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Politics and Letters

Interviews with
New Left Review

don't think I felt when *The Long Revolution* came out that anybody had really understood it. *Culture and Society* soon acquired the reputation of being a decent and honourable sort of book, whereas this was a scandalous work. It was a standard complaint that I had been corrupted by sociology, that I had got into theory. The fact is that it was perceived as a much more dangerous book. Just at that time I came back to Cambridge. The spirit of the experience was like '39–41 once again: there was a sense of really hard and bitter conflict.

The political situation of course, had changed very rapidly between '58 and '61. The Long Revolution *appeared in 1961 during the peak of the extremely violent press campaign against CND in the Labour Party, while Gaitskell was vowing an all-out struggle to it. There was a sudden fear of the left which had not existed a few years earlier, within the national political arena.*

That obviously affected the reception of the book. It is an ironic footnote that the one welcoming review of the book was written by Crossman, of all people. He misunderstood it fairly completely – in fact I don't know how much of it he read. Not long after I took part in a public debate on the press – a major topic of the book – with Crossman, in which he was radically on the other side: he actually refused to believe it when told by somebody afterwards that I was the person who had written the book.

What were your feelings on reading the long essay on the book written by Edward Thompson which appeared in New Left Review *at the time? Was that the first extended critical notice you had received from the left?*

I think it probably was – in print at any rate. The whole nature of the culture at that time was such that fierce arguments and debates occurred all the time informally. One of the difficulties I had in focussing Edward's critique, as I told him, was that at the time I was under intense attack from the right: it really was extremely difficult to know in which direction to look. The onslaught from the right was so strong that I felt at certain critical moments an inability on the left to sustain theoretical differences and yet present a common front. I am not referring here to the main argument of Edward's article, but to certain asides and tones. It was a period in which the left in general had difficulty in restraining itself from frustrated point-scoring, as distinct from the expression of theoretical

differences which have the object of mutual clarification so that one can move on. Edward said some necessary and correct things. One central theme of his essay was a counterposition of ideas of society (and then culture?) as 'a way of life' and 'a way of struggle'. That pointed at a very crucial problem, which as a matter of fact has still not disappeared from his own work and certainly has not disappeared from mine. But the ambience of the time was such that it was capable of slipping very rapidly into something which, certainly in that review, becomes a less substantial, a polemical point.

What I mean is this. If someone were to define culture as a whole way of life excluding struggle – that would clearly have to be met with the sharpest opposition and correction. On the other hand, it seemed to me that there was a blurring between two kinds of formulation which were in fact used almost interchangeably on the left – 'class conflict' and 'class struggle'. There is no question that class conflict is inevitable within the capitalist social order: there is an absolute and impassable conflict of interests around which the whole social order is built and which it necessarily in one form or another reproduces. The term 'class struggle' properly refers to the moment at which that structural conflict becomes a conscious and mutual contention, an overt engagement of forces. Any socialist account of culture must necessarily include conflict as a structural condition of it as a whole way of life. Without *that* it would be wrong. But if you define the whole historical process as struggle, then you have to elude or foreshorten all the periods in which conflict is mediated in other forms, in which there are provisional resolutions or temporary compositions of it. I was after all particularly conscious of this, because the fifties in England had precisely been a period – this was what the whole political argument was then about – of marked diminution of class struggle in a situation in which there was nevertheless class conflict. Unless one could make this distinction, one was in danger of falling into the rhetoric of 'a whole way of struggle', which was peculiarly unfitted to a time in which what was permanently there as conflict was expressed in terms precisely other than struggle. I sensed in Edward's writing a strong feeling for the heroic periods of struggle in history, which was very understandable yet as it formulated itself particularly unsuitable for dealing with the unheroic decade which we had just been living through. For the fifties, in spite of a revival of a significant younger left, was a very base period, which appeared to have neutralized and incorporated many of the very

would now make to those earlier definitions. First, it is readily apparent that in certain periods there may exist a disparity of a very marked kind between the different systems of a society – the relative importance of different kinds of production and social process can be very uneven. That necessarily limits the idea of the parity of structures. Second, it is obvious that there is also a temporal unevenness in the formation and evolution of these structures. I was always aware of this problem, as you can see from so many of my particular analyses, but I was not able to negotiate it theoretically at the time. My present vocabulary of dominant, residual and emergent patterns within any given culture is intended to indicate precisely the phenomenon of this historical discrepancy. So in these respects there bas been a quite decisive change in my thinking.

On the other hand, the thesis of what you call the inseparability of structures – the inextricable interrelations between politics, art, economics, family organization – is one I maintain. The way I would put it today is that these are indissoluble elements of a continuous social-material process. But I can see that my appeal to experience, in those earlier definitions, to found this unity was problematic. What I said in effect was that we know this to be so about our own lives – hence we can take it as a theoretical assumption. The difficulty with that argument, however, is that in certain epochs it is precisely experience in its weakest form which appears to block any realization of the unity of this process, concealing the connections between the different structures – not to speak of the unnoticed relationships of domination and subordination, disparity and unevenness, residue and emergence, which lend their particular nature to these connections. Indeed, it could be said that my own time was just such an epoch, and that the project of my books was precisely to force back, against the conclusions of experience in its simplest allusive sense, a renewed awareness of the indissolubility of the whole social-material process. Now, it did not seem to me that one could reawaken this sense of overall connection by the strategies I had previously seen followed. Essentially, these sought to show how determinant in particular cases economical-political practice had been over the whole of the rest of actual living. They characteristically involved an extreme selectivity in this demonstration of particular consequences, and an exclusion of other kinds of activity which did not bear the stamp of any such direct relation. Above all, the extraction of one area of emphasis within the society, the abstraction of the capitalist mode of production as such, tended to lead by

repetition to a substitution of terms of analysis for terms of substance. If one took the notion of an indissoluble social-material process seriously, one could not concede the analytic priority of a particular extraction from it. For that would enable you to run certain causal connections, but it would not allow you to run certain others; in particular, since most of these techniques have been worked out historically, when you came to the analysis of contemporary society it would be relatively numb – it would simply start from one sector and assimilate the others to it.

Paradoxically, I think that in these earlier books I myself tended to counterpose the notion of cultural process, which seemed to be so extraordinarily overlooked, to what I took to be a previously emphasized and adequately expounded economic or political process. The result was that I in turn abstracted my area of emphasis from the whole historical process. In the effort of establishing that cultural production was a primary activity, I think that at times I gave the impression – especially given the ambiguity of my use of 'experience' – that I was denying determinations altogether, although the empirical studies scarcely suggest that. It took me a long time to find the key move to the notion of cultural production as itself material, which was implicit in a lot of my empirical work but which would have been better understood if it had been made explicit. Because once cultural production is itself seen as social and material, then this indissolubility of the whole social process has a different theoretical ground. It is no longer based on experience, but on the common character of the respective processes of production. However, at the time my effort to reinstate what had been the radically neglected area of cultural practice was taken by others, both in support (which I did not want) and in opposition (which was very easy), as a claim for its primacy over the other processes. Then, of course, the organization of the book could be seen in that light, since it contained a prolonged history of various cultural institutions but no account of the other kinds of practice which created very different institutions, which were inseparable from them. In other words, my work was subject to some of the same criticisms, that it was an approach from a sectoral definition, that I had made of others.

That is a helpful clarification of certain of the problems posed by your initial formulations. But there remain a number of other objections that will have occurred to anyone of more classical Marxist formation. One could be put to you by quoting a remark by a Marxist you particularly respected, Lucien

Goldmann. Commenting on what Marx meant by the primacy of economic production in historical process, Goldmann once said that this was an idea that should not be very difficult for anybody to understand and accept, once you think of the fact that throughout history up to the present epoch, the overwhelming bulk of conscious human lives have been spent in producing their own means of subsistence; quantitatively this is the absolutely dominant single experience and practice of the majority of human beings till now.[33] *It is hard to resist the conclusion that this area of activity must possess a real causal primacy over all other social activities. We are not saying that this is necessarily a wholly satisfactory explanation or definition, but what would be your response to it?*

It would be one of warm agreement and then asking where it left us, specifically in mid-20th-century advanced capitalist societies. That was certainly the ground of the radical redirection of intellectual life which Marx achieved, and which indeed in the crisis of the industrial revolution was being groped towards even by others. But once one has accepted it, two questions have to be raised. The first is the extraordinary extent to which – looking at it as a matter of historical and anthropological record – people at the very limits of the possibility of maintaining their own lives were by some means or other always involved in other activities. It continually amazes me, for example, going round Britain, to see the frequency of churches when you think of the sheer material effort involved in the production of these buildings, many of them fine churches in stone which have survived from periods in which hardly anybody actually would have had a stone house. It is very difficult, even within an emphasis which is natural and overwhelming, to fit them into simple notions of causal primacy – unless one were to argue that the building of a house to God was an integral part of the mode of production itself, indeed that, as Godelier might argue, it was a controlling element of the relations of production.

The other question concerns the specificity of capitalism. In *The Long Revolution* I spoke of the economy as a system of 'maintenance' rather than 'production', which was much criticized on the left. But the reason I did so was that capitalism seemed to me qualitatively a new order in its constant creation of novel kinds of production and need, for internal reasons of its own economic development. There was a danger of generalizing that

[33] Lucien Goldmann, *Recherches Dialectiques*, Paris 1959, p. 67.

process backwards in time – hence I chose to use the more limited term of maintenance. Probably that did lead to an insufficient emphasis in the other direction. Today, however, I am interested in the increasing influence of the idea, which derives originally from Lukács, that the domination of the economic order of society is peculiar to the capitalist epoch. I find that difficult to accept in its simplest sense, but it would explain one's sense of a qualitative alteration of the meaning of production precisely as the capitalist mode of production itself matured. It is at any rate noticeable that in the 20th century the exponents of capitalism have been the most insistent theorists of the causal primacy of economic production. If you want to be told that our whole existence is governed by the economy, go to the city pages of the bourgeois press – that is really how they see life.

