

Space, Cultural Materialism and Structure of Feeling: Reflections on the Chinese Reception of Raymond Williams

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THE LAST DECADE HAS WITNESSED a burgeoning literature on Raymond Williams in China. In addition to over fifty articles, three book-length studies have been published since 2001, whereas prior to 2001 there were only two essays and one book of this kind. The themes that are privileged in the Chinese discourse on Williams include the principal categories in Williams's theories: the concepts of the knowable community and of cultural materialism. The latter, which has become a focus of the debates on Williams in China, is often discussed in terms of canon, institution, mediation, totality, ideology, hegemony, the base-superstructure model, and, above all, structure of feeling.

Interestingly, the concept of cultural materialism has also found echoes to a greater or less extent in almost all the works that Chinese critics have written on Williams. Even more significantly, up to now it has invariably found positive responses. In each of the four monographs produced in China dealing with Williams we find a whole chapter devoted to cultural materialism, and many of the articles concerned actually have the words 'cultural materialism' in their titles, such as 'A Mirror to History: An Analysis of Raymond Williams's Cultural Materialism',¹ "Theories of

¹ Published by Zhang Pinggong in *Xueshu yanjiu* [*Academic Research*], 8 (2003).

Cultural Materialism”: A Field That Is Worthy of Continuing Attention – Reading Raymond Williams’s *Marxism and Literature*,² ‘Cultural Materialism: A Theoretical Exploration – On Raymond Williams’s *Marxism*,’³ to name only a few. Cultural materialism, as Williams says in *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford 1977), is a position which it took him years to reach and ‘which can be briefly described as ... a theory of the specificities of material cultural and literary production within historical materialism’ (p. 5). In *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (London 1980), he gives a more elaborate definition: ‘I would now claim to have reached ... a theory of culture as a (social and material) productive process and of specific practices, of “arts”, as social uses of material means of production (from language as material “practical consciousness” to the specific technologies of writing and forms of writing, through to mechanical and electronic communications systems)’ (p. 243). It is this emphasis on the materiality of culture and its socio-historical aspects, and the implied critique of the ‘orthodox’ Marxist theory of culture, that has ignited the most enthusiastic response from the interpretative community in China. A typical example can be found in *The Cultural Politics of New Left: Raymond Williams’s Theory of Culture*, recently published by Zhao Guoxin:

On the one hand, cultural materialism is a reaction to the Leavist mode of criticism which overemphasises the text to the neglect of its social and historical backgrounds. On the other hand, it is a sublation of the orthodox Marxist theory of culture. It is materialistic because it brings into prominence the important role of social production and historical contexts in the production of culture.⁴

Embedded in this passage is a tone of affirmation and appreciation, and this is far from an isolated case. Wu Yeping, for instance, has given effusive praise to Williams’s cultural materialism, which she sees as ‘representing a praxis par excellence in analysing cultural phenomena in their social and historical contexts’.⁵ Tribute is also paid to Williams in another recently published article because his cultural materialism ‘has perfected

² Published by Ma Chi in *Heilongjiang shehui kexue* [*Heilongjiang Social Sciences*], 1 (2009).

³ Published by Yin Xuhui in *Qinghai shifan daxue xuebao (zhexue shehui kexue ban)* [*Journal of Qinghai Normal University (Philosophy and Social Sciences)*], 6 (2009).

⁴ Zhao Guoxin, *Xinzuopai de wenhua zhengzhi: leimengde weiliansi de wenhua lilun* [*The Cultural Politics of New Left: Raymond Williams’s Theory of Culture*] (Beijing 2009) p. 24.

⁵ Wu Yeping, *Leimengde weiliansi de wenhua lilun yanjiu* [*A Study on Raymond Williams’s Cultural Theory*] (Lanzhou 2006).

“the base–superstructure formula” in traditional Marxist theory and has overcome a mechanical theoretical tendency’.⁶ A similar view is held by Fu Degen, who also praises Williams for ‘criticising the reductive economism’, and for having, after he ‘discussed the base–superstructure proposition’, ‘disagreed with its orthodoxy in theorising and its rigidity in application’.⁷

Interestingly, most of those who embrace the notion of cultural materialism see it as a development of Marxism rather than a deviation from it. Qiao Ruijin and Xue Ji, for instance, have argued that Williams’s ‘effort to deconstruct the antithesis between base and superstructure ... seems to have deviated far away from Marxism, but rather than “stepping beyond Marxism”, his cultural materialist views are in line with Marxist philosophy and are actually its extension and development in the cultural sphere’.⁸ Such instances point to an exceptionally strong interest in, and warm appreciation of, Williams’s theory of cultural materialism.

But why has there been such a warm response?

