



About

Raymond Williams

Edited by Monika Seidl, Roman Horak, Lawrence Grossberg



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Raymond Williams: reading novels as knowable communities

Ana Clara Birrento

His work is still 'in time for us', Stephen Connor wrote in 1998 about Raymond Williams. In fact, twenty years after his death, Williams' intellectual legacy is, indeed, still in time for us. Williams remains an influential figure and a source of inspiration for any theorist or practitioner of cultural studies, into whose grammar he engraved a set of fundamental concepts and relevant analytical tools. In the perplexity of understanding (Inglis 1993), Williams reflected, revised and developed his critical positions about the nature of culture, the politics of literature and social relations, rehearsing them to find new definitions which enable us to know the modes of how and what a text expresses about a culture.

Out of the body of knowledge and critical intervention, two core legacies have engaged my attention: the concepts of 'structure of feeling' and 'knowable community'.¹ The alliance of these methodological and analytical tools helps us to apprehend the active processes involved in the social and cultural changes and to clarify the textures of historical experience. As cultural categories, they have allowed us to reassess and to recontextualize novels as cultural constructions, putting into perspective what have been two torn halves: the great tradition of high, institutional, canonical culture; and the common, exterior culture, product of a democratization process of culture and society, a process which has connected human beings and the social, political and economic structures of the great arch of history.

Williams brought together what modern thought has separated in the relation between culture and society. The study of the literature and the analysis of the culture of a period are recurrent in Williams' critical work. His use of literary texts to exemplify the concept of 'knowable community', as well as the concept of 'structure of feeling' is one of his achievements. The latter allows Williams to examine the interrelation between areas of individual experience and social experience, allowing him also to examine interrelations between public and private processes and between historical formations and social structures, turning these active and communicable (John and Lizzie Eldridge 1994).