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**The Art of Healing: Psychoanalysis, Culture and Cure**

by

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Submitted for Examination for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Critical Theory

University of Sussex

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“We have to ensure the means of life, and the means of community.

But what will then, by these means, be lived, we cannot say”

– Raymond Williams

Dedicated to all those who have helped me,

you are many.

## **Submission Statement**

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been, and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Joanna Kellond

Signature.....

Date.....

**University of Sussex**

**Joanna Elizabeth Thornton Kellond**

**For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Critical Theory**

**The Art of Healing: Psychoanalysis, Culture and Cure**

**Summary**

This thesis explores how we might think the relation between psychoanalysis and the cultural field through Donald Winnicott's concept of the environment, seeking to bring the concept into dialogue with more "classical" strands of psychoanalytic theorizing.

A substantial introduction sets out the rationale behind the thesis by reading Freud and Winnicott in relation to the "classic" and the "romantic" (Strenger 1989), or the "negative" and "positive" (Rustin 2001), in psychoanalytic thought. It goes on to outline the value of bringing these tendencies together in order to think the relationship between psychoanalysis, culture and change.

The chapters which follow move from psychoanalysis as a "cultural cure" – a method and discourse drawing on and feeding into a broad conception of cultural life – towards a notion of "culture as cure" informed by Winnicott's theory of the environment. Chapter one examines Freud's refusal of the "culture"/ "civilization" distinction and considers what it means for the idea of a cultural cure. Chapter two considers whether Winnicott's thinking about "culture" ultimately prioritises the aesthetic over the political. Chapter three uses Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* ([1932] 1994) to explore an analogy between totalitarianism, technology and maternal care. Chapter four turns to the series *In Treatment* (HBO 2008-) to think about the intersections of therapy and technology in terms of reflection and recognition. Chapter five employs Ian McEwan's *Saturday* (2005) as a means to reflect on the capacity of culture to cure.

Ultimately, I suggest that social "cure" may require more than "good-enough" cultural forms and objects, but Winnicott's "romantic" theorization of the aesthetic, coupled with a "classic" attention to structures of power and oppression may offer a means of thinking the relationship between psychoanalysis and culture in potentially transformative ways.

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## Introduction

### Psychoanalysis, Culture and Cure

There is this good word in our language: CURE. If this word be allowed to talk it can be expected to tell a story. Words have that kind of value, they have etymological roots, they have a history: like human beings, they have a struggle sometimes to establish and maintain identity. (D. W. Winnicott [1970] 1990a, 112)

Nevertheless...hasn't psychoanalysis found one of its most productive aspects in its relation to culture? Can it not be maintained that it is *originally* at home in its reflections on Sophocles, on Shakespeare, on jokes? In *culture*, therefore. (Laplanche 1999, 221)

The use of analysis for the treatment of the neuroses is only one of its applications; the future will perhaps show that it is not the most important one. (Freud 1926, 248)

In a talk delivered in Hatfield in October 1970, Donald Winnicott confers the status of “good word” upon “cure.” The source of this goodness lies in the word’s ability to tell a story, if we allow it to speak. That story might tell us something about psychoanalysis, about its various aims, and how it hopes to achieve them. Almost immediately, however, Winnicott introduces some ambivalence, an antagonism: the life of this good word is described in terms of a struggle – akin to that of a person – to come into and maintain its being. He goes on to tell us something more about this being and what he perceives to be its dereliction: “I believe cure at its roots means care. About 1700 it started to degenerate into a name for medical treatment, as in water-cure. Another century gave it the added implication of successful outcome; the patient is restored to health, the disease is destroyed, the evil spirit is exorcized” (113).

As Winnicott points out, “cure” finds its etymological roots in “care.” The word derives from the Latin, “cura,” meaning care, through the French “cure” – “care” again – dating from the eleventh century (*Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “cure” [accessed April 11, 2014, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/46000>]). Winnicott describes the shift in the meaning of the term, “the passage from care to remedy,” in terms of an impoverishment – the meaning “degenerates” – something is lost in the passage from one meaning to another, he suggests.



“Cure, in the sense of remedy, successful eradication of disease and its cause, tends today to overlay cure as care,” he writes (113); the imperative of successful outcome blots out cure as process and interaction.

This talk, entitled “Cure,” was delivered to an audience of doctors and nurses, but Winnicott sets out to complicate the meaning of cure for medicine, foregrounding the importance of a concept of care to medical work. “Applied science” and the “specific remedy” can be taken for granted, he claims, “what is significant is the interpersonal relationship in all its rich and complex human colours” (113, 115). Crucially, Winnicott believes that medicine can learn about this from psychoanalysis, which is more than “a matter of interpreting the repressed unconscious; it is rather the provision of a setting for trust, in which such work can take place” (114–5). Winnicott thus makes care essential to the psychoanalytic cure, and he goes on to insist on the social significance of the practice: “in terms of society’s sickness,” he writes, “care-cure may be of more importance than remedy-cure, and all the diagnosis and prevention that goes with what is usually called a scientific approach” (120). Society needs care, not remedy, he suggests, and he concludes his talk by outlining a continuity between care-cure and “what we expect to find in the best poetry, philosophy and religion” (120). The suggestion is not only that psychoanalysis might provide a template of care-cure, but that such experiences might also be found in existing cultural forms and institutions. “Culture,” broadly conceived, becomes a source and site – potentially – of care-cure in itself.

Winnicott’s talk gets to the heart of what are, for me, defining questions: can culture cure? What would it mean to claim that it might? How would such an argument implicate how we think about psychoanalysis itself? Winnicott’s reference to culture as a form of care-cure exemplifies the complex ways in which psychoanalysis articulates itself in relation to culture, in this instance by offering an analogy between the psychoanalytic cure and culture; staging psychoanalysis as a form of culture. This very specific example reflects a broader problematic:

how might we understand the relationship between psychoanalysis and culture – at once provocative, elusive and difficult – which Winnicott’s articulation begins to set out?

