

Formations of Feelings, Constellations of Things

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—INTRODUCTION

In this essay I want to try and accomplish two things. The first is to revisit Raymond Williams's notion of 'structures of feeling' with the intention of clarifying what Williams meant by 'feelings', and of exploring the concept's possible range and reach within the study of culture. In the midst of the enthusiastic championing of what Patricia Clough and others have named 'the affective turn' in the human and post-human sciences it might be an opportune moment to return to this foundational (though often criticised) concept within cultural studies to see what it can productively offer cultural investigation and how it might inflect and accentuate the current and diverse interests in affect.¹ The second goal is to suggest that while the analysis of 'structures of feeling' has been deployed primarily in studies of literary and filmic culture it might be usefully extended towards the study of more

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ubiquitous forms of material culture such as clothing, housing, food, furnishings and other material practices of daily living. Indeed it might be one way of explaining how formations of feeling are disseminated, how they suture us to the social world and how feelings are embedded in the accoutrements of domestic, habitual life. The joining together of a socially phenomenological interest in the world of things, accompanied by an attention to historically specific moods and atmospheres, is, I think, a way of mobilising the critical potential of ‘structures of feelings’ towards important mundane cultural phenomena.

Informing these two aims is a much larger project that is the deep background for this essay. In trying to describe and chart changes in postwar British society at the level of everyday life (changes that could be described with a very broad brush as the journey from a welfare state consensus to what will become neoliberalism) I want to reserve a place for feelings and tastes as historical agents (rather than just as symptoms of more fundamental historical processes).² Seeing feelings and tastes as agents of history and as form-giving social forces means having to depart from the insistent de-materialising of the sensorial aspect of these terms. By reminding ourselves that ‘feeling’ is related to a world of touch, to a sensual world that is fabricated out of wood, steel, denim, crushed-velvet and tarmac, and that ‘taste’ is connected to a world that is ingested, that triggers olfactory and gustatory sensations, I hope to push social and cultural history towards an attention to changes in the hum-drum material world of carpets and curries, beanbags and bean sprouts. My intuition and my gamble is that the felt world is often experienced in something like a synaesthetic mode where feelings of social flourishing and struggling take on particular flavours, sounds, colour-schemes and smells; where hope and nostalgia, melancholy and exuberance have sensual forms that are sometimes durable and sometimes fleeting. Such structures of feeling might have particular sensorial amalgams such that a particular mood of optimism comes with textures, fragrances and soundscapes; or an atmosphere of low-level anxiety has a colour-scheme, an aroma and a tactility. This, I hope, is to inject historicity into what is now a slightly old-fashioned term—‘lifestyle’.³

Treating feeling and taste as historical agents also requires apprehending ‘fashion’ (the engine of lifestyle) as process: fashion is not an accomplished fact that characterises an epoch or a group, rather it is the ongoing process of *worlding*,

where history is seen as continual fashioning and re-fashioning. (Just to be clear here, by fashion and lifestyle I don't mean 'being in-fashion' or the world of 'designer brands' but the ubiquitous process that we all undertake, albeit with radically different resources, of fashioning worlds with whatever is to hand.) To treat fashion and lifestyle seriously is, I want to suggest, one way of overcoming the inflexibility of a system of social classification inherited from the nineteenth century. Fashions, and the feelings and tastes that drive them, are not evenly spread across society. Fashions and fashioning shape what it is to feel young and old; to feel part of a group, part of a social and ethnic class; they articulate modes of identity and forms of dis-identification; and they render gender and sexuality as a form of visibility and as shared sets of sensitivities. Trying to describe the experience and histories of class (as something lived in endlessly subtle and sensorial forms) through a classificatory system based on a highly limited taxonomy (working, middle and upper, for instance) blunts historical investigation. To my mind treating fashions (mundane as well as spectacular) as having historical agency is a way of providing more socially nuanced and historically sensitive figurations of social class and other forms of hierarchical organisation. The political value of maintaining a view of history as class struggle (as a struggle between the owners of the means of production and the workforce) gets lost if we can't also see the way that those struggles are refashioned as fewer people own the means of production, while more and more people feel as though they own property, even if that feeling also has to reside in a monthly payment to the bank or building society (who, of course, are the real owners). Similarly, feelings of youth, of being modern and current, or alternatively of feeling 'passed-it' or out of time, animate and complicate class experience and can also, at times, significantly refashion it. My claim is that 'structures of feeling' can help provide more vivid historical renderings of social experience by allowing sensorial 'worlds' to appear as inhabited by *singularly* distinct historical subjects.

'Structures of feeling', I want to claim, allows us access to the way feelings and tastes are an activity of 'worlding' that renders life as *this* life and not another, and renders time as *this* time and not another. My aim is not to recruit Williams and his suggestive phrase to the cadre and armoury of affect theorists and their lexicons. Nor do I want to use Williams to make a decisive intervention in debates within the

dense and multiple fields of affect theory.⁴ My intention is rather to use Williams's problematic and productive phrase to conjoin an attention to cultural feelings (atmospherics, moods, manners, attitudes, orientations, and so on—an attention that might be of interest to affect theorists) with the study of the materiality of the designed world, in the name of cultural historicity, particularly the historicity of changes in everyday life during the last fifty or so years. What follows is an initial down payment on trying to substantiate this claim.

