Marking, Reference Points, and Mode of Production: on the Differences which Make a Difference[1]

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RÉSUMÉ

Cet article traite des problèmes relevant à la fois du domaine, de l'étendue et de l'utilisation de certains procès sémantiques en tant qu'éléments de l'hégémonie capitaliste. L'accent est mis sur l'étude des catégories dites marquées et non-marquées, sur les conflits et les incertitudes, sur la création et la modification de catégories ainsi que sur l'utilité de certains concepts analytiques conventionnels.

> *"...il n'existe jamais de texte original: tout mythe est par nature une traduction... qu'un auditeur cherche à démarquer en le traduisant... tantôt pour se l'approprier et tantôt pour le démentir... Le mythe n'est donc jamais de sa langue, il est une perspective sur une langue autre..."* (Lévi-Strauss 1971: 576-577).

[1] The subtitle is borrowed from Bateson; see e.g., Bateson 1972: 315. I would like to thank C. Creider, D. Legros, J. Magdoff, P. Maranda, G. Sankoff, E. Schwimmer, M. Seguin and S. Tobias for helpful comments on my paper. The general subject matter is of concern to a variety of colleagues in close communication with one another. Most of the text of this paper was written before I read Williams 1976 and Williams 1977, which include similar arguments on categories. From a theoretical standpoint, Williams 1977 bears directly on the issues raised here. I have drawn on Williams' discussion of "hegemony' for a few reformulations, limited by the approach of a publication deadline.

A number of semantic classes exhibit a rather interesting characteristic. On the one hand, their subclasses (or instances) can be seen as being equally representative of the larger class to which they belong. Thus we can say that a 'detached house' or a 'townhouse' are both 'houses'. 'Detached house' and 'townhouse' are substitutable for each other in a construction such as "A — is a kind of house". The two kinds of house are thus in a paradigmatic relationship.

However, we can also see a townhouse as being somehow less of a 'house', or less of a 'real house', than a 'detached house' is. In this sense, 'detached house' and 'townhouse' are not substitutable for each other, and furthermore, they are in an ordinal relationship, a kind of syntagmatic relationship (Silverman 1975). 'Detached house' and 'townhouse' form a directed order of more-to-less houseness, as kinds of 'house' — at least in my idiolect.[2] And the detached house is a more exemplary case of 'house' than a 'townhouse' is.

For analytic purposes one would want to know: What is it about a townhouse which, in the latter relations, makes it less of a house than a detached house, and vice-versa? One may point to features ascribed to the objects; the objects' uses; aspects of the context of identification; attributes of the speakers, etc. (see Labov 1973; Lakoff 1972).

Consider 'author' and 'authoress' (see Greenberg 1966). 'Author' may refer to a male or a female, or either, indiscriminately. 'Authoress' may refer only to a female. A label, 'author', refers to the class as a whole, and also to a particular sub-class: male authors. 'Female authoress' is redundant. 'Author' is unmarked vis-à-vis a genderless author. With 'authoress' we mark for femaleness. In referring to a male author, 'author' refers to what I take to be the exemplary case.

Thus: A term labels (a) a general class ('author' as any author), and (b) the (or an) exemplary case of that general class (male author), while (c) another term (perhaps derived: 'author', 'author*ess*') labels another and contrasting member of the general

[2] The "ethnography" included in this paper as general ethnography is largely speculative. Hopefully the points are of sufficient theoretical interest to justify this.

class, and (d) the marked label ('authoress') may not substitute for the unmarked one (one male author and one authoress do not combine to form two authoresses, except, perhaps, biologically).

Why should it be that the female is marked?

There are a number of possible explanations for this sort of phenomenon. One is that 'author' is used more frequently than 'authoress'. Another is that, very simply, there are more male than female authors. 'Authoress' is marked in relation to author, as 'male nurse' is marked in relation to 'nurse': fewer female authors, fewer male nurses; femaleness is marked in the first; maleness is the second.

At the same time, in one way or another, many exemplary cases and marked cases seem to relate to domination and subordination (e.g., 'men' as human beings, or as males). One may propose the principle: to the dominating (at least), the dominating are the most exemplary members of the larger class; the subordinate are marked members. We can entertain some strong relation between domination-subordination, exemplariness, and the marked-unmarked relation.