The answer lies in China’s historical and cultural circumstances. For decades, the decade of the Cultural Revolution in particular, Chinese scholars have found themselves in a very perplexing situation in which they are supposed to abide by the ‘orthodox’ or, to be more precise, vulgarised Marxist base–superstructure model, which implies reductive and economically deterministic views, and implicitly assigns a mere secondary status to culture. In other words, many Chinese scholars see in cultural materialism, which presupposes the elimination of the rigid dichotomy of the base and the superstructure, a way out of their cultural impasse. As a matter of fact, various people have drawn attention to the need to apply cultural materialism to the reality in China. Ma Chi, for example, believes that it applies to China at least in the sense that it stimulates people to think about the following question: ‘What should a Chinese scholar, in the fields of Marxist literary theories and cultural studies, really do?’⁹

⁶ Yin Xuhui, ‘Wenhua weiwu zhuyi de changshi’ [‘Cultural Materialism: A Theoretical Exploration – On Raymond Williams’s Marxism’], *Qinghai shifan daxue xuebao (zhexue shehui kexue ban)* [Journal of Qinghai Normal University (Philosophy and Social Sciences)], 6 (2009) p. 16.

⁷ Fu Degen, ‘Zouxiang wenhua weiwu zhuyi’ [‘Towards Cultural Materialism’], Ph.D thesis (Beijing 1998) p. iv.

⁸ Qiao Ruijin and Xue Ji, ‘Leimengde weiliansi weiwu zhuyi wenhuaguan jixi’ [‘An Anatomy of Raymond Williams’s Materialist Views on Culture’], *Makesi zhuyi yu xianshi* [Marxism and Reality], 3 (2007) pp. 154–7: 155.

⁹ Ma Chi, “‘enhua weiwu lun’: yige zhide jixu guanzhu de lingyu – du leimengde weiliansi de makesi zhuyi yu wenxue’ [‘Theories of Cultural Materialism’: A Field That Is Worthy of Continuing Attention – Reading Raymond Williams’s

Another appeal for the use of Williams's theory is made in an article by Zhang Pinggong: 'Williams's cultural materialism is conducive to an adequate understanding and mapping of the cultural context of contemporary China, and to the analysis and critique of our own literary traditions and cultural experience.'¹⁰ Compared with Zhang Pinggong's and Ma Chi's comments, Fu Degen is more explicit and more specific:

For years excessive importance was attached in our country to the relationship of literature to economics and politics, due to the influence of Soviet Union's research model. Since the Reform and the introduction of the opening-up policy, multifarious trends of Western thought in art and literature have arrived in China, hence the emergence of various 'new methods'. Perhaps as an over-rectification of those formerly prevalent research methods, these 'new methods' have more or less 'formalist' leanings and tend to overlook external factors underlying art and literature. Raymond Williams's cultural materialist thought has a role to play in helping us overcome both the tendency to the rigid reliance on politico-economic factors and the tendency to formalism, thus providing us with a frame of reference and enabling us to rebuild the relationships between literature and society on a higher level.¹¹

Although Fu Degen has set a specific target, such as is lacking in Ma Chi's and Zhang Pinggong's remarks, of putting into practice Williams's thought, we are still not very clear about how that target can be reached. Despite this deficiency, the efforts made by Fu Degen, as well as by Ma Chi and Zhang Pinggong, are praiseworthy in so far as they have brought home to us a sense of the urgency of the issue.

A new trend, in the midst of all the calls to apply Williams's thought to China, manifests itself in 'Political Science of Words', an article by Lu Jiande who has pinpointed the area of words where true inspiration can be drawn from Williams. Although he does not mention even once the term 'cultural materialism', he nevertheless demonstrates, in a thought-provoking manner, the way in which Chinese culture can be approached as a (social and material) productive process and in which the use of

Marxism and Literature'], *Heilongjiang shehui kexue* [*Heilongjiang Social Sciences*], 1 (2009) pp. 84–7: 87.

¹⁰ Zhang Pinggong, 'Lishi zhi jing: xi leimengde weiliansi de wenhua weiwu zhuyi' [A Mirror to History: An Analysis of Raymond Williams's Cultural Materialism], *Xueshu yanjiu* [*Academic Research*], 8 (2003) pp. 70–3: 73.