—STRUCTURES OF FEELING

During the thirty odd years that Raymond Williams deployed the term 'structures of feeling', it could point to an entity as vast as the dominant feelings of an age (of the Elizabethan age, for instance) or as historically specific as an emergent (or even pre-emergent) set of concerns coming into focus for specific groups (for instance in the new social movements of the 1980s and beyond). 'Feelings' could at times be covered by the word 'experience' and would include a massive terrain of attitudes, manners, actions, behaviours and so on. 'Structure' seems to be a word that is primarily used to suggest a commonality, a series of relations and repetitions, a way of insisting that 'feelings' aren't the private property of an individual but are part of a common *social* culture. Neither 'structure' nor 'feeling' has any inherent specificity in this context; and their combination hardly clarifies matters. To say that the term is vague, should, I think, be obvious. The more important question might well be: is it *necessarily* vague? Does the vagueness of the term allow it to do the sort of work that a more precise term would inhibit?

The features of the phrase that require more clarification are not, I don't think, the temporal or spatial units that can be described by it (local, identity-specific, national or international; the *longue durée* of an epoch, or the relatively short time-span of economic booms and busts, for instance). In this 'structures of feeling' is an abstraction, just like 'culture'; it is fundamentally tensile in quality and will always require clarification as it tries to apprehend the empirical. As Paul Filmer suggests: 'as with any concept formulated to assist in the analysis of the emergent flux of social process, it is likely to require clarification whenever it is introduced into critical discourse and whenever it is applied to the critical analysis of concrete, empirical social and cultural practices'.⁵ Indeed one way of thinking about the

critical lexicon that Williams produced during his career is that it was principally aimed at providing just such tools for clarification. So the finely wrought distinctions between 'oppositional', 'alternative' and 'incorporated', and the dynamic temporal situation that the terms 'emergent', 'residual' and 'dominant' point to, are all ways of clarifying and qualifying formations of feelings.⁶

To my mind the features of the term that would benefit from more discussion (and the ones that I will concentrate on in this essay) are, firstly, the anthropological context for the invention and deployment of the term, and, secondly, the cultural forms and materials that are seen as conveying 'feelings'. The detailing of the direct and indirect influence of anthropological theory on Williams's conception of 'structures of feeling' allows, I think, for a much fuller discussion of what Williams meant by 'feeling' and the sorts of qualities and phenomena that could be referred to by that term. I also think that because Williams was professionally a literary critic and literary historian, the emphasis in his books is often necessarily on the way that literature (particularly drama) can offer evidence of structures of feeling. Yet throughout his writing, particularly at moments of autobiographical performance, there are clear indications that he saw structures of feelings as being conveyed and sustained by much less representational forms; conveyed and sustained by forms that have a ubiquitous presence within the everyday, for instance clothing, buildings, and for many, religion.

The phrase 'structures of feeling' was first used by Williams in 1954 in his jointly authored book (with the documentary filmmaker Michael Orrom) *Preface to Film*.⁷ In this book he coins the phrase as a way of holding together an argument that insists that dramatic forms are recognised as part of a social totality, and as providing the most vivid evidence of what that totality is like as a living form (its qualities or attitudes, for instance). While cultural historians and literary critics might seek to grasp the world as divided up into separate entities (religion, leisure, family, politics, and so on) this is not how the world is experienced: 'while we may, in the study of a past period, separate out particular aspects of life, and treat them as if they were self-contained, it is obvious that this is only how they may be studied, not how they were experienced'.⁸ This is an issue that the historian faces. It is an argument against the atomising effects of disciplinary specialisation (the specialisations that produce separate realms of economic history, social history,

political history and cultural history, for instance). He goes on to use an analogy that he will return to each time he discusses 'structures of feeling': 'We examine each element as a precipitate, but in the living experience of the time every element was in solution, an inseparable part of a complex whole'.⁹ Initially the phrase is used to encourage a particular form of attention towards dramatic works. Its aim is to transform finished artworks, that might be available for specialised and atomised interpretation, into unfinished, socially responsive works, that are 'still' emerging within the melange of a dynamic culture, and that rather than requiring specialist interpretation, require understanding, contextualising and connecting. The phrase is intended to direct our attention towards the work's historicity; its role as documentary evidence of 'the native's point of view' (so to say), for a particular community, at a particular time.

'Structures of feelings' are, for Williams, what get remaindered when professionalised specialists get their hands on culture and divide it up into distinct realms of 'psychology', 'society', 'economy', 'history', 'art' and so on. 'When one has measured the work against the separable parts', writes Williams, 'there yet remains some element for which there is no external counterpart. This element, I believe, is what I have named the *structure of feeling* of a period, and it is only realizable through experience of the work of art itself, as a whole.'¹⁰ We should be wary of thinking, however, that this means we can *only* recover structures of feelings from artworks: the emphasis of the 'only' might not refer to 'art' so much as to the idea of experiencing it as a 'whole' (as a whole way of life, as a world). Such emphasis seems to be clarified when he writes, 'all changes in the methods of an art like drama are related, essentially, to changes in man's radical structure of feeling'.¹¹ Thus while art (film, plays and novels, primarily) might be the privileged documentary route to recovering a structure of feeling, it is human, 'lived experience'—as an entirety—where structures of feeling exist.¹² As such structures of feeling are not an aspect of life (or art) that can be siphoned-off and analysed; they saturate the lifeworld in complex ways, as mood, attitude, manners, emotions, and so on.

