

Abstract

This study of Raymond Williams' thoughts concentrates on his idea of cultural studies, particularly his concept of cultural materialism and its contributions to the study of consumerism. However, as the intellectual foundations of Williams' thoughts are extremely varied, this study will limit itself to his developments from Marxism only.

The findings reveal that Williams proposes an approach to cultural studies which is unique and distinguishable from the various existing Marxist schools, namely, Orthodox Marxism, Western Marxism, and Marxism in England. Briefly, Williams' cultural studies can be summarised as containing the following major points.

(1) It focusses on culture as arising out of the society as a whole and assuming significance on par with the economic realm. This places Williams in a position vis-a-vis Orthodox Marxism which gives first priority to the economic realm, and closer to the positions of Western Marxism, Marxism in England, particularly the New Left.

(2) It emphasizes the material social process which is the basis of cultural production and reproduction. On this points Williams has taken concepts introduced by Marx in analysing economic production such as productive forces, means of production, and production relations and reinterpreted them for understanding cultural production. Thus Williams' cultural studies

is distinct from cultural studies of other Marxist traditions which can be dated from Lukacs on.

(3) It shows a strong concern for the role of human agency as central in constituting society or even in revolutionising it. This position can be seen in the concepts of alternative culture, oppositional culture, residual culture, emergent culture, and cultural formation which he introduces. These concepts expand the understanding of cultural domination further and add a new light to Gramsci's concept of hegemony by pointing to the important role of the human agency and the possibility of social and cultural revolution, both theoretically and empirically. Furthermore, through his concept of "hegemonic", he points out the dynamics the dominant culture which constantly adjusts itself to incorporate other opposing forces into its domain.

Williams' approach to cultural study contributes to the understanding of consumer culture in the following ways.

(1) The study of consumer culture broadens the scope of the analysis of capitalism to cover cultural production as well as economic production. In Williams' frame of analysis, consumer culture is seen as part of the dominant culture. The consciousness of consumerism which dominates modern capitalist society is the image of society as a market society. On the point of production and reproduction of consumerism, consumer culture relies heavily on large-scale communications network such as the print media, television, as its essential means of production. In

this way, consumer culture is able to establish its influence over cultural production in modern capitalist society.

(2) Regarding the social process of cultural production, Williams illustrates the process of incorporation by which consumer culture expands its domination through the use of advertising and the commoditisation of culture. Williams also points out that this process goes on alongside with the process of developing forms of consciousness other than that of consumerism.

(3) His theoretical contributions open up the possibility of cultural revolution in capitalist society which goes hand-in-hand with political revolution, resistance to state power, and economic revolution as proposed by Orthodox Marxism. Cultural revolution, however, needs to base itself on an effective system of material production of culture. The consideration of culture on an idealistic basis alone would be inadequate. Finally political transformations need to extend beyond the realm of state and parliamentary system to reach a broader area of civil society and adopt the path towards social democracy.