¹¹ Fu Degen, 'Towards Cultural Materialism', p. 100.

keywords can be an effective method of investigation. ‘Our society is obsessed’, he says, ‘with concepts and labels’. It is a task of crucial importance, therefore, ‘to discuss and redefine as Williams did, in a critical spirit and with a historical consciousness, the keywords that have made a tremendous impact on our society, which is the prerequisite for the protection of our cultural ecology’.¹² Unlike many others who have called for the necessity of drawing upon the intellectual resources of Williams’s works but left the implications unexplored, Lu Jiande has made concrete efforts to probe into some of the keywords that are prevalent in Chinese cultural life but often go unquestioned, words such as ‘intelligentsia’, ‘democracy’, ‘science’, and ‘revolution’. Of all his investigations, the most noteworthy is his enquiry into the word ‘institution’ which, when translated into Chinese, often loses one of its important meanings, i.e., the norms, principles, and customs that are often unstipulated in any written form, but have nevertheless struck deep roots in a group, community, and society. More specifically, it is often translated as 制度 which, when translated back into English, can never be ‘institution’ again but will appear as ‘order’ or ‘system’, words which put the emphasis on a form that is written down or that is visible and quantifiable. Lu Jiande seizes upon this problem in translation and turns it into a significant cultural issue:

More often than not, behavioural norms (or patterns) that have been long in existence and are widely accepted are not in black and white, but they can all be called ‘institutions’. For example, bribing others with silver dollars (so as to seek interests and to extend power), as described in *All Men Are Brothers*,¹³ was an institution at that time ... Every society has its own customary rules, and things established and accepted through common practice, that give expression to the basic values underpinning people’s conduct and are far more vital than written rules and laws. The implementation of written rules and regulations often depends on social customs and usages, and depends on the ‘institutions’ that grow in specific historical circumstances. Over the past century, an obsession with the magic power of written rules and commands has taken a grip on many of the Chinese intelligentsia who mistakenly believe that various long-standing abuses and malpractices can be removed by reforms on the level of ‘systems’,

¹² Lu Jiande, ‘Ciyu de Zhengzhixue (Dai Yixu)’ [‘The Political Science of Words (As an Introduction to the Translation)’], in *Guanjianci* [Keywords] (Beijing 2005) pp. 9, 11.

¹³ One of the most famous Chinese classical novels, written by Shi Naiyan (1296–1370).

whereas the ‘systems’ concerned are merely documents containing ineffective rules, orders, and so on. Some experts (especially ‘economists’), who are favourites with the media, are blind to the power of customs in shaping and transforming a human being. Their reform designs and schemes, therefore, simply overlook deep-rooted cultural factors. Hopefully, *Keywords* can help our academics, in the field of social sciences and humanities, examine the ‘institutions’ that are invisible but ubiquitous in our society.¹⁴

The significance of this passage lies in the insight it gives into the root cause of one of the inveterate problems in Chinese social and cultural life, and in showing us how the problem can be tackled by borrowing from Raymond Williams an investigative tool, namely the method of analysing keywords. It should be further pointed out that Lu Jiande has actually adopted a position within cultural materialism here, for his work implies a firm belief in the dynamic role of the superstructure, such as the social sciences and humanities, in shaping the base. Moreover, he has demonstrated a way of understanding the diverse social and material production of such works as *All Men Are Brothers* to which connected categories of ideas and values can be historically applied.

But there is still a long way to go before Williams’s cultural materialism really materialises. There are hidden shoals and reefs ahead. For example, the misunderstanding or misinterpretation of Williams’s views gives rise to confusions over the status of literature in his cultural theory. In other words, there has been a strong tendency among Chinese critics to indiscriminately put Williams on a par with those who pride themselves on de-canonising and de-aestheticising literary works. Wu Yeping, for instance, praises Williams for having ‘initiated a concept of literature as “forms of writing”’,¹⁵ and she gives a very revealing title to one of the sections of her book, namely ‘The Challenge Cultural Materialism Poses to Literary Studies’. She then goes on to elaborate a dichotomy between ‘aesthetic judgements’, which she associates with the traditional concept of literature, and ‘the ability to read and write’, which she implicitly conceives as an innovative notion of literature:

Subordination to class norms of aesthetic judgements can be designated as an important characteristic of the concept of traditional literature. The ability to read and write, within the theoretical

¹⁴ Lu Jiande, ‘The Political Science of Words’, p. 7.

¹⁵ *A Study on Raymond Williams’s Cultural Theory*, p. 157.

framework of cultural materialism, constitute a culturally and politically emancipatory mode, unifying education and politics ... Williams regards literature as a historical and relative being with neither permanent essence nor universality ... Reading and writing are the most basic means of culture, as well as literature's basic modes of existence. In Williams's view, in fact, literature is no more than a cultural phenomenon.¹⁶

All this gives us a false impression that Williams equates literature with non-literary, though cultural, documents.

A similar argument can be found in Zhao Guoxin's *Cultural Politics of New Left*, in which Williams's cultural materialism is compared to New Historicism: 'Both cultural materialism and New Historicism ... attach great importance to non-literary documents and upgrade them to such an extent that they can make rival claims as an equal with literature.'¹⁷ Such examples are actually so numerous, in both Zhao's book and in other people's works that we need not elaborate them further here.

