

Pierre Bourdieu and Raymond Williams

Correspondence, meeting and crossed references¹

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Just back from a second colloque in Paris: something peculiar is happening there. A group of scholars of the left, younger than us but not very young, are trying to make contact with the English tradition of “cultural” historical work, as a counter to either Althusserian structuralism or trendy American eclecticism. You probably know all about this: but the man whom I think we should keep contact with is Pierre Bourdieu at the Centre de Sociologie Européenne at the Maison des Sciences de l’Homme.

Excerpt from an undated postcard from E. P. Thompson to Raymond Williams².

The brief, focused correspondence between Raymond Williams (1921-1988) and Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) is factual proof – among others that we will mention shortly – of the existence of a concrete two-way relationship between the Welsh

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1. Translated by Fábio Ribeiro. We thank Richard Burton Archives (Swansea University) and Jérôme Bourdieu for their authorization to reproduce in this article, respectively, excerpts from letters sent by Edward Thompson to Raymond Williams and by Pierre Bourdieu to Raymond Williams. Acknowledgements: Alejandro Blanco, Daniel G. Williams, Dimitri Pinheiro da Silva, Dmitri Cerboncini Fernandes, Felipe Maia Guimarães da Silva, Fernando Antonio Pinheiro Filho, Katrina Legg, Maria Alice Rezende de Carvalho, Max Gimenes, Sergio Miceli.
2. Source: Richard Burton Archives – Swansea University. Reference: [wwe/2/1/16/365](#). This postcard was probably written in 1975, since Thompson’s paper in *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* dates from June 1976. This also suggests the possibility that Thompson might have arranged Williams’ trip to Paris in 1976.

and French authors³, which is very suggestive in order to think the development of European sociology of culture (and also of general sociology and cultural criticism) in the second half of the 20th century, a process in which both were major figures.

This paper's main goal is to survey the concrete contacts between them.⁴ The first one consists of two quotations of books by Williams in Bourdieu's paper "Intellectual Field and Creative Project" (Bourdieu, [1966] 1969). The second one was Williams' trip to Paris to take part in the "Seminar of Sociology of Culture and Modes of Domination", which took place in the École Normale Supérieure in December 1976 (Chamboredon, 1977, pp. 30-31), that resulted in the publication of a paper by Williams in Bourdieu's journal *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales* (*ARSS*). The third contact is the correspondence itself, a few letters from 1976 and 1977. Finally, the fourth one was a critical text by Williams in 1980, written with Nicholas Garnham (Garnham and Williams, 1980), about Bourdieu's work after *Distinction* (Bourdieu, [1979] 1984) was published in France. Other than these main points of contact, there were short mentions by both authors in other publications.

These four points of contact structure our text in the following sections: "Quotations", "Meeting", "Correspondence", and "Analysis". Any further contacts of which we are aware will be mentioned in these sections, since they amount to brief quotations and commentaries. Williams quotes Bourdieu in *Politics and Letters* (1979)⁵ and in *Culture* (1980)⁶. In Bourdieu's books, Williams is mentioned once in *The Rules of Art* ([1992] 1996) and there is a brief comment about *The Country*

3. While it is possible to establish theoretical approximations (and differences) between these authors (as attempted by Jones, 2006; and Passiani, 2009, with promising results), that is not our aim in this paper, which will explore actual points of contact such as quotations, reviews, correspondence, and meetings.
4. The sequence of contacts around which this paper is built is based on the episodes of which we are aware. There is always the possibility of the existence of further episodes, and more exhaustive research could have included other records. Nevertheless, it is very likely that the points of contact that we will analyze were the most representative ones in the relationship established between both authors.
5. In the chapter called "Marxism and Literature" in *Politics and Letters*, while refuting the supposedly scientific character of certain conservative analyses of the educational system, Williams uses Bourdieu for support in the following comment: "A good example in the social sciences is the re-examination by Bourdieu and his colleagues of the statistical data on which certain educational theories about the equalization of opportunity in France were built" (Williams, 1979, p. 327, our emphasis), which would demonstrate the biased character of the conservative analyses.
6. In that book, Williams mentions *Reproduction* (Bourdieu and Passeron, [1970] 1990) very briefly: "Thus some concept of reproduction is necessary if we are to have any critical sociology of, for example, either education or tradition. It is characteristic of educational systems to claim that they are transmitting 'knowledge' or 'culture' in an absolute, universally derived sense, though it is obvious that different systems, at different times and in different countries, transmit radically different selective versions of both. Moreover it is clear, as Bourdieu and others have shown, that there are fundamental and necessary relations between this selective version and the existing dominant social relations" (Williams, 1981, p. 186, our emphasis).

and the City (Williams, 1973) in *Pascalian Meditations* ([1997] 2000), which will be discussed later.

Back to the correspondence, using as reference the letters that Bourdieu sent Williams, we suppose that the written contact between them happened mostly in the second half of the 1970s. The three letters available in the *Richard Burton Archives* at Swansea University (Wales) are dated from December 22nd 1976, September 7th 1977 and April 8th 1987. This last one is also the least important, since it is a standardized letter sent to several recipients about the formation of a group of collaborators for a new European review journal.