Psychoanalysis, of course, comes from culture, in the sense that all phenomena are, from one perspective, a product of their lived context. It is, as E. Ann Kaplan glosses, a “historical, ideological, and cultural discourse” (1990, 13).<sup>1</sup> The discourse does not exist in a vacuum, it has a history, it navigates historical change. Freud’s theories originate in the context of the late nineteenth century, and remain foundational, but society and history also impinge on the discipline: “times have changed and so too, in innumerable ways, has the set of institutions, ideas, theorists and practitioners that constitute the psychoanalytic movement,” writes Stephen Frosh (1991, 33).

Additionally, psychoanalysis has long been preoccupied by culture. Jean Laplanche once remarked that:

When psychoanalysis moves away from the clinical context, it does not do so as an afterthought. Or to take up side issues. It does so in order to encounter cultural phenomena. For when psychoanalysis is exported, it is not exported just anywhere; not everything outside the clinical realm is an object for extra-mural psychoanalysis, and the conditions that pertain to its domains and methods constantly have to be redefined. (1989, 11–12)

Laplanche iterates the centrality of the question of culture for psychoanalysis; it is not a “side issue” or an “afterthought,” but an important and legitimate preoccupation. However, his description fails because it sets up an encounter between a discrete entity called psychoanalysis and that which is outside – the former “moves away” and is “exported” from the clinic. Echoing Freud, he speaks of psychoanalysis as something used to speak *about* culture, a body of knowledge which is “applied” to culture, rather than a discipline implicated in culture in and of itself. Yet Laplanche is aware of the need to constantly refine and redefine the “domains and methods” in which and with which psychoanalysis operates, this complicates

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<sup>1</sup> The literature on the history of psychoanalysis, and the discipline’s complex imbrication with its historical milieu, is immense. See, for example Marcus (1987), Frosh (1991), Gay (1998), Rustin (2001), Brenkman (2004), Zaretsky (2005).

such a position, highlighting the relationship between psychoanalysis and culture as one of interplay and negotiation, and making the line between inside and outside difficult to draw. In a subsequent essay, Laplanche revises this position, offering a more nuanced description of the enduring interrelation: “can it not be maintained that [psychoanalysis] is *originally* at home in its reflections on Sophocles, on Shakespeare, on jokes? In *culture*, therefore” (1999, 221), a comment which captures the ways in which the discourse develops through engagement with its lived milieu, addressing itself to – and through – “culture,” both in the narrow sense of the arts and humanities (Sophocles and Shakespeare) and the broader conception of a cultural life in which practices such as joking play a part.

Winnicott, like Freud, paid considerable attention to the question of culture, and the two thinkers offer compelling insights into how psychoanalysis thinks about, and might be thought in relation to, the axes of culture and cure. Peter Rudnytsky, for instance, has suggested that Freud and Winnicott “reincarnate a perennial dichotomy in the history of ideas,” which pivots on diverging conceptions of human nature (1991, 111). In his seminal paper, “Romanticism and classicism,” dating from 1924, T. E. Hulme summarizes the distinction: “put shortly, these are two views, then. One, that man is intrinsically good, spoilt by circumstance; and the other that he is intrinsically limited, but disciplined by order and tradition to something fairly decent” (1936, 117). Forms of psychoanalysis generally fall into one of these categories, Carlo Strenger has suggested (1989; 1997). Whilst Freud is commonly thought to take a “classic,” somewhat Hobbesian, line, viewing human nature in terms of an “innate depravity” (Rudnytsky 1991, 111), Winnicott echoes the more “romantic” Rousseau, investing in a basic sense of human goodness which can be nurtured or impeded by the world it encounters.

The purchase of these intellectual tropes alone illustrates how psychoanalysis is always involved with culture, and they impinge on how the discipline construes the aims of its

therapeutic task. “Classical” analysis, so the argument goes – perceiving an inherent antagonism between human nature and social process – focuses on what might be gained through insight, “nothing but the truth can cure” (Strenger 1989, 596). It is possible to illuminate the causes and forms of our distress, but perhaps not to fundamentally change them. “Romantic” analysis, on the other hand – believing in the potential for harmony and reconciliation – aims to facilitate “growth and emotional development that had become held up in the original situation” (D. W. Winnicott [1962] 1990b, 168).

Whether these positions are irreconcilable is a moot point, but that both sets of aims complicate a medical model of cure is plain to see. In fact, psychoanalysis “turns the familiar concept of cure into the problem rather than the solution,” writes Adam Phillips (1994, xiv–xv). The method of free association makes it increasingly difficult to perceive exactly in what a cure might consist. “To believe in such a process,” writes Phillips, “and to know what a cure is – what recovery looks like – the doctor must already know what a life is supposed to look like” (xiv). Winnicott wrote that the method of free association allowed Freud to move away from curing symptoms and onto a more important task: “to enable the patient to reveal himself to himself,” a comment which can bear the weight of either therapeutic inflection – insight or growth – and which takes its distance from a medical understanding of cure ([1961] 1986a, 13).

Freud often resisted the medical language of health and well-being, and he worried that psychoanalysis would eventually be reduced to psychotherapy, remembered as no more than a treatment listed in psychiatric textbooks (Frosh 1999, 263). His support for lay analysts is only the most obvious evidence of his reticence towards an equation between psychoanalysis and medicine. In a famous early rubric, Freud suggested the discipline aims to transform “hysterical misery into common unhappiness” (1895a, 305), a formulation which takes its linguistic distance from a medical model, and insists on the distinctness of the mind

and body in terms of treatment. Put simply: minds are not cured in the same way as bodies. Discussing the origins of psychoanalysis in the treatment of hysteria, Juliet Mitchell reiterates that the hysterical symptom does not arise for organic reasons, and its removal is predicated upon understanding the work of the unconscious, the translation of wish taking place between secondary and primary processes (2000, 16–7); a process of translation which occurs in fundamental relation to the vicissitudes of the social environment. Ian Parker formulates this well: for Freud, “mental pain was always infused with cultural processes,” he writes (2012, 46).