But one related point has to be made: some critics do not explicitly put Williams into the category of those who mention literature and non-literary works in the same breath, but they have created confusion by overemphasising the political aspect of his work. Zhang Pinggong's article, for instance, produces an impression that Williams relies exclusively on a political interpretation of literary works, while leaving completely out of account their aesthetic dimensions: 'Williams first applied his theory of cultural materialism to research on English literature in the Renaissance period, especially the classic works by Shakespeare ... The success of Shakespearian plays, therefore, lies in their political tendency to criticise current malpractices rather than their transcendental aesthetic appeal'.¹⁸ Even when there is no deliberate attempt to belittle the aesthetic function, the actual absence of aesthetic dimensions is often a feature of the works that deal with Raymond Williams. An interesting example, by no means isolated, can be found in Li Zhaoqian's article 'Raymond Williams's Reflections on Literary Paradigm', whose central argument is that Williams's great contribution lies in the development of 'a working definition of literary paradigm' which 'is a growing historical continuum'.¹⁹

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 166–7.

¹⁷ *The Cultural Politics of New Left*, p. 151.

¹⁸ 'A Mirror to History', p. 72.

¹⁹ Li Zhaoqian, 'Leimengde weiliansi de wenzue fanshi sikao' ['Raymond Williams's Reflections on Literary Paradigm'], *Shijie wenzue pinglun* [World Literatures Review], 2 (2009) pp. 236–40: 236.

Williams's 'cultural materialism', he goes on to argue, 'is at the beginning of a new dominant literary paradigm'. For all its focus on literature, however, the article does not touch at all on the aesthetic aspect of literature.

In short, the current state of Williams's reception in China is marked by a tendency either to eliminate the distinction between literary works and non-literary documents, or to denigrate the aesthetic values which would otherwise be central to literature. Such a tendency is in fact part of an international trend to politicise, de-canonise and de-aestheticise traditional classics, especially when it comes to the evaluation of Williams's work, as reflected in an article by Stanley Aronowitz, who has come to the following conclusion:

Williams is less interested in the intrinsic merit of the work in terms of criteria of aesthetic value such as felicitous writing style, formal innovation, or narrative elegance than in the extent to which it is *signifying practice* of a concrete historical conjuncture. His object is whether the novel or poem provides *knowledge* of what he calls the 'structure of feeling' of a specific historical moment, and even more concretely of a given *class*, not whether it is a source of pleasure.²⁰

Furthermore, we should see that trend as one of the symptoms of a worldwide crisis of the humanities, a crisis given a succinct summary by Zhang Longxi in his most recent article: 'what poses a more serious challenge, or what has been called a crisis of the humanities, is not just an unpropitious time and environment, but an internal questioning of the value and legitimacy of culture and tradition by literary scholars and cultural theorists themselves'. It is this 'internal questioning that Zhang Longxi regards as the greatest threat to classics: 'Classics, traditionally understood as the repositories of moral, social, and spiritual values, what Sainte-Beuve in an earlier time called the "temple of taste", are under attack as embodiments of repressive ideologies of the patriarchy, the ruling élites, or the colonialist empire'.²¹ In this general context, the rubbishing, de-canonisation, and politicisation of literature has become a popular game among many of our literary critics.

But is Raymond Williams also one of those fanatical game players?

²⁰ Stanley Aronowitz, 'Between Criticism and Ethnography: Raymond Williams and the Invention of Cultural Studies', in Christopher Prendergast (ed.), *Cultural Materialism: On Raymond Williams* (Minneapolis 1995) pp. 320–39: 321.

²¹ Zhang Longxi, 'Valeurs, défense, crise et avenir des sciences humaines', *Diogenes*, 229–30 (Jan.–June 2010) pp. 11, 15.

To answer this question we need to look into whether literature is a legitimate discipline and whether there is still such a thing as a classic or a literary canon in the first place. Here again, we may turn for reference to Zhang Longxi, who responds enthusiastically to Frank Kermode's Tanner Lectures at the University of California at Berkeley, presented in November 2001 and published in 2004, in which Kermode holds it 'to be a necessary though not obvious requirement of the canon that it should give pleasure'.²² Aesthetic pleasure is one of the prerequisites for any person who chooses to talk about literature as such. 'The point may be a simple one', argues Zhang Longxi: 'if you don't find pleasure in literature, don't pretend to be a literary critic – but it becomes important to emphasise aesthetic pleasure at this particular time when literary works are often used as so many social, historical, or political documents to comment on other subjects and for other purposes'.²³ To argue for aesthetic pleasure is not to deny a political, ideological, or any other dimension of literature. On the contrary, a moderate dose of political and ideological sensitivity is a wholesome contribution to literary and cultural studies as a whole, but an ideological over-interpretation of any literary work or a carnival-like blurring of the boundary between literature and non-literature could only create chaos. While it is true that cultural studies is a problem-based academic pursuit and is often interdisciplinary, it does not follow that it should neutralise any of the distinctive elements of any discipline. Although cultural studies cannot but be interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary, there has to be a discipline from which it can cross to another. The same is true of the literary critics who pursue cultural studies.