Could we take you up on these points? Let us take your example – the astonishing sum of labour and energy invested in the building of churches, let us say in 11th-century England, at a time when stone houses were unknown to the overwhelming majority of the population. It is certainly true that there has been no epoch in which any society has ever been coextensive merely with the practices of economic production: cultural and political activity have always accompanied them. But just to insist on this fact is to return to the problematic of simultaneity. For structures can be temporally simultaneous, but they need not thereby be causally equal. In Anglo-Norman England there were so many houses of God, so few houses of men that were in any way comparable. Can we imagine a society, however, without any houses of men at all – just with houses of God? The question is a reductio ad absurdum: *obviously you could not, because the population would have nowhere to live. Could you, on the other hand, imagine a society just with houses of men, without any houses of God? The answer is yes, perfectly well. In fact such a society historically existed at no great distance from England. Much of Scandinavia had not yet been Christianized: in Sweden in the 11th century there were no houses of God. So we know as a matter of historical fact that this variation is possible. It is true that historical materialism does not possess any worked-out theory, even for one epoch, let alone trans-epochally, of the exact connections between the economic and political and cultural or ideological orders. But to dwell at exclusive length on this point can be a way of burking and evading the central fact that we can in a perfectly reasonable and empirically verifiable way assert that the processes of physical production have till now exerted an ultimate*

power of constraint over all others – that they form a framework for all other practices which all other practices do not form for the economy in the same sense. Would you accept that?

Yes, I would certainly accept it – if it is defined in terms of inherent historical variability. I would not accept it, if it is taken as the ground on which to build an explanation of late capitalist society, because by this time so many other kinds of economic activities are operative that have nothing to do with physical subsistence or maintenance. Let me go back to that example of the churches. It is perfectly clear that this was a mode of construction imposed from above. But the success of this mode poses the very difficult question of the precise interconnections between structures of political power, actual relations of production and patterns of cultural incorporation – for primary producers who were actually near starvation did a lot, often under protest but at times of their own will, of productive labour on buildings which had nothing whatever to do with satisfying the physical urgency of survival. There were people who were physically exposed at the very time when they were building shelter for an authority which was not human, which was not of them, even when you have allowed for the other social functions that churches served. In other words, I think that the social distribution of energy invested in physical survival and physical reproduction is very historically variable. If indeed these ever become the primary human intention or an absolute priority, the entire society would be revolutionized. Even when you have allowed for the major kinds of domination and subordination, the imposition of political orders, the use of military force to compel a diversion of energy from those primary tasks, it is the degree to which they were not wholly perceived as such that is worrying for a historical analysis.

Another way of looking at the problem might be to pose the question very sharply of historical change. In some ways this could be regarded as the Achilles heel of your formulations of this period. There is one passage in The Long Revolution *which deals specifically with this question. In it you write: 'If we find, as often, that a particular activity came radically to change the whole organization, we can still not say that it is to this activity that all the others must be related; we can only study the varying ways in which, within the changing organization, the particular activities and their interrelations were affected. Further, since the particular activities will be serving varying and*

sometimes conflicting ends, the sort of change we must look for will rarely be of a simple kind: elements of persistence, adjustment, unconscious assimilation, active resistance, alternative effort, will all normally be present, in particular activities and in the whole organization.'[34] *In effect, you here reject the very idea that historical change can yield evidence of causal hierarchy. You prefer to emphasize the ambiguity and heterogeneity of change anyway, 'the elements of persistence and adjustment', which are such that all we can do is 'study the particular activities and their interrelations'. Now it is not at all clear why, if one activity does radically change the whole organization of society, and you concede that this is often the case, one cannot say that all other activities must be related to it. Of course, they should also be related to each other, and of course all the changes in a society at any given moment won't be reducible to the activity which changes its overall structure. But one can still surely say that if a particular activity radically changes the whole organization of society, it possesses a causal primacy – that is the normal meaning of the term. Why were you unwilling to accept this?*

Another very simple way of putting the point would be this: what is the starting point for the whole of your own work in this period? It is the industrial revolution. If we look at the industrial revolution the one obvious fact is that it completely transformed English society as a whole. You have shown the way in which its advent also transformed the actual experience out of which literature came to be written: it is one of the most obvious themes of Culture and Society *and is very strongly present in the second part of* The Long Revolution. *Now if we ask ourselves: is it conceivable that instead of the industrial revolution there could have been such an event as a poetic revolution, capable of transforming the society in a similar way at a similar speed and to a similar depth? – the answer is plainly and patently no. That very commonsensical query merely returns us to the point that the economy typically possesses a causal reach and power that poetry does not. You seem to have felt in this period that to concede that point was somehow to demean the status of art or other cultural practices. This is not an implication which in any way need follow. All you have to concede is that there is an asymmetry of efficacy in the historical process. Historical change is the crux of the whole problem because it is there that one can most closely and evidently discern the relative order or hierarchy of practices.*

[34] L.R., p. 62.

I don't find myself disagreeing with this. Including the possibility, even the probability, of understanding what I was saying as contradicting it. Of course, the key change is seen in these two books as the industrial revolution, which was a revolution in economic production; in that sense it had causal primacy. However, the kind of 'relating' I was thinking of when writing the passage you've just quoted was the idea that, say, because there was an industrial revolution there must have been industrial poetry. Actually there were industrial novels, as I demonstrated. But what there was not was the kind of entity postulated by Caudwell – 'capitalist poetry'. Yet it would seem to be a perfectly reasonable deduction from a very simple version of economic determination, that since the decisive phenomenon was the advent of capitalism, there should be capitalist poetry. When I was writing *The Long Revolution* I was probably over-preoccupied by these one-dimensional sorts of explanation and relation. What you are asking me to say, and what I would be very willing to say, is that the industrial revolution was causally primary across the whole field of my study. I would even argue that it had a disproportionate effect on all the other activities which could not survive it, even when they were consciously opposed to it.

But what one then has to go on to say is that it is ultimately impossible to treat the industrial revolution as a process which had external effects in a literature subsequent to it. For the industrial revolution was among other things a revolution in the production of literacy and it is at this point that the argument turns full circle. The steam press was as much a part of the industrial revolution as the steam jenny or the steam locomotive. What it was producing was literacy; and with it a new kind of newspaper and novel. The traditional formulations that I was attacking would have seen the press as only the reflection at a much later stage of the economic order, which had produced the political order which had then produced the cultural order which had produced the press. Whereas the revolution itself, as a transformation of the mode of production, already included many changes which the ordinary definitions – and this is where the whole problem started – said were not economic. The task was not to see how the industrial revolution affected other sectors, but see that it was an industrial revolution in the production of culture as much as an industrial revolution in the production of clothing – which I suppose was its first achievement – or in the production of light, of power, of building materials. Once one begins to break economic production down into its specific processes, it is

not so surprising that in a society at that stage of historical development what was also being produced was popular literacy, political order, public opinion or entertainment. This is immensely difficult to put, and I am not saying at all that it is put correctly in *The Long Revolution*. I can see that the effort to establish a new emphasis led me, I don't think to deny, but not sufficiently to state that historical causation must be seen primarily in terms of production and changes in modes of production. But this had been specialized to a narrow definition of the economic which actually underestimated the degree to which it was true. Although I did not have the right terms at the time, that was the direction of my analysis. The fundamental materialist claim was not less but more true than was traditionally thought. I would add that I now find much support for my kind of emphasis in the work of socialists in economic anthropology.

At the risk of seeming insistent, we want to press a further question. It is a very striking feature of all your work that you discuss culture itself in materialist terms in a way that many Marxists who were declaiming the primacy of the economic never did. They tended to accept a division of spheres between culture, a less tangible reality relatively uninscribed in material practices, and an economy devoted to the physical production and reproduction of machines and the means of consumption. Your writing, by contrast, from The Long Revolution *through to* Marxism and Literature *has always explored the precise material elements of any cultural system. However, there is a way of emphasizing the materiality of cultural practices that leads back to a circular social whole. There can be the suggestion that since they are material, they can be causally equated with material practices of a more conventionally economic sort. This would be an advance over idealist versions of a social whole, but would it adequately answer our problem? In your case, after all, it is surely no accident that it was textile manufacturing, with its vast potential demand for objects of elementary physical need, which triggered the industrial revolution – not newspaper printing. Doesn't your own phrase for the cotton industry, 'its first achievement', in fact concede the relevant structural priority?*

One could take another historical problem to crystallize the issue. The most classical example of the extreme difficulty of relating a cultural phenomenon, comprising a vast set of material practices, to economic processes is, of course, the history of Christianity. A complex of religious practices sprang up in a remote province in the first century of the Roman Empire, grew until it became the official doctrine of the late Roman State, persisted through the Dark Ages,

exercised ideological supremacy in the Middle Ages, then went through multiple transformations showing vitality and efficacy right through the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Enlightenment and down to the period of the Industrial Revolution itself, one of whose great changes was of course in religious feeling. Historians have often pointed to the history of Christianity as a standing refutation of the Marxist idea of a superstructure which must conform to an economic infrastructure, emerging and disappearing with it. Would it be an adequate reply to insist on the fact that this religion has always constituted a massive complex of material practices, many of them – monasteries, cathedrals, schools, taxes – directly imbricated in economic life? The answer is surely not. The fundamental point about the history of Christianity is rather that this immensely powerful cultural and ideological system could persist across epochs and civilizations, covering the whole of Europe with its monuments in stone, glass, paint, manuscript or print – yet can we point to any major historical change in the structure of society ever brought about by any transformation in Christianity? It is extremely difficult to do so. It is evident that between the classical world and the Middle Ages the structures of society were altered from top to bottom and that this transformation can very obviously be related to changes in production processes, from slave to feudal economies. But no comparable changes occurred in the structure of Christianity, enormously important though its history has been for us. The price of its very persistence is the limit of its determining power. It is in that kind of comparison that the asymmetry of effect between economy and culture can be most clearly seen.