Viewing the discourse from a “classical” perspective, Elizabeth Roudinesco argues that psychoanalysis aims not to cure but to change; the “cure” the discipline offers is “the existential transformation of the subject” (2003a, 34–5). As Roudinesco puts it, even if psychoanalysis may not be able to end suffering, it offers the opportunity “at least to become conscious of its origins and so to take it on” (15). Roudinesco ties the value of psychoanalysis to its capacity for revelation, its promulgation of what Philip Rieff famously termed an “analytic attitude” which aims to allow the analysand to know, and come to terms with, “the truth” (1966). In his essay on Jensen’s *Gratula*, Freud defines the nature of the psychoanalytic cure in precisely these terms, describing the “analytic method of psychotherapy” as involving “the making conscious of what is repressed and the coinciding of explanation with cure” (1907, 89). The context of the transference is essential to the process: “the process of cure is accomplished in a relapse into love,” but the value of psychoanalysis resides in its ability to deepen the analysand’s knowledge and understanding of their situation, rather than change it.<sup>2</sup>

However, social criticism was a part of Freud’s thinking from the start. Already in his earliest letters to Wilhelm Fliess (1985) Freud was linking the aetiology of the neuroses to the

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<sup>2</sup> Though Freud writes, in “‘Wild’ Psycho-Analysis,” that “it is a long superseded idea” that “the patient suffers from a sort of ignorance, and that if one removes the ignorance by giving him information [...] he is bound to recover,” the (im)possibility of a “successful” psychoanalysis remains linked to the idea of the transference as a route to repressed unconscious impulses (1910a, 225).

restrictive norms of sexual behaviour common to the time. In February 1893, in a long draft of his aetiological theory, Freud wrote that, in the absence of contraception, “society appears doomed to fall victim to incurable neuroses” (1985, 44). Freud’s decision to classify neurosis as a *social* sickness – an affliction of society rather than the problem of individual men and women – demonstrates the purchase of the social in his thinking from its early days. Investigating distress and its sources led on to social critique: “the injurious influence of civilization,” Freud writes in 1908, “reduces itself in the main to the harmful suppression of the sexual life of civilized peoples (or classes) through the ‘civilized’ sexual morality prevalent in them” (1908, 185). Once again, Freud classifies neurosis as a social illness which might only be alleviated by social transformation beyond the consulting room.

As is well-known, in his later years Freud became reticent about what psychoanalytic psychotherapy might be capable of achieving. Writing in 1937, in “Analysis Terminable and Interminable,” he takes a particularly dim view of what psychoanalysis can do. “Is there such a thing as a natural end to an analysis – is there any possibility at all of bringing an analysis to an end?” he writes. Can the analyst ever hope to resolve “every one of the patient’s repressions” and to “fill in all the gaps in his memory” (1937, 119–20)? Can the patient ever be *cured*? Apparently not, it would seem, if we follow Freud in this paper. Not only does he doubt the possibility of preventing a fresh neurosis from arising, he also remains unconvinced that one already treated might not return; hormonal changes around puberty and the menopause, as well as the unforeseeable occurrence of a fresh injury to the ego or body – not to mention the analyst themselves and the unreckonable death drive – place the therapeutic claims of psychoanalysis in serious doubt (226; 230).

Freud’s apparent equivocation concerning the therapeutic value of analysis is “nothing revolutionary,” Ernest Jones suggests in his introduction, “there is nothing unexpected in the cool attitude [...] towards the therapeutic ambitions of psycho-analysis or in the enumeration

of the difficulties confronting it" (Freud 1937, 211–2). "Analysis Terminable and Interminable" comes four years after *The New Introductory Lectures*, in which Freud provocatively claims to have "never been a therapeutic enthusiast" (1933, 151). Jones links Freud's reservations about therapy with his increasing attention to the non-clinical resonances of psychoanalytic theory: "he was always eager to direct attention to the importance of the non-therapeutic interests of psycho-analysis, the direction in which lay his own personal preferences, particularly in the later part of his life" (Freud 1937, 211).

Freud's letters to Jung, written nearly thirty years before "Analysis Terminable and Interminable," evince this shifting preoccupation. In July 1910 he wrote to Jung that he was becoming "more and more convinced of the cultural value of  $\Psi$ A [psychoanalysis]," and that he "longed for the lucid mind that will draw from it the justified inferences for philosophy and sociology" (1974, 340). The editors of the letters suggest that Freud's holograph, which has "*Welt*" (world) in place of "*Wert*" (value), is an instance of parapraxis, yet the idea of the "cultural world" of psychoanalysis gestures towards the discipline's rich and long-standing involvement with cultural life (340). Freud's comment also points up the cultural significance which psychoanalysis was in the process of acquiring, due, at least in part, to his study of Jensen's *Gradiva* (1907), and his essay on Leonardo (1910b), which was, at that time, being read and passed around amongst his associates (1974, 344). "Culture" as a concept covers the ground from creative to collective value, and, over time, Freud came to focus increasingly on the significance of psychoanalysis in understanding collective life, writing, in *The Question of Lay Analysis* (1926), of his belief that the insights offered by psychoanalysis to medical science "are only small contributions compared with what might be achieved if historians of civilization, psychologists of religion, philologists, and so on would agree themselves to handle the new instrument of research which is at their service" (1926, 248). As he suggests in that text in a comment I chose as an epigraph, "the use of analysis for the treatment of the neuroses is only one of its applications; the future will perhaps show that it is not the most

important one”(248), an articulation which speaks of the cultural significance of psychoanalysis whilst pointing up the possibility of historical change.