Now let us return to the question of Williams and de-canonisation. Does Williams leave aesthetics out of account when he approaches literary works?

The titles of some of his major works suggest a strong passion in Williams for literature: *Drama from Ibsen to Eliot*, *Drama in Performance*, *Modern Tragedy*, *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht*, *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence*, *Orwell*, and *Marxism and Literature*. Even in the works whose titles do not highlight literature, such as *Culture and Society*, *The Long Revolution*, *The Country and the City*, we often find page upon page, nay, chapter upon chapter, devoted to it. In *The Country and the City* (London 1985), for instance, over a hundred writers, plus a far greater number of their literary works, are discussed and analysed with exquisite literary taste, regardless

²² Frank Kermode, *Pleasure and Change: The Aesthetics of Canon*, ed. Robert Alter (Oxford 2004) p. 20.

²³ Zhang Longxi, 'Valeurs, défense, crise et avenir des sciences humaines', p. 17.

of the fact that Williams's literary taste is intertwined with philosophical, social, historical, and political insight. Let us take 'Surviving Countrymen', chapter 21 of *The Country and the City*, for example. One of its foci is on how the so-called 'regional novel' develops from one mode, with George Eliot/Thomas Hardy as its representative and landscape description/nature poetry as its typical forms, into another mode which focuses on feelings about the earth and about natural growth, and which contains central imagery of human relationships, especially of love and desire. Here is an excerpt in which George Eliot is compared with Meredith:

Her uncritical transition from Germany to England, where there were no 'peasants', is notable enough. But what is more important is that within the fastidious phrases a stock figure can be seen as emerging, and we have been hearing his grunts ever since. Honest grunts though; that is usually the point. He is not the simple natural figure of Wordsworth; he is something that is about to be called elemental. Rough land, rough grappling with nature, rough feelings, rough honesty ...

Meredith in his novels sticks mainly to the limitations; the countryman is hard, stubborn, enduring, confined. But the virtues of Earth, in the new fertile sense, were about to break through. If you read *Rhoda Fleming* you can already see the outlines of many later novels, but if you read the poems you can hear the new rhythm itself ... (*The Country and the City*, pp. 250–1)

The whole passage reads like a pleasurable piece of literature. Look at this line: 'Rough land, rough grappling with nature, rough feelings, rough honesty'. An extraordinary sense of beauty is revealed here: remarkable alliteration, symmetrical pairings, majestic parallels, melodious rhythm, all working to evoke aesthetic feelings. There are many more instances, even within this short passage, which point to Williams's sensitivity and sensibility with regard to the aesthetic elements of literature. His taste for characterisation vividly manifests itself when he sees 'a stock figure' 'emerging', and when he nudges us into an auditory literary experience: 'and we have been hearing his grunts ever since'. This taste is also evident in 'the simple natural figure of Wordsworth'. When he comes to dwell on Meredith, he talks about 'the virtues of Earth' which 'were about to break through', emphasising 'the new fertile sense' – only those who are aesthetically susceptible could have come up with such a collocation! And the last line of the above-quoted passage testifies once more to his taste for

poetic rhythms. Such instances abound. The following is but one more of the many paragraphs in this book whose sensuous qualities are unmistakable:

This now conscious intercourse with the Earth became, in its fusion of agricultural sexual imagery (see Lawrence's descriptions of ploughing and milking in the first chapter of *The Rainbow*) a dominant mode; dominant also in the special sense that the imagery is male, to the female Earth. The emotional basis for the rough peasant lover, the deep passions of this life of the soil, is to be found here but is only one of its figures. (p. 251)

We should hasten to add that Williams is not merely dealing with the aesthetic aspects of the novels by George Eliot, Meredith, and Lawrence. The immediate context of the two above-quoted passages is the evolution of country houses, which in turn indicates the social, historical, and political changes taking place in the course of industrialisation. Here is a contextualising passage within the same chapter:

