagant "epics" and musicals filmed on newly developed "wide-screen" technologies[3] to offer entertainment consumers something that televsion could not duplicate. However, rising production costs for big budget blockbusters made investment in the film industry a risky enterprise. For example, the film Cleopatra (1963) cost 20th Century-Fox $40 million in losses (Izod, 1988: 171). Further, with rising lending rates, the interest charges on financing alone meant that a film would have to take in at the box office two and a half times the cost of production just to break even (Izod, 1988: 172).

With Hollywood more and more capital-dependent, the banking industry quickly became the most powerful force in the industry. The studios had become increasingly tied to outside financiers who quickly grew impatient over the growing list of box-office busts that Hollywood had produced. In the late 1960's, after a number of years of losses, the banking industry put pressure on the studios to diversify their operations, to reduce inventories and production costs, and to co-operate more closely with each other (Wasko, 1981:

151).

The crisis in the film industry at this time was not solely precipitated by the increasing size of production budgets. Hollywood was experiencing a crisis of overproduction as more and more films flooded an ever shrinking market. This was caused in part by the creation in the late 1960's of three new production companies which were subsidaries of the three television networks. This compounded the problem that the studios faced in trying to sell their products to television. The networks had overpurchased from the studios and by 1968 television had enough material to cover programming until 1972 (Izod, 1988: 171-174).

As financiers forced the film studios to streamline their operations and cut production, a series of corporate mergers and take-overs followed creating diversified multi-media conglomerates that dominate the entertainment industry to this day. Ownership of the major studios appeared attractive to many corporations since the studios still had large assests and could, in this time of economic crisis, be purchased at a remarkably undervalued price. Many corporations also sought to stake out an interest in Hollywood to add to holdings in other sectors of the entertaiment industry. Thus, when Gulf and Western purchased Paramount, it extended its influence from television into film. By the mid-1970's multi-media conglomerates came to dominate the entire entertainment market.

This increasing centralization of the media industry was aided by rising interest rates that were sustained in the 1980's by the fiscal policies of the Reagan administration. As it became more difficult to finance production without access to spare capital, only the giant media conglomerates could remain competitive. Hence, by the 1980's the old Warner Brothers studio was merely a nest in the giant Warner Communications Corporation that included Atari; Warner Amex Cable Communications; the Warner record label as well as Atlantic and Electra; interests in film, television and videocassette production and distribution; merchandising of toys; manufacture of Panavision film equipment; publication of paperback books, comics and magazines; the New York Cosmos soccer team; Warner Cosmetics; and the Franklin Mint (Izod, 1988: 176-177; Mattelart, 1979: 196-198).[4]

As the old studio system was bought up by corporations beginning in the late 1960's, films were increasingly put together as "deals" by independent producers who then secured funding from the studios. In some ways, this represented a greater degree of freedom for creative personnel than had previously existed. In the studio era, writers, directors, producers, and stars were directly employed by the studios who sought to extract as much profit from their creative activity as possible. Studio managers, following their industrial counterparts, implemented an "assembly-line" mode of production that sought to locate all creative decision-making solely within the executive ranks. With the advent of independent productions, filmmakers were no longer as tightly bound to the directives of studio executives even though the independents relied heavily upon the studios for financing (Gomery, 1986: 10; Ryan and Kellner, 1988: 6).

More freedom was accorded filmmakers in 1966 also when the Production Code was abolished and a new rating system introduced. The old Production Code was established in 1930 when the studios were increasingly criticized for glamorizing immoral behaviour through such vehicles as the gangster film. In the face of lobby groups such as the Legion of Decency, the studios agreed to establish guidelines regulating what could and could not be depicted on the screen. The Production Code placed strict limits on such subjects as sexuality, and also extended to a prohibition of any film that showed criminal behaviour in a way that elicited sympathy or imitation. With the end of the code, filmmakers were free to present previously forbidden subjects (Sklar, 1975: 294-297; Izod, 1988: 105; Ryan and Kellner, 1988: 6).

Given this relative freedom, in the late 1960's a "New Hollywood" cinema took shape. The rise in the numbers of independent productions, the move away from big budget star vehicles, and the end of the Production Code all contributed to a new look American film. Further, at this time the first generation of film school trained and educated directors were emerging. These men and women were well versed in alternative forms of cinematic representation and brought to their films a more experimental style heavily influenced by European film movements. Hollywood's market research also showed that young people were at the core of the movie-going audience. The counter-cultural "structure of feeling" of the time was recognized by the studios who became interested in films that would attract a visually literate and liberal audience that remained to be tapped (Sklar, 1975: 302; Ryan and Kellner, 1988: 6).

Hence, in 1967 a series of highly succesful films emerged from Hollywood that represented a significant break in both form and content from the traditional American cinema. Cool Hand Luke told the story of a working class man imprisoned for a minor offense; the film became an overt critique of authority and American "chain-gang" justice. Bonnie and Clyde was a highly stylized and sympathetic portrait of the two Depression-era outlaws. In The Heat of the Night drew attention to racism and discrimination. In Cold Blood examined the psychology of murder and punishment in the United States. However, what has become perhaps the landmark movie of this era came two years later. At a production cost of $400,000, Easy Rider went on to earn twenty-five times that amount (Sklar, 1975: 302). The film told the story of two heroin dealers who take the profits from their last deal and set out across the United States to discover meaning in their lives. The film is punctuated by a soundtrack of contemporary rock music. The journey of self-discovery, however, ends in senseless tragedy as the two are murdered by Southern rednecks they pass on a highway. The film's theme of rootlessness and alienation seemed to resonnate with a young audience radicalized by the social and cultural movements of the 1960's.

However, this culturally emergent New Hollywood Cinema was relatively shortlived. With the increasing centralization of the media industries throughout the 1970's the blockbuster or event movie became an essential part of a conglomerate's profit-making scheme as such films promised to return profits of a greater magnitude than those of smaller budgets. With all the appropriate media tie-ins in place, the conglomerates could market such films much more effectively than the old studios. The strategy seemed to work. Throughout the 1960's, only one picture in ten made a profit; in the 1970's three out of ten movies generated profits. By the 1980's, one out of two blockbusters (budgets over $14 million) achieved financial success (Variety, 16 Jan. 1985: 7).