Let us speculate by suggesting that many exemplary cases provide the points of reference (perhaps 'ideal types') for the (intellectual) construction of the less exemplary cases. If the exemplary case is the dominating member, then the latter is being presented as the point of reference for the *reality* of the subordinate member, since in everyday life we probably assume that words indicate real people and things. This is, at least, a working hypothesis.

From the paradigmatic side of the coin, all authors are equally authors, all men and women are equally persons (or Men, or Man), all nationals are equally nationals. Through such a device the dominating can double-bind the subordinated: Yes, you and we are all equally part of a larger reality which the category in its broader unmarked sense indicates. No, you are lesser. If the subordinated assert themselves by using the marked category, they open the door for a more explicit lessness. Thus they might find it appropriate to very self-consciously (and other-consciously) use such terms, or to oppose them. Otherwise, the subordinated becomes invisible in the ambiguity of the unmarked form. The very ambiguity of the unmarked form, without further contextual clues, can keep the matter

up in the air. This combination of invisibility and marked visibility has been well-described in the literature dealing with dominated groups (e.g., Fanon).

There is, however, more to be said about 'author'.

Let us accept the idea of a genderless, unmarked author. Who, or what, is 'an author'? 'Author' is a complex category, and we may speculate about it. If I write a manuscript for myself, I am the author of it. But I am only marginally 'an author', or 'the author, X'. Imagine the following possibility: Somebody (a) sells manuscripts to publishers, who (b) print and sell the books to buyers, (c) the author is specialized as such, makes most of his or her living from this activity. Let us say that for certain purposes this is an exemplary case of 'author' at this level. If those three features are present, a person is unambiguously 'an author'. If one feature is lacking, the person's authorness will be marked, perhaps by 'but' ("She's an author, but..."). If two features are missing, the person's authorness will be more strongly marked. For example: Rather than selling a manuscript to a publisher, I might be a 'staff writer' (are 'staff writers' 'authors'?). At the other extreme, I might give copies of my work away. I might distribute them on a streetcorner, either for money, or free. I might not make most of my living from the activity.

Neither staff writers nor people who write and distribute things free on the streetcorner seem to be exemplary cases of 'author'.

I suggest that here we must refer directly to the hegemonic processes (see Williams 1977) of capitalist relations. The staff writer is more like an ordinary worker, in that he or she sells his or her labour (labour-power) to an employer (capital), and works under the direction of others. An exemplary case of author is defined negatively in relation to that. This exemplary author sells, but sells his or her product rather than labour-power directly, and does not 'work' under the control of others. Even more strongly: the exemplary author sells to firms. If I stand on the streetcorner and sell my tracts I am still selling, but in direct exchange for revenue. I am something like a petty commodity producer.

Thus, the most exemplary author (a) sells, (b) writing product rather than labour directly, (c) to firms, (d) makes a fair portion of his or her 'living' out of it, and (e) directs his or her own labour.

A 'writer' on this analytic line would be less authorish when one or more of these features is missing. But the features may not be equally weighted, in the sense that the absence of any one feature would make any two people equally marked authors. For example, the absence of (d) may not be as strongly marked as the absence of (a).

The genderless exemplary author, then, is defined by his or her specific imagined relationship to the conditions of production. And the semantic understanding must go beyond 'author' to a set of categories such as 'work', 'labour', 'job', 'profession'.[3]

Speaking very loosely: The predominant mode of production is production for exchange-value, in which labour-power is a commodity, and in which the labour process is controlled. Perhaps the least marked 'work' is work most consistent with this. Work which is unpaid can be marked in relation to work which is paid; work in which only products are sold can be marked in relation to work in which labour-power is sold; work which is uncontrolled by others can be marked in relation to work which is controlled by others (cf. Williams 1976: 282). It may also be the case that work in which the mode of labour is apparently characterized by a strong 'immaterial component' (e.g., 'mental labour') can be marked in relation to work apparently characterized by a strong 'material component'. If these depictions are accurate, the situations are consistent with a recognition of the predominant modes of labour and exchange, and also with a criticism of the position of those involved in 'planning' rather than 'execution', or 'ownership' rather than 'getting your hands dirty'.[4] And yet, one can still pose a larger, unmarked work: "Everybody has to work."

There are then at least two marking problems with regard to author: author-not really an author, and author-authoress. Marking

[3] For the purpose of this paper we can accept Althusser's "Thesis 1": "Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (Althusser 1971: 162). We can accept it with the caveat that 'individuals' not be universalized.

[4] It should be noted that as the mode of production evolves, there is a shift in the relations between different forms of labour, e.g., the specific position of material commodity production; these relations are also tied to the 'places' of different countries in the international system (e.g., Canada vs. the U.S. and U.K.). Thus the approach to the relation between mode of production and semantic process must be both dynamic and specific. On the question of 'immaterial things' see Marx 1952: 194-195.

here seems to call our attention to domination by the capitalist mode of production, and to domination in relations within and subordinated to it (cf. Dorais 1977).

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More must be said about reference points. In English some strongly political-ideological words such as 'justice' and 'equality' have negatives which are formed by the addition of negative labellers, such as *in*justice and *in*equality. As a native speaker of English and as the inhabitant of a society in which such terms are found, it seems to me that the images of the negative are clearer and more coherently organized than the images of the positive. It seems easier to point to something and say, "That is unjust" or "That is inequality", than it is to point to something and say, "That is just" or "That is equality". In think this observation has been made by some social critics.

In English, at least for equality, there is some historic basis for an understanding of why this should be so. In *Keywords,* Raymond Williams (1976) says:

> The earliest uses of EQUALITY are in relation to physical quantity, but the social sense of EQUALITY, especially in the sense of equivalence of rank, is present from [the fifteenth century] though more common from [the sixteenth century]. EQUALITY to indicate a more general condition developed from this but it represented a crucial shift. What it implied was not a comparison of rank but an assertion of a much more general, normal or normative condition... But after [the middle seventeenth century] it is not again common, in this general sense, until [the late eighteenth century], when it was given specific emphasis in the American and French revolutions. What was then asserted was both a fundamental condition — 'all men are created EQUAL' — and a set of specific demands, as in EQUALITY before the law — that is to say, reform of previous statutory INEQUALITIES, in feudal and post-feudal ranks and privileges (Williams 1976: 101; I have put into upper-case letters what appears in bold-faced type in the original).

Perhaps in many of its uses, 'equality' was counterposed to other conditions, as positive to negative, and took on much of its shape from the negation of those other conditions as they were understood — equality vs. 'rank' or 'privilege'. It makes historical sense, then, to see many of our positive ideological terms as having been — and continuing to be — parts of political-economic conflict, and being developed in opposition. After a certain battle is thought

to be won, perhaps the term itself appears as the descriptive as well as normative point of reference, describing an existing condition, and the other conditions are presented as the absence of or negation of that condition. But the negatives are still clearer, and the ideological connotations of the categories include strong connotations of *time,* such that the (apparent) positive is to the (apparent) negative as the (apparent) present (and/or future) is to be (apparent) past.

One might propose that the lexical labelling and the semantic process takes opposite courses: The lexical marking presents the positive condition as the point of reference and the negative condition as the negation or absence of the positive condition. The semantic process sustains (if in modified form) the negative condition as the clearer point of reference, and presents the positive condition as its negation.

When such terms are used in conflict, the conflict probably includes a conflict over the identification of the negative reference condition (cf. Kenneth Burke). What may appear as 'different ideas' — even different vague ideas — of freedom, justice or equality, are encompassed by different ideas of oppression, injustice, inequality. The apparently positive terms hover over an arena which, as expressed in language, is constituted by different and conflicting images of negative conditions dialectically related to programmes for change. The negation of the negative conditions gives some positive content to the apparently positive terms, but conflicting content since political negation allows of a greater variey of possibilities than does logical negation!

For any group at any moment, then, one may best understand the meanings of the positive categories through an understanding of what the members of that group take or are given (through media, schools, etc.) as "typical" instances of the opposite condition.

The construction of differences between phenomena is an activity of everyday life as it is an activity of areas which seem remote from everyday life. Assume we can demonstrate that for a wide variety of concepts, how we make distinctions (and assert similarities) relates closely to domination by the capitalist mode of production, and to domination in relations within and subordinated to it. Then we are confronted with a close relation

between the reproduction of the conditions of production, and semantic process — semantic process both in form (marked/unmarked), and in content (for occupational categories, national categories, etc.). This is one of the ways in which hegemony masquerades as something very simple, as the distinction, the difference, between this and that (see Dorais 1977).

One might suggest an historical process, tied up with the expansion of the capitalist mode of production, which I have called "the capitalisation of meaning" (Silverman 1978; cf. Williams 1976). The people involved in the expansion of the capitalist mode of production (expansion *within* a society and culture, as well as expansion to other societies and cultures) may not self-consciously have invented 'authors', 'houses', 'food', 'clothing', or 'music'. But the organization of the ranges of meaning of those categories may have been made capable of reconstruction such that the organization of those ranges, *and* of the realities they apparently denote, could be consistent with the organization of the predominant mode of production (at more than one level). If the exemplary case of 'author' is not only a male author but is also one who sells; if the exemplary case of 'house' is a 'single-family dwelling' that is 'owned'; if to anglophones the exemplary case of 'popular music' is American and British popular music: Then there is a unity between the reality, the categories describing it, and the organization of the mode of production.

Refractions of production for exchange-value may be inserted as implicit semantic criteria in a wide variety of concepts: the often silent coefficient of other features. And how, when one thinks about it, could it be otherwise, since much of our action is constituted by production for exchange-value, as well as by other sorts of domination and more explicitly ideological practices.

In this light, it becomes difficult to sustain certain social science analytic distinctions, such as that between a world of "objects" and the "orientation of the actor to the objects" as anything but a second-order distinction, if the senses of what actors *are*, and what objects *are*, are themselves part of capitalist hegemony.[5]

[5] Althusser observes: "...all ideology hails or interpellates concrete subjects, by the functioning of the category of the subject" (Althusser 1971: 162; emphasis omitted). See Barnett and Silverman 1978.

Many of the objects we use have been produced by others and alienated from others. Those objects come to us through a system of production of which we are part. While the manufacturers of, say, telephones, may not prescribe a definition of telephone for us, what is available to us as a telephone is the telephones marketed by those manufacturers. Or the foods, or books, or radios. The realities which give the categories their concrete shape are products of this system. And we use (or do not use) and acquire (or do not acquire) those products in particular ways which are also part of that system of production.

If we accept that the manufacturers' major criterion for production is profit, then objects are constructed in such a manner that their sale will yield the most profit. The 'features' of objects are thus determined as much by the requirements of maximizing profit as by anything else. We encounter, then, the accelerating incorporation of new meaning features (e.g., 'energy-saving') (and the transformation of old ones), which maximize profit and domination, and which, as S. Tobias has suggested, can appear to be not only "utilitarian", but also "aesthetic". Hence the route from profit or property relations to semantic criteria is not as long as it may seem.[6]

One need look very simply at what 'owning' means and invokes — or 'home' or 'author', or 'telephone', 'music'; and, of course, 'individual'.

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I would now like to pose explicitly what is, from one perspective, the larger issue: Given what we know about the operation of capitalism, can we construct interesting hypotheses about the properties of meaning systems implicated in it? I think we can. (It should be noted that I am not assuming here the existence of uniform lexemes or meanings across the population; difference and

[6] This point was suggested by students in an Anthropology seminar, University of Western Ontario, 1975. Much of the argument, of course, can be taken as having been sparked by Marx and Engels' famous theory, "The ruling ideas of each age have ever been the ideas of its ruling class" (Marx and Engels 1968: 51). At present, there appears to be increasing interest in the subject of ideology in everyday life, as in, just to cite a few examples, Barthes 1972; Bernstein 1972; Lefebvre 1971; Maranda, ed. 1977; Marchak 1975; Wagner 1975; Williams 1976, 1977; and the papers in this volume, and works cited by them.

ambiguity are part of the story. But I am assuming that there are certain processes at work, which are often most visible through the activities of state agencies or state-related agencies, and corporations).

Capitalist hegemony has included much "official" tinkering with categories in the interests of control (e.g., 'crime', 'mental illness', grades of commodities and of employment); it has included the creation of apparently new products (e.g., 'guided missiles' — the 'guided' perhaps becoming invisible; 'deodorants'); it has included differentiation within recognized classes of products ('short-range' and 'long-range missiles'; 'underarm', 'foot' and 'body' deodorants); it has included the attempt to identify a particular *class* of product with a particular brand-named product, to promote 'brand loyaly' in order to maximize profit.[7]

The system as a whole thus includes *(interalia;* see Silverman 1978):

(1) *From the point of view of the 'apprenticeship of categories'* (in P. Maranda's phrase), the perpetuation of old meanings and the introduction of new ones, perhaps as part of the same process (as with the category 'ethnic groups'), involving learning, unlearning, and relearning;

(2) *From the point of view of operations,* (a) the exemplariness of the particular, but in certain areas the appearance or reality of a contest over the exemplariness ('pop' or 'soft drink' = 'cola' ≠ 'coca cola'; 'pop' ≠ 'cola' = 'uncola' = 'seven up'); (b) the redefinition of old categories, also with the possibility of contest (the precise *differentia* of 'life' and 'death'); (c) the creation of new categories, again with the possibility of contest ('symbolic anthropology'); (d) the uneven relation between the negative and positive members of political-ideological pairs (injustice/justice), certainly with the possibility of contest;

(3) *From the point of view of content,* the increasing scope of aspects of production for exchange-value, including the requisite labour processes, forms of the State, and reification.[8]

[7] Wagner (1975) sensitively discusses related matters.
[8] Remarks by P. Maranda were particularly helpful for this section.

Especially insofar as the appearance of *choice* is sustained, we would thus expect (a) the clarity of some distinctions (between kinds of missiles, or deodorants, or employment); (b) the blurring of some distinctions (between social classes); (c) the relative vagueness of one side of some distinctions (inequality/equality); (d) the have-your-cake-and-eat-it-too approach to distinctions ('men' applies to both men and women, except where it does not); and (e) areas indicative of contest over modified or new distinctions or over the relations between distinctions and exemplary cases.

Many of the above items, if taken individually, are not limited to liberal democratic capitalist societies. But one may hypothesize that in their scope and relations to one another, they characterize a hegemonic process which is far from universal (cf. Dorais 1977).

How do these features relate to the applicability of certain analytic concepts? Where clarity is favoured, we expect certain analytic concepts to be most applicable, e.g., denotation vs. connotation; signification vs. designation. But we also expect a contextual clarity ("A *soft drink is,* for the purposes of this Act...") which tampers with some aspects of the applicability of those analytic distinctions.

Where blurring is favoured, we expect ambiguity and overlapping gradations at the same level (e.g., 'status'), and the lesser applicability of the more compartmentalizing analytic concepts.

In some cases "blurring" would be a polite form for "distortion". Barthes observes:

> ...as an economic fact, the bourgeoisie is *named* without any difficulty: capitalism is openly professed. As a political fact, the bourgeoisie has some difficulty in acknowledging itself: there are no 'bourgeois' parties in the Chamber. As an ideological fact, it completely disappears: the bourgeoisie has obliterated its name in passing from reality to representation, from economic man to mental man. It comes to an agreement with the facts, but does not compromise about values, it makes its status undergo a real *ex-nominating* operation: the bourgeoisie is defined as *the social class which does not want to be named.* "Bourgeois', "petit-bourgeois', 'capitalism', 'proletariat' are the locus of unceasing haemorrhage: meaning flows out of them until their very name becomes unnecessary (Barthes 1973: 138; emphasis in the original; footnotes omitted).

We might note at this point an important difference between "critical" and "uncritical" semantic analysis. For critical analysis, an important problem is constituted by the *absence* of certain explicit meanings, as well as by their presence. In order for the interpretation of absence to itself be meaningful, certain principles of selection are necessary lest the infinite world of absences envelop the analysis. Certain absences may present themselves as unrealized combinations of existing semantic criteria, as being ruled out by rules of context, etc. Componential analysis and related formal approaches call attention to such absences, which may merge into those the analysis of which is recommended by the study of modes of production.[9]

Where the have-your-cake-and-eat-it-too approach is favoured, we expect the complex clarity and ambiguity of marked-unmarked.

In areas indicative of contest, we expect conflicting and mobile relationships between classes and their exemplary cases. Thus some analytic distinctions (category vs. instance; signification-designation-denotation) themselves blur.[10]

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[9] See Carroll (1977) for related points on the interpretation of absence.
[10] Wallace (1970) writes of the relative occurrence of different sorts of operations in different domains.

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