But there is an obvious change in, for example, the country-houses of Henry James, which have become the house-parties of a metropolitan and international social round ... Its determining dimension is now not land but money; houses, parks, and furniture are explicitly objects of consumption and exchange. People bargain, exploit and use each other, with these houses as the shells of their ambition and intrigue. Money from elsewhere is an explicit and dominant theme. Social cultivation, still linked in Jane Austen with the general process of improvement, is now a complicated process that flows from a wider society. Detached capital, detached income, detached consumption, detached social intercourse inhabit and vacate, visit and leave, these incidentally surviving and converted houses. (p. 249)

It goes without saying that Williams has a strong social, economic and political concern here, but socio-economic concerns need not exclude aesthetic concerns. As a matter of fact, these different dimensions in Williams's analysis often go hand in hand and are even intertwined to a nicety. The following comment on Lawrence is a good example:

he saw quite clearly as an enemy a materialist and capitalist industrial system ... His is a knot too tight to untie now: the knot of a life under overwhelming contradictions and pressures. But as I have watched it settle into what is now a convention – in literary education especially

– I have felt it as an outrage, in a continuing crisis and on a persistent border. The song of the land, the song of the rural labour, the song of delight in many forms of life with which we all share our physical world, is too important and too moving to be tamely given up, in an embittered betrayal, to the confident enemies of all significant and actual independence and renewal. (p. 271)

A social and political overtone pervades the whole passage here, but into the socio-political strands are woven aesthetic ones, what with a striking image of ‘knot’ and an emphasis on ‘delight in many forms of life’, further accentuated by the parallel constructions with a recurring motif of ‘song’, which cannot but appeal to our aesthetic senses.

In his other works, too, we can find Williams bringing his aesthetic judgement to bear on his evaluation of various works of art and literature, and of various literary schools. Let us take a look at chapter 7 of *The Long Revolution* (Harmondsworth 1965), in which Williams gives a comment on James Joyce:

And to mention this remarkable work [*Portrait of the Artist*] is to acknowledge the actual gain in intensity, the real development of fictional method... A world is actualized on one man's senses: not narrated, or held at arm's length, but taken as it is lived. Joyce showed the magnificent advantages of this method when in *Ulysses* he actualized a world not through one person but through three; there are three ways of seeing, three worlds, of Stephen, Bloom, and Molly, yet the three worlds, as in fact, compose one world, the whole world of the novel. *Ulysses* does not maintain this balance throughout... (p. 310)

What is particularly notable here is Williams's emphasis on the balance between the general way of life and individual persons, that he considers to be the essence of the method of realism and the centre of value: ‘Every aspect of personal life is radically affected by the quality of the general life, yet the general life is seen at its most important in completely personal terms. We attend with our whole senses to every aspect of life, yet the centre of value is always in the individual person – not any one isolated person, but the many persons who are the reality of the general life’ (p. 305). The acute sense of balance and harmony revealed here is both of socio-political and aesthetic significance.

We should further emphasise that Raymond Williams attaches great importance to literature as such. In *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (1980), for instance, he maintains that there should be ‘a simultaneous realization of and response to’ what he calls ‘structures of feeling ... in some of the

greatest literature', which implies a sense of hierarchy, contrary to many critics who describe him as keen on pulling down literature to the level of 'ordinary culture'. More importantly, he has expounded his views on 'the specific literary phenomenon: the dramatization of a process, the making of a fiction, in which the constituting elements, of real social life and beliefs, were simultaneously actualized and in an important way differently experienced, the difference residing in the imaginative act, the imaginative method, the specific and genuinely unprecedented imaginative organization' (pp. 24–5). What we have here is virtually a definition of the literary genre with imagination as its distinctive element. Who can say that there are no aesthetic seeds in those imaginative acts, imaginative methods, and imaginative organisations?

Moreover, Williams has dwelt directly on the aesthetic. The second chapter of Part III in his *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford 1977) is entitled 'Aesthetic and Other Situations'. Here is one of the most important statements in that chapter:

Thus we have to reject 'the aesthetic' both as a separable abstract dimension and as a separable abstract function. We have to reject 'Aesthetic' to the large extent that it is posited on these abstractions. At the same time, we have to recognize and indeed emphasize the specific variable intentions and the specific variable responses that have been grouped as aesthetic in distinction from other isolated intentions and responses, and in particular from information and suasion, in their simplest sense. (p. 156)

It should by now be clear that Williams not only recognises but also emphasises the importance of specific aesthetic intentions and responses, although he is strongly opposed to empty talk of 'the aesthetic' as an abstract notion.