Furthermore, the return to blockbuster production was also precipitated by a change in marketing philosophy. In the late 1960's, the studios aimed their products at young people who already constituted the largest share of filmgoers in the United States. Hollywood had known since 1950 when it first began to conduct market research that seventy to seventy-five per cent of the film audience was under thirty years of age, with the greatest proportion being between fourteen and twenty-five. Beginnng in the 1970's, however, the media conglomerates sought to keep the audience it already had while at the same time attract those members of the public that had traditionally stayed away from the theatre. The solution many sought was to produce "family-going" films, films that would appeal to both youth and parents (Izod, 1988: 182) Such films as Star Wars (1977), Superman (1978), ET (1982), and Raiders of the Lost Ark (1981) were marketed as comic-book myths complete with robots, cuddly creatures, and superhuman heores, not to mention the extensive media tie-ins with toys, books, and video games. Aside from their intentional appeal to children, however, these films also attracted older audiences. As Frederic Jameson (1983) notes, the adult public finds in these films a nostalgic pleasure, a return to the cultural experiences of the time from the 30's to the 50's when the Saturday afternoon serial of the Buck Rogers type played in theatres across America (116). These more recent films reinvent past experiences by recasting alien villians, superhuman heroes, heroines in distress, doomsday technologies, and the cliffhanger in a contemporary cultural form.

By the late 1970's, therefore, Hollywood had returned almost completely to blockbuster production. The result of the conglomerates formed in the media industry has been that the oligopoly which anti-trust legislation had split in the late 1940's was now being put together again. This change in the way that films were produced and marketed also affected the content, setting limits and exerting pressures on what type of film could be made. The New Hollywood cinema of the late 1960's and early 1970's became a dominant cultural form only in a period of transition within the Hollywood studios. While the breakdown of the studio system under anti-trust action during the 1940's and 1950's increased the risk of producing and distributing feature films, by the early 1970's media corporations spread this risk by the intensification of conglomeration and diversification. Within these conglomerates, the major studios were able to dominate the marketing of films in the United States. As financing for blockbusters in the 1970's became more difficult because of high interest rates, banks were less likely to lend to an unaffiliated and independent producer (see Wasko, 1981: 140). Moreover, the attempt by the multi-media conglomerates to extend their audience beyond the young demanded a new type of film. The New Hollywood cinema, though not made extinct by these structural changes, became, in Williams's terms, a residual cultural formation.

The Crime-Drama Films of the 1970's and the Failure of Liberalism

While the economic forces at work in Hollywood at this time played an important role in determining the practices of film production, it is important to recall that "determination" in this sense does not mean a total prefiguration of cultural forms. The political-economic structure of the American film industry set certain limits and exerted specific pressures upon film production, but in no way does this imply that the specific forms that Hollywood cinema took were pre-formed by an existing external force. For example, while at an infrastructural level the production of such films as Star Wars and Superman can be attributed to specific changes within the industry and within the marketplace, these films were also determined by previous cultural representations: the serials of the 1940's and 1950's. Further, through their practices of signification, these films actively articulated historically specific ideologies of aggressive entrepreneurialism and patriarchical heroism.[5]

The American cinema, therefore, is part of a complex web of social relationships and practices. Understanding the political economy of Hollywood reveals the pressures and limits that exist within the industry. At another level however --- a level equally "material" --- is the actual practice of signification and representation. That is, how do specific films signify the social world? To use a well-worn phrase, the cinema does not simply reflect the world as it is; on the contrary, films work to actively and selectively "re-present" reality in very specific ways.

A case in point is the urban crime-drama films of the 1970's. What is signified here is a specific response to the reality of crime in American society. These films are set against a backdrop of a perceived social disorder stemming from the struggles of the 1960's: the radical youth and student movements, feminist movements, the protests against Vietnam and American foreign policy, and the conflicts over civil rights. In the early 1970's President Richard Nixon, in his counterattack on dissent, launched a campaign against crime and drugs. In terms of law enforcement strategies, many conservatives were outraged by the Supreme Court's Miranda decision which gave more rights to criminal suspects and curtailed the previous powers of law enforcement agencies (see Ryan and Kellner, 1988: 38-42).

Given rising crime rates and government campaigns against illegal activities, it might prove tempting to assert that the crime-drama film simply reflected the "state of the nation".[6] However, a reflection theory would obscure the way in which selective interpretations of the social world are represented in the cinema. That is, there are a number of responses that could be formed surrounding the issue of crime. Criminal behaviour could be signified in such a way as to advocate the stronger imposition of moral and legal force within society. On the other hand, crime could be represented as the ills of a society that is based upon gender, race and class inequality. Ideas formed within the context of material social facts, therefore, do not merely reflect a pre-given reality, but work, within certain limits and pressures, to shape and give meaning to the social world.

For example, the "New Hollywood" cinema tended to portray crime as a social problem that stems from such things as poverty, racism, and urban crowding. Neo-conservative films, on the other hand, underplayed the social context of crime and instead asserted the need for the stronger imposition of law and order. These latter films sought to challenge the "liberal" bias they argued was evident in New Hollywood cinema. By liberal, as Peter Gourevitch (1986: 241-242) notes, neo-conservatives in America certainly did not mean the tradition of individualism and the sympathy for laissez-faire economic policies the term has come to connote in its European usage. On the contrary, they employed "liberal" to refer to progressive social policies, moral permissiveness, restrictive measures placed upon state authorities to protect individual freedoms, and state intervention into the market. By signifying crime as a result of deeply embedded social inequalities, the liberal cinema of New Hollywood, neo-conservative films suggested, failed to see that crime was in actuality a result of individual actions, not social conditioning, and that criminal behaviour could only be addressed by tough actions against wrongdoers. However, the neo-conservative cinema argued that such legal enforcement procedures had been significantly curtailed by the directives of a liberal justice system that had given criminal suspects too many rights and that had handcuffed police from doing their job.

Thus, during the brief moment of New Hollywood cinema, the crime-drama genre painted criminals in a largely sympathetic light; overall, they tended to be treated more as victims than as victimizers. The film Bonnie and Clyde (1967) deals with the story of two Depression-era outlaws who are ultimately brutally murdered by the police. Images of imprisonment and confinement punctuate the film. In an early sequence, Bonnie (Faye Dunaway) is shown clutching the metal bars of her bed, symbolic of her entrapment within her small-town working class life. After meeting Clyde Barrow (Warren Beatty), however, images of escape and freedom become juxtaposed against those of incarceration. Clyde promises to take Bonnie away from her dreary existence as a waitress and shots of colourful open fields, underlined within the soundtrack by up-tempo banjo music, follow the two rebels in their escape from urban confinement. The flight into nature comes to represent their freedom from a repressive urban environment.