Anyone even slightly familiar with Williams's work will recognise that 'structures of feeling' echoes with his emphasis on treating culture as a 'whole way of life'.¹³ 'A whole way of life' is Williams's way of signalling that culture needs to be seen through the transdisciplinary optic of anthropology. And it becomes

increasingly clear in Williams's work that it is specifically the contribution of the North American anthropologist Ruth Benedict and her 1934 book *Patterns of Culture* that supplies the relevant method. Thus in an essay from 1950 addressed to other teachers working in adult education Williams is emphatic in his recommendation of foundational 'supplementary' reading for approaching literature and criticism:

There is one book among many works of anthropology which seems to me so distinguished that it cannot wisely be omitted from an essential reading list in this field; Ruth Benedict's *Patterns of Culture*. Her book provides the method of comparative social evaluation which is necessary both to give the work of cultural analysis full scope and to keep it relevant.¹⁴

Williams's work is full of explicit reference to Benedict, and his adoption of 'pattern' as an analytic term is directly related to Benedict's anthropological concerns. In his 1961 book *The Long Revolution*, Williams claims that some form of pattern recognition forms the basis of cultural analysis:

It is with the discovery of patterns of a characteristic kind that any useful cultural analysis begins, and it is with the relationships between these patterns, which sometimes reveal unexpected identities and correspondences in hitherto separately considered activities, sometimes again reveal discontinuities of an unexpected kind, that general cultural analysis is concerned.¹⁵

The Long Revolution offers two analyses of structures of feelings. The first is concerned with the literature of the 1840s and in the way that attitudes and behaviours towards the poor are articulated in the novels of the period, the second is concerned with 'Britain in the 1960s' (the book was written in 1959) and is an attempt to extrapolate changing structures of feeling in Britain within social institutions (schools, universities, trade unions, political parties, and such like), within work relations (the rise of managerialism, for instance) and within everyday life (the extension of consumerism, the growth of media consumption, and so on). I will return to this analysis later, for the moment I want to give a sense of the descriptive language that Williams employs in these and other analyses.¹⁶ In many ways it could be described as 'social formalism': thus, he isn't necessarily concerned with the explicit content of an argument, but in its 'approaches and tones' (indeed 'tone' is an insistent descriptor in Williams's approach). Some of the 'feeling' words

connect to behavioural attitudes ('thrift', 'sobriety', 'piety', 'pathos' and so on). Other words connect to a sense of the tempo of change and the orchestration of energies ('pulse', 'rhythm'). And some words suggest, metaphorically, some hard-to-pin-down atmosphere or mood ('colour', 'tone').

This vocabulary is close to the language that Benedict and her associates (primarily, in this instance, Gregory Bateson) used in their 'pattern' analyses. In her work in the 1930s Benedict sought a synthetic, comparative approach to the study of culture that looked for particular configurations of what she called 'the emotional background' of a culture in and across the observable rituals and forms of behaviour, which were the privileged phenomena for anthropological concern at the time. Culture, for Benedict, was a gestalt form that configured beliefs and behaviours against affective and emotional conditions and traditions that often lay 'below' the declared content of a society.¹⁷ This emotional background was sometimes referred to by Benedict as 'ethos'; a term that was also deployed and elaborated by Bateson in his 1936 book *Naven*.¹⁸ An ethos might include tacit understandings that allow a statement to be understood as a joke rather than as a serious opinion; it might include shared sentiments that might be oblique or obscure to an outsider while requiring no reflexive attention on the part of an insider; it might signal those cultural forms that get called manners, mores or 'appropriate' behaviour. In Benedict's analyses the emotional background or ethos is pushed to the foreground and used to characterise a particular society: 'I have called the *ethos* of the Pueblo Apollonian in Nietzsche's sense of the cultural pursuit of sobriety, of measure, of the distrust of excess and orgy'.¹⁹ Thus 'ethos' was the 'emotional patterning characteristic of the culture' and a crucial element in 'fundamental and distinctive cultural configurations that pattern existence and condition the thoughts and emotions of the individuals who participate in those cultures'.²⁰

I will need to come back to how Benedict and Bateson understood ethos in relation to how Williams understood structures of feeling: there are discontinuities here as well as continuities. But what is of concern now is the way that emotional backgrounds and structures of feeling are seen as being conveyed and sustained within culture. In other words, what are the vehicles for feelings in culture?

One of the reasons, I think, for revisiting the link between anthropology and cultural studies, is that anthropology has never had a particular stake in privileging the complex representational forms that are often the mainstay of humanities research (novels, plays, commentaries) and which cultural studies inherited from its roots in the study of English literature, not least from Raymond Williams. For anthropology (or the type that Benedict and Bateson pursued, at least) ‘a whole way of life’ is not just found in foundation myths, rituals or beliefs, or in cultural objects and practices but in the ways these exist within ‘functioning wholes’. Thus, for Benedict, objects and beliefs have to be seen in situ:

We still know in reality exactly nothing about them [cultural objects and practices] unless we know the way in which the arrangement of the house, the articles of dress, the rules of avoidance or of marriage, the ideas of the supernatural—how each object and culture trait, in other words, is employed in their native life.²¹

Williams, of course, also maintained the importance of ‘a whole way of life’ as the crucial context and ambition of any analysis. Yet while Benedict and Bateson undertook their fieldwork within living culture, Williams’s field was the long durée of industrialised change that stretched from the seventeenth century to the late twentieth. Because the analyses of structures of feeling are concerned with the historicity of experience they are in one important sense always grammatically in the present, even if that present is in the eighteenth century.²² But this does mean that while the carriers of structures of feeling within a current moment might be informal and ephemeral culture, ‘carried’ primarily by living (and unrecorded) speech and everyday social practice, this is not possible to recover when that moment is located in the past. ‘Once the carriers of such a structure die’, Williams wrote in *The Long Revolution*, ‘the nearest we can get to this vital element is in the documentary culture, from poems to buildings and dress-fashion, and it is this relation that gives significance to the definition of culture in documentary terms.’²³ Quite rightly Williams is less remembered for his commentary on dress-fashion and building than he is for his accounts of poetic and dramatic cultures. Yet there are telling moments within his work—often these are moments of autobiographical performance²⁴—where description of dress, of places (the tea rooms of Cambridge,

for instance), and the lives conducted within buildings (in chapels, factories, universities and railway signal boxes), combine feelings sustained in and by material forms with Williams providing testimony as a living witness and carrier of specific feelings.