To divorce Williams from literature and the aesthetic is, therefore, to deny his fundamental contribution to cultural studies which, in his case at least, relies on a thorough command of and a great passion for literature. As Lu Jiande says:

Williams loves art and literature; without his outstanding comprehension of literature there would have been no *Culture and Society* and *Keywords* ... He differs from Leavis in that he is concerned with and studies various unwritten forms of communication (such as movies and television), and in that he is opposed to any narrow and shallow understanding of the word 'literature'. But if cultural studies goes so far as to separate itself from the literary heritage and takes pride in so

doing, Williams as its founding father would disinherit some of his disciples of the cultural wealth.²⁴

This is an apt rejoinder indeed to those who celebrate the disappearance of the distinction between literature and non-literature when talking about Williams.

It is implied in the foregoing discussion that there has emerged in China (for example in the article by Lu Jiande) a new tendency to emphasise the importance of Williams's literary criticism as his core contribution to cultural studies, despite the general disparagement of the role of literature in Williams's academic pursuits and the conspicuous absence or dilution of the aesthetic dimension in the overall critical and interpretative discourse on Williams. While this new tendency is certainly a move in a right direction, a nagging issue still needs to be addressed: in what way do literary works excel in their function as cultural critique? The answer seems to have been suggested by Liu Jin in his article 'On Raymond Williams's Spatial Criticism of Modern British Literature'. Williams's 'spatial criticism', Liu Jin argues, is 'the most characteristic and most valuable part of his cultural-literary criticism', and he praises Williams for 'mapping modern British literature in the light of three kinds of space formation, namely "the country", "the city" and "the border", and their interrelationships as well as their historical evolution'.²⁵ It should be pointed out that Williams himself never used the term 'spatial criticism' as such, and that Liu Jin took his cue from Philip E. Wegner's ideas concerning this. In his article 'Spatial Criticism', Wegner argues that the project advocated by people like Lefebvre and Foucault, which challenges the tradition of privileging temporality and history over space and which sees space itself both as a production shaped by social processes/human interventions and a force shaping ways of human being in the world, 'is already evident in Raymond Williams's classic survey of modern British literature, *The Country and the City*'.²⁶ Of particular significance is Wegner's comment on 'structures of feelings':

Williams examines the changing 'structures of feelings' concerning the relationships between the 'city' and the 'country', as well as the

²⁴ Lu Jiande, 'The Political Science of Words', p. 10.

²⁵ Liu Jin, 'Lun Leimengde weiliansi dui xiandai yingguo wenxue de kongjian piping' ['On Raymond Williams's Spatial Criticism of Modern British Literature'], *Waiguo wenxue* [Foreign Literature], 3 (2007) pp. 105–14: 114.

²⁶ Philip E. Wegner, 'Spatial Criticism: Critical Geography, Space, Place and Textuality', in Julian Wolfreys (ed.), *Introducing Criticism at the 21st Century* (Edinburgh 2002) pp. 179–201: 182–6.

transformations and expansions that occur in the very definition of each of these inseparable conceptual poles, as these are negotiated in the tradition of modern British literature, a tradition he traces from the country-house poems of the sixteenth century up through the global literatures of the present day.²⁷

What is significant about this comment is that Wegner, perhaps for the first time, relates the concept of ‘structure of feeling’ to spatial criticism. But Wegner’s comment is simply too brief and, having pointed out the possible relationship, he leaves it unexplored. The thread, however, is aptly picked up by Liu Jin, who devotes a whole chapter in his book *Literature and ‘Cultural Revolution’* to what he calls ‘The Literary Space for Cultural Revolution’. His purpose, he says, is to prove that ‘Williams’s study of the theme of “the country and the city” in modern British literature is not merely to map the transformations of a geographical space but, more importantly, to map the metamorphoses of a cultural space, i.e. to probe deeply into the vicissitudes of “structures of feeling” within those changed and changing spaces of culture’.²⁸ What Liu Jin does, in other words, marks an integration of spatial criticism into the analysis of structures of feeling.

The phrase ‘structure of feeling’, as we know, occurs in much of Williams’s writing, and it is in fact a dominant concept throughout all of his work. In *Marxism and Literature* he gives it a concise definition: ‘For structures of feeling can be defined as social experiences *in solution*, as distinct from other social semantic formations which have been precipitated and are more evidently and more immediately available’ (pp. 133–4). He also emphasises that ‘as a matter of cultural theory’, structure of feeling

is a way of defining forms and conventions in art and literature as inalienable elements of a social process: not by derivation from other social forms and pre-forms, but as social formation of a specific kind which may in turn be seen as the articulation (often the only fully available articulation) of structures of feeling which as living processes are much more widely experienced. (p. 133).

It is exactly this ‘formation’ that becomes the keyword in Liu Jin’s hands, although he calls it ‘space formation’, rather than ‘social formation’,

²⁷ Ibid., p. 186.