Throughout the film, the two outlaws are juxtaposed against the repressive state forces that seek to control their rebellion. The Texas Ranger who pursues and eventually cold-bloodedly executes Bonnie and Clyde is shown to be a cruel man who is only seeking revenge against the criminals who humiliated him. The outlaws, on the other hand, are shown to be attractive and sympathetic characters. Bonnie, once liberated from her urban prison, writes poems and playfully poses for the camera. Clyde, after meeting a farmer whose land had been taken over by the bank, gleefully proclaims that he robs banks and the two take turns shooting at the foreclosure sign. A sense of playful rebelliousness pervades the film as slap-stick comedic conventions frame the Barrow gang in selected parts of the movie. But perhaps the most attractive element of the two main characters is the love and care that they develop for each other during the brief moment of freedom they experience together.

However, at the same time as Bonnie and Clyde articulated a romantic vision of rebellion, it also revealed the limitations of that vision. The film ends with the cruel and tragic deaths of the two heroes; the repressive force of the state is once again asserted. Rebellion against the corruption and abuses of authority, in the liberal vision, seems doomed. Bonnie and Clyde can rob as many banks as they wish, but in the end farmers will still lose their land and criminal behaviour will be severely punished. This tragic view of the world stems in large part from the failure of liberalism to take a radical leap into the realm of possibility. For the liberal film, the only escape from social repression is a retreat into nature, an individualistic flight from repressive social forces. What liberal films fail to consider is the way in which society can be changed, not in an individual manner, but on a collective scale.

A similar vision is expressed in Chinatown (1974). Released seven years after Bonnie and Clyde, it is significant that the film, though nominated as best picture, never made Variety's list for the top twenty films of the year.[7] By this time, the liberal vision as expressed in the crime-drama genre was losing its appeal. Chinatown , set in the 1930's, depicts a society that is controlled by corrupt economic and political elites. Jake Gittes (Jack Nicholson) is a private detective who stumbles upon the discovery that during a Californian drought precious drinking water is being dumped into the ocean by Noah Cross (John Houston), the ruthless owner of a water monopoly. Gittes falls in love with Cross's daughter, Evelyn (Faye Dunaway), who eventually reveals that Cross killed her husband and fathered her daughter by incest. Cross is a ruthless capitalist patriarch who uses his influence with the police to track down Gittes and Evelyn who had planned to escape to Mexico. In the film's tragic conclusion, Evelyn is killed by the police and Cross takes her daughter. As Gittes tries to explain to the indifferent police the true nature of the situation, a friend advises him, "Forget it, Jake. It's Chinatown."

The sense of powerlessness and pessimism that resonnates at the end reveals once again the limitations of the liberal vision. An innocent woman is killed, the guilty are free, and police corruption remains perfectly intact. In struggling against the economic power blocs of society, Gittes had failed to accomplish anything. Society remains unjust, and the film offers the viewer nothing to remedy that.

This sense of pessimism and powerlessness is also articulated in the liberal crime-drama through the weaknesses of the male hero. The viewer discovers, throughout the course of the film, that Clyde is sexually impotent. In *Chinatown,* Gittes's nose is cut, a symbol of his emasculation; throughout most of the film he wears a bandage that signifies his weakness. The strong and virile male hero is not present in these films.

Where the liberal crime-drama film ended in pessimism and evoked a sense of tragedy and powerlessness, a new wave of films sought to signify a different sense of crime and a different response to it. In 1971 the film *Dirty Harry* launched a whole cycle of vigilante and "law and order" films that radically challenged the liberal vision. *Dirty Harry* was extremely popular, ranking fifth in box office rentals (see Appendix). The film tells the story of a police officer (Clint Eastwood) who captures a lone and fanatical sniper refered to only as Scorpio. Scorpio is released on a technicality and Harry is warned by his "by-the-book" superiors not to pursue the case any further. In fact, a

Harvard law professor is asked to talk to Harry concerning the protection of a suspect's legal rights. After Scorpio kills again, however, Harry sidesteps the liberal justice system and pursues Scorpio with the expressed purpose of killing him. Harry is successful, but disillusioned with the ineffectiveness of the contemporary legal system, he tosses his badge away.

With Dirty Harry a very significant change has taken place in the manner in which crime is signified. Whereas a film like Bonnie and Clyde portrayed criminals in a sympathetic light and painted legal authorities as blood-thirsty vigilantes, Dirty Harry does almost the reverse. The killer, Scorpio, is an evil and fanatical individual who, as the single name suggests, has no history and no past. He is also clearly associated with anti-establishment politics; he wears long hair and sports a belt buckle in the shape of a peace symbol. On the other hand, Harry most closely resembles the character of the Texas Ranger in Bonnie and Clyde. He is determined, emotionless, and often ruthless in his pursuit of Scorpio.

However, in a very important way Harry breaks with the image of the Texas Ranger. Whereas the Ranger represented and embodied the repressive forces of the state, Harry operates largely beyond the official authority of the law. He stands outside the corruption and hypocrisy of a legal system that seems more determined to protect vicious killers than the general public. In doing so, in stepping beyond proper legal procedure, Harry subscribes to his own code of law and order and succeeds in defeating crime. In this manner, the new conservative films like Dirty Harry share with the liberal crime-drama a hero who rejects the official systems of justice. However, the conservative film offers the viewer a solution to the tragic vision of liberalism by reconstituting a moral and legal authority outside of the bureaucratic and uncaring state.

For Harry to succeed in thwarting Scorpio, therefore, he must stand outside of ineffective liberal institutions. One scene in the film shows Harry standing alone against the sky, his monumental figure dwarfing the city in the background. The shot signifies Harry's separation from the liberal society he rejects, and at the same time celebrates his power as an individual over that society. Whereas Clyde and Gittes were portrayed as impotent and ineffectual in their struggle against the entrenched power blocs of society, Harry's aggressivity and toughness are underlined throughout the film as positive traits of the male hero. Clyde and Gittes were significantly "de-masculinized" characters; Harry's masculinity is celebrated. In one scene, Harry mistakes an effeminate homosexual for Scorpio. The man, noticing Harry's gun, coyishly remarks, "My, that's a big one!" The sequence thus works to draw a link between aggressive masculinity and the restoration of law and order in a world of social decay.

Similar themes are expressed in The French Connection (1971). A tough police officer, Popeye Doyle (Gene Hackman), uncovers an international drug-smuggling ring. The film is shot in a gritty documentary style that seems to stand as a record of an urban American city overrun with crime and drugs. Doyle uses brutal tactics to track down the criminals, including the physical and verbal harassment of blacks in a bar. In another scene, Doyle embarks on a spectacular car chase, putting innocent members of the public in danger; he is willing to stop at nothing to catch the criminals. In the end, Doyle captures the smugglers but the suspects are released because of a lack of concrete evidence. The tough and aggressive individual uncovers criminal activity, but the liberal justice system subverts all his efforts.