Freud’s ambivalence towards the therapeutic possibilities of psychoanalytic psychotherapy is an assertion that psychoanalysis is more than a therapy or cure: that its transformative capacities might extend beyond the removal of symptoms. A year after publishing his paper on “‘Civilized’ Sexual Morality,” Freud wrote, in a letter to James Putnam from December 1909, that the inability of psychoanalysts to “compensate our neurotic patients for giving up their illness [...] is not the fault of therapy but rather of social institutions [...] the recognition of our therapeutic limitations reinforces our determination to change other social factors so that men and women shall no longer be forced into hopeless situations. Out of our therapeutic impotence must come the prophylaxis of the neuroses” (Hale 1971, 91). Whilst Freud doubts the possibility of health and well-being under existing conditions, he tentatively suggests that they might be possible under different conditions. In spite of his reticence about the therapeutic efficacy of psychoanalysis, we see in these comments a tentative Aristotelian idea of what might constitute a “good life,” a vision in which health is predicated upon wider social transformation beyond the consulting room, namely changes which lessen the need for the repression of sexual desire. This is the positive vision of human need which informed the optimism of Reich and, for a time, Marcuse, fuelling the sexual revolution of the 1960s. Though Freud is reported to have said to H. D. “my discoveries are not primarily a heal-all. My discoveries are a basis for a very grave philosophy. There are very few who understand this” (cited in Zaretsky 2005, 234), the distinction between grave philosophy and therapeutic intervention becomes somewhat blurred, because psychoanalytic theory comes to function therapeutically: it seeks to produce social change. “There is no use in philosophy,” Epicurius writes, “unless it casts out the suffering of the soul,” a comment which captures the complex therapeutic capacities of theory and philosophy (cited in Nussbaum 1994, 13).



The importance of psychoanalysis for intellectual thought has been considerable. Sonu Shamdasani describes the discipline as “the dominant form of psychological intelligibility in the West” in the twentieth century, claiming for Freud the honour of most cited author in the social sciences, arts and humanities. Yet he goes on to suggest that psychoanalysis often functions to prop up discourses in trouble by providing interpretative tools, whilst the limits of what psychoanalysis might offer to cultural analysis, its failings, are ignored (1994, xiii–xiv).<sup>3</sup> Shamdasani raises the question of what psychoanalysis is and who has authority over it, given the complex ways in which it functions both inside and outside of the clinic.<sup>4</sup> Freud himself noted, in *An Autobiographical Study*, that “the word ‘psychoanalysis’ has itself become ambiguous. While it was originally the name of a particular therapeutic method, it has now also become the name of a science – the science of unconscious processes” (1925, 70). Instrument, method, body of knowledge; psychoanalysis is several things, and this polyvalence – the status of psychoanalysis as both therapeutic technique and theoretical corpus, as well as the relationship between these two components – complicates the relation between psychoanalysis, culture and cure.

Arguably, “classical” or “negative” aims represent a dominant strand in psychoanalytic theorizing outside the clinic. Michael Rustin identifies a “negative in psychoanalytic thought,” a theoretical orientation he associates most closely with the Lacanian tradition which he describes thus:

The idea of the ‘negative’ focuses attention on the inherent limits of human self-understanding, and the inherent distortions and falsifications involved in representation. The psychoanalytic process in this view links the idea of authenticity (itself impossible to achieve) to the questioning of the symbolic and imaginary structures by which misrecognitions are sustained. (2001, 138–9)

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<sup>3</sup> The “failings” Shamdasani has in mind centre on the capacity of institutionalization (through bodies like the International Psycho-Analytical Association) to precipitate an orthodoxy which places restrictions on thought and creativity.

<sup>4</sup> For discussions of the place of psychoanalysis in academic thought, see Horden (1985), Feldstein and Sussman (1990), Donald (1991), Shamdasani and Münchow (1994), Campbell and Harbord (1998), Frosh (2010).

As Rustin makes clear, whilst this tradition remains sceptical towards the possibilities of a simplistic self-presence, it concurrently sets out to lay bare the illusions, or misrecognitions, which structure reality. Rustin associates this tradition most closely with the work of Althusser, Laclau and Žižek who take up what might be considered the radical potential of the “analytic attitude”; its capacity to reveal something approaching “the truth,” and thus work counter to processes of mystification and ideological enchantment (Althusser 1969; Laclau 1987; Žižek [1987] 2008). Change is here predicated upon gaining knowledge of the structures of oppression and domination which give form to life. Rustin’s main contention is that this tradition does not offer a positive set of values which might be used to think about social change. Frosh also wonders whether the “diagnostic edge” which characterizes this tradition might leave it unable “to commit to anything” at all (2010, 182).

Insight, then, can be a cure shared across classical analysis and the theoretical use to which it is put outside of the clinic. However, a shared modus of revelation masks a persistent antithesis between theory and therapy across the twentieth century. The radical capacities of non-therapeutic psychoanalysis have long been pitted against the perceived conformity facilitated by its clinical counterpart. “*Psychoanalysis*,” writes Russell Jacoby, “*is a theory of an unfree society which necessitates psychoanalysis as a therapy*.” To reduce the former to the latter is to gain the instrument at the expense of truth; psychoanalysis becomes merely medicine” (1975, 122). On this account, therapy is palliative, offering a means of reconciling subjects to existing social conditions. “While psychoanalytic theory recognizes that the sickness of the individual is ultimately caused and sustained by the sickness of his civilization, psychoanalytic therapy aims at curing the individual so that he can continue to function as part of a sick civilization without surrendering it altogether” (Marcuse [1955] 1966, 245). Understood in this context, the “therapeutic turn” perceived to have taken place in cultural life

over the course of the twentieth century represents an exercise in ideological adaptation and mystification.<sup>5</sup>

The impact of Freud's progeny has been immense, the discourse has been popularized, influencing everyday life and modes of thought; John Forrester notes that "its presence is so constant and all-pervasive that escaping its influence is out of the question" (1997, 184).<sup>6</sup> In 1906, Jung wrote to Freud of the dangers implicit in popularization: "the more psychoanalysis becomes known, the more will incompetent doctors dabble in it and naturally make a mess of it. This will then be blamed on you and your theory" (1974, 11). Upon returning from the USA where he had delivered his Clark University lectures, Freud was informed by Jung of the spread of psychoanalytic ideas. "You can't stop a forest fire," he wrote in his reply (249–50). Time has proved him right, as Mimi White avers, "Freud's legacy is not restricted to a complex and multivalent range of academic theories and psychoanalytic practices; it is also implicated in everyday life and cultural knowledge" (1992, 20).