According to Bourdieu's "Chronology of Life and Work" elaborated by Sergio Miceli (2005), 1989 saw the release of "the quarterly journal *Liber, Revue Européenne des Livres*, as a supplement to several European newspapers, each in its own language, published between October 1989 and June 1991" (Miceli, 2005, pp. 139-40)⁷. The same author tells us that this journal would become the *Revue Internationale des Livres*, published from 1994 to 1998. Williams did not contribute to those publications since he died in 1988, one year before the release of *Liber*.

The other two letters are more important, since they are personal. The first one would have been sent by Bourdieu a short time after Williams' trip to Paris, and focuses on the possibilities of an interchange between them. The second one, as well as furthering this negotiation, showcases what in Bourdieu's point of view was the core of the relationship established between them, described as a "miraculous agreement".

Quotations

Unless we are mistaken, the first point of contact between our authors can be found in two quotations of excerpts from *Culture and Society* (Williams, 1958) and *The Long Revolution* (Williams, 1961) in the well known text "Intellectual Field and Creative Project"⁸, in which, according to Louis Pinto (1998, p. 83), Bourdieu presented a "first project of analysis" of his sociology of literature, built around his concept of "field"⁹.

7. "Revista trimestral *Liber, Revue Européenne des Livres*, encartada como suplemento em diversos jornais europeus, em suas respectivas línguas, entre outubro de 1989 e junho de 1991".

8. Even though the Williams quotations are central to the argumentation Bourdieu builds, the most quoted book in that paper is *The sociology of literary taste* ([1923] 1945), by the German critic Levin Schücking.

9. The age difference between them could partially explain the fact that Williams' work began approximately ten years before Bourdieu's, which would mean that the latter had previous knowledge of the former's texts.

This project, according to Pinto, alongside “Intellectual Field and Creative Project” ([1966] 1969), included the papers “The Market of Symbolic Goods” ([1971] 1993) and “Field of Power, Intellectual Field and Class Habitus” (1971). All three papers were published in Brazil shortly after their original publication in France. “Intellectual Field and Creative Project” was published by Editora Zahar, following a request by Moacir Palmeira, in *Problemas do estruturalismo* (1968) [*Problems of Structuralism*], a book that was a translation of an issue of *Les Temps Modernes* and was the first text by Bourdieu to be published in Brazil. It was very important in the first phase of the French sociologist’s reception in that country (Bortoluci, Jackson and Pinheiro Filho, 2015). The other two articles were published in the collection *A economia das trocas simbólicas* ([1974] 2011) [*The economy of symbolic exchanges*], edited by Sergio Miceli.

The first reference to Williams in “Intellectual Field and Creative Project” appears in the beginning of the text, during the analytical reconstitution of the intellectual field’s autonomisation. In the English case, a decisive period was Romanticism, between the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th:

According to Raymond Williams, “the radical change [...] in ideas of art, of the artist and their place in society”; which with the two generations of romantic artists, Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey on the one hand, and Byron, Keats and Shelley on the other, coincides in England with the industrial revolution, presents five fundamental characteristics: “first, that a major change was taking place in the nature of the relationship between a writer and his readers; second, that a different habitual attitude towards the ‘public’ was establishing itself; third, that the production of art was coming to be regarded as one of a number of specialized kinds of production subject to much the same conditions as general production; fourth, that a theory of the ‘superior reality’ of art as the seat of imaginative truth was receiving increasing emphasis; fifth, that the idea of the independent creative writer, the autonomous genius, was becoming a kind of rule” (Williams *apud* Bourdieu, [1966] 1969, p. 92).

This quotation comes from “The romantic artist”¹⁰, the most sociological chapter of *Culture and society*, and we can measure its importance in the argumentation that Bourdieu develops by the fact that he uses this excerpt in order to analytically ground his attempt to reconstruct the intellectual field’s autonomisation, something that was latent in Williams but was central not only to Bourdieu’s text, but also for his whole theoretical outline.

10. *Culture and society* is divided into three parts – “A Nineteenth-Century Tradition”, “Interregnum”, and “Twentieth-Century Opinions” – and “The Romantic Artist” is the second chapter from the first part.

If we take as a reference point the whole of *Culture and society*, it is noteworthy that Bourdieu quoted a passage of a chapter apparently set apart from the central thesis of Williams' book, which is structured mainly around the analysis of an extensive set of works and the reconstruction of the English literary tradition, which, in the author's perspective, was unified by a critique of industrial society. This current, besides English authors of the 19th and 20th centuries, also included literary critics, for whom culture would be a sort of antidote to the dislocations caused by the advance of industrialism. This is exactly how a scholar like Paul Jones criticizes Bourdieu's reading, calling it "a complete misunderstanding of the relation between that chapter and the book as a whole" (2006, p. 201). However, Jones does not take into account that Bourdieu's quotation presupposes another possible reading of *Culture and Society* that would take the chapter in question as one of the book's main threads, not only according to Bourdieu's interests, but also because of its function in the development of Williams' argumentation.

More precisely, such a reading would suggest that the central role played by writers in their critique of industrialism in England would have been conditioned by the transformation of the social relations of literary production and circulation that, according to Williams, came alongside the Industrial Revolution. Due to the industrialization of printing, the growth of the literary market, the formation of a middle-class audience, the consolidation of a new concept of art (as a "higher reality") and artist (as an "autonomous genius"), and the professionalization of literary activity, therefore writers would be invested as society's legitimated spokespeople charged with reflecting on its changes and on the function of culture in that process.

In any case, the development of the intellectual project that Williams began with that book reinforces the pertinence of Bourdieu's analysis, since the sociological approach would be furthered in *The long revolution*, a book that, unsurprisingly, generated criticisms recalled in the following way by Williams in *Politics and letters*:

Culture and society soon acquired the reputation of being a decent and honourable sort of book, whereas [*The long revolution*] was a scandalous work. It was a standard complaint that I had been corrupted by sociology, that I had got into theory (Williams, 1979, p. 134).

Like the first quotation (from *Culture and society*), the excerpt from *The long revolution* that Bourdieu reproduced a little further in the same article underlines the interpretations proposed by the Welsh author about English literature, this time starting from the social features of cultural producers and the audience. Again, it makes sense that Bourdieu would quote an excerpt from *The long revolution* in "Intellectual Field and Creative Project", a text that aimed to systematize the "object" and

the “limits” of “the sociology of intellectual and artistic creation” (Bourdieu, [1966] 1969, p. 89). Let us see what Bourdieu says in a footnote, followed by the quotation:

Raymond Williams also brings to light the interdependent relations linking the appearance of a new public, belonging to a new social class, of a group of writers coming from the same class and of institutions or art forms invented by that class. “The character of literature is also visibly affected, in varying ways, by the nature of the communication system and by the changing character of audiences. When we see the important emergence of writers of a new social group, we must look not only at them, but at the new institutions and forms created by the wider social group to which they belong. The Elizabethan theatre [...] as an institution was largely created by individual middle-class speculators, and was supplied with plays by writers from largely middle-class and trading and artisan families, yet in fact was steadily opposed by the commercial middle-class and, though serving popular audiences, survived through the protection of the court and nobility [...] The formation in the eighteenth century of an organized middle-class audience can be seen as in part due to certain writers from the same social group, but also, and perhaps mainly, as an independent formation which then drew these writers to it and gave them their opportunity. The expansion and further organization of this middle-class audience can be seen to have continued until the late nineteenth century, drawing in writers from varied social origins but giving them, through its majority institutions, a general homogeneity” (Williams *apud* Bourdieu, [1966] 1969, p. 93).

The quotation appears at the point in which Bourdieu relates the development of the cultural market with the constitution of the field, and was taken from the chapter called “The social history of English writers” from *The long revolution*¹¹, which discusses in the *longue durée* (1480-1930) the social recruitment of writers based on three criteria: family origin, educational background, and professional activity. The quoted excerpt deals explicitly with the changes in the social recruitment of cultural producers and the public between the 16th and 19th centuries. In the 16th century, Williams refers to the context of Elizabethan theatre, which would have allowed for a certain degree of professionalization for the writers/playwrights. However, that momentum did not have a persistent effect, since the funding of this cultural institution still depended on aristocratic patronage even though the writers and the public came from the middle and popular classes. In the passage from the 18th to the 19th century, the relationship between middle-class writers and a middle-class public

11. The book is divided into three main parts. This chapter is the fifth one of the second part, which presents several texts with a more explicit sociological and historical orientation, such as the ones that deal with the education system (chapter 1 – “Education and British Society”), with “The Growth of the Reading Public” (chapter 2) and with the popular press (chapter 3 – “The Growth of the Popular Press”).

would be of a different kind, because it would amount to a fully fledged consumer market and would result in a persistent momentum towards the professionalization of writers. For Bourdieu, this development of the market would be a condition for the autonomy of the literary field. Therefore, once more Bourdieu grounds a decisive step of his argumentation on Williams' data and analysis.

It is worth noting that this correlation between the development of the market and the field's autonomisation – more specifically, the “liberating effects” produced on the writers by the market – would be reinforced almost thirty years later in *The Rules of Art*, once again mentioning Williams:

The major virtue of this comparison [between the passage from servant to free worker and from the writer dependent on patronage to the writer inserted in the market] is to put us on guard against the widespread inclination to reduce this fundamentally ambiguous process solely to its alienating effects (*in the tradition of the British Romantics analysed by Raymond Williams*): we forget that it exercised liberating effects, too, for example by offering the new ‘proletarian intelligentsia’ the possibility of earning a living (no doubt a rather miserable one) from all the small jobs linked to industrial literature and journalism, although the new possibilities thereby acquired could also be the basis of new forms of dependence (Bourdieu, [1992] 1996, p. 55, our emphasis).

Meeting

Williams' participation, in December 1976, in the “Seminar of Sociology of Culture and Modes of Domination” organized by Bourdieu at the École Normale Supérieure, and the resulting publication of chapter 12 of *The country and the city* in *ARSS* would provide the opportunity for a second contact between both authors, this time face-to-face. According to a document in Raymond Williams' archive – a timetable of scheduled activities by his French hosts – he stayed in Paris for one week between December 9th and 16th, 1976. Although we cannot be sure of the activities that actually happened, Williams probably taught a short course about Thomas Hardy's novels¹² from the 10th to the 14th, gave an open lecture on the 15th, and then a talk at Bourdieu's seminar on the 16th.

For Bourdieu, both his seminar and his journal were, among other things, ways for him to “set up the foundations and the alliances with foreign social scientists that were considered his peers (Williams, Ginsburg, Schorske, Goffman etc.)” (Miceli,

12. It is likely that the course would have been based on *The country and the city*, since chapter 18, “Wessex and the Border”, deals with Hardy.

2002)¹³ while the French sociologist was still not completely consecrated. The seminar presentation was reviewed by Jean-Claude Chamboredon as an introduction to the *ARSS* paper, and it suggests that Williams spoke about his analytical perspective in general, and particularly about *The country and the city*, which had been published in England in 1973. We should note that Chamboredon, both in the beginning and the end of his small text on Williams¹⁴, highlights analytical solutions by Williams that could have been identified in Bourdieu:

The refusal of the commonplace opposition between the internal history of [literary] works and the external history is the starting point of Raymond Williams' analysis in his book about the evolution of the social images of the city and the countryside (Chamboredon, 1977, p. 30)¹⁵.

Thus, literary history and the history of ideas lead to a history of the social work of ideological production (*Idem.*, p. 31)¹⁶.

It is worth noting that both Williams' book and the chapter that was published, do not deal with abstract theoretical reflections – instead, they analyze a concrete problem, the historical and social rooting of the images of the countryside and the city incorporated in English literature. This kind of approach resonates with Bourdieu's perspective¹⁷ systematically defended, alongside Chamboredon and Passeron, in *The craft of sociology* ([1968] 1991).

Years later, Bourdieu would directly mention, with a brief commentary, the text published in *ARSS* in the chapter titled "Critique of scholastic reason" in *Pascalian meditations*, published in France in 1997 and in Brazil in 2001:

All this is seen particularly well in the invention, in eighteenth-century England, of the natural park, as analysed by Raymond Williams. The new organization of land, which turned the

13. "lançar as bases e alianças com cientistas sociais estrangeiros considerados pares (Williams, Ginsburg, Schorske, Goffman etc.)".
14. Chamboredon mentions in a footnote that his introduction was written based on his notes about Williams' presentation.
15. "Le refus de l'opposition ordinaire entre l'histoire interne des oeuvres et l'histoire externe est au principe de la démarche de Raymond Williams dans son livre sur l'évolution des images sociales de la ville et de la campagne".
16. "L'histoire littéraire et l'histoire des idées conduisent ainsi à une histoire du travail social de production idéologique".
17. It is worth quoting: "To the same degree as I dislike those pretentious professions of faith by pretenders eager to sit down at the table of 'founding fathers', so do I delight in those books in which theory, because it is the air one breathes, is everywhere and nowhere - in the detour of a note, in the commentary on an old text, or in the very structure of interpretative discourse" (Bourdieu, [1992] 1994, p. 178).

English countryside into a landscape without peasants, that is, into a pure object of aesthetic contemplation, based on the cult of the “natural” and of undulating curves, is part of the world-view of an enlightened agrarian bourgeoisie which, at the same time as it “improves” agriculture in a grid of straight lines, aims to create a visible universe totally devoid of any trace of productive labour and any reference to producers - the “natural” landscape (Bourdieu, [1997] 2000, p. 24).

The comment in *Pascalian meditations* exactly about the text published in *ARSS* twenty years earlier also indicates the persistent strategy of strengthening an international network of authors linked together by a shared analytical perspective (Miceli, 2002). It is noteworthy that in chapter 3 of the same book, “The historicity of reason”, Bourdieu quotes E. P. Thompson’s¹⁸ article “Modes of domination and revolutions in England” published in *ARSS* (1976) one year before Williams’ paper.

In Bourdieu’s reasoning, the social invention of a “perfect landscape” would be exemplary in order to grasp the process of differentiation of the fields of cultural production and the related genesis of a pure aesthetic disposition. At the same time, Williams’ perspective would be a counterpoint to any purely philosophical and abstract exercise, working as an argument in favour of a style of reflection about culture that, instead of denying the social, goes towards it.

We should note that Bourdieu’s mention to Williams in *Pascalian meditations* happens in a book with an explicit autobiographical tone, which is also characteristic of *The country and the city*. It is known that the postscript to the first chapter of *Meditations* later would become a part of Bourdieu’s *Sketch for a self-analysis*, but the whole struggle with philosophy in *Meditations* involves the dimension of memory. In Williams’ book, this approach guides the whole reasoning, but we can detect it more directly in the dedication to his peasant grandparents and in the introductory chapter, “Country and City”, in which the memory of his home village and the reconstitution of his father’s life are used to ground the confession that his book would also be a biographical record. Although indirectly, perhaps Williams’ experience of a tension between his peasant origin and his academic destination is felt even more strongly in the chapter “Wessex and the Border”, about the main character in Thomas Hardy’s novel *Jude the obscure* (1895), exactly the author he talked about in the short course he gave in Paris:

18. About the contact between Bourdieu and Thompson, prior to the one with Williams, see this paper’s epigraph, which reproduces part of a postcard (undated, but probably from 1975 or 1976) sent by Thompson to Williams which mentions the former’s participation at a debate in Paris in which he met Bourdieu and was impressed by him and his group.

But it is more than a matter of picking up terms and tones. It is what happens to us, really happens to us, as we try to mediate those contrasted worlds: as we stand with Jude but a Jude who has been let in; or as we go back to our own places, our own families, and know what is meant, in idea and in feeling, by the return of the native. This has a special importance to a particular generation, who have gone to the university from ordinary families and have to discover, through a life, what that experience means (Williams, 1973, p. 198).

This tension is also one of the main themes of the first novel written by Williams, the clearly autobiographical *Border country* (1960), whose plot recovers the experience of a peasant-born student at university and his return to his community. These movements help the book shape the feeling of dislocation between the country and the city, produced by the character's social ascension through academic achievement. The feelings of unease that the character has while moving between different worlds is expressed in the novel by the opposition between the nickname Harry and the official name Matthew, by which he is known in his home village and at the university respectively – which would also have happened with Raymond, who was called “Jim” by his relatives and friends from Pandy, the Welsh village in which he was born (Smith, 2008).

Correspondence

A third point of contact between both authors was their correspondence. As mentioned, we had access to two letters sent by Bourdieu to Williams in December 22nd 1976 and September 7th 1977. The first one was sent right after Williams' stay in Paris, which had ended six days before the letter was written and begins by stating Bourdieu's satisfaction with their recent meeting and his expectation of a persistent future interchange. Bourdieu then mentions reading the paper “Developments in the sociology of culture” (Williams, 1976), which caused in him the impression of a “very thorough meeting of minds”, referring specifically to his own paper “Sociologists of mythologies and mythologies of sociologists” (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1963).

Although reading both texts together does not lead us to any unexpected discoveries, it does allow us to speculate with more concrete evidence about the possible bases of this “meeting of minds” mentioned by Bourdieu. The text with Passeron (1963) develops a stinging critique of the (ironically called “prophets”) interpreters, including Edgar Morin and others, of the so-called “mass media”, an expression they consider problematic. The authors refute the concept of “masses” because of its prejudiced and generalist character, and also refuse the mode of interpretation that focuses on the circulation of so-called “mass culture” but that is barely interested

in the contexts and agents involved in its production¹⁹. And even then, the analysis of circulation/reception would be sociologically insufficient because it neglects the public's social heterogeneity and its abilities of critical reception of the consumed cultural goods. In "Developments in the sociology of culture", we find the same criticism of the concept of "masses", even though it is not as central to the main argumentation of the paper²⁰. But another point that might have caught Bourdieu's eye in Williams' text (although it is not mentioned in the letter) is the latter's defence of an approach mindful of the "materiality of signs" (Williams, 1976, p. 505), that is, of a properly sociological perspective for the analysis of cultural practices. Finally, another possible encounter between both authors suggested by Williams' text could have been the understanding of sociology of culture not simply as a specialization, but above all as a research perspective able to peer into the logic and mechanisms of reproduction of capitalist society.

We know that Williams' paper published in *ARSS* was a chapter of *The country and the city*, but the letter suggests that another possibility was contemplated, namely, the publication of a part of the first chapter of *Television*. That option was discarded, but the negotiation proves that Bourdieu knew Williams' book when he wrote *On television* two decades later ([1996] 1998), and this information should not be neglected in a possible comparison between both books. We should note that the meeting between both authors happened at the end of a highly productive period for Williams, in which he published *The country and the city* (1973), *Television* (1974), and *Marxism and literature* (1977) – all of which were involved in the direct relationship between our authors. We will see that the second letter finishes with a mention to that last book.

The second letter is likely a reply to a previous message by Williams (which we have not been able to access yet), in which he would have invited Bourdieu to participate, as his reply suggests, in a collective work titled *Human communication*, a project that was never concluded. Bourdieu contemplates possibilities of collaboration with his articles "The economics of linguistic exchanges" (1977), "The fetishism of language" (1975) and parts of his books *The love of art* ([1966] 1990) and *Photography: a middle-brow art* ([1965] 1990). Alongside these possible contributions for themes suggested by Williams, Bourdieu suggests the inclusion of the theme "Language and politics".

19. Instead, Bourdieu and Passeron defend sociological analyses of cultural practices that relate the instances of production to the ones of circulation/reception, which is something that Williams also claims in "Developments in the sociology of culture" (1976).

20. However, we should note that Williams considered that a very important issue in the concluding remarks of *Culture and society*.

The letter finishes with a mention of *Marxism and literature* and the “miraculous agreement”:

I should have begun by telling you that I read your book *Marxism and literature* with enormous interest and agree profoundly with you. (You have probably seen the extent of our agreement in my text on language. The fact is, I feel so *isolated* here that the extent of our agreement seems to me somewhat miraculous)” (Letter from Bourdieu to Williams, September 7th, 1977)²¹.

The agreement suggested by Bourdieu might be described, in theoretical terms, around two main points. The first one would be that both claimed a materialist conception of culture, having as main presupposition understanding it as social practice, a position that Williams defended in his text “Base and Superstructure in marxist cultural theory” ([1973] 1980), a paper that summarizes *Marxism and literature*:

Now if we go back to the cultural question in its most usual form – what are the relations between art and society, or literature and society? – in the light of the preceding discussion, we have to say first that there are no relations between literature and society in that abstracted way. The literature is there from the beginning as a practice in the society (Williams, [1973] 1980, p. 44).

The second point, as suggested earlier, refers to their more general concept of the theoretical and empirical status of sociology of culture. The cultural dimension would be in equal footing (and overlapping) with the economical and the political ones and would deserve as much attention as historians and social scientists usually devote to those other spheres of reality. In this sense, sociology of culture would have the macro-sociological ambition of understanding social dynamics in its totalities, and therefore would not be a specific disciplinary area, but instead a comprehensive analytical perspective, and works such as *The long revolution* and *Distinction* are proof of that because of the reach of the interpretations they suggest.

But the “miracle” that Bourdieu refers to can also be related to the similarities between the trajectories of both authors, something that Bourdieu did not mention explicitly in his commentaries in the letter, but we suggest was a conditioning factor in the theoretical affinity between them. Both had not only petit-bourgeois or popular origins, but also provincial ones. Both Williams and Bourdieu ascended socially through education and had to face experiences of social uprooting and

21. Source: Richard Burton Archives – Swansea University. Reference: wWE/2/1/16/33.

reconversion during, and as a result of, successful academic paths, ending up at the most important institutions of higher education in England and France. In this way, Bourdieu's use of the adjective "miraculous" is very meaningful, and perhaps not accidental, since they would have both followed the path of the "*oblats miraculés*"²² mentioned by the French sociologist – people that struggled to break barriers in order to climb the educational ladder, even though those feats would later be naturalized as a result of their consecration.

As we saw, Williams was born in 1921 in the small village of Pandy at the border between Wales and England. Like Bourdieu, he was an only son²³. His father was a railroad worker in the area, his mother came from a peasant family, and both were Labour activists. His family origin is described in *Politics and letters* and also in *The country and the city*, which, as we mentioned, has an autobiographical theme:

When I was born he was a signalman, in the box in the valley: part of a network reaching to known named places, Newport and Hereford, and beyond them London, but still a man in the village, with his gardens and his bees, taking produce to market on a bicycle [...] He had been as much born to the land as his own father, yet, like him, he could not live by it (Williams, 1973, p. 4).

After starting conventional schooling at the primary school in his native village, in which "education was, of course, also regarded as one way out of frustrating employment" (Williams, 1979, p. 9), Williams managed to attend a grammar school and, after the examination to obtain the Higher School Certificate, he was nominated to Cambridge. We should highlight two aspects of his time in university: first, his entry into the prestigious English course, where literary criticism was practised and understood as the dominating discipline in the humanities; second, his immediate participation in Cambridge's Socialist Club, and the subsequent membership of Britain's Communist Party. Incidentally, the higher importance of political activism in his trajectory, despite all doubts and discontinuities, represents a difference in

22. Students fully committed to academic success who end up experiencing "miraculous" social mobility. This is worth quoting in full: "I cannot relate here the whole machinery of the process of consecration which, from the *concours général* and the *classes préparatoires* to the *concours* for entry to the *École normale*, leads the elect (and most especially the *oblats miraculés*) to elect the School that has elected them, to recognize the criteria of election that have constituted them as an elite; and, then, to orient themselves – no doubt with all the more eagerness, the more they have been consecrated – to the 'queen of disciplines'" (Bourdieu, [2004] 2007, pp. 4-5).
23. Would we be able to call both their families "petit-bourgeois"? According to Bourdieu himself in *Distinction*, these families usually restrict the number of children in order to invest as much of their small resources as possible in the acquisition of cultural capital in order to achieve social ascension.

comparison to Bourdieu, who was also affected by politics (his father was a leftist activist as well), but to a smaller degree and later in life.

Williams' intellectual path was marked, since *Culture and society*, by a disagreement with academic literary criticism,²⁴ both because of the Marxist bias of his writings and his adoption of an increasingly sociological perspective.²⁵ His academic career would come to fruition with the invitation to teach in Cambridge in the beginning of the 1960s. Bourdieu's statement about his own trajectory, referring to "the scale of my path through social space and the practical incompatibility of the social worlds that it links without reconciling them" (Bourdieu, [2004] 2007, p. 1) in the beginning of *Sketch for a self-analysis* fits Williams' path almost perfectly.

Like Williams, Bourdieu reached one of the most important institutions in his country's education system, the *École Normale Supérieure*, and graduated in the leading discipline in the humanities – in this case, philosophy, from which he would gradually drift towards sociology, a discipline he defended throughout his career in opposition to powerful figures of the French intellectual field of the mid-twentieth century, such as Sartre and Lévi-Strauss. This attitude of confrontation with their original disciplines might be related to both writers' popular social origins. As we know, Bourdieu was born in a village in the Béarn. His father was a postman from a modest peasant family, and his mother from a slightly richer one. These points of departure turned Bourdieu and Williams into outsiders, chronically unadjusted to elite university environments.

If the unfavourable social origin conditioned Williams and Bourdieu's dissension in the intellectual fields in which they left their marks, specifically their first disciplines – literary criticism and philosophy – the experience of war possibly amplified their subjective unease inside elite educational institutions and catalyzed their confrontations with the dominant traditions and the innovations that resulted. Williams fought in World War II, leading a tank battalion, whereas Bourdieu did his military service during Algeria's war for independence. In any case, both had to deal with the effects of uprooting throughout their lives. If we believe Williams' account in *Politics and letters*, he would have been less exposed to this splintering. Perhaps his political engagement compensated somewhat the disarticulation caused by his dislocation in social space. Bourdieu's strong bet in scientific activism (from which he would later arrive at politics) did not alleviate his suffering, despite leading to an innovative sociological approach and even to a "symbolic revolution":

24. Especially the kind of criticism incarnated by F. R. Leavis and the group involved with the journal *Scrutiny*.

25. For a theoretical reconstruction of Raymond Williams' analytical perspective and his relationship with English Marxism, see Rivetti (2015).

And what I have said here of the causes or reasons of each of the experiences described, such as my Algerian adventures or my scientific enthusiasm, also masks the subterranean impulse and the secret intention that were the hidden face of a double life (Bourdieu, [2004] 2007, p. 72).

Analysis

The final main contact between both authors is a long introductory text to the English translations of two excerpts from *Distinction: a social critique of the judgment of taste* ([1979] 1984)²⁶, in addition to the paper “The production of belief: contribution to an economy of symbolic goods” (Bourdieu, [1977] 1980)²⁷, published in the journal *Media, Culture & Society* (v. 2, n. 3, 1980). “Pierre Bourdieu and the sociology of culture: an introduction” was written by Raymond Williams with Nicholas Garnham, who edited this issue of the journal (Garnham and Williams, 1980).

It is noteworthy that in this issue’s “Editorial”, probably written by Garnham, the editors acknowledge a debt to “Bourdieu and his colleagues at the Centre for European Sociology” (Editorial, 1980, p. 207) and present the issue also as a diplomatic counterpoint to Bourdieu’s previous publishing initiatives in favour of Williams and authors close to him:

They were responsible for introducing *The Uses of Literacy* to a French readership and have published in their journal *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales* work by Williams, Thompson, Hobsbawm and Willis. This issue is in part an attempt to build reciprocally on those existing links (Editorial, 1980, p. 208).

Williams and Garnham begin their introduction by remarking that Bourdieu’s reception in Great Britain (and in the United States) was still fragmentary in 1980, and that the scope of his work had not been properly grasped in both these contexts.²⁸ The authors highlight the comprehensiveness of Bourdieu’s work, both because of the broad set of objects investigated and because of the common theme throughout his writings, all in some way oriented towards the problem of “reproduction”. This is why, even though they focused on the analysis of *Distinction*, they wanted to present “the structure of Bourdieu’s thought” (Garnham and Williams, 1980, p. 209), and

26. In the Brazilian translation ([1979] 2007), those excerpts correspond to a section of the first part, “The Titles of Cultural Nobility” (pp. 17-61) and to the panel that contains graphs 5 and 6 in the second part (pp. 116-121).

27. First published in *ARSS*, v. 13, 1977.

28. *Distinction* was published in the United States in 1984, and this would be an important milestone of a more favourable and generalized reception of Bourdieu’s work in that country.

were interested in the possible contributions of this perspective to English cultural and media studies, back then involved in confrontations between more abstract analytical perspectives of the problem of ideology (inspired by Althusser) and branches that advocated historical and sociological approaches to the same issue, focusing on class determinations.

According to the authors, Bourdieu's proposed solution in his "theory of ideology or rather of symbolic power" (*Idem*, p. 210) would allow this analytical impasse to be overcome by combining more general economical and class determinations with the specific conditioning factors of the intellectual field in the analysis of the genesis of symbolic practices and representations.

The text's extremely positive tone can be grasped by the qualification of Bourdieu's sociology as materialistic and directly interested in unveiling the mechanisms of domination and reproduction of cultural and economic inequalities, without neglecting the specificity of this (cultural) dimension of social reality. But the tone reaches its peak when they attribute a critical dimension to Bourdieu's thought that would bring him close to Marx:

The second important link between Bourdieu's work and the central tradition of historical materialism is that it is cast in the form a 'critique' in the classical sense practiced by Marx himself. That is to say one must not make the mistake of appropriating Bourdieu's theoretical and empirical analysis of symbolic power to some marginal sub-discipline such as cultural studies or the sociology of culture and knowledge. This analysis lies at the very heart of his wider general theory, just as theories of fetishization and ideology do in Marx's work, because it provides the very conditions of its own potential scientificity (*Idem*, p. 211).

We should note that this compliment, in the form of a parallel with Marx, was made when Bourdieu had not been fully consecrated in France, and only in an incipient manner in the Anglo-Saxon world²⁹. At the same time, the attempt to link Bourdieu to Marx would reinforce the German author's legitimacy and also of the tradition associated with him, especially the unorthodox trend advocated by Williams in England. In the remainder of the text, the authors reconstruct Bourdieu's theory of practice and the central part of the argumentation developed in *Distinction* through a somewhat biased reading especially interested in class determinations in the formation of the habitus, in the mechanisms of domination inscribed in the creation of hierarchies of standards of consumption and taste that are implied in the distinction between classes, and also in the analysis of general and specific condition-

29. For instance, Bourdieu had not yet been appointed to the Collège de France, which happened in 1981.

ings of cultural and artistic practices. These are entwined, even if in a mediated way, in the production of relationships of domination between classes and class fractions.

The text ends with the reaffirmation of the “materialism”³⁰ of Bourdieu’s thought and its analytical power, because of the central position that it assigns to class struggle (in its social and symbolic dimensions), the appreciation of working class culture and the perception of the contradictions between objective social reality and the forms of consciousness that the authors attribute as elements of Bourdieu’s interpretation. According to Garnham and Williams, such an interpretation would allow the devising of alternatives of political practice. However, as we know, in *Distinction* Bourdieu did not propose a political path based on his analysis and, according to them, this would be a limitation of his thought, a “functionalist/determinist residue” (*Idem*, p. 222):

However it has to be stated that unlike many who would criticize this position he is (a) resolutely committed to a materialist theory of class struggle and of the position of symbolic struggle within that wider struggle (b) especially in *La distinction* he exhibits a very rare attribute on the left, namely a positive and unpatronizing valuation of the cultural values and aspirations of the working class which at the same time never lapses into naive populism or workerism (c) that his theory, while focused on the problem of Symbolic power, allows fully for the concrete analysis of the specific contradictions between the objective social conditions determined by the mode of production and the consciousness and practices of classes and class fractions, contradictions that might offer the concrete possibility of revolutionary mobilization and action. However it has to be said that there seems to us (and this is very much a question of tone, nuance and attitude) to be a functionalist/determinist residue in Bourdieu’s concept of reproduction which leads him to place less emphasis on the possibilities of real change and innovation than either his theory or his empirical research makes necessary (*Idem*, p. 222).

In conclusion, even though we will not evaluate here whether Williams and Garnham’s reading is pertinent or not, we want to highlight the political component of this intellectual movement of *rapprochement* between Williams and Bourdieu, especially from the former to the latter. We suggest that the more direct relationship between science and politics in Williams’ intellectual project would be a cause of this way of appropriating Bourdieu’s thought, which could become an “ally” in his original

30. This “materialism”, for the most part, has to do with the shared supposition between Williams and Bourdieu that culture is a social practice. Furthermore, when Garnham and Williams call Bourdieu’s sociology “materialistic”, they aim to bring it closer to Marxism in general, and especially to Williams’ position inside it.

context of the internal disputes in the English Marxist field. On the other hand, we saw in the beginning of this paper that Bourdieu's incorporations of Williams, ever since "Intellectual Field and Creative Project", served a predominantly scientific purpose, namely, of reinforcing the construction of a theoretical and interpretative scheme dedicated to the problem of the cultural fields. Furthermore, through the invitation for the Paris seminar and for publishing in *ARSS*, he wanted to establish a strategic partnership in the transnational sociological space.

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Abstract

Pierre Bourdieu and Raymond Williams: Correspondence, meeting and crossed references

The brief and focused correspondence between Raymond Williams (1921-1988) and Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) proves the existence of actual and mutual relations between the Welsh and French authors, which are worthy of discussion in order to reflect on the development of the European sociology of culture during the second half of the twentieth century. The main purpose of this article is to recover the contacts they had, apart from the correspondence, through crossed citations, a seminar in Paris in 1976 and a critical text by Williams in partnership with Nicholas Garnham, published in 1980, on the work of Bourdieu after *La distinction* was published in France.

Keywords: Pierre Bourdieu; Raymond Williams; Correspondence; Quotations, Sociology of culture.

Resumo

Pierre Bourdieu e Raymond Williams: correspondência, encontro e referências cruzadas

A breve e concentrada correspondência entre Raymond Williams (1921-1988) e Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) comprova a existência de relações concretas, de mão dupla, entre os autores galês e francês, muito sugestivas para se pensar o desenvolvimento da sociologia da cultura europeia na segunda metade do século XX. O objetivo principal deste texto é recensar os contatos que eles mantiveram, além da correspondência, por meio de citações cruzadas, de um seminário em Paris no ano de 1976 e de um texto crítico de Williams em parceria com Nicholas Garnham, publicado em 1980, sobre a obra de Bourdieu, em seguida à publicação de *A distinção* na França. Palavras-chave: Pierre Bourdieu; Raymond Williams; Correspondência; Citações; Sociologia da cultura.

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