The French Connection thus appears to end on a note of tragedy and pessimism much like the liberal crime-drama film. However, the tragic vision it expresses is less one of the hero's ineffectiveness to deal with a corrupt society, than with liberal society's ineffectiveness to deal with an individual's success. Doyle captures the criminals, but guidelines and rules of proper procedure impair the imposition of the full weight of justice upon the wrongdoers. Regulations that govern law enforcement are signified as limiting and restraining the individual's ability to carry out an effective job.

The lone male individual's fight against crime is also drawn out in the cycle of vigilante films that closely resemble the conservative vision expressed in Dirty Harry and The French Connection. In Walking Tall (1973), the hero, Buford Pusser, returns home after army duty and a failed attempt to stake out a career in professional wrestling. He discovers that his small town has become a hotbed of criminal activity. Reluctant to get involved in the problems that engulf his community, Pusser is converted after receiving a terrible beating. Wielding an enormous wooden club, he launches a vicious one-man campaign against the criminals who had destroyed his town. The only thing that hinders him from completing his job is a corrupt legal system that cynically upholds the constitutional rights of suspects. After being wounded during the climax of his war against crime, Pusser stands as an example for the townspeople who are then awakened from their indifference and fear and finish the job he had started by burning down the criminals's headquarters.

The distinctive feature of Walking Tall is the community's action against crime, a scene that reminds the viewer quite clearly of High Noon. However, this concertive effort arises only after the lone individual, Pusser, shakes the townspeople out of their apathy. At the heart of the film, therefore, is a glorification of individual initiative and determination. It is only after one citizen takes a stand that any effective change can be made.

It becomes a curious characteristic of the conservative vision that the male hero maintains no normal human relationships, sexual or otherwise. Harry's wife is dead and his former partner quit the police force after being wounded; in fact, Harry is reluctant to take on a new partner. Popeye Doyle tends to work alone. He has one encounter with a woman in the film, but it is only a brief one-night affair that could not be properly called a "relationship". Only Buford Pusser was portrayed as a family man, but his wife disappeared midway through the narrative. The neo-conservative crime hero is further removed from any human contact. He is, in many ways, a borderline psychotic, unable to deal with the world of civility and tradition. The only code he ascribes to is his own personal code of revenge and retribution. And the only law he understands is the law of violence.

Similar themes are expressed in Death Wish (1974). The film tells the story of Paul Kersey (Charles Bronson) whose family is attacked by three men. His wife is killed and his daughter is left in a catatonic state. Kersey is a pacifist but is enticed into a violent and aggressive stance after a visit to Arizona. Watching a staged gunfight at a tourist attraction, Kersey decides to use the old methods of law enforcement to fight New York City's criminals. He patrols the streets at night, trying to lure potential wrongdoers into confronting him. After Kersey claims numerous victims, the crime rate significantly falls. He is eventually captured by the police but the liberal city government, recognizing the sense of security and peace that Kersey's exploits had brought to the city, cover-up the arrest and release Kersey to another crime-ridden American metropolis.

In Death Wish violent crime is signified as random and anarchic, the irrational act of deranged individuals. Significantly, all the criminals that Kersey executes are blacks and poor people. However, no attempt is made to explore this link between racism, poverty and crime. The criminals in the film are dehumanized and dehistoricized; they remain nameless and indistinguishable. This treatment of criminals is exemplified in the scenes that involve the ritual executions. When Kersey attacks his victims, the camera places him alone in the frame, an editing technique that both underlines the difference between Kersey and the criminals and objectifies the victims. Whereas the working-class and minorities were portrayed as victims in many liberal crime-dramas, in the conservative vision, these subordinate social groups are pictured as the root of the problem.

Throughout the 1970's, the conservative vision of crime was restated in a number of financially successful films, many of which were sequels to the films discussed above. Magnum Force (1973), Walking Tall Part II (1975), The Enforcer (1976), Walking Tall: The Final Chapter (1977), and The Gauntlet (1977) all followed similar conventions. They related the story of a lone male hero whose aggression and determination, even in the face of the constraints imposed by the liberal state, helped him to restore a sense of law and order to a society increasingly represented as in the grip of wide-scale domestic disorder. All these films worked to contest the liberal justice system and reveal how that system prevents good cops from doing their job.

Yet what ultimately may explain the box-office success of such films, and what might lie at the heart of their narrative construction, is the way in which these films re-articulate historically constituted American mythologies, the manner in which these films selectively incorporate archaic cultural forms. In essence, these films transcode or re-inscribe, through a process of generic transformation, the mythology of the American frontier onto the contemporary urban environment. The conservative crime-dramas of the 1970's returned once again to already popularly held beliefs about the American frontier.

Richard Slotkin (1973) has described the frontier thesis as the myth of "regeneration through violence". In Slotkin's analysis, the American frontier mythology is premised upon the belief that America is a wide-open land of opportunity where the strong and self-reliant individual can push his or her way to the top (5). However, Slotkin emphasizes that the frontier myth also embodies an ambivalence to this land of opportunity; it is both an abundant garden and a hostile wilderness (109-110). The evil influence of the natural environment --- usually represented by native Indians in traditional literature and, more recently, the Western film genre[8] --- is overcome as the lone hero learns to "fight the enemy on his own terms and in his own manner, becoming in the process a reflection or a double of his dark opponent," (563). By becoming the mirror of his adversary, the male hero resorts to the same violent tactics used by the forces of evil, but in so doing works to "regenerate" the social formation.

Slotkin's observations certainly hold true for the conservative crime-drama film. Harry, Doyle, Pusser, and Kersey are all cold, emotionally detached, brutal, and asocial. In other words, they exhibit similar characteristics as the criminals that they seek to destroy. What is signified here is a belief that in order to overcome the evil that inhabits the "urban wilderness", one must become like the "savages" that disrupt the social world. And this is precisely the weakness that these films ascribe to the liberal justice system and the liberal state; it cannot, because of its very nature as a civilized institution, make the descent into the criminal mind. In order to restore law and order, the heroes of these films must step out of the social system of law and order and confront crime on its own terms. Only then can the evil influence be overcome, but the cost of this regeneration is that the hero is sometimes ostracized from society. Harry quits the police force. Kersey is forced to leave the community to which he restored order.

The conservative crime-drama films of the 1970's thus work to signify criminal behaviour in a variety of ways. Crime is seen as all pervasive and random; it follows no specific logic. Further, rising crime rates are exacerbated by a liberal justice system that places too much control and regulation upon aggressive individual initiative. Both Harry and Doyle continually confront superiors who seem more concerned with protecting criminals' rights than saving their communities from drugs and violence. Criminals themselves have no history, no identity except as members of subordinate social groups. However, this aspect of criminal activity is never explored; motivations behind deviant behaviour are unclear at best. Finally, to restore law and order, the lone male hero must in effect become a double of the enemy he seeks and employ the same brutal tactics with the same emotional detachment that the criminal did in his or her act of violence.

This is not to suggest that the liberal crime-drama film was rendered anachronistic in the 1970's. As Williams notes (1980: 43), no single cultural formation exhausts the full range of human activities and responses. Alternative and oppositional representations persist. Though the liberal crime-drama films, as a whole, never achieved the popularity of the conservative cinema, the tragic liberal vision was sustained, if even at a residual level. Serpico (1974) exposed police corruption. Dog Day Afternoon (1975) portrayed criminals and homosexuals in a much more positive light than the conservative cycle of films. Martin Scorsese's Taxi Driver (1976) was a critique of the vigilantism that was exalted as the triumph of male individualism in Dirty Harry and Death Wish.

Hence, the representation of crime in the cinema during this period was very much a contested terrain. And yet, by the late 1970's and into the 1980's, the conservative crime-drama become more and more predominant in theatres across the United States and Canada. Part of this failure of the tragic liberal vision to win a broad base of support perhaps lies in its inability to offer effective solutions to a social crisis such as crime. It painted a dark universe in which individuals were unable to escape injustice and inequality. On the other hand, the conservative vision was able to successfully exploit this gap and turn the issue of crime against liberalism. Crime is not caused by poverty and racism, the conservative cinema asserted, but is the result of a liberal justice system that impedes the swift execution of the law. In this view, more aggessive law enforcement --- enforcement significantly aimed at subordinate social groups --- can remedy the situation. It is in this regard, I will argue, these films can be seen as both constituting and constituted by the hegemony of neo-conservatism.

The Hegemony of Neo-Conservatism: The Critique of the Welfare State

The period of the 1970's and 1980's represents an important and radical shift in the politics of many Western capitalist democracies. It is a moment in which new conservative political and cultural movements are formed to challenge, contest, and eventually alter the existing ideological consensus that had been in place since the late 1940's. While social, political, and economic crises had existed before the rise of neo-conservative movements, the debates that revolved around these crises were, for the most part, united in their adherence to at least three fundamental beliefs: i) a rejection of laissez-faire market capitalism on the grounds that such a system inhibits the desired end of social justice; ii) a subsequent desire to expand the role of the State into the marketplace to provide citizens with social welfare programs that will protect them from the blind forces of the economy; and iii) a strong commitment to the expansion of liberty in personal moral conduct (Barry, 1987: 1-3; 140). This form of consensus politics, as alluded to above, has been commonly characterized within the United States as "liberalism."

For American liberals, then, the state was conceived as playing a strong role in the promotion of social welfare but with regards to personal moral conduct, state intervention into such issues as abortion and human sexuality was viewed as an infringement upon individual liberty.[9] However, the failure of many liberal social policies eventually contributed to a crisis in hegemony. The 1960's "War on Poverty", for example, represented the apex of liberal commitments to social welfare and state assistance to the needy. However, by the early 1970's it had become increasingly clear to a growing number of people that massive state intervention into the market had failed miserably. Latent poverty levels fell from about one-third of the population n 1950 to twenty-one per cent in 1965 and eighteen per cent in 1968 (Barry, 1987: 156). And yet, as the social programs of AFDC (Aid for Families with Dependent Children), Medicaid, and food stamps were instituted, poverty figures actually began to rise. In 1972, latent poverty rose to nineteen per cent and jumped to twenty-one per cent in 1976 (Barry, 1987: 156-157). High levels of inflation and unemployment in the 1970's seemed impervious to state intervention (Gourevitch, 1986: 208-209). The situation tended to undermine the legitimacy of liberal social planning; the groups who were to benefit from social welfare programs actually appeared to suffer more.

A new anti-consensus politics --- neo-conservatism --- initially formed around these failures of the liberal state. Neo-conservatives advocated a considerable shift in the rhetoric of political economy through a defense of neo-classical economics. They proposed extensive tax cuts, the redistribution of the tax burden, spending cuts for social welfare programs, looser enforcement of government regulations concerning business activities, critical changes in the administration of labour relations, and significant increases in military spending (Gourevitch, 1986: 208). The latter policy was proposed in response to a series of foreign policy failures (Vietnam, Iran, and Soviet aggression in Afghanistan) that had presaged the decline of America as a world superpower.

Eventually, neo-conservative critics such as Daniel Bell, Irving Kristol, and Robert Nisbet broadened their intellectual assault against the excesses of big government and social welfare spending into a general lament over a perceived decline in traditional American values. The welfare state, it was argued, could be blamed for much of the social turmoil associated with the radical and anti-establishment movements of the 1960's and early 1970's; rising crime rates and increasing drug abuse also fuelled this argument. Neo-conservatives maintained that the welfare state, in its concern with poverty and social inequality, failed to hold individuals responsible for their state in society. Further, social programs merely reproduced poverty by taking away the incentives that individuals would have in a "free" economy to better their social standing; with people receiving enough funds from the government to get by, why would they want to work? (Barry, 1987: 143-157; Hobsbawm, 1989: 89).

The liberal welfare state, in the minds of neo-conservatives, thus worked to undermine the fundamental American value of individual initiative, a value that corresponds well with the frontier mythology. Neo-conservatives argued that this erosion in values led to a rise in "moral nihilism" and a general crisis in social order. Coupled with a rising populist conservatism, most notably associated with the "Moral Majority" and its campaign against pornography, abortion, homosexual rights, the abolition of school prayers, and flag-burning, a general consensus began to build premised upon the belief that permissive liberal tendencies had somehow corrupted essential American social values. Neo-conservatives painted a picture of American society as on the brink of economic and moral ruin, overrun by disorder and degenerancy and suffering a crisis in authority (Barry, 1987: 143-157).

This new hegemonic alliance paid particular attention to the notion of crime. For American liberals, crime has been consistently viewed as a social problem that stems from such problems as poverty, racism, and urban crowding. In the liberal view, crime can thus be alleviated only through centralized state action that seeks to rectify the underlying environmental conditions that give rise to criminal behaviour in the first instance. On the other hand, neo-conservatives have followed a more "libertarian" logic in their examination of crime.[10] They posit crime not as the effect of social inequalities, but as the actions of a wrong-doer. Individuals, they argue, are free and autonomous and must therefore be prepared to take moral responsibility for their actions (Barry, 1987: 191). Criminals cannot seek refuge behind their social background to escape what is ultimately their decision to commit an offense against society. Hence, criminals should not be treated as victims, but punished as victmizers who break essential social rules of conduct. Retributive justice and the use of aggressive tactics to secure law and order have become the hallmarks of the neo-conservative approach to criminal behaviour.[11]

What is central to these changes in the way crime is signified and understood is what Stuart Hall (1988: 84ff) has termed "authoritarian populism". He describes this as a shift in both the balance of social and political forces and in the forms of political authority and social regulation exercised by the state. It represents an attempt on the part of a new hegemonic alliance "to impose a new regime of social discipline and leadership 'from above' on a society increasingly experienced as rudderless and out of control," (1988: 84). In the United States, neo-conservatives were able to signify crime in such a way. Criminal activity was constructed as a "crisis in authority"[12] that could be combated only through an unprecedented inposition of moral-legal force. Crime, therefore, became one of the issues around which specific neo-conservative readings of discipline, authority, and morality were legitimated.

It is within this historical and material context, then, that one is able to locate the urban crime-drama film. Its assault on the liberal justice system, a system that protects criminals' rights rather than punishes their actions, articulates with the neo-conservative critique of the moral nihilism spawned by the liberal welfare state. By abstracting crime from its material base --- from such factors as poverty and racism --- the conservative crime film works to reassert the basic libertarian philosophy of individualism in which social agents are held to be autonomous, ultimately free of social constraint and influence, and wholly responsible for their conduct. Given that criminal behaviour is located firmly within the wrongdoer, the perpetrator must be severely punished. Hence, the solution that these films offer is to be found in the person of the lone male hero whose aggressivity and brutality metes out the proper retribution. And through the violent tactics that he employs, the hero regenerates the social order and reasserts his own moral authority.

NOTES

1. For a critique of the dominant ideology thesis, see Abercrombie and Turner (1982).

2. The films that I have selected for analysis are those within the crime-drama genre that led the way in box-office rentals in Canada and the United States. See the Appendix for complete details.

3. As Raymond Williams (1975: 13-14) has shown, new technologies do not develop in isolation or by accident, but are intentionally pursued to meet particular social needs and practices. Such is certainly the case with synchronous sound and wide-screen innnovations within the cinema (see Sklar, 1975: 152-157). Wide-screen technology, as suggested, was intentionally developed in response to competition from television's smaller screens.

4. In March of 1989 Time Inc. merged with Warner Communications to form one of the largest media conglomerates in the world. The combined company, Time Warner, has assets of over $18 billion and a prjected yearly revenue of $10 billion generated from book and magazine publishing, film and television production, cable systems and networks, and other subsidary businesses (see Kellner, 1990: 66).

5. For a critique of the ideology operating in these films, see Ryan and Kellner, 1988: 228-236.

6. I think this slide towards reflection theory does arise in the analysis of Hollywood cinema of this period offered by Michael Ryan and Doug Kellner (1988). In an otherwise excellent study, the authors do at times portray the cinema as a reflection of already existing social trends and ideas. What this tends to ignore is the way in which films can work to constitute specific interpretations of the social world.

7. See Variety, Wednesday, January 8, 1975: 24.

8. In fact, as Robert Ray (1985: 307-308) has noted, many conservative crime-drama films explicitly transcode the conventions of the classical Hollywood Western. Death Wish for example overtly evokes the Western's gunfight in a series of "showdowns" between Kersey and the urban outlaws he stalks.

9. In Canada, for example, we need only recall former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau's pronouncement that the state has no right to be in the nation's bedrooms.

10. I have employed the term "libertarian" here in its more popular American usuage, as the perspective that persons are fully autonomous and ultimately independent of any social and historical forces. While people may be born into different positions within the social order, as abstract individuals they are held responsible for the eventual maintenance or change in this position (see Hartz, 1955). Hence, libertarian philosophy, in this view, tends to "de-historicize" the subject and foregrounds the agency of the individual.

11. For a much more detailed analysis of the rise of the ideology of law and order within the neo-conservative state see Stuart Hall, Chas Critcher, Tony Jefferson, John Clarke, and Brian Roberts (1978).

12. The signification of criminal behaviour as a "crisis of authority" has been recently articulated in the so-called "War on Drugs" in the United States. William Bennett, one-time "commander-in-chief" of the drug war stated: "The drug crisis is a crisis of authority --- in every sense of the term 'authority'. With the weakening of political authority, the drug user, dealer and trafficker believe that the laws forbidding their activities no longer have teeth, and they consequently feel free to violate those laws. There is a crisis of social authority: the family and our schools --- those institutions responsible for keeping children occupied with redeeming pursuits and away from the easy, destructive temptations of immediate pleasure --- are not performing as well as they once did. There is also a crisis in moral authority: the idea that breaking the law is wrong...has lost its power to deter.... We need to reconstitute authority....We must build more prisons. There must be more jails. We must have more judges to hear drug cases and more prosecutors to bring them to trial, including military judges and prosecutors to supplement what we already have," (William J. Bennett, "Moralism and Realism in the Drug War: Restoring Authority," New Perspectives Quarterly, Summer 1989: 4).

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION: TOWARD A CRITICAL THEORY OF CULTURE

This study seeks to explicate and assess Raymond Williams's theory of cultural materialism. In it, I argue that Williams's work, as against much of the recent thinking on the subject, offers a significant and vital reconstruction of Marxist theory on two important levels. First, Williams offers a valuable reconsideration of materialism. Secondly, he extends this analysis into a complex reading of Marxist cultural theory.

It was shown that inconsistencies and contradictions within Marx's own work contributed to the emergence of reductive and economistic readings of historical materialism. In particular, two separate conceptions of consciousness --- as reflection and as anticipatory --- led to a problematic interpretation of the materialist understanding of "determination". In orthodox Marxism, consciousness came to be perceived more and more as a passive reflection of a society's essential economic activity. Hence "determination", especially when applied to the base/superstructure metaphor, was defined and understood as a total prefiguration of conscious activity by the objective logic of economic production.

Williams argues that it is possible to move beyond this economistic approach by redefining determination as the setting of limits and the exertion of pressures. He also points out that the economic base is no simple category, but must be viewed as a process. Hence, there cannot be any one-to-one causal primacy given to the economy of any society. This said, however, it is important that Williams does maintain a sense of the historical material determination of social practices, but with the recognition that these practices form varied and relatively autonomous responses to the material social world.

Given the economistic model developed within classical Marxism, it was almost inevitable that reductionist theories of culture would arise. Recognizing the strengths of the ideas developed by the Frankfurt school of critical theory, Lukacs, and Goldmann, Williams suggests that the weakness that runs throughout all these theories lies in their tendency to view culture as a secondary social activity. What this ignores, argues Williams, is the recognition that culture is itself a form of material practice.

Various challenges to Williams's theory have been raised. Yet, in my view, in his later work Williams successfully responds to critics who claimed that his work on English culture remained mired in the idealist problematic. However, some more recent structuralist objections to Williams's "culturalism" reveal weaknesses in Williams's approach. Nonetheless, I have argued that these limitations can be adequately addressed through an expanded understanding of "hegemony".

Williams's reading of Gramsci reveals that hegemony is something that deeply saturates all elements of a society. It is also lived in very material ways; in the language we speak, the relationships we form, the sports we play, the work we perform --- in all the values and beliefs we live out and experience. Hence, hegemony is won at many sites and comes to constitute our sense of the world, not as it actually exists but how we come to recognize and define it.

I think, in the final analysis, that the greatest strength of Williams's cultural theory lies in its multi-dimensional approach. Against certain tendencies within contemporary cultural studies that emphasize only the empowering and oppositional aspects of cultural practices, Williams is quick to assert the importance of political economy as a tool of analysis. Hence, the "materialist" aspect of his approach stresses the absolute importance of analyzing cultural forms within the actual conditions of their production, whether that is examining the structure of the book publishing industry or the organization of television production. But unlike the Frankfurt School's condemnation of the cultural industry as a vehicle and instrument of ideological domination, Williams is quick to recognize that cultural production, understood as material signifying practices, represents a contested terrain. Thus, a textual analysis of these forms, within their historical context, works to complement his political-economic analysis.

Hegemony and Counter-Hegemony

I began this study with a rather pessimistic account of the relevance of historical materialism in a world marked by intense political, economic, social, and ideological changes. Even leaving aside questions about its long-term significance, the emergence of neo-conservatism in the guise of Thatcherism, Reaganism, and perhaps even "Mulroneyism" has signaled something of a defeat for the politics of the left. Trade unions, social welfare programs, and government regulatory bodies have all felt the effects of a significant restructuring of Western capitalism and a retreat into rightist extremism.

In Britain, for example, the Thatcher government openly and persistently declared its intention to radically alter the very nature of capitalism. It promoted a policy of direct class confrontation by taking on the nation's trade unions. Thatcherism transformed the social infrastructure through a drastic series of privatization measures that threatened health services, public education, and other programs except, most notably, the police and military. In the United States, radical conservatives blamed liberals and special interest groups for the growth of a cumbersome welfare state, for the political and economic decline of the United States on the world scene, and for the erosion of traditional morals and values (Hobsbawm, 1989: 88-90; Kellner, 1990: 60).

Perhaps most discouraging for the Left has been the recognition that neo-conservative ideology was not imposed upon an unsuspecting public, but was actively won and largely consented to. In the face of a perceived social, economic, and political crisis, neo-conservatism was able to offer its values and beliefs as a solution to these ills. In essence, it was able to signify the world in such a way as to label its problems and present what appeared to be viable solutions. In the United States, this was largely accomplished through the articulation and signification of the discourse of libertarian individualism. It asserted the "natural" initiative and aggressive enterprise of individual human beings, a quality which had been curtailed by the intrusive regulations of the liberal state. To restore the economy, therefore, neo-conservatives argued for deregulation that would free individuals from the yoke of state servitude. In terms of social programs, it was felt that welfare and other forms of social assistance lulled people into a state of apathy, dependency and passivity that only perpetuated a vicious spiral of poverty. To break this cycle, neo-conservatives promised to cut social programs and let the unrestrained forces of the market lead people back to the American dream. One need only follow the beckoning "invisible hand".

It is important to see, therefore, that there is no necessary correspondance between the rise of neo-conservative hegemony and the political, social, and economic crises of the 1970's. Neo-conservatism represents only one response to these ills. Its success was predicated upon what Williams (1980: 38-39) has identified as "selective incorporation", the ability to signify and represent the social world in very specific --- and hence "selective" --- ways. The legitimation of the radical right's politics worked, I think, through a process of selectively incorporating certain widely held but contradictory values and beliefs, what Stuart Hall (1988: 142-143) has called "popular morality". It is a recognition that human consciousness is not unified, but is in process and is inconsistent. For example, individuals may at once firmly believe in such values as possessive individualism, fixed concepts of good and evil, and retributive justice, while at the same time remaining equally committed to an intolerance of such things as injustice, the oppression of others, and the unequal distribution of wealth and prestige. By refracting the social world solely through the lens of libertarian individualism, neo-conservatism found a broad base of support but at the same time "selectively excluded" more progressive values and beliefs.

Hence, one of ways in which hegemony was won, was through various cultural practices that very selectively signified the world in a manner that articulated with the logic of neo-conservatism. The urban crime-drama films, for example, incorporated such popular ideologies as aggressive individualism and a belief in the value of retributive justice. It did so, I have argued, through a transcoding and generic transformation of the frontier mythology, a widely held American belief in the values of aggressive male individualism and a "regeneration through violence".

What this study raises, then, is the possiblity of formulating an alternative practice of representation, one that appeals to the popular ideologies of justice and equality. This means signifying crime, for example, in ways that promote a more progressive understanding of its origin and result. Crime is a very real social problem that destroys countless lives and communities, but how we respond to that problem becomes of utmost importance.

While I have argued that the Hollywood crime-drama of the 1970's "re-presented" crime in a manner that won consent for a neo-conservative hegemony, it is important to recognize that alternative significations are possible and did exist. Critical cultural theory should be prepared to recognize, within the dominant culture, the persistence of alternatives and the emergence of opposition.

When dealing with the cinema, therefore, cultural theorists must explore what alternative practices would look like. Is it necessary, for example, for a "counter-cinema" to break with the formal devices of Hollywood? Does narrative closure, personalized camera work, and subjective narration always serve dominant ideological ends? Or is it possible to employ these codes and conventions in a manner that signifies the social world in a way that counters the dominant culture? Or is an oppositional cinema doomed to exist on the periphery of mainstream film practices, to be viewed only in film schools and "art" theatres? These questions are crucial, for they may in the end point the way to positive socialist interventions into the cinema.

While I cannot with any great confidence answer these questions, I think there are some positive signs that show that some films, even operating within the Hollywood system of production, do offer alternative --- although perhaps not oppositional --- representations of the social world. In terms of the crime-drama films, I am thinking specifically of _Taxi Driver_ (1976). The film was a surprising commercial success, even given its "X" rating. It operated largely within an established genre and employed similar narrative devices as the conservative crime-drama: a violent lone hero and a standard revenge plot.

The film relays the story of Travis (Robert DeNiro), a New York taxi driver who, after being confronted by evil, is led to act on his own and rid society of the wrongdoers. Like Harry and Paul Kersey, Travis is a loner, a man detached from society and from the comforts of real human relationships.

Travis's attempt to establish a relationship with a campaign organizer for a liberal presidential candidate fails miserably. He takes her to see pornographic movies, unaware that this is not what people usually do on dates. She tells him that she reminds him of a song performed by Kris Kristofferson, but Travis has never heard of the popular singer. Following the standard conservative plot, Travis is shown as existing outside of the social world that surrounds him, an extreme isolated individual who cannot relate to people.

However, what began as a seemingly routine conservative crime-drama slowly shifts in focus to a critique of that vision. The liberal candidate, Charles Palentine, meets Travis in one scene and soon the viewer begins to question Travis's emotional stability. Palentine, whose election slogan is "We are the People: Let the People Rule", asks Travis what he thinks the biggest problem facing the country is. After drawing an initial blank, Travis responds that whoever wins the election must deal with the crime that has overrun New York City and "just clean up the whole mess...just flush it down the fuckin' toilet!" Travis's rage seems inexplicable, a sign of intense anger and frustration that lies beneath the veneer of civility he projects. As the narrative progresses, Travis's instability becomes more and more pronounced. He admits to the viewer that he has "some really bad ideas" in his head. In a terrifying parody of the aggressive male hero, Travis states in voice-over narration: "Listen you fuckers, you screwheads. Here is a man who would not take it anymore, who stood up against the scum, the cunts, the dopes, the shit." The language, to say the least, is unsettling and reveals that Travis's concern with crime is spawned less by a sense of moral conviction than by his own instability.

Travis thus becomes representative of a re-articulated vision of the neo-conservative male hero. Angered by the crime and immorality that surrounds him, Travis decides to punish those he holds responsible. He plans to assassinate the liberal politician, Pallentine. In this scene, Travis is completely transformed; he dons military fatigues that bulge with weapons and sports a grotesque Mohawk haircut. However, his plan is aborted and he instead turns his aggression toward a pimp, Sport, and tries to rescue a young teenage prostitute, Iris, from his control. In a long and violent gunfight, Travis kills Sport and two of his associates. The camera lingers over the carnage and wounded bodies, revealing the horror of Travis's vigilantism. The final sequence contains shots of newspaper articles that praise Travis as a hero; the soundtrack consists of Iris's father reading a letter that thanks Travis for returning Iris to her parents.[1]

The film implies, I think, that behind the conservative vigilante movies, behind the emotionally unaffected lone male hero, lies a kind of acute madness. It provides a critique of the aggressive individualism that the conservative films asserted could solve complex social problems. Even with the somewhat "heroic" ending, Taxi Driver questions the nature of a culture that values and glamorizes such a psychotic individual as Travis.

I do not mean to suggest that Taxi Driver can be seen as part of a "socialist cinema" if such a thing even exists in the United States. However, the film reveals the way in which even within the mainstream cinema alternative representations exist. A critical theory of the cinema must be prepared to recognize this diversity. By doing so we move beyond readings of particular films and begin to formulate a counter-hegemonic aesthetic. For if hegemony is won at many sites, socialist thinkers should be prepared to think about questions of cultural signification as part of a challenge that can be waged against the ideas and values of neo-conservatism. Socialist politics will necessarily involve more than economic and political struggles; it will also include cultural struggles. In the end, I think this is what Raymond Williams has alerted us to. In his words:

> If I am asked finally to define my own position, I would say this. I believe in the necessary economic struggle of the organised working class. I believe that this is still the most creative activity in our society, as I indicated years ago in calling the great working-class institutions creative cultural achievements, as well as the indispensable first means of political struggle.... I believe that the system of meanings and

> values which a capitalist society has generated has to be defeated in general and in detail by the most sustained kinds of intellectual work. This is a cultural process which I called "the long revolution"... a genuine struggle which was part of the necessary battles of democracy and of economic victory for the organised working class. People change, it is true, in struggle and by action. Anything as deep as a dominant structure of feeling is only changed by active new experience. But this does not mean that change can be remitted to action otherwise conceived. On the contrary the task of a successful socialist movement will be one of feeling and imagination quite as much as one of fact and organization. (In Eagleton, 1989)

To develop a counter-hegemony, a socialist movement must be prepared to engage in imagination, to propose alternative representations of the social world. A Marxist cultural theory should be sensitive to alternative significations of social problems such as crime, but beyond this, it should also begin the long and difficult task of conceiving of socialist responses, of not just "countering", but of winning its own hegemony.

NOTES

1. Just as hegemony represents a contested terrain, the reading of Taxi Driver is also a site of struggle. Ryan and Kellner (1988: 87-89) argue that the film directly follows in the cycle of conservative crime-dramas like Dirty Harry and Death Wish. On the other hand, Robert B. Ray (1985: 349-360) interprets the film as a radical critique of American culture, an allegory of Vietnam in which a sense of detached isolationism was followed by a violent, and ultimately, ineffective intervention.

APPENDIX

In determining which crime-drama films to analyze, I refered to Variety's annual list of the top money-makers in the Canada-United States market. The list is put together on the basis of rentals accruing to the distributors and not the total receipts taken in at all the theatres. Information following the title of the film includes the name of director, producer or production company, distributor, date of release, and its overall ranking that year. Drawing from this list, I have provided an analysis of those urban crime-drama films that were most popular at the box-office and were currently available for screening (i.e. video rentals); in the case of Magnum Force and Walking Tall II as well as other sequels, I have limited my study, for the sake of brevity, to an examination of the first film in the series since the subsequent variations tend to stick fast to the original.

Dirty Harry (D. Siegel; Warner Bros.; Dec. 1971) 5

Shaft (G. Parks; J. Freeman; MGM; June, 1971) 12

The French Connection (W. Friedken; P. D'Anton/Schine Moore; 20th Century-Fox; October, 1971) 12

Magnum Force (T. Post; R. Daley; Warner Bros; December, 1973) 4

Walking Tall (P. Karlson; M. Briskin; CRC; March 1973) 17

Serpico (S. Lumet; M. Bregman; Paramount; Feb. 1974) .. 9
Chinatown (R. Polanski; R. Evans; Paramount; July 1974) 21
Walking Tall (reissue) 26
Death Wish (M. Winner; H. Landers, B. Roberts; Paramount; August, 1974) 30

Dog Day Afternoon (S. Lumet; M. Bregman/M. Elfand; Warner Brothers; August 1975) 7
Walking Tall Part II (E. Bellamy; C. Pratt; CRC/AIP; July 1975) 22

The Enforcer (J. Fargo; R. Daley; Warner Brothers; December 1976) 8
Taxi Driver (M. Scorcese; M. & J. Phillips; Columbia; Feburary, 1976) 12

The Gauntlet (C. Eastwood; R. Daley; Warner Brothers; December 1977) 14
Walking Tall: The Final Chapter (J. Starret; C. Pratt; AIP; June 1977) 37

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