²⁸ Liu Jin, *Wenxue yu ‘wenhua geming’: leimengde weiliansi de wenxue piping yanjiu* [*Literature and ‘Cultural Revolution’: A Study on Raymond Williams’s Literary Criticism*] (Chengdu 2007) p. 244.

which can nonetheless be examined as the articulation of structures of feeling. What fascinates him is how ‘the country’, ‘the city’, and ‘the border’ are regarded by Williams ‘not as static and solidified geographical spaces, but as cross-stratifications of cultural spaces that are in a state of flux and full of tensions between heterogeneous cultural forces’.²⁹ Of particular relevance to my argument is what is here described as ‘cross-stratifications of cultural spaces’, where literature and literary criticism, more than other cultural documents, are likely to excel.

Literature excels in exploring cross-stratifications of cultural spaces mainly for two reasons: first, its extraordinary capacity to represent their complexity, and second, its unique function of aesthetic appeal which makes exploring those complex cultural spaces a more intense experience.

Let us take for example a paragraph from *The Country and the City*, an analysis of the nineteenth-century British countryside which Williams, with reference to Meredith’s fiction and poems, sees as a space³⁰ undergoing physical and spiritual regeneration:

A working country, that is to say, was becoming, yet again but in a new way, a place of physical and spiritual regeneration. It was now the teeming life of an isolated nature, or the seasonal rhythm of the fundamental life processes. Neither of these feelings was new in itself. What was new was their fusion into a structure of feeling in which the earth and its creatures – animals and peasants almost alike – were an affirmation of vitality and of the possibility of rest in conscious contrast with the mechanical order, the artificial routines, of the cities. At its strongest this was a socially adapted pantheism. At its strangest it was a displacement of sexual feeling, in the awkward course of the Victorian liberation: a transitional imagery, in which sex was ploughing, a bed of bluebells was a breast: neither activity quite stated, neither feature quite seen; the intensity part of their confused secret. Yet if you turned to doubt, there was the cold sick nerve of money and the city; property and repression and ugliness; the frustration of worldly conventions and routines. (p. 252)

Here the complexity of various lived experiences, of crisscrossed heterogeneous cultural forces, and of different old feelings fused into a new structure of feeling, is so enormous that it can only be adequately treated by literary means. Meredith has done it. Williams has affirmed it. And Liu Jin

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Williams used the word ‘place’, but Liu Jin has rightly translated it as {空间}, which really means ‘space’. See Liu Jin’s translation, *ibid.*, p. 260.

is sensitive enough to have seized upon it and given the following comment, after quoting Williams's analysis above: "The "country" under the pen of Meredith is at once brimming with vitality and full of misery, at once filled up with "romantic sentiment" in its critique of the "city" and permeated with a sense of helplessness and feelings of bitterness with regards to the status quo of the "country."³¹ This is certainly a succinct comment, but there is one important dimension lacking: whereas the complexity of the space formation of the 'country', subsuming intricate structures of feeling, is duly pointed out, the implications of the aesthetic are left unexplored or simply ignored. And this is not an isolated case. Throughout both his book and the article quoted earlier, Liu Jin leaves the aesthetic dimension of Williams's work by and large untouched. That is to say, for all the progress he has made, his work is still symptomatic of the nationwide, nay the international, trend to de-aestheticise Williams's intellectual work.

As previously noted, however, the exploration of complex cultural spaces will be a more intense experience if the aesthetic is brought into play. Let us return, therefore, to the above quotation concerning Meredith. Williams's aesthetic susceptibilities are undoubtedly revealed in his felicitous writing style embodied by poetic diction and images, such as 'teeming life', 'seasonal rhythm', 'ploughing', and 'a bed of bluebells'. To top it all, 'an affirmation of vitality and of the possibility of rest in conscious contrast with the mechanical order, the artificial routines' suggests a striking antithesis between beauty and ugliness, both elements being active in those dynamic fluid cultural spaces and in the equally dynamic vital structures of feeling which in turn suggest a superb example of aesthetic judgement. In other words, the happy marriage of the aesthetic and the socio-historical or the socio-political is a hallmark of Williams's literary and cultural criticism. Only by affirming this conjunction can we do justice to Williams, be it in China or elsewhere.

To conclude, the existing interpretations and commentaries by Chinese critics, especially with regard to cultural materialism, have brought new insights and a Chinese perspective to bear on a continued engagement with Williams, but they are more or less vitiated by the conspicuous absence of the aesthetic dimension, which is symptomatic of an international trend to de-canonise and politicise literary classics. A wholesome antidote is suggested by the call, in Lu Jiande's article, for attention to the inseparability of cultural studies and literary heritage, and by Liu Jin's endeavour to integrate spatial criticism into the analysis of structures of feeling, although it would have been more appealing had an aesthetic dimension been fused into his critical discourse on Williams.

³¹ Ibid.