In a conversation conducted in 1959 between Williams and the literary and social critic Richard Hoggart, the pair discuss 'working class attitudes' (and 'attitudes' is very much a 'structure of feeling' word), particularly in terms of the difference between the densely populated urban world of Leeds where Hoggart grew up (an industrial and commercial centre in northern England) and the Welsh village of Pandy where Williams lived. Williams describes how class feelings among labourers and miners in Wales didn't take the form of a sense of inferiority. Such feelings were sustained not simply by self-belief but by a whole panoply of material forms including clothing:

I remember the men at home—a whole attitude in a way of dress. Good clothes, usually, that you bought for life. The big heavy overcoat, good jacket, good breeches, leggings, then a cardigan, a waistcoat, a watchchain, and all of it open, as a rule, right down to the waist. Layers of it going in, and of course no collar. But standing up, quite open. They weren't, really, people with a sense of inferiority.²⁵

'A whole attitude in a way of dress', might be a useful way of locating structures of feeling within relays of material culture and social conventions that aren't the usual evidential basis for social attitudes and structural sensitivities. Clothing or crockery or furniture are difficult to see as determining and sustaining carriers of feelings in themselves, which is why Williams treats them (as Benedict might) within a larger sense of practice and practical consciousness: it isn't simply the wearing of a good quality jacket, waistcoat and cardigan; it is a certain *practical* bravura in wearing these in a way that wasn't 'buttoned up' (in both a literal sense and a metaphorical sense of not being tentative, inward, cagey). The modern sense of 'having attitude', meaning not being passive or compliant, is enacted in this example of garment wearing a century before the modern sense of the word attitude had currency.

In the same discussion Williams mentions how his father had a feel for democratic practice, and that this disposition was the product of non-conformist religious institutions (the tradition of attending chapel):

Well, the self-government tradition in the chapels disposed many people to democratic feeling; feeling, really, rather than thinking. Someone like my father who grew up in a farm labourer's family, outside the tradition that brought conscious trade union attitudes, still got, I think, the feelings that matter.²⁶

For Williams a democratic feeling is a crucial aspect of a progressive cultural politics. And you can see a crucial aspect of the politics of a 'structures of feeling' approach when you recognise that a democratic impulse might be more important as a feeling than as a thought, or rather unless it is lived as a felt-thought, it can produce the gestures of an ersatz and empty impulse that results in democratic-seeming phenomena like 'staff satisfaction surveys' that instead of teaching democratic feelings, teach us how to submit to bureaucracy.

In his analysis of the structures of feeling circulating in Britain in 1960 he is prescient in his sense of the way that a smokescreen of 'consultation' and feedback is used to mask a savage authoritarianism:

This is the real power of institutions, that they actively teach particular ways of feeling, and it is at once evident that we have not nearly enough institutions which practically teach democracy. The crucial area is in work, where in spite of limited experiments in 'joint consultation', the ordinary decision process is rooted in an exceptionally rigid and finely-scaled hierarchy, to which the only possible ordinary responses, of the great majority of us who are in no position to share in decisions, are apathy, the making of respectful petitions, or revolt.²⁷

This aspect of an undemocratic 'felt culture' is a crucial aspect of the structure of feeling of neoliberalism, where a constant demand to 'feedback' and to 'share best practice' is a condition of unconstrained submission to administration.²⁸

Structures of feeling, though, don't have to have an explicit sociopolitical form such as a pathos towards suffering, or a submission to bureaucratic networks. They can also feature much more indefinite and diffuse sensual forms. Thus at the start of *The Country and the City* from 1973, Williams offers his own feelings towards the city and the country. The city for Williams is full of ambivalent feelings. On the one hand the city can be seen as an obstacle to progress: he has, he writes, 'known this feeling' when 'looking up at great buildings that are the centres of power'. On the

other hand his overarching feeling towards the city is a 'permanent feeling ... of possibility, of meeting and of movement'.²⁹ A feeling of possibility strikes me as a very different kind of feeling from a 'democratic' impulse, or a sense of self-respect. It suggests energy, a sense of a rhythm, an unknown form of practice that could erupt at any time. It sits on the side of the emergent, or the pre-emergent, whereas the democratic feeling that his father had sat more precisely on the side of the residual, a form that was being steamrolled into oblivion by anonymous bureaucratic forms.