The seductiveness of therapeutic discourse has long been noted. In 1944, Theodor Adorno, then residing in LA, wrote that "now that depth psychology, with the help of films, soap-opera, and Horney, has delved into the deepest recesses, people's last possibility of experiencing themselves has been cut off by organized culture" ([1979] 2005, 65).<sup>7</sup> On Adorno's analysis, the revisionist tendencies of American psychoanalysis – here exemplified by Horney who edited a popular guide to psychotherapy and ultimately came to reject Freudian thought – work with the culture industry, or culture *as* industry, to enforce compliance to

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<sup>5</sup> Carol Leader writes that "we are in an age that is increasingly dominated by cultural representations of psychoanalysis, therapy and explorations of human emotional life. The media provides an almost constant diet through a variety of forms such as films, drama series, reality TV, self help programmes and a range of radio and TV counselling, therapeutic documentaries, talks and phone-ins. On top of this, there are numerous magazine and newspaper articles that feature what appears to be a growing preoccupation with all that is emotional and therapeutic" (2011, 177–8).

<sup>6</sup> For the popularization of psychoanalysis, and its influence on cultural life, see Spector (1974), Turkle (1978), Riley (1983), Hale (2000), G. Richards (2000), Zaretsky (2005).

<sup>7</sup> On the relationship amongst psychoanalysis, media technologies and popularization see Shortland (1987), Freedman (1999), Gabbard (1999), Heath (1999), Sklarew (1999), Bainbridge (2011).

capitalist social norms. Through this process, Adorno claims, the Freudian idea of the mind, the power of the unconscious, is reduced to something that could be known and treated. “Terror before the abyss of the self,” he goes on, “is removed by the consciousness of being concerned with nothing so very different from arthritis or sinus trouble” (65).

Sherry Turkle echoes Adorno’s thoughts when considering the dissemination of psychoanalytic ideas through popular culture in France in the late 1960s and 1970s. Turkle writes that “in the popular culture, psychoanalysis is often represented as a source of answers instead of as a practice that leads the individual to layer after layer of increasingly difficult questions” (1978, 192). For Turkle, although popularization took place under the auspices of Lacanianism, the revolutionary nature of Lacan’s insight into the process of subjectivization was lost in its translation to the wider sphere (205–6). Instead, a rhetoric of psychoanalytic “helpfulness” pervaded which is “far away from [...] a kind of psychoanalysis that shatters assumptions and helps the individual grasp the contradictions of his situation” (208), a comment which highlights the way in which the aims of the discipline are often understood in terms of insight rather than improvement.<sup>8</sup> Adorno and Turkle link the dissemination of psychoanalysis to forms of consolation associated with the medical (arthritis or sinus trouble) and the therapeutic (that “helpfulness”). One effect of the dissemination and dilution would seem to be, on these accounts, to curtail the radical potential of analysis; Adorno writes that “psycho-analysis itself is castrated by its conventionalization,” rendered powerless by publicity (2005, 66). Crucially, the relationship between psychoanalysis and its dissemination is seen only in terms of an impoverishment; the possibility that dissemination might perform a positive function is seemingly disavowed. However, as Candida Yates puts it, contemporary – and culturally pervasive – discussions of therapy “appear to court a wider set of expectations”

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<sup>8</sup> Turkle gives an extreme example, in the French-Lacanian context, of analysands feeling that their analyst was not concerned with making them well but “with something else entirely. Some people felt they couldn’t talk to an analyst about ‘getting better,’ but had to use an acceptable language with which to express their desire for symptom relief” (1978, 205).

than the analytic attitude, which includes the possibility of cure and the promises of happiness and well-being (2011, 59). Such ideas remain both fraught and contentious, because they advance a belief that health might be achievable under existing social and political conditions, and thus run the risk of masking and obfuscating “the socio-political causes of distress” whilst de-emphasizing “the socio-historic forces affecting our lives” (B. Richards and Brown 2011, 19).

On-going debates over the relationship between therapy and culture demonstrate the continuing purchase of psychoanalysis as a mode of thinking with relevance in contemporary life. The possibilities and implications of the discipline’s interrelation with culture, understood in terms of the therapeutic, were a key concern of the AHRC funded “Media and the Inner World” project, which culminated in a special issue of the journal *Free associations* on the topic in 2011, entitled “Therapy Culture/ Culture as Therapy,” which published articles that evinced an increased attention to, and awareness of, the therapeutic possibilities of cultural forms and objects themselves. Barry Richards and Joanne Brown, for example, set out “to bring societal institutions and processes into dialogue with the insights from psychoanalysis and the consulting room” in order to theorize how a “therapeutic sensibility” might be fostered outside the spaces of the clinic. Such a sensibility would include “emotional expressivity, knowledge or thoughtfulness, and concern or compassion for the self and other,” a description which provides a means of assessing whether “developments in radio, television, new social media, education, healthcare and so on are therapeutic” (2011, 20–21). On this account, assessing whether cultural institutions and forms are therapeutic depends on making judgements about the extent to which their modes of operation foster particular ways of relating to both the self and others. The authors are clear: “we are not claiming that the role of the media in a person’s life can be compared to the role of a counsellor, therapist or analyst, but might it nevertheless have some therapeutic functions?” (23).