I agree. Even when you have taken seriously the attempts to run the Reformation as responsible for the rise of capitalism, you still cannot in my view accept that as a historical explanation. On the other hand, one should not understimate the degree of internal transformation within the apparent continuity of these immensely prolonged belief-systems. Every key crisis in the society as a whole provoked great conflict in the system, which responded with reinterpretation, redistribution of emphasis, in many cases even positive denial. These responses then tended to form new configurations of residual, dominant and emergent religious feeling. The result is typically a simultaneity of multiple different relations between the presumed belief-system and the actually operative social system.

There is another crucial problem that I still quite insufficiently understand, which poses a similar theoretical difficulty. It is very

remarkable that if you look across the whole gamut of Marxism, the material-physical importance of the human reproductive process has been generally overlooked. Correct and necessary points have been made about the exploitation of women or the role of the family, but no major account of this whole area is available. Yet it is scarcely possible to doubt the absolute centrality of human reproduction and nurture and the unquestioned physicality of it. Seen as a historico-material process, it clearly has complex relations to the other forms of production. If you were to say to me, can a change in the nature of the family cause the sort of change in a society that a change in the production of energy, or of clothing, has generated? – the answer is no, it cannot. We would still agree there. But at the same time I think that the category of production is itself an expression of the capitalist specialization of production to commodities, which then poses to us precisely these problems about forms of production that are not commodities. In the very energy of our protest against the ubiquity of commodities, our first response was to say that these were not areas of production at all. But the consequence was then to make them secondary. I think we now have to go back and say they are forms of production, while still registering that certain kinds of production have radically displacing and altering effects on others that others do not have on them. Too much is conceded rather than too much is contained, it seems to me, if we merely insist – as we should – that the production of food, shelter, and clothing must be primary in social life and that the way that is done is going to determine the way everything else is done. The particular difficulty is to integrate that kind of truth with an analysis of advanced capitalist society, where commodity production has become so much more extensive, while central areas of human life have been excluded from the category of production altogether.

It is interesting that one of the major omissions of The Long Revolution *should be of just the area you have mentioned. You argue that there are four essential systems within any society: the system of maintenance (economic), the system of decision (political), the system of communication (cultural), and the system of generation and nurture (familial). At the same time, however, it is striking that you describe the 'long revolution' itself at the outset as composed of three processes – the democratic revolution, the industrial revolution and the cultural revolution. In your conclusion, it is this triad again that you use to analyse British society in the sixties. Your discussion of industry, as a system of*

maintenance, takes the form of a very powerful criticism of the socialism of consumption and of bureaucratic nationalization: it represents the first extended case made within the New Left for a socialism of production, focussed on work relations. Your account of the political system of decision is less far-reaching, but contains some of the earliest criticisms of English electoralism and proposals for parliamentary reform in that period. Your enquiry into the cultural system includes what was then a highly original programme of institutional innovation, which you later developed in Communications. *But in this otherwise comprehensive survey, there is one great silent area. The fourth system which you distinguish in your analytic theory of the composition of any social order receives no programmatic treatment at all – the system of generation and nurture. How should one interpret this absence? Does it mean that you felt the problems of the family, above all the position of women within it, were not amenable to deliberate social change in the same way as the other three systems? Given the general sensitivity of your writing to those areas which did not form part of conventional political discourse at the time, it is very surprising that problems of women and the family do not make any kind of entry at all in your work of this period.*

I think that is absolutely fair. It was not, however, that I wasn't thinking about them. In a sense the reflections then forming in my mind were very closely related to the kind of analysis developed in the last part of *The Long Revolution*. If I had written them out, my approach would have been to look at the contradictory features of what is also a revolution in that area. The emergence of a militant and explicit movement of women's liberation from the late sixties onwards was wholly welcome and necessary and overdue. But it has seemed to me insufficiently based on an analysis of these contradictions. What I mean by this is as follows. On the one hand, it is clear that the system of generation and nurture has continued to retain certain distinct priorities in human energy and attention: here is an area where people really do struggle to reserve certain absolutes against a capitalist order, under whatever pressure, devoting themselves to the care of others in the most extreme economic difficulties. On the other hand, alongside the reality and importance of this experience, there is also the frequent evidence of the break-up of relations under the strain of poverty or unemployment, and of the very ugly reproduction inside certain families of the repression and cruelty and frustration of the work situation, of which women and children are the primary victims. Now the

contradiction of contemporary social changes has been that the unfinished attempt to liberate women and children from the traditional controls of extreme deprivation and from the reproduction of brutality within the family has itself become complicated, as every human liberation is within the capitalist order, by imperatives which are a product of the system itself. I have in mind not only that ideological reduction of sex to consumption which is now so common. I mean also that the counter-position of liberation to the family was at a certain stage solicited by capitalism itself – which, in its need to recruit cheap female labour, was in effect saying, 'Come out of your homes and do light work for us at a lower wage than we can pay men.' So today there is at once the unanswerable claim of women to be able to go out and work in the world, and the consequence created by capitalism in its usual wanton short-sightedness, that the whole system of generation and nurture has become problematic in some quite new ways, yet really nothing is done about it.

The women's liberation movement has given the right theoretical answer, that generation and nurture should by its very nature be a shared process of men and women. But the practical extent of liberation that is ever likely to occur under capitalism is likely to be determined by the priorities of the market. In this sense the current capitalist order is more intrusive even than in certain phases of the past when there was more actual scarcity and poverty. For problems of generation and nurture are now falsely assigned to a communal care which is then not adequately provided, or even provided at all. Instead of women minding children at home, they should send them to nurseries, but we haven't any money for those at the moment: that is now the characteristic capitalist and liberal message. Together with it goes the notion that work – work for wages, not freely-chosen work – has a categorical priority over any other disposition of human energy. Against that, the women's liberation movement has been entirely right to raise the transitional demand of payment for housework, or – something I feel very strongly about – for mothers of young children, who are incredibly hard worked and who are really neglected today because there is no profit to the social order from them, and they attract no significant political attention from any party. These are the kinds of contradiction within the very real process of liberation that I would have tried to analyse. I wish I had done so in *The Long Revolution*, and I also wish I understood what prevented me from doing so, because it wasn't that I was not thinking about the question. I think that the

likelihood is that I had such a comparatively unproblematic experience both in my own home and in my own family, which were very good ones, that I was not as intensely aware of disorder and crisis in the family as I was in other areas. But it was nevertheless an intellectual failing not to confront the problem, especially since I had identified it.

Your work contains a very effective critique of the base/superstructure model of an economistic form of Marxism. At the same time, you have always insisted that any theory of society must be an inclusive one, with a grasp on the social totality as a whole. One of your criticisms of the base/superstructure model is precisely that, by marginalizing a whole set of key practices, it disables any grasp of the overall social process. But there is another Marxist model of determination, whose pivot is the concept of contradiction – the idea that capitalist society is driven by laws of accumulation that generate recurrent economic crises, and whose dynamic creates social conflicts between classes that produce the potential for its political overthrow. One of the difficulties with the general argument of The Long Revolution *is that one gets little sense of the dynamic of the total set of class relationships. In particular what are the contradictions at work in the process of what you call the 'cultural revolution'? What is it a revolution against?*

The classical theory of contradictions within the capitalist economy still seems to me to stand, although it is also evident that the theory must be made much more complex. The post-war development of capitalism showed, to the surprise of those who had accepted the rhetoric of the thirties, that it could for a long time avoid depressions by a series of adaptations. These adaptations then in turn produced other kinds of crisis, which we can see today. The lesson is that the contradictions of the capitalist economy work themselves out at a much deeper and more structural level than the forms in which they were initially presented to us. I think that still we must be prepared for some surprises in that respect. I hope not.

In a more general sense, however, there is something fundamentally contradictory in the capitalist mode of production which is not only to do with its internal economic laws. What capitalism produces in commodity form excludes certain crucial kinds of production which are permanent human needs. This is true not only of its initial turbulent period when it brutally transformed patterns of human settlement and immediate

relationship, rhythms of work and dispositions of time, but also of the way it settled down into a more stable order. All the essential human needs that could not be co-ordinated by commodity production – health, habitation, family, education, what it calls leisure – have been repressed or specialized by the development of capitalism. The deepening of the division of labour, and the radical reduction of the notions of humanity and sociality that these processes have involved, have produced profound contradictions – more impossible for capitalism to solve than those which are generated within the market. This is not to diminish its economic contradictions in the traditional sense, which I think it will never resolve. But the cultural revolution finds its source in the perennial resistance to the suppression of so many basic and necessary forms of production by capitalism. The cultural revolution is then against the whole version of culture and society which the capitalist mode of production has imposed.

You say at one point in the book: 'It has been the gravest error of socialism, in revolt against class societies, to limit itself so often to the terms of its opponents: to propose a political and economic order, rather than a human order. It is of course necessary to see the facts of power and property as obstacles to this order, but the alternative society it has proposed must be in wider terms, if it is to generate the full energies necessary for its creation.' Any revolutionary socialist must agree with that. Then you go on: 'Indeed, the political and economic changes might come, and the human order be very little changed, unless these connections are made.'[35] *Weren't you in danger of overstating the emphasis here in the other direction? The argument is surely too totalistic – even granting what is presumably the tacit reference to Stalinism in the USSR. Soviet society may not be socialist, but one could not say that its immense political and economic changes have left the human order of pre-revolutionary Russia unaltered.*

I think it was an overstatement. I was actually thinking not just of the experience of Stalinism, but also of Fabianism – which even more disastrously would not know what a human order was. The immediate example I gave was the whole problem of work. I was writing in the spirit of the passage from Morris we discussed earlier. In that sense, the point has still to be made, about liberal capitalism and about actually existing socialism.