In his description of feelings in relation to the country Williams is at his most evocative, describing not an idyll but a dense network of sensual triggers and conflicting sentiments:

It is the elms, the may, the white horse, in the field beyond the window where I am writing. It is the men in the November evening, walking back from pruning, with their hands in the pockets of their khaki coats; and the women in headscarves, outside their cottages, waiting for the blue bus that will take them, inside school hours, to work in the harvest. It is the tractor on the road, leaving its tracks of serrated pressed mud; the light in the small hours, in the pig farm across the road, in the crisis of a litter; the slow brown van met at the difficult corner, with the crowded sheep jammed to its slatted sides; the heavy smell, on still evenings, of the silage ricks fed with molasses. It is also the sour land, on the thick boulder clay, not far up the road, that is selling for housing, for a speculative development, at twelve thousand pounds an acre.³⁰

Feelings can't be contained by positive or negative evaluations, instead they exist in 'whole ways of life' that feature speculative development alongside 'women in headscarves' and men with 'their hands in their pockets'. Attitudes clash, sensual forces connect the 'heavy' smell of silage with the 'sour' earth. This is a structure of feeling that is a feeling for community, and nature, and the threat of developers.

But if structures of feeling can contain sensorial description and collective memory, if it can include bodily attitudes and 'fellow feeling', if it can register practical consciousness and material politics, is it just too vague a phrase to be useful? Is an approach to 'structures of feeling' simply an invitation to register cultural forms beyond the ideational, beyond the ideological? Is it simply a

provocation that petitions for fuller descriptions of our collective lives, lives lived across landscapes and cityscapes, across institutions and informal gatherings, among furniture and clothing, sounds and smells?

—THE NECESSITY OF VAGUENESS

When Gregory Bateson started out with his New Guinea fieldwork he had a vague, but ambitious project in mind:

I was especially interested in studying what I called the ‘feel’ of culture, and I was bored with the conventional study of the more formal details. I went out to New Guinea with that much vaguely clear—and in one of my first letters home I complained of the hopelessness of putting any sort of salt on the tail of such an imponderable concept as the ‘feel’ of culture. I had been watching a casual group of natives chewing betel, spitting, laughing, joking, etc., and I felt acutely the tantalizing impossibility of what I wanted to do.³¹

Analysis is left with spitting, laughing, joking, but the project is always of understanding how such practices are part of a whole way of life that has a distinct tonal range, a definite set of attitudes, of feelings, of moods and manners. Or at least the project is always attempting this understanding.

For Bateson the word ‘feel’ was crucial, not because it pointed to emotions or affects, or manners and attitudes, but because it didn’t really point anywhere at all. Bateson used words like ‘feel’, ‘stuff’ and ‘bits’ as placeholder words: ‘these brief Anglo-Saxon terms have for me a definite feeling-tone which reminds me all the time that concepts behind them are vague and await analysis’.³² In other words, one of the points of using a word like ‘feeling’ rather than say ‘affect’ would be that it was less able to determine the sorts of phenomena that it might uncover and disclose. In this we could say that ‘structures of feeling’ was not simply a phrase that sought to attend to culture in solution rather than as precipitate, but that the phrase itself was designed to refuse, or at least delay, the sort of precipitation that results from analysis. For Bateson ‘feel’ could only be a beginning, to be swapped for more complex and precise designations of cultural process. I think that one of the reasons Williams hung on to the phrase ‘structures of feeling’ even though it was constantly critiqued (by people close to him) is that it sat on the side of the empirical, not in

some naïve anti-theoretical manner, but as part of a commitment to a radical empiricism that always moves towards the pulsing, populated world even if it recognises that there is no untroubled access to such a world.³³ In other words ‘structures of feeling’ names a *theoretical* commitment to the priority of corporeal, telluric life.

The path from ethos to ‘structures of feeling’, from Benedict and Bateson to Williams, is not a straightforward one and includes aspects of discontinuity as well as continuity. The continuity is evident when, for instance, Williams describes structures of feeling as ‘characteristic elements of impulse, restraint, and tone; specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feelings against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought: practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living relationship to continuity’; this has the same sense of knotted gestalt that is evident in the work of Benedict and Bateson.³⁴ But there are also differences, and discontinuity.

It seems clear that Benedict and Bateson were more interested in the stabilities of cultural forms than in their radical mutability. When Benedict describes a cultural ethos as Apollonian or Dionysian what she has in mind is a distinct taxonomy of ‘emotional backgrounds’ that could allow her to compare and contrast cultural forms (which would include critiquing the rivalry at the base of American capitalism as chronically ‘wasteful’). Bateson, who defines an ethos as ‘*a culturally standardised system of organisation of the instincts and emotions of the individuals*’ sees his project as uncovering a distinct typology of ethoses:

The ethos of a given culture is as we shall see an abstraction from the whole mass of its institutions and formulations and it might therefore be expected that ethoses would be infinitely various from culture to culture—as various as the institutions themselves. Actually, however, it is possible that in this infinite variousness it is the *content* of affective life which alters from culture to culture, while underlying systems or ethoses are continually repeating themselves. It seems likely—a more definite statement would be premature—that we may ultimately be able to classify the types of ethos.³⁵

Williams does have some sense that, at least on one level, such large-scale ‘structures of feeling’ are indeed operative and can tell us something about the

character of a society (its commitments to competitive individualism, for instance, or the structural dominance of a class system).³⁶ But in general Williams is much more interested in the sorts of incremental changes that gather around a generation, or a community, or a class.³⁷

When Williams returned to Cambridge University after spending the war in an artillery regiment he found that suddenly he didn't 'speak the same language' as the current crop of undergraduates and faculty. Six years earlier he had come to Cambridge from a working-class family in Wales. He found he spoke a different language then as well. 'Not speaking the same language' is the feeling that undergirds his *Keywords* project:

When we come to say 'we just don't speak the same language' we mean something more general: that we have different immediate values or different kinds of valuation, or that we are aware, often intangibly, of different formations and distributions of energy and interest.³⁸

'Not speaking the same language' doesn't rest on one or two words that have taken on new connotations, new accentuations; it rests on relays of words being pulled into new constellations, new 'structures of feeling'. Describing a process of linguistic change where 'certain words, tones and rhythms, meanings are offered, felt for, tested, confirmed, asserted, qualified, changed', Williams's *Keywords* project can be described as sociopolitical philology, registering changes in feelings via the reaccentuation of words within patterns of utterances.³⁹ Such relays of words had been fundamental to his understanding of the idea of 'culture': 'The words I linked it [*culture*] with, because of the problems its uses raised in my mind, were *class* and *art*, and then *industry* and *democracy*. I could feel these five words as a kind of structure.'⁴⁰ If such a constellation could be seen as designating a 'structure' for a 'structure of feeling' then we could just as easily replace the word structure with either 'relay' or 'configuration' or 'pattern'.

Configurations of feeling are not carried by words alone. The material world of things undergoes all sorts of reaccentuation and reattunement. For instance the pine kitchen table, once only found in working-class houses or in those kitchens where only servants worked, became in Britain and elsewhere in the 1960s and beyond an essential element of a more informal domesticity for the 'new middle classes' who were also reaccentuating words like freedom, liberty and community, in new

directions. And kitchen tables connected to other relays of clothes, music, food, chairs, greetings, names, books, forms of relaxation, sayings, and on and on and on.⁴¹ They also disconnect: a second-hand pine table is neither an oak dining table nor a Formica covered table. Williams prioritised language and dramatic forms as his documentary evidence of the past in his works of literary criticism: in the realm of feelings that he describes in his personal testimony we are shown a more physically sensual world of clothing and community, food and furnishings.

In many ways the world of clothing and furnishings might offer a different sensitivity for registering changes in 'structures of feeling' than that found in language and dramatic forms.⁴² As Williams seems to suggest in *Keywords* semantic shifts and semantic struggles are usually slow, accumulating over decades and centuries. Clothing, food and furnishings, on the other hand are much closer to the world of commerce, and much more sensitive to the vagaries of taste, as well as directing and giving form to such changing tastes. They are syncopated to much faster rhythms. Of course in some ways I'm setting up a false alternative here: the worlds of novels and films, for instance, rely heavily on conjuring mood and feeling precisely through their particular use of clothing, architecture, language, furnishings, food, and so on.

Many of the most exciting writers in the current turn to affect are also literary critics who acknowledge their relationship to Williams's concept. Some of the best work in this area recognises the way Williams's project was purposefully open to include more phenomena than that covered by the terms emotion and affect. Sianne Ngai, for instance, has a wonderfully compendious grasp of the range and ambition of Williams's use of the term feeling:

Williams is not analysing emotion or affect, but, rather, strategically mobilizing an entire register of felt phenomena in order to expand the existing domain and methods of social critique ... His primary aim is to mobilize an entire affective register, *in its entirety*, and *as a register*, in order to enlarge the scope and definition of materialist analysis. This is something quite different from the goal of offering a 'materialist analysis' of affect itself.⁴³

Such an assessment is based on the openness and vagueness of the term 'feelings'. It is this openness that is important, and one way of continuing and extending its use is

to direct it towards new object of attention. And this might mean reconnecting with its roots in anthropology and the social sciences more generally. I also think that those who study material culture and design could usefully employ 'structures of feeling' to describe the energies and tones that attach to our material worlds. The path has already been laid, to some degree, by the likes of Kathleen Stewart in her eloquent and efflorescent descriptions of micro-worlds taking place across the United States in small towns, and side streets.⁴⁴ Or in a very different vein by Ruth Wilson Gilmore's insistent look at the 'infrastructures of feeling' in the penal system in America.⁴⁵

In an essay from 1975 Raymond Williams imagines being asked the question 'You're a Marxist, Aren't You?' The essay he writes is a reply to that question and involves his reflection on working with the Labour Party in the 1930s and in the changes and challenges to progressive politics in the years following the end of World War II. He ends the essay by looking to the future and by connecting his form of cultural materialism to the requirements of socialist politics:

The task of a successful socialist movement will be one of feeling and imagination quite as much as one of fact and organisation. Not imagination or feeling in their weak senses—'imagining the future' (which is a waste of time) or 'the emotional side of things'. On the contrary, we have to learn and to teach each other the connections between a political and economic formation, a cultural and educational formation, and, perhaps hardest of all, the formations of feeling and relationship which are our immediate resources in any struggle.⁴⁶

The work around 'structures of feelings' was never simply about doing better, fuller cultural history (though that is one of its generative effects); it was about understanding how change occurs, how social and cultural forms are maintained, and, perhaps most importantly of all, of locating what Williams referred to as 'resources of hope'.

One way of characterising Williams's entire project is to see it as nursing and nurturing 'resources of hope' for the struggle for socialism. It seems clear that structures and formations of feeling were such a resource and that they had something to do with relationships lived at an immediate level. Of course in any historical moment or period such feelings were more likely to be 'resources of

despondency' than of hope, or of feelings that block the path to socialism. The material world doesn't provide any guaranteed 'democratic tools' or 'socialist objects' but it does name a world that has to sustain our daily lives, and in doing so it carries and sustains worlds of feeling. We need to chart the relays of things and feelings that block the paths of our flourishing, just as we need to grasp hold of feelings and things that can, potentially at least, offer a more hopeful future.

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¹ See Patricia T. Clough (ed.), *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2007. As for the criticism the term has solicited, one of the most emphatic critical statements comes from Stuart Hall, who writes: 'this confusion, which persists in Williams's later work, is predicated on an uninspected notion of "experience" which, in the earlier work, produced the quite unsatisfactory concept of "a structure of feeling" and which continues to have disabling theoretical effects', Stuart Hall, 'Politics and Letters', in Terry Eagleton (ed.), *Raymond Williams: Critical Perspectives*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1989, p. 62. Stuart Hall didn't always have this opinion and had previously used Williams's term as an explanatory phrase for describing the work of the illustrated magazine *Picture Post*; Stuart Hall, 'The Social Eye of *Picture Post*', in *Working Papers in Cultural Studies* 2, University of Birmingham, 1972, pp. 71–120.

² Though postwar British society provides the specific case study, the project I'm describing is not limited to questions of national culture. Indeed one aspect of cultural change in Britain could be described as something like a 'becoming-Mediterranean' for a particular class formation. The loosening of social strictures and the general rise of informality that occurs in Britain during this period also occurs in many other countries. Which is to say that I hope these thoughts are of interest to people who aren't particularly interested in British history. I am keen that my case study is seen as just one provincial example among others, and that if it has relevance outside its case study it is because it tries

to describe some of the material processes and forms of the settlements and unsettlements that class cultures can make.

³ 'Lifestyle' was a critical sociological and cultural concept in the 1980s and 1990s, primarily associated with critical explorations of consumer culture. Other authors, though, have used the term more fulsomely as a way of opening up the empirical world to social aesthetic concerns. For instance the French philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre often used the term 'style' to describe what might be termed a 'whole form of life' (often associated with pre-modern rural living) to be contrasted with the fragmentation and atomisation of modern forms of everyday life under chronically advancing capitalism, which for Lefebvre lacked a coherent style. Art historical enquiry in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century similarly used the term 'style' as a way of connecting formal concerns in art and decoration with a more general living worldview. In my work I follow Lefebvre's linkage of style and everyday life, but without the nostalgia for a prelapsarian rural idyll, and recognising the stylistics of fragmentation.

⁴ For a comprehensive overview of affect theory and an argument about its most productive aspects for the social sciences see Margaret Wetherell, *Affect and Emotion: A New Social Science Understanding*, Sage, London, 2012. For a collection of essays that explores different aspects of affect theory, see Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (eds), *The Affect Theory Reader*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2010. For a useful intervention in the field of affect theory, see Clare Hemmings, 'Invoking Affect: Cultural Theory and the Ontological Turn', *Cultural Studies*, vol. 19, no. 5, 2005, pp. 548–67. doi: 10.1080/09502380500365473.

⁵ Paul Filmer, 'Structures of Feeling and Social-cultural Formations: The Significance of Literature and Experience to Raymond Williams's Sociology of Culture', *British Journal of Sociology*, vol. 54, no. 2, 2003, p. 201. doi: 10.1080/0007131032000080203.

⁶ These clarifying tools are most succinctly introduced in his *New Left Review* essay from 1973, 'Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory', reproduced in *Problems in Materialism and Culture*, Verso, London, 1980, pp. 31–49, and further elaborated in *Marxism and Literature*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1977.

⁷ Raymond Williams and Michael Orrom, *Preface to Film*, Film Drama, London, 1954. While the book is co-authored it was made up of two distinct parts. The first part 'Film and the Dramatic Tradition' was written by Williams, and 'Film and its Dramatic Techniques' by Orrom.

⁸ Williams and Orrom, p. 21.

⁹ Ibid. See Williams's *Marxism and Literature*, pp. 133–4 for the same formulation twenty-three years later.

¹⁰ Williams and Orrom, pp. 21–2. At roughly the same time Henri Lefebvre could write a similar definition of everyday life: 'Everyday life, in a sense residual, defined by "what is left over" after all distinct, superior, specialised, structured activities have been singled out by analysis, must be defined as a totality'; Henri Lefebvre, 'Foreword', *Critique of Everyday Life: Volume 1*, translated by John Moore,

Verso, London, 1991, p. 97. The foreword is to the second edition, first published in France in 1958. A similar sense of everyday life as something that often gets remaindered by the social investigation designed to apprehend it is also evident in Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1984. Thus we could suggest that, on one level at least, there is a family resemblance between the terms 'structures of feeling' and 'everyday life'.

¹¹ Williams and Orrom, p. 23.

¹² This doesn't mean that artworks are simply reflections of lively feeling, they are also, for Williams, the conveyors of feelings: 'the new work will not only make explicit the changes in feeling, but will in itself promote and affect them'; Williams and Orrom, p. 24.

¹³ Though Williams uses the phrase 'a whole way of life' throughout his early work, it is given pride of place in his essay 'Culture is Ordinary', which can be read as a statement of purpose to combine an anthropological understanding of culture with careful attention to representational forms. See Raymond Williams, 'Culture is Ordinary', in *Resources of Hope: Culture, Democracy, Socialism*, London: Verso, 1987, pp. 3–14. Originally published in 1958.

¹⁴ Raymond Williams, 'Books for Teaching *Culture and Environment*', *The Use of English*, vol. 1, no. 3, 1950, reproduced in John McIlroy and Sallie Westwood (eds), *Border Country: Raymond Williams in Adult Education*, National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, Leicester, 1993, p. 178. The main text referred to in the article is F.R. Leavis and Denys Thompson's *Culture and Environment: The Training of Critical Awareness*, Chatto and Windus, London, 1960, first published in 1933.

¹⁵ Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution*, Hogarth Press, London, 1992, p. 47.

¹⁶ For one long extended investigation of structures of feeling see Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, Hogarth Press, London, 1993. First published in 1973.

¹⁷ For a succinct statement of her anthropological approach see Ruth Benedict, 'Configurations of Culture in North America', *American Anthropologist*, vol. 34, no. 1, 1932, pp. 1–27. doi: 10.1525/aa.1932.34.1.02a00020.

¹⁸ Gregory Bateson, *Naven*, 2nd edn, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1958. The first edition was published in 1936.

¹⁹ Benedict, 'Configurations of Culture in North America', p. 4.

²⁰ Ruth Benedict, *Patterns of Culture*, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1934, p. 55.

²¹ Benedict, 'Configurations of Culture in North America', p. 2.

²² For a discussion of the different availability of structures of feeling in the past and present see Raymond Williams, *Politics and Letters: Interviews with New Left Review*, Verso, London, 1981, pp. 162–4.

²³ Williams, *The Long Revolution*, p. 49.

²⁴ Perhaps the most obvious place that Williams articulates autobiographical structures of feeling is in his novels. See Laura Di Michele, 'Autobiography and the "Structure of Feeling" in *Border Country*' in

Dennis Dworkin and Leslie Roman (eds), *Views Beyond the Border Country: Raymond Williams and Cultural Politics*, Routledge, New York and London, 1993, pp. 21–37.

²⁵ Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams, 'Working Class Attitudes', *New Left Review*, no. 1, 1960, reproduced in John McIlroy and Sallie Westwood (eds), *Border Country: Raymond Williams in Adult Education*, National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, Leicester, 1993, p. 113.

²⁶ Hoggart and Williams, p. 114.

²⁷ Williams, *The Long Revolution*, p. 312.

²⁸ Universities, for instance, could be extraordinary sites for learning democratic feelings (for all of those concerned, not just students). The actuality is somewhat different as they become turbocharged bureaucracies.

²⁹ Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 6.

³⁰ Ibid. Incidentally 'the may' refers to the may tree which is a common name for the hawthorn tree which flowers in the month of May.

³¹ Gregory Bateson, 'Experiments in Thinking About Observed Ethnological Material', *Philosophy of Science*, vol. 18, no. 1, 1941, reproduced in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1972, p. 81.

³² Ibid., p. 84.

³³ For Lawrence Grossberg the term 'structures of feeling' is never adequately theorised by Williams (Grossberg, 'Affect's Future' in *The Affect Theory Reader*, p. 317). But what if this inadequacy was a crucial element of its flexibility, requiring it to be theorised anew each time it was deployed to apprehend the empirical as a whole way of life? What if theorising tended towards culture-as-precipitate and that what was required was a concept phrase that insisted on the culture-as-solution of the empirical? Such a concept phrase might, I think, look a lot like 'structures of feeling', which might be a way of pursuing a theory of the waywardly empirical.

³⁴ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1977, p. 132.

³⁵ Bateson, *Naven*, p. 118.

³⁶ In this I think commentators such as Andrew Milner, who claim that 'structures of feeling' are always counter-hegemonic, miss something crucial in the ways structures of feeling can be residual or dominant as well as emergent, and that they may be an articulation of an emergent extension of a current hegemony, a new addition to undemocratic culture, for instance. See the otherwise superb article by Andrew Milner, 'Cultural Materialism, Culturalism and Post-Culturalism: The Legacy of Raymond Williams', *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 11, no. 1, p. 55. doi: 10.1177/026327694011001005.

³⁷ His blindspots, as many critics have noted, tend to be gender and ethnicity. As with class, an analysis of structures of feeling that is alert to gender and ethnicity will need to face the problematic that characteristic elements of a structure of feeling might often include racism and misogyny as overarching structural elements, while particular sets of 'feelings' may be mainly 'felt' by women, say, or by non-whites.

³⁸ Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, Fontana, London, 1983, p. 11, first published in 1976.

³⁹ The words 'accentuation', 're-accentuation' and 'utterance' are central to V.N. Vološinov's *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, which had been translated into English in 1973 and was central to Williams's later thinking. While the *Keywords* project was initially conceived during the writing of *Culture and Society* in the 1950s, it wouldn't be hard to imagine that Williams returned to it with increased interest after reading Vološinov's book, which was also central to his arguments about language in *Marxism and Literature*.

⁴⁰ Williams, *Keywords*, p. 13.

⁴¹ The historian Raphael Samuel had a strong sense of the way 'structures of feeling' in the 1980s, at the time of Margaret Thatcher, were sustained as much by kitchen design as by an ideology of 'Victorian values'—or to be more precise that 'Victorian values' were *enfleshed*, so to say, in kitchen designs and not by parroting Thatcherite beliefs. See his *Theatres of Memory Volume 1: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture*, Verso, London, 1994.

⁴² As one example from hundreds of possibilities, see Leora Auslander, *Taste and Power: Furnishing Modern France*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1996.

⁴³ Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 2005, p. 360.

⁴⁴ Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2007.

⁴⁵ Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2007.

⁴⁶ Raymond Williams, 'You're a Marxist, Aren't You', reproduced in *Resources of Hope*, London: Verso, 1989, p. 76.

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