As should be clear from Richards and Brown's outline of a "therapeutic sensibility," the kind of psychoanalytic thinking on which they draw goes beyond the analytic attitude in theorizing psychoanalytic aims, proposing some notion of "health" which might be used to judge therapeutic success. Such positive aims characterize the object relations tradition of psychoanalysis, with which Richards and Brown engage. Harry Guntrip exemplifies the object relations ethos when he writes that "Freud said that at best we can only help the patient to exchange his neurotic suffering for ordinary human unhappiness. That, I believe, is too pessimistic a view, and the patient has glimpses of feeling the possibility of experiencing himself and life in a much more real and stable way" (1973, 279). On this analysis, the therapeutic relationship aims to facilitate not only insight, but psychic integration, a sense of self and an enhanced capacity to engage in personal relationships. Psychotherapeutic work can be judged successful, and at an end, when these aims are perceived to have been achieved. Such a way of thinking radically alters the ways in which psychoanalysis might function outside of the consulting room. Rustin writes that:

The Kleinian and object-relations traditions are constituted by a corpus of theories, an elaborate range of therapeutic techniques (not merely of classical psychoanalysis but variants developed for less intensive or more focused applications), and models of psychic development which have a definite ethical cast. These have made these traditions consistent with ideas of positive social intervention. The idea that the disruptive phenomena of the unconscious can be contained in more and less destructive ways, that relatively benign relationships between the inner world and external reality can be conceived in theory and to some degree sustained in reality, has led to some commitment within the object-relations tradition to projects of social improvement. (2001, 157)

Rustin describes how a positive assessment of what produces mental health might be brought to bear on theorizing social change. On this account, the "elaborate range of therapeutic techniques" generated by Kleinian and object relations theorists can be gainfully employed within the wider social sphere to positive effect.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Rustin tends to perceive a continuity between theorists in the Kleinian and independent traditions of object relations theory. Noting that the independent tradition is "more environmental" and does not stress the primacy of hate and envy, he nonetheless holds that the differences are "in large part"

This positive attitude to the relationship between therapy and culture is linked to changes in analysis, with regard to both patient pathology and clinical technique. “It would be pleasant,” writes Winnicott, “if we were able to take for analysis only those patients whose mothers at the very start and also in the first few months had been able to provide good-enough conditions. But this era of psychoanalysis is steadily drawing to a close” ([1954] 1958a, 291). Why is it drawing to a close? Is Winnicott suggesting an actual historical change in patient pathology, a shift from the neurotic to psychotic, narcissistic or borderline conditions understood as a consequence of cultural changes taking place across the twentieth century?<sup>10</sup> Or is he making a point about the kinds of patient psychoanalysis is prepared to treat? In his own work as a consultant psychiatrist for the Government Education Scheme during the Second World War, and at Paddington Green Children’s Hospital over a long period extending either side of that war, Winnicott encountered rather more “delinquent” children and working-class families than he did members of the European middle-class, and the kinds of pathologies he encountered were often not of the neurotic variety.<sup>11</sup> Such experiences led to major changes in analytic understanding and practice. As Greenberg and Mitchell note, Winnicott initially attempted to align his work with that of Freud and Klein, dividing cases into the rough categories of neurotic, depressive and borderline, and they conclude that, for him, “Freud was right with respect to neurosis, Klein was right with respect to depressives,” but Winnicott “takes as his own province the relatively unexplored area of psychotic and borderline-psychotic phenomena” (1983, 208).<sup>12</sup> Winnicott poses an imperative question:

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matters “of emphasis” (1991, 39). Both positions do advance normative theories of infantile development, though Klein is certainly more in the “classical” than the “romantic” tradition.

<sup>10</sup> This kind of argument is treated extensively by Frosh (1991).

<sup>11</sup> Winnicott reports on, and theorizes from, his wartime experiences in *The Child, the Family and the Outside World* and *Deprivation and Delinquency* ([1964] 1991a; [1984] 2012). In the preface to his collected papers he describes the importance of his work at the children’s hospital: “it has been valuable for me to keep in touch with social pressure” (1958b, ix).

<sup>12</sup> The post-Kleinian thinker, Wilfred Bion, also laid claim to this area of pathology, and there are considerable affinities between his work and Winnicott’s. Phillips notes that Winnicott’s “holding” and Bion’s “reverie” are the “two formative paradigms of analytic technique in the British School,” a point Thomas Ogden supports when he argues that they offer “two vantage points from which to view an

What is life about? You may cure your patient and not know what it is that makes him or her go on living. It is of first importance for us to acknowledge openly that absence of psychoneurotic illness may be health, but it is not life. Psychotic patients who are all the time hovering between living and not living force us to look at this problem, one that really belongs *not to psychoneurotics but to all human beings*. ([1971] 1991b, 100)

The experience of the psychotic patient prompts Winnicott to ask what makes life worth living, shifting focus from the “hedonia” of Freudian analysis to a more “eudemonic” perspective. It was the treatment of these patients that led to Winnicott’s major innovations in analytic technique, innovations with radical implications for the relationship between psychoanalysis, culture and cure.

From its beginnings, psychoanalysis found itself confronted with patients whose pathologies seemed unamenable to the classical technique of free association. Writing in 1904, Freud recommends that the analyst should limit his treatment to “those who possess a normal mental condition”:

Psychoses, states of confusion and deeply-rooted (I might say toxic) depression are therefore not suitable for psycho-analysis; at least not for the method as it has been practised up to the present. I do not regard it as by any means impossible that by suitable changes in the method we may succeed in overcoming this contra-indication—and so be able to initiate a psychotherapy of the psychoses. (1904, 264)

What changes in the method would be needed to treat psychotic illness? Work with patients exhibiting psychotic forms of disturbance led Winnicott to formulate the idea of psychoanalysis as a “holding” or “facilitating” environment, which functions as shorthand for the major technical innovations to which his thinking led. This environment, modelled on the mother’s care, would be characterized by an analyst who is “reliably there, on time, alive, breathing,” who promises to “keep awake and become preoccupied with the patient” but who will remain relatively objective: ensuring not to make “moral judgements,” “intrude” with details of her own life, or “take sides in the persecutory systems” ([1954] 1958a, 285). The session will take place in a comfortable room, “not a passage,” and the analysts will refrain

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emotional experience” (Phillips 1994, 113; Ogden 2004, 1349). Despite their similarities, however, it is Winnicott who draws the psychoanalytic focus to the nature of environmental provision.



from “temper tantrums” and “compulsive falling in love.” Crucially, Winnicott writes in the last on this bullet pointed list, “the analyst survives” (285–6).