[35] LR, p. 131.

Turning to your own research for The Long Revolution, *you wrote: 'We have reasonably adequate and continuing accounts of the rise of industry and the growth of democracy in Britain. But we have no adequate history of our expanding culture.'*[36] *The second clause is so to speak the programme for Part II of the book. The first, however, seems a strange assumption for 1961, when you were writing. Today one's mind would go immediately to, say,* The Making of the English Working Class *and* Industry and Empire *as 'adequate accounts': the great flowering of socialist and Marxist historiography is essentially a phenomenon that post-dates your book. What were you referring to then?*

I only realized how inadequate the literature I had read was when Edward Thompson's remarkable *The Making of the English Working Class* appeared. But at least some books existed, whereas with subjects that I was dealing with, like the history of the press or of standard English, there was nothing at all. Actually, however, I might as well say that it was with something approaching panic that I wrote those particular lines. For I could see where my argument for a general account of the whole social process was leading me, and I knew what I was going to be able to produce in response to it in Part II – the particular chapters of cultural history, with the important addition of a projected history of habitation, which would have brought in much more of the economic order. In other words, I was aware that in a sense what I would develop was in contradiction with what I had advocated. So in part those sentences were a device to exempt me from that commitment. But I also knew that I could not do anything at all if I had to undertake anything beyond my own field. After all, the new knowledge you've cited is the product of a whole generation of historical research which I could never have done. Even my cultural research taxed me with learning English history as I went along, for the autobiographical reasons that I have explained.

That raises a second question. For the paradox of The Long Revolution *is not just that you plead passionately in Part I for a sense of the whole social process, polemicizing – at times too sharply – against even analytic separation of single areas or activities of that process from each other, and that then in Part II you concentrate on the cultural domain alone. It also lies with your treatment of*

[36] LR, p. 141.

culture itself. For what you give the reader is seven chapters, all of them pioneering studies, on education, literacy, press, spoken language, writers, drama and the novel. But there is no totalization at all of these chapters. In fact there is very little connection even of a written form between one and the next. The interconnection between the different processes is left unexplored, so that the sum of the changes you call 'the history of our expanding culture' is never brought together. This is all the more striking in that you give a very brilliant demonstration, which every reader would remember, of a systematic analysis of the interrelationship of different areas and activities in a particular historical conjuncture elsewhere in the book, in your synchronic account of the structure of feeling of the 1840s. Another aspect of the relative isolation of the institutional chapters from each other, which accentuates the distance between them, is that they share no common starting-point in time. The chapters on the spoken language, education and the reading public go back to the Middles Ages; on the popular press and novel to the industrial revolution; the chapter on English writers starts with the very earliest periods of English prose; whereas that on dramatic forms is concerned only with the modern period. Was it a deliberate decision to write Part II in a discontinuous way, without any attempt at a final interrelation of them?

I don't know how conscious it was. I could see the connections across, but I did not know how I could totalize them. I still find this difficult. I have attempted in a recent essay to totalize just one part of this process at the level of working-class culture, by running together what was happening in the drama, in the press, and in education; but even that does not include the political-cultural organizations of the working class. All I can say is that even that presented major problems, especially because of the very complex relations between the working class and what would eventually be called lower-middle-class elements within the urban popular culture. At the time, I felt that the essay on the 1840s was about as much as I could hold together. The second part of the book consists of a series of forays into certain areas, little more than that, which are not consolidated. The most I could do was to put education very deliberately first. I also regret that a chapter on advertising was omitted – it was kept back for a collective volume on the subject, which then (because the economists couldn't agree) never appeared: that would at least have supplied one crucial thread of connection to the economy. However, what is encouraging today is that a good deal of the necessary work of connection is now being done, yielding

cross-correlations which often make me look again at my own material, which I am glad to do.

Why did you decide to adopt the term culture, in full consciousness of its accumulated semantic range, to denote a whole way of life – in preference to the term society, which in the opening pages of your analysis of culture you agree can have the same meaning? Your choice of the term of culture seems to be one of the options that constitutes your own work as a distinctive oeuvre *within socialist thought.*

I suppose I felt that, for all its difficulties, culture more conveniently indicates a total human order than society as it had come to be used. I also think by this time I had become so used to thinking with this concept that it was just a matter of persistence as much as anything else. After all most of the work I was doing was in an area which people called 'culture', even in the narrower sense, so that the term had a certain obviousness. But you know the number of times I've wished that I had never heard of the damned word. I have become more aware of its difficulties, not less, as I have gone on.

All the same, there are surely a number of significant connotations of the term culture as a synonym for society, in the sense of a 'whole way of life'. One is that culture puts a great emphasis, in a way society does not, on the lived texture of the social order: it is closer by its associations of inwardness to subjective experience. Another is that it can suggest an assimilation of the social order to one particular area of it, tending towards a culturalist perspective. Finally, and most importantly, the term culture has a strong normative element which society does not. You can be a hundred per cent opposed to capitalist society, but you cannot be one hundred per cent opposed to bourgeois culture, as Marx himself testifies. The concept of culture contains inherently positive components, whether a shared medium such as a national language, or the inheritances of high art.

There is another connotation which was very important to me when I was writing the book: the sense of culture as a process. Historically, culture was cultivation of something – it was an activity; whereas society can seem very static. I often liked the term for this reason. Its modern derivation is actually from Vico, who used it with precisely this emphasis on process.

The term 'the long revolution' was meant to convey a similar sense of a movement through a very long period. At the same time, of course, the concept of culture has itself classically been converted into an unchanging, timeless body of values or ideas. So the difficulties of vocabulary are acute. Between us and the historical process the problems of language are really formidable. This is why I have much more sympathy than most of my generation for the neologisms or importations of idiom which have been characteristic of the generation immediately younger than my own. It is terribly easy to mock these, but they are prompted by the fact that the existing terms have acquired so much ideological freight. On the other hand, you can run the argument the other way: if you do not contest the appropriation of terms like culture, which was then being constantly opposed to democracy and education, you surrender too much.

What specific advantages did you see in the term culture for socialist theory? How did you pose its relationship to class?

There are two answers to that. The single most shocking thesis to established liberal opinion in *Culture and Society*, including people who liked the book in other ways, was that I did not define working-class culture as a few proletarian novels – which they were quite prepared to look at as a regional genre – but as the institutions of the labour movement. That was the gain of talking about culture as a whole way of life. It was an advance over the conventional notions of working-class culture on the left too, which had concentrated on the struggles by the working class to articulate a body of poetry and autobiography, and eventually other kinds of writing. In my view, it was extremely important to recover and honour these, but it was false to present them as an alternative culture, which was a common tendency. What Welsh proletarian writers managed to say about their extraordinary experience in industrial Wales, for example, is of the greatest interest; but it is not to diminish our respect for the effort it represented to say that it remained a subordinate culture. I think this was a more Marxist position than the one with which it was contending.

On the other side, I also rejected for the same reasons the conventional descriptions on the left of the major thought and writing in England from the 16th to the 20th centuries as bourgeois culture. For the fact is that a great deal of that culture was produced by people who were actually fighting the bourgeoisie, even where they failed, even where they were

deeply contaminated by bourgeois forms. It was crucial to retain the sense of that struggle, because otherwise the whole body of that essential work was simply appropriated by the right. By the fifties the trick was being turned that if you thought George Eliot was a good novelist, you had to be against socialism. There was a directly political confiscation of the past that was intolerable. I cannot emphasize strongly enough how important it seemed to contest this appropriation, and the notion of culture which was held to ratify and interpret it.

In doing so, of course I ran some risks. I realized that when someone said to me in the late fifties: 'I know what you are really doing – you are writing a socialist history of culture, but whenever you see a socialist term coming up you omit it and put in another term.' I said: 'This may be the effect but it is not the intention.' Because of the need to engage with the dominant interpretation, my language was very different from that in which I would have written between '39 and '41. I am not surprised that in the next phase of the arguments people felt they had to move to a quite alternative terminology, because they thought that the existing vocabulary confused the emergence of a different position too much.

The concept of 'structure of feeling' is one of the most notable theoretical innovations of The Long Revolution *and is one which you have consistently used and developed in the long span of time from that book right up to the present, with* Marxism and Literature. *At the outset, you define the structure of feeling as follows in* The Long Revolution: '*The term I would suggest is* structure of feeling: *it is as firm and definite as "structure" suggests, yet it operates in the most delicate and least tangible parts of our activity. In one sense, this structure of feeling is the culture of a period: it is the particular living result of all the elements in the general organization.*'[37] *You then go on: 'I do not mean that the structure of feeling, any more than the social character, is possessed in the same way by the many individuals in the community. But I think it is a very deep and wide possession, in all actual communities. . . . One generation may train its successor, with reasonable success, in the social character or the general cultural pattern, but the new generation will have its own structure of feeling, which will not appear to have come "from" anywhere.'*[38] *The essential point of reference for the notion of structure of feeling here appears to be not so much a class, or a society, as a generation. Although it is never brought out explicitly, the same emphasis recurs in your treatment of the 1840s and again much later in* Marxism and Literature. *The passage just quoted continues: 'The new generation responds in its own ways to the unique world it is inheriting, taking up many continuities, that can be traced, and reproducing many aspects of the organization, which can be separately described, yet feeling its whole life in certain ways differently, and shaping its creative response into a new structure of feeling.'*[39] *The whole problematic of generations is, of course, also very important in your novels and other work. The first critical query we would like to pose about your definition of a structure of feeling is this: any given historical period will always contain at least three adult generations who are active and producing meanings within a single time-span – that is, setting aside the problem of plurality of classes. How can one speak of 'the structure of feeling' of a period, as you do in your account of the 1840s, when at least three structures of feeling would appear to be definitionally present in so far as there would be at least three active generations?*

[37] LR, p. 64.
[38] LR, p. 65.

The general reason is the close connection in my account between the notion of the structure of feeling as accessible for analysis and what appears to be new cultural work. For rightly or wrongly, I think on the whole rightly, we do usually identify the point at which a cultural generation seems to form with what is often, in terms of the actual lives of the people who compose that group, just a decade of their activity. If one takes for example the 1930s, one can trace the emergence of a particular structure of feeling there, in a set of young writers with whom that decade is then retrospectively identified, although most of them in fact continued to write until the sixties, some even into the seventies. The way in which I have tended to apply the term in analysis is to the generation that is doing the new cultural work, which normally means a group which would have a median age of around thirty, when it is beginning to articulate its structure of feeling. It follows that one would then identify the structure of feeling of the middle-aged and the elderly with earlier decades. It was in that sense that I spoke of the structure of feeling of the 1840s. But I did not sufficiently clarify my procedure there.

[39] LR, p. 65.

The second question, then, is how the concept can be articulated to a plurality of classes. For in Victorian England, to pursue the example, there were at least three major social classes – landed aristocracy, industrial bourgeoisie and urban proletariat, not to speak of agricultural labourers, rural small-holders, as well as a heterogeneous petty-bourgeoisie. Paradoxically, you do directly refer to these classes when you discuss the notion of 'social character', but not when you analyse the 'structure of feeling'. The impression is left that a structure of feeling could be common to all classes in a society, once its only referent is generational. What was your view of this problem?

It has exercised me greatly. The concept was initially developed from the accessible evidence of actual articulations in texts and works that I could read. The result was that in societies in which class contributions to that kind of writing were highly differential, it was all too possible to overlook the existence of alternative structures. There is certainly not enough stress on these in *The Long Revolution*, where the notion is presented in essentially temporal and general terms. I would now want to use the concept much more differentially between classes. But it is also important to note that this diversity is itself historically variable. For example, during the 1660s and 1670s two contemporary structures of feeling of absolutely contrasted character existed even among the limited social class that was actively contributing to cultural work. There are other periods, however, in which one structure seems to be more widespread. The 1840s was just such an example. For although the structure of feeling I was analysing in those novels, written mainly by middle-class or lower-middle-class writers, was a class possession – if one pushes the analysis its many class elements are quite clear – it was to a surprising extent shared by the working-class writers who were beginning to contribute at that time. The problem in a case like this, of course, is that the evidence for the concept is only going to be articulate and available in fully expressed work. Yet it can be objected that the notion illegitimately infers from this range of evidence the existence of a structure which is much wider and is unexpressed. I feel the force of this criticism.

How exactly did you come to develop the concept?

The first time I used it was actually in *Preface to Film*. The passage reads: 'In the study of a period, we may be able to reconstruct, with more or less

accuracy, the material life, the social organization, and, to a large extent, the dominant ideas. It is not necessary to discuss here which, if any, of these aspects is, in the whole complex, determining; an important institution like the drama will, in all probability, take its colour in varying degrees from them all. . . . To relate a work of art to any part of that observed totality may, in varying degrees, be useful, but it is a common experience, in analysis, to realize that when one has measured the work against the separable parts, 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.'[40] In other words, the key to the notion, both to all it can do and to all the difficulties it still leaves, is that it was developed as an analytic procedure for actual written works, with a very strong stress on their forms and conventions. It is a much more straightforward notion when it is confined to that. Yet the pressure of the general argument was continually leading me to say, and I think correctly, that such works were the articulate record of something which was a much more general possession. This was the area of interaction between the official consciousness of an epoch – codified in its doctrines and legislation – and the whole process of actually living its consequences. I could see that here might very often be one of the social sources of art. The example I then worked on was the contrast between the formal ideology of the early Victorian middle class and the fiction its writers produced. The point of the deliberately contradictory phrase, with which I have never been happy, is that it was a structure in the sense that you could perceive it operating in one work after another which weren't otherwise connected – people weren't learning it from each other; yet it was one of feeling much more than of thought – a pattern of impulses, restraints, tones, for which the best evidence was often the actual conventions of literary or dramatic writing. To this day I find that I keep coming back to this notion from the actual experience of literary analysis rather than from any theoretical satisfaction with the concept itself.

Keeping to literary documentation for the moment, then, there still seems to be some uncertainty in your chronological application of the term. You've explained very clearly that the structure of feeling of any given period relates

[40] PF, pp. 21–2.

primarily to the creative work done by the active younger generation. You've written in Marxism and Literature *that while 'the effective formations of most actual art relate to already manifest social formations, dominant or residual', 'it is primarily to an emergent formation that the structure of feeling,* as solution, *relates'. In other words, other artistic formation represents structures of feeling as precipitate rather than as solution. That seems quite consistent. But on the same page you also say: 'At times the emergence of a new structure of feeling is best related to a rise of a class: England 1700–1760.'*[41] *That is a long time: 1700 to 1760. It is the better part of a century. Some three generations would have been active in that period at the median age of thirty. Again, in your work on drama you very tellingly use the concept of structure of feeling to trace the liberal deadlock between individual and society: yet this structure spans the whole epoch from Ibsen to Brecht or beyond. Again, a multi-generational process seems to be at work. Did you mean that there were successive structures of feeling which were generationally distinct but cognate in other ways, each representing a modulation of the last?*

I have no simple answer, but perhaps some clarification. The epoch from 1700 to 1760 is a very complex one, because it includes two radically opposed structures of feeling that are related to the rise of the same class – Augustan classicism and bourgeois realism. I keep trying to work on this, because it's theoretically so important. Of course it can be partly clarified by distinguishing fractions of the class, within a key variable in university education. Moreover it is a time of conscious cultural composition of the new class; I mean to write about Johnson in this sense. Certainly within one generation there was a dominant classicism and an emergent realism, but it is one of the extraordinary facts about the period from 1760 on that a very vigorous realism is eventually contained and displaced, for a further generation and even beyond. One way of tracking that down would be in the limits of each earlier structure of feeling. The methodological problem is similar to that in other fields. You isolate, by analysis, a particular structure, but when it is truly dominant, influencing or even determining later periods, you move almost without noticing it from a seized moment of structural analysis to what is of course, all the time, also a historical movement and development. But then, while acknowledging that there are also other movements, there is great value in tracing, as you put it,

[41] ML, p. 134.

successive modulations in a structure of feeling, until you reach the point where there is a qualitative break – the 1790s in England for example – and then you postulate a period and try to analyse a newly emerging structure of feeling.

Another problem posed by your unit of analysis, so to speak, is how one delimits a particular generation in any given society. For it is a delicate methodological question where you actually draw the lines between age-groups. To take your criterion, at any one moment there are those with a median age of thirty: but what about those with a median age of twenty-five or forty? Where do they fit? This is a problem that occurs quite frequently in everyday speech. What solution would you adopt for it?

This is a very difficult question. There are periods like the 1840s, which reveal a generation of writers – in this case novelists – who were not merely physically of the same age, but who were fully contemporary with each other in the sense that they manifestly share certain perceptions, preoccupations and styles of work. Then there are other periods in which a range of coeval writers do not seem to compose a generation in that sense at all: different figures are there and are doing different kinds of work. A further complication can occur if biological contemporaries compose or publish their work at a major temporal distance from each other, yet with close internal connections. An example which illustrates this problem is the fact that Hobbes was in age a contemporary of Jacobean dramatists like Webster or Tourneur. But the Jacobean playwrights were young men who published their plays in their twenties. Hobbes, because of all sorts of vicissitudes but also the nature of his work, did not publish until his middle or old age. So one might ask how a play like *The White Devil* or *The Atheist's Tragedy* could be described as contemporary with *Leviathan*. But I think if you read *Leviathan* beside them, you get a mutual illumination on both. They share a very precise structure of feeling in common, including the absolutely basic premise, contradicting so much of the official consciousness of the time, of an initial condition of war of all against all. The Jacobean dramatists produced this structure very suddenly, as a set of formal conventions; the action of a drama becomes a virtually endless series of struggles between mutually destructive individuals, from which there is no release. This very sharply contrasts with plays that had been written only ten years before, in which maximum havoc may be let

loose but there is always the concept of an authority which will resolve it, at whatever level of loss. Hobbes takes the assumptions of Webster or Tourneur as his starting-point, but he works through them to a kind of resolution with a new definition of authority. That is the later, historical effect.

So the problem of generations is certainly a very tricky one: perhaps we need another term distinct from the biological category. I have been particularly conscious of this myself, since I have not since 1945 worked contemporarily with my own generation and I think these asymmetries always happen. Should one speak in this sort of cultural analysis of a generation of work rather than a generation of birth? I'm trying to resolve this now, with some new methodology of cultural formations.

Your discussion of structures of feeling frequently employs a contrast between past and present, in The Long Revolution. *You write, for example: 'It is only in our own time and place that we can expect to know, in any substantial way, the general organization. We can learn a great deal of the life of other places and times, but certain elements, it seems to me, will always be irrevocable. Even those that can be recovered are recovered in abstraction, and this is of crucial importance. We learn 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. The most difficult thing to get hold of, in studying any past period, is this felt sense of the quality of life at a particular place and time: a sense of the ways in which the particular activities combined into a way of thinking and living.'*[42] *You go on to speak of living witnesses being 'silent' once we approach the past. The general suggestion is that it is much more difficult to seize or interpret a structure of feeling in the past than in the present, where an experience of it is immediately available. Yet surely your argument, if anything, should work in the opposite direction. In the present, the immensity of unselected cultural activity before us should make it very difficult to grasp, from within, the nature of the contemporary structures of feeling – particularly given the uncertainty as to what direction much of this activity will take. Whereas the past is typically characterized by a certain crystallization of historical judgment as to what works or documents were most central to it: its materials are more fixed. The fluidity and indeterminacy of the present surely render it at least as, if not more, difficult to interpret than the past? At times you seem close to conceding this – once when you say that not all those who*

[42] LR, p. 63.

experience or bear the structure of feeling of any given period may have any awareness of it at all, which must mean that it is no simple matter to discern at any one point. In another passage, in your chapter on dramatic forms, you say: 'It is never easy, in one's own generation, to see whether the [present] situation is that of 1630 or 1735, with plenty of activity, but on no lasting basis, or 1530 or 1890, at the beginning of a major movement.'[43] *This seems a much more plausible position. But how can you reconcile it with your earlier assertion?*

I think that I quite simply confused the quality of *presence*, which distinguishes a structure of feeling from an explicit or codified doctrine, with the historical present – which is another matter altogether. What I would now wish to say is that while a structure of feeling always exists in the present tense, so to speak grammatically, I do not now think it more recoverable or more accessible in the temporal present than in the past. I did feel, when I re-read *The Long Revolution* ten or fifteen years later, that the part which had stood up best was the concluding analysis of the structure of feeling at the time it was written – because it grasped the facts of widespread dissent, yet, situating them within the structure of feeling, saw the dissent as a largely negative reaction, out of which a new constructive period was rather unlikely to come. Of course, there was plenty of evidence for this in the actual conventions and styles of the period. So one might by lucky chance locate a structure of feeling in the present, but theoretically I would not say that it is easier to do so. For the structure is precisely something which can only be grasped as such by going beyond the indiscriminate flux of experiences that are contemporary with one. On the other hand I think the reason that the confusion arose was that I did want to insist very sharply on the true presence of a structure of feeling, as distinct from the official or received thought of a time, which always succeeds it.

The phrase you have just used has a ring of Scrutiny *to it. To what extent did the notion of structure of feeling represent a way of retaining Leavis's emphasis on experience, but giving it an objective and historical form?*

Yes, 'experience' was a term I took over from *Scrutiny*. But you must remember that I was all the time working on historical changes in literary

[43] LR, p. 297.

conventions and forms. Leavis's strength was in reproducing and interpreting what he called 'the living content of a work'. By contrast, the whole *Scrutiny* tradition was very weak in all consideration of formal questions, particularly when it was a question of deep formal structures which had undergone historical change. I was very conscious of this when writing on drama. On the other hand, most ordinary kinds of English Marxist analysis I knew passed so quickly from the literary products to what they represented that it jumped over the works themselves in finding their social affiliations. The notion of a structure of feeling was designed to focus a mode of historical and social relations which was yet quite internal to the work, rather than deducible from it or supplied by some external placing or classification.

You've stressed the literary origins of the notion of 'structure of feeling' – its aid to your critical work on texts. Isn't there, however, a danger in The Long Revolution *of a kind of silent elision from the texts of a period as privileged evidence of the structures of feeling to the structures of feeling as privileged evidence of the social structure or historical epoch as such? The concept then tends to become an epistemology for gaining a comprehension of a whole society. That movement, from text to structure of feeling to history, seems much less defensible.*

I now feel very strongly the need to define the limits of the term. There are cases where the structure of feeling which is tangible in a particular set of works is undoubtedly an articulation of an area of experience which lies beyond them. This is especially evident at those specific and historically definable moments when very new work produces a sudden shock of *recognition*. What must be happening on these occasions is that an experience which is really very wide suddenly finds a semantic figure which articulates it. Such an experience I would now call pre-emergent. On the other hand, a dominant set of forms or conventions – and in that sense structures of feeling – can represent a profound blockage for subordinated groups in a society, above all an oppressed class. In these cases, it is very dangerous to presume that an articulate structure of feeling is necessarily equivalent to inarticulate experience. For example, it seems probable that the English working class was struggling to express an experience in the 1790s and 1830s which in a sense, because of the subordination of the class, its lack of access to means of cultural

production, but also the dominance of certain modes, conventions of expression, was never fully articulated. If you look at their actual affiliations, what is striking is a great grasping at other writings. Working people used Shelley; they used Byron, of all people; they responded very strongly to Mrs Gaskell. Should they or should they not have? These works could only have been approximations or substitutes for their own structure of feeling. Then there are historical experiences which never do find their semantic figures at all. I felt this very much in writing *The Country and City*. Even though there is much more literary expression than is usually allowed, there are still vast areas of silence. One cannot fill that silence with other people's structures of feeling.

That delimits the notion of social experience from articulated structure of feeling. But there is still the problem of the epistemological privilege of experience itself in your work. In The Long Revolution *you say a number of times that the key to any description is the particular experience that is its starting-point. This idea, that experience is epistemologically determinant, finds a very central formulation in your introduction, where you write: 'I do not confine myself to British society because of any lack of interest in what is happening elsewhere, but because the kind of evidence I am interested in is only really available where one lives.'*[44] *This assumption leads to consequences that are quite unwarranted historically. For example, when you discuss the 1840s, you list seven decisive influences on the structure of feeling of the decade. Not one of them has anything to do with foreign or overseas developments. Yet if you look at Elizabeth Gaskell's* Mary Barton, *a novel you discuss, you find a direct warning to her readers of the dangers of a repetition in England of the Parisian insurrections of 1848. In fact, English contemporaries were keenly aware of the seismic upheaval of 1848 in Europe – only a few years earlier Peel was actually fortifying his country house against the dangers of possible armed attack on it. Yet because 1848 was not a national experience in the direct sense, it is not even mentioned in your account.*

The list of main features of the 1840s I gave was actually meant to mark off the way in which its history was conventionally assumed to be reflected in literature. The purpose of the analysis of literature was then to try to show all the pressures which were overlooked by it. Thus *Mary Barton* was

[44] LR, p. 14.

composed within a structure of feeling which made it peculiarly apposite to the conjuncture of 1848, when the European explosion occurred – that was the point of her introductory note. For one of the determining characteristics of so much of the English writing of the late 1840s was an anxious oscillation between sympathy for the oppressed and fear of their violence. That tension is one of the deep processes of composition of *Mary Barton*. You can also find it in George Eliot, who wrote a letter responding warmly to the French revolution of 1848, and wishing a similar event would occur here – but then typically saying that it could not, since the English poor lacked the necessary ideas and intelligence. That combination of movement of sympathy and fear of violence is very important to the structure of feeling I was describing. I would certainly stress it more today.

Your reply still remains within the terms of the lived experience you were reconstructing, however. The point is that the composition of your book appears to join these limits, by appealing in its turn to the privilege of national experience. There is a connection between your initial statement of method and the particular lack of the stress you have just noted.

I concede this. But I should explain that the sentences you've quoted from my introduction were really referring much more to Part III of *The Long Revolution*, where I actually was surveying the contemporary situation in England, and even attempting in outline the total analysis, whose absence you've pointed out in Part II. The claim about evidence where one lives wasn't related as such to the 1840s. However, I am not using this to evade the theoretical point, which I think is correct. If the mode of analysis is viable, it must be applicable anywhere. Some elements of a structure of feeling are, of course, only traceable through a rather close analysis of language, which will always be a national one. But the most normal evidence for such a structure is conventions, which are often international. My own view, as a matter of fact, is that the most interesting use I have been able to make of it is, much more than the essay on the 1840s, my accounts of Ibsen and Brecht – of whose contexts of experience I knew very little.

That is a very helpful clarification. But the wider problem of the category of experience remains perplexing. It must be the only word you use recurrently

that is not given an entry in Keywords. *In Leavis's writing it is a subjectivist notion of value – of 'life'. Despite the fact that you have transformed its* Scrutiny *usage, the term does continue to carry something of its intellectual heritage. For your most recent discussion of a structure of feeling defines it as the field of contradiction between a consciously held ideology and emergent experience. The idea of an emergent experience beyond ideology seems to presuppose a kind of pristine contact between the subject and the reality in which this subject is immersed. Doesn't that leave the door sufficiently ajar for a Leavisian notion of 'life' or 'experience' to return?*

No. That should be very clear. For after all the basic argument of the first chapter of *The Long Revolution* is precisely that there is no natural seeing and therefore there cannot be a direct and unmediated contact with reality. On the other hand, in much linguistic theory and a certain kind of semiotics, we are in danger of reaching the opposite point in which the epistemological wholly absorbs the ontological: it is only in the ways of knowing that we exist at all. To formalist friends, of whom I have many, who affect to doubt the very possibility of an 'external' referent, it is necessary to recall an absolutely founding presumption of materialism: namely that the natural world exists whether anyone signifies it or not. The fact is that we have been passing through a phase of rabid idealism on the left in the sixties and seventies. It is a positive relief to read Timpanaro's reminder that physical organisms exist in an undeniably material world whether or not they have ever been signified.

That said, I think the relation between signification and referent in one's own situation differs from that in any other. This is very difficult to formulate. But in the case of other situations, one learns only through recorded articulations; all that one has is necessarily, as it were, texts or documents. Certainly in one's own time one gathers far more than most people realize from just these versions of an endless documentation. By contrast in the whole process of consciousness – here I would put a lot of stress on phenomena for which there is no easy knowing because there is too easy a name, the too easy name is 'the unconscious' – all sorts of occurrences cut across the established or offered relations between a signification and a reference. The formalist position that there is no signified without a signifier amounts to saying that it is only in articulation that we live at all. Now maybe this is just a generalization from my own history, but I have found that areas which I would call structures of

feeling as often as not initially form as a certain kind of disturbance or unease, a particular type of tension, for which when you stand back or recall them you can sometimes find a referent. To put it another way, the peculiar location of a structure of feeling is the endless comparison that must occur in the process of consciousness between the articulated and the lived. The lived is only another word, if you like, for experience: but we have to find a word for that level. For all that is not fully articulated, all that comes through as disturbance, tension, blockage, emotional trouble seems to me precisely a source of major changes in the relation between the signifier and the signified, whether in literary language or conventions. We have to postulate at least the possibility of comparison in this process and if it is a comparison, then with what? If one immediately fills the gap with one of these great blockbuster words like experience, it can have very unfortunate effects over the rest of the argument. For it can suggest that this is always a superior instance, or make a god out of an unexamined subjectivity. But since I believe that the process of comparison occurs often in not particularly articulate ways, yet is a source of much of the change that is eventually evident in our articulation, one has to seek a term for that which is not fully articulated or not fully comfortable in various silences, although it is usually not very silent. I just don't know what the term should be.

There is a remarkable similarity between the formulations you've just used and Sartre's account of what he calls – precisely – l'expérience vécue, *in his late work on Flaubert. One way of trying to clarify the problem might be to broaden its terms of reference. To take the example of another thinker in France, one could contrast your use of experience till now with that of Althusser, as a diametrical opposite. In Althusser's work, experience is simply a synonym for illusion. It is ideology in its pure state – the opposite of science, or truth. That is a position he has taken over, more or less unmodified, from Spinoza: it represents an extreme form of the philosophical tradition of European rationalism. In your work up to this point the impression is conveyed that experience on the contrary is the domain of direct truth. At times, as we've seen in* Culture and Society, *you have even counterposed conceptual or discursive thought against immediate experience, as superficial and unreliable – a sphere of false fixity and clarity, the world of 'doctrines'. This emphasis obviously has a long history: it can be traced back, in fact, to Locke. Philosophically, it represents the classical position of European empiricism. Now there are*

obvious objections to be made to either stance. For example, in the case of Althusser's work, the exclusive opposition of science/ideology effectively equates the idea of truth with science. Since immediate experience is the medium of ideological illusion, Althusser in effect argues that it is only by the production of concepts that we can apprehend reality at all. Manifestly, however, this is not the case: we can look out of the window and tell whether the sun is shining or not without any knowledge of meteorology. Our report is a matter of immediate experience, and registers a truth. This is an elementary point. But that kind of experience escapes the Althusserian system altogether. On the other hand, your tendency to treat experience as the deepest field of truth incurs the opposite liability. For it is quite evident that people may have very powerful experiences, and be completely convinced of their connection to reality, which from a different social or historical perspective we can perceive as saturated with illusion and structured somewhere quite else. A familiar example is the case of certain kinds of psychological disorder or malady where a person is completely gripped by an experience that is very vivid to them, but of whose sources they are entirely unaware and can misinterpret radically. Similarly, to take the previous example, an ability to tell the weather does not suffice to give knowledge of the movement of the earth round the sun: immediate experience is directly contradicted by astronomy as a science.

This is why the suggestion in The Long Revolution *that one should attempt to interpret a whole social structure by the canon of actually living within it, if taken seriously, is centrally disabling. For even within one national society there are manifestly many processes which are inherently inaccessible to our immediate experience. We cannot possibly, for instance, hope to work out the laws of accumulation of capital or the tendency of the rate of profit from our personal experience of daily life. Yet these may be an absolutely essential determinant of the way in which the whole society is moving. That is not to speak of the national limitation implied in the criterion, which would effectively rule out international enquiry or comparison altogether. But, of course, the world has been such for a very long time now that without knowledge of the whole international environment into which it is integrated, one can understand very little of one's own society. That is surely one of the first lessons of socialism.*

In your latest definition of a structure of feeling as the area of tension between ideology or articulation and primary experience, there remains a danger that these earlier limits – which you've criticized – may still not be entirely overcome. For there is a suggestion that articulation or ideology covers

or informs – often deforms – an experience which is always wider than it. In the binary opposition which you use, experience necessarily exceeds articulation, producing meanings which may or may not be recorded – that's the problem of silence or otherwise – but always containing more than ideology can remit. In your recent political discussion of the notion of hegemony, you make the very effective point that the hegemony of a ruling class can never extend over the whole range of a society's experience, since by definition it operates through exclusion and limitation.[45] *The problem remains, however, that there are all kinds of great historical processes that cannot be encompassed within either of the two terms in which you formulate a structure of feeling – ideology or immediate experience. Any systematic discourse on history or society must aim at a scientific knowledge that is underivable from any literary text. To return to your analysis of the 1840s: in that decade there occurred a cataclysmic event, far more dramatic than anything that happened in England, a very short geographical distance away, whose consequences were directly governed by the established order of the English state. That was, of course, the famine in Ireland – a disaster without comparison in Europe. Yet if we consult the two maps of either the official ideology of the period or the recorded subjective experience of its novels, neither of them extended to include this catastrophe right on their doorstep, causally connected to socio-political processes in England. That is surely a reminder that one cannot run together different sorts of enquiry in the way that you sometimes seem to do in* The Long Revolution. *It is not possible to work back from texts to structures of feeling to experiences to social structures. There is a deep disjuncture between the literary text from which an experience can be reconstructed and the total historical process at the time. There is not a continuity at all.*

I accept this almost entirely. But I think one can differentiate its historical applications. It is very striking that the classic technique devised in response to the impossibility of understanding contemporary society from experience, the statistical mode of analysis, had its precise origins within the period of which you are speaking. For without the combination of statistical theory, which in a sense was already mathematically present, and arrangements for collection of statistical data, symbolized by the foundation of the Manchester Statistical Society, the society that was emerging out of the industrial revolution was literally unknowable. I tried

[45] ML, p. 125.

to develop this contrast in *The Country and the City* between the knowable community, a term used with irony because what is known is shown to be incomplete, and the new sense of the darkly unknowable. There are many kinds of response to that. After the industrial revolution the possibility of understanding an experience in terms of the available articulation of concepts and language was qualitatively altered. There were many responses to that. New forms had to be devised to penetrate what was rightly perceived to be to a large extent obscure. Dickens is a wonderful example of this, because he is continually trying to find fictional forms for seeing what is not seeable – as in the passages in *Dombey and Son* where he envisages the roofs of houses being taken off, or a black cloud that is the physical shape of all the lives that are lived yet otherwise cannot be represented at all. With these figures he is seeking to render the basic reality of the society, which is certainly not empirically observable. One could interrun this with the development of the statistical techniques of social enquiry. The contrast between Mayhew and Booth is very interesting. Mayhew's work is composed of a constant interaction between premises, observations, questions. He takes his assumptions of how people are living back into the streets and talks to people to find out if they are true: if somebody tells him that they do not earn that much as a watercress seller, it modifies his view of the world. It is not eccentric to call this social observation continually tempered by experience. Booth's method is quite different. Before he speaks to anybody in the East End of London, he has totally mapped its structure by streets, in an incredibly impressive job of work, and then he takes his classifications to the East End to prove that radical propaganda about it was false. To his credit, or I suppose that of Beatrice Webb, when actual observations contradicted the rationality of the model, there was some disturbance to the survey.

From the industrial revolution onwards, qualitatively altering a permanent problem, there has developed a type of society which is less and less interpretable from experience – meaning by experience a lived contact with the available articulations, including their comparison. The result is that we have become increasingly conscious of the positive power of techniques of analysis, which at their maximum are capable of interpreting, let us say, the movements of an integrated world economy, and of the negative qualities of a naive observation which can never gain knowledge of realities like these. But at the same time, it is an ideological crisis of just this society, that this inevitable awareness has also led to a privileged

dominance of the techniques of rational penetration and a corresponding undervaluation of areas where there is some everyday commerce between the available articulations and the general process that has been termed 'experience'. Experience becomes a forbidden word, whereas what we ought to say about it is that it is a limited word, for there are many kinds of knowledge it will never give us, in any of its ordinary senses. That is a necessary correction. But I find that just as I am moving in that direction, I see a kind of appalling parody of it beyond me – the claim that all experience is ideology, that the subject is wholly an ideological illusion, which is the last stage of formalism – and I even start to pull back a bit. But I think the correction is right and in a way I should always have known it, because after all I was pretty dependent on statistical procedures in Part II of *The Long Revolution* for findings that I could not possibly have obtained from experience.

That balance seems very acceptable. One of the areas which you could have mentioned, where the notion of experience clearly keeps its credentials, is the practice of class struggle. It is normal in the political language of socialism to speak of a working-class militant as 'experienced' – Lenin did so hundreds of times – which means something quite precise, that someone with the same or greater degree of formal knowledge of the society but without that experience could not organize actions with anything like the same degree of effectiveness. Of course, it is also true that fetishization of experience within an organization can become a form of conservatism: experience won today does not necessarily dictate the tactics or the strategy of tomorrow – partly because the enemy itself learns from experience. But a correct emphasis on experience as practice in struggle is essential for any form of revolutionary politics. One gets the impression from The Long Revolution *that you felt socialist theory was then claiming a knowledge of contemporary society which actually did not meet with the practical experience of struggle against it. Is that so?*

Well, much of Part III is a conscious comparison between the received models of English society at the time and what seemed to me was actually happening. I drew on various kinds of alternative evidence in my own response to the very fiercely fought and agitated debates between right and left within the labour movement through the fifties. But what I essentially felt about them was that, although I was very much nearer the one than the other, neither really answered to the social experience to which they were

attempting to speak. That is what explains the no doubt exaggerated judgment that socialism had almost wholly lost any contemporary meaning. What I was trying to say was that it was above all necessary not to pretend that there was a strong, well-rooted socialist movement which was in a position to change the society and that the first duty was affiliation to it. It was a time, on the contrary, when the real need was to contrast very rapidly changing social relations with the prevailing formulations which were helpless before them. I think out of that came certain directions for a relevant cultural practice, although I would now put them much more strongly.

Perhaps we could conclude by asking you a question about this last part of The Long Revolution. *You said earlier that you conceived the essay on 'Britain in the 60s' as an attempt to capture the structure of feeling at the time. Now this brings us back to one of the problems with which we started. If that was the case, how did you relate your analysis to the class divisions within the society? There were at least two major classes in England in this period, not to speak of many intermediate strata with their own sensibility and history and memory. Wouldn't your tacit reference to a structure of feeling in the singular have tended to blur that reality?*

I was using the term, in the sense I suggested earlier, of the structure of feeling of the emergent productive class. What I was trying to do was at once to register the strength with which it was emerging, and thereby rendering certain prior meanings residual, and yet also the fact that it was becoming contained within a predominantly bourgeois structure, which had incorporated a large part of organized working-class thinking within it. For example, I thought it was necessary to explain the so-called phenomenon of 'classlessness': to show what it was that made sense in that emergent structure of feeling, and what was strictly an ideology which was blocking the very emergence of this structure. Very obviously certain habits of deference and postponement were being lost. On the other hand, not only in the received ideologies but in many working people's descriptions of their own lives, there was a displacement of class relations from their necessary centrality to a curious mixture of a certain undoubted real loosening and a particular style of consumption, which was itself merely a shift in the market and nothing whatever to do with fundamental relations between classes. That is why I distinguished between what I

called the open 'class-apparent' differential and the fundamental and unaltered differential of the ownership of capital. The focus of my account was the structure of feeling of working-class people, rather than the political doctrines or arguments of the time.

3. Keywords

The sort of historical philology represented by Keywords *seems to be an entirely original venture, at least within the English-speaking world. You explain in your introduction to it that* Keywords *grew out of materials that you couldn't include in* Culture and Society. *But in the twenty years between the writing of the two books your ideas obviously altered and developed.* Keywords *takes the principle of looking at changes of historical meaning much further and more systematically than* Culture and Society. *Were you influenced by or interested in other kinds of linguistic study in the interim, which had a direct bearing on* Keywords?

I started with the discovery in the fifties that I could understand the contemporary meanings of terms like 'culture' much more clearly once I had explored the historical semantics behind them, which was a great surprise to me. It was not an entirely unfamiliar method, of course, because the English course at Cambridge had involved the discussion of certain words like 'nature' to establish their historical usages; but this was regarded very much as an ancillary to literary appreciation. When I realized the potential wider interest of this procedure, I wrote an appendix to *Culture and Society*, taking a range of the words at issue in the book. The publisher didn't want to include it, for reasons of length. In the intervening years I went on noting further examples of terms that had undergone important changes of meaning. I was also reading more theory of language. But although I now know of one or two other schools which would have been relevant to me – for example, the German scholars who work on certain medieval terms – at the time I couldn't find any other enquiry which moved either practically or theoretically in the same direction. So in that sense it felt very much as if I was working on my own. Indeed most of the linguistics I was reading, especially in the sixties, was structuralist in bent, sheering away from the very notion of historical developments in meaning. I suppose I got some impulses in reaction to

institutions of struggle to which appeal was being made.

But at the same time I could see a danger on my own side. For there are elements of any cultural process which tend to form bonds between classes that are not merely antagonistic relations. Almost by definition, some cultural institutions involve positive relations, whatever their strain, between classes. In these cases conflicts emerge as arguments over the extent of the institutions, the nature of their content or curricula, and so on. It was always possible, studying these elements in the cultural process, for one's sense of struggle to diminish, to the point where one could miss real clashes between social classes. One of the areas where in fact that happened was in my work on the history of the popular press in the 19th century: it was precisely Edward who helped me to see that the popular press up to the late 1840s was a press of struggle, which I had not adequately registered. But, of course, the popular press after the 1840s unfortunately ceased to be so, and it seemed to me that a rhetoric of 'way of struggle' as opposed to 'way of life' might prevent one from understanding that later development: what I would now define as incorporation.

'If one was to seek the most fundamental premise of The Long Revolution, *one should probably start with your initial definition of the title itself. At the beginning of the book, you set out three processes – the democratic revolution, the industrial revolution and the cultural revolution – which together compose a single 'long revolution' for you. The problem that this poses for a traditional Marxist position can be seen very clearly if one then looks at what you say about the interrelations between the practices involved in these three processes. Towards the end of the first part, you say: 'The truth about a society, it would seem, is to be found in the actual relations, always exceptionally complicated, between the system of decision, the system of communication and learning, the system of maintenance and the system of generation and nurture. It is not a question of looking for some absolute formula, by which the structure of these relations can be invariably determined. The formula that matters is that which, first, makes the essential connections between what are never really separable systems, and second, shows the historical variability of each of these systems, and therefore of the real organizations within which they operate and are lived.'*[30] *The key emphasis here is on the impossibility of separating these systems. A second significant statement occurs in the course of your discussion*

[30] LR, p. 36.

of the standard question of the relationship between art and society, conventionally defined. You write: 'If the art is a part of the society, there is no solid whole, outside it, to which, by the form of our question, we concede priority. The art is there, as an activity, with the production, the trading, the politics, the raising of families. To study the relations adequately we must study them actively, seeing all the activities as particular and contemporary forms of human energy. . . . It is then not a question of relating the art to the society, but of studying all the activities and their interrelations, without any concession of priority to any one of them we may choose to abstract.'[31] *Here you associate the idea of abstracting systems with that of ascribing priority to any one of them, rejecting either procedure. The logical conclusion is drawn most clearly in the first pages of the work you wrote immediately afterwards,* Communications, *where you declare: 'We are used to descriptions of our whole common life in political and economic terms. The emphasis on communications asserts, as a matter of experience, that men and societies are not confined to relationships of power, property and production. Their relationships, in describing, learning, persuading and exchanging experiences are seen as equally fundamental.'*[32]

These passages appear in frontal contradiction with a central tenet of historical materialism: the primacy, or determination in the last instance, of the economic within any social totality. Your arguments for rejecting it seem to be twofold. First you maintain that the various activities of a society are so closely interwoven that they are never separable in reality. Second you argue that since they are in effect simultaneous in our experience, they must be equivalent in their significance, for the overall shape of society. Now, in the period of time from The Long Revolution *up to* Marxism and Literature *your thought has clearly undergone very important changes and developments in a whole number of respects – cultural, political and theoretical. In your most recent two books,* Keywords *and* Marxism and Literature, *you say that you are writing within a general position of historical materialism. What we would like to ask you is whether the formulations from* The Long Revolution *and* Communications *which we have just quoted still represent your position on the nature of a social totality today?*

Let me try to get at it this way. There are two major qualifications that I

[31] LR, pp. 61–2.
[32] C, p. 18.

The publisher who accepted the manuscript, really on the basis of *Drama from Ibsen to Eliot*, which had won a modest academic esteem, told me that it was the sort of book he liked to have on his list, a very reputable work, but of course very few people would want to read it. He said: 'I've got another book called *The Uses of Literacy*, of which I would say the same.' So the amount of attention it got was quite unexpected. The book was read, it was argued about, it seemed in one sense to initiate and in another sense to confirm a tendency towards a new sort of debate. In particular, a younger generation of readers seemed to understand it very well. On the other hand, it was by no means universally welcomed – the quotations used to sell the book today don't give an idea of the amount of negative reactions it aroused. An example was the very hostile review by the literary editor of the *Guardian*, Anthony Hartley. That sector of right-wing liberal opinion was very alarmed by the book, which it saw as a new attempt at a reassociation of culture and social thinking which it thought had been seen off after the thirties.

The most immediate effect on me was to take some kinds of pressure off, and put other kinds of pressure on. It ended the frustration of writing so much unpublished material. After *Culture and Society* I could much more easily publish what I was doing. It also earned a little money, which made a substantial material difference to us, since by that time we had a sizeable family. It had been very difficult to go on writing work of which more than half was unpublished, in conditions when other kinds of writing which I could have done – commercial writing – would have relieved the situation. For the first time since the end of the War, we didn't have to live under the pressure of an extreme shortage of money. The pressure it put on was that of henceforward working in a much more public domain. Suddenly people were saying, why don't you write about this or that? It was easier to get what I was writing anyway into print, but there was now a great deal of invitation to write things I didn't want to do. That is easy enough to deal with, but the much more difficult case is the project which you would not mind doing – something perfectly interesting in itself, but not necessarily what you would have done next. The question of priorities became very difficult. It took some time to work that through.

2. The Long Revolution

Could we ask then about the connection between Culture and Society *and* The Long Revolution? *How was the second book conceived?*

Essays and Principles in the Theory of Culture was my first title for it. The 'principles' were to be an account of the primacy of cultural production – the sense of cultural process which I had been thinking about all through writing on other people in *Culture and Society*. That later became Part I of *The Long Revolution*. The 'essays' were topics I had taught, or was going to teach, in adult classes – the reading public, the social history of writers, the press and dramatic forms. Those made up what was to be Part II of *The Long Revolution*. So the original project was a book which had just got these theoretical chapters plus the chapters on the history of particular institutions and forms. It was in response to the quite new situation of '57–9, including to some extent the discussion of *Culture and Society* itself, that I conceived the idea of writing the third section – 'Britain in the Sixties'. I wanted to be able to develop the position briefly outlined in the conclusion of *Culture and Society*, by a general analysis of contemporary culture and society, a wide structure of feeling in the society as it intersected with institutional developments. The work was a much more developing project even than *Culture and Society*, which of course now seems the more unified book. It was a case of bringing together certain impulses and trying to hold them in some sort of shape. The final form was discovered in the course of the research.

While we are on this subject, are we right in recollecting that The Long Revolution *got a much more inimical reception from the established press?*

The degree of hostility was quite unforgettable. There was a full-scale attack of the most bitter kind in certain key organs. The *TLS* was particularly violent and *ad hominem*. But the reaction was very general. I