The facilitating environment is a concept that lends itself to broader social and cultural concerns, complicating the relationship between the spaces inside and outside of the clinic once more. In a talk delivered in 1961 on different varieties of psychotherapy, Winnicott describes what he considers a suitable treatment for psychotic forms of disturbance:

In so far as illness of this kind needs treatment, we need to provide opportunity for the patient to have experiences that properly speaking belong to infancy under conditions of extreme dependence. We see that such conditions may be found apart from organized psychotherapy, for instance, in friendship, in nursing care that may be provided on account of physical illness, in cultural experiences, including some that are called religion. ([1961] 1990c, 106)

This comment captures much that is at stake in the theory of the environment, and its effect on how we might think the relationship between culture and psychoanalysis, in particular the capacity of the discipline to theorize therapeutic intervention in relation to cultural life. For Winnicott, psychotic forms of disturbance are understood to result from failures in early infancy; through the “telescope” of psychotic illness, he insists, “you see the very early stages of emotional development becoming distorted by faulty infant care” (105). Winnicott understands such forms of illness in terms of an incapacity to relate to the self and to others; something has gone wrong in emotional development, and the particular form of psychotherapy which he describes aims to undo this failure by providing previously unavailable forms of experience which replicate early care. Yet the source of such transformation extends, potentially, far beyond the consulting room:

It is from psychosis that a patient can make a spontaneous recovery, whereas psychoneurosis makes no spontaneous recovery and the psycho-analyst is truly needed. In other words, psychosis is closely related to health, in which innumerable environmental failure situations are frozen but are reached and unfrozen by various healing phenomena of ordinary life, namely friendships, nursing during physical illness, poetry, etc., etc. (1958a, 284)

It is worth noting here that Winnicott’s conception of “healing phenomena” is not restricted to a narrow definition of “culture,” but extends over various aspects of collective life. When

Winnicott writes that the schizoid or borderline patient reveals something of what life itself is about, he demonstrates the extent to which his developmental theory constitutes a theory not of illness but of socialization. Mitchell describes Winnicott's as a "quintessentially 'psychosocial' approach," whilst Sally Alexander gives a sense of the mutual implication of Winnicott's thinking with non-clinical concerns: "Winnicott's vision is social—the maternal environment, the two-body relation inaugurates subjectivity" (Mitchell 2009, 46; Alexander 2013, 151). Winnicott himself writes that, "psycho-analysis does not cure," what it offers is an opportunity for "socialisation and self-discovery" ([1968] 1989a, 216). In the quotes set out above, we see Winnicott's belief that the opportunities for socialization provided by psychotherapy are also available through cultural experience itself, which points up the relevance of his concept of the environment for thinking about the roles of cultural institutions more broadly. The importance of this idea cannot be over-stressed; Winnicott is evoking psychoanalysis not as a cure for neurosis, but as a means of socialization effected through the care-cure provision of environment, a point which moves his thinking far beyond the consulting room.

As Alexander claims, "Winnicott always kept part of his mind on the institutions that formed civil society and in which he worked. Town planning, public health and housing, hospitals, schools (including nursery schools) staffed by reliable and tolerant individuals were the necessary context of mental landscapes" (2013, 151). Winnicott's understanding of technique – which is implicitly linked to his developmental theory – is always and already a theory of socialization and subjectivity which gestures towards the therapeutic potentials of cultural forms and institutions. Within a Winnicottian framework, the relationship between culture and cure takes on a very specific cadence; culture might potentially cure, or better, the possibilities for cure are not circumscribed by the walls of the consulting room, but spread out over cultural life. In fact, the distinctiveness of the analytic situation is exactly what is placed in question.

Winnicott's notion of the "environment," as a space of care-cure, lends itself to an analogy between the psychotherapeutic work of analysis and the experience of the socio-cultural world, providing a way to think about the forms of environmental provision necessary within that world. Elements of his thinking have been taken up by social theorists to explore what conditions need to be in place for individuals to be "healthy." Anthony Giddens, for example, uses Winnicott in developing the idea of "ontological security," which he describes as:

The confidence that most human beings have in the continuity of their self-identity and in the constancy of the surrounding and material environments of action. A sense of the reliability of persons and things, so central to the notion of trust, is basic to the feelings of ontological security; hence the two are psychologically related. Ontological security has to do with 'being' or, in the terms of phenomenology, 'being-in-the-world.' But it is an emotional rather than a cognitive, phenomenon, and is rooted in the unconscious. (1990, 92)

As Giddens points out, the feeling of ontological security in adult life depends on a process of infantile development during which the child has learnt to have confidence in others. Basic trust evolves through our encounters with caregivers, whose routine attentions give us the faith to believe that others can be relied upon (1991, 38–9). In many ways, Giddens reiterates Winnicott's own understanding of the forms of social life which need to be in place for human life to flourish – reliability, security – which were outlined briefly above.

Winnicott understood the need for institutions to provide a particular form of interaction analogous to "good-enough" maternal care, but he was also aware of the ways in which existing forms may fail in this task, which his dedication to giving talks (to social workers, social psychiatrists and educators, as well as the radio broadcasts he regularly delivered on the BBC aimed at parents) clearly evinces.<sup>13</sup> Lisa Farley has gone as far as to argue – perceptively – that these broadcasts themselves constitute a form of aural environment. Particularly in the context of war, she suggests, Winnicott used the radio as something other than a means of

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<sup>13</sup> Some of Winnicott's talks to the caring professions are collected in *Home is Where We Start From* ([1986] 1990d). Many of his broadcasts are collected in *The Child, the Family and the Outside World* and *Talking to Parents* ([1964] 1991a; 1994).

pacification and mystification, turning it into a “reliable environment,” whilst actively resisting “the tendency to lull the listener into a psychoanalytic discourse of easy answers” (2012, 458–9). Winnicott, she suggests, was more than aware of the oppressive uses to which the wireless might be put, and he consciously sought to work counter to them. It is not only the public institutions of the school, borstal or children’s home, then, which Winnicott may have conceived in environmental terms. Farley makes a strong case for assuming that Winnicott also extended the reach of the concept to the “institution” of public broadcasting in addition to “poetry, philosophy and religion.”

In recent years, Winnicott’s thinking has achieved a limited visibility in the field of cultural criticism through the concept of the transitional object, which lends itself so clearly to theorizing aesthetic experience.<sup>14</sup> I do not wish to ignore this valuable concept, but I do seek to place it within the wider context of Winnicott’s thinking on the environment. When Roger Silverstone, for instance, turns to the transitional object to discuss our experience of television, he finds it so apposite because the medium “is neither an infinitely malleable nor neutral object.” It comes “pre-packed as it were: a complex communication of sound and image with already powerful reality and emotional claims” (1994, 15). However, Silverstone focuses on how viewers, on an “individual and psychodynamic” level, use television, engaging with it creatively to foster their own meanings. Whilst I agree fully that specific individuals will engage in personal practices of encoding and decoding, I have chosen to focus attention on the cultural form/object not only as a mediator between the subject and their environment, but as an environment in and of itself. I do not seek to make claims for the effect of cultural forms

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<sup>14</sup> In his biography of Winnicott, F. Robert Rodman reports an anecdote concerning the concept’s ubiquity: “I heard Robert Stoller in the 1970s tell an audience at the Los Angeles Psychoanalytic Society and Institute that it was time to declare a moratorium on the use of the concept of the transitional object as applied to phenomena other than those to which Winnicott originally applied it. I do not believe that I have ever heard a comparable statement about anyone else’s theory” (2003, 165)! For Winnicott on this topic *Playing and Reality* is the key text ([1971] 1991b). For discussions of transitional phenomena from within the analytic community see Grolnick, Barkin, and Muensterberger ([1978] 1988). Recent work in the humanities which employs the concept includes Silverstone (1994), Konigsberg (1996), Hills (2002), Kuhn (2005; 2013), Bainbridge (2012).

and objects on individual “receivers,” but rather to draw attention to the structure of address itself – the form and content of the message – and how we might use Winnicott to think about it. I do not wish to advance an argument for determinism, but rather to allow for “the idiosyncrasies of human subjectivity without removing subjectivity from its social and historical context” (Layton 2008, 66).

Ellen Handler Spitz suggests that “in the arts, various aspects of form and convention serve parallel roles” to that of the environment (1993, 264), however she doesn’t explore the idea that the arts, or culture more broadly, could provide an environment which might succeed or fail. Martha Nussbaum writes that “we should not ask about the “facilitating environment” for development by looking to the family circle alone,” insisting on the need for public institutions – and arts education in particular – to “provide what Donald Winnicott called a ‘facilitating environment’ for lives of trust and reciprocity” (2004, 225, 223). Unlike Handler Spitz, Nussbaum sets out to describe what a good-enough environment would be like.<sup>15</sup> Also drawing – obliquely – on Winnicott, Silverstone asks that we begin to formulate “a model of media as environmental,” as “an environment which provides at the most fundamental level the resources we all need for the conduct of everyday life” (2007, 13). Both of these critics employ Winnicott’s concept in order to critique existing environmental forms and argue for alternatives. Transported beyond the spaces of infancy and the clinic, Winnicott’s “facilitating environment” lends itself to thinking about the care-cure potential contained in diverse cultural institutions and objects.

Presenting a theory of how the environment should be, how it might facilitate life and health, is open to criticisms which understand subjectivity only as a consequence and product of oppressive mechanisms, and view public institutions and environments as largely

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<sup>15</sup> Her answer: reflective of human frailty and vulnerability, facilitative of compassion.

instruments of oppression and mystification. Slavoj Žižek describes contemporary critical theory in terms of a choice between two opposing positions:

A 'pessimistic' historico-political analysis pointing towards a final closure (today's society as the one in which the very gap between political life and mere life is disappearing, and the control and administration of 'mere life' is directly asserted as the essence of politics itself), and a more 'optimistic' approach which perceives 'totalitarian' phenomena as a contingent 'deviation' of the Enlightenment project, as the symptomal point at which the 'truth' of the latter emerges. (2002, 95–6)

Žižek outlines the essence of a positive and negative in critical thought that we have already tracked through psychoanalytic thinking, a “positive” based on the idea that things could be different, and a “negative” more reticent about proposing how to bring about such change. Winnicott’s thinking, as discussed, falls largely into the “optimistic” camp, premised as it is on notions of failure and change. True to form, Žižek views these positions as “two sides of the same coin,” the former the “obscene fantasmatic underside” of the latter. His point is important – and useful – because he insists on the interdependence of the two approaches, a position echoed by Strenger in his assessment of the “classic” and the “romantic” in psychoanalytic thought. “Ultimately,” Strenger writes, “one of the goals of psychoanalysis must be to find the right balance between the two” (1989, 594).

The value then, in bringing together Freud and Winnicott as representative examples of these two tendencies is not only to provide a contrast to, and background for, a “romantic” approach. Rustin acknowledges the normativity of theoretical constructions dependent on theories of development, which tend towards stating what “should” happen, but he remains convinced that the positive can exist with “a critical and deconstructive practice [...] addressed no less to a self-conscious scrutiny of its own presuppositions” than to an attack on an opposing system of thought (2001, 154). In many ways, the “classic” provides just such a counter, preventing the “romantic” from falling in love with its own ideas and concepts. I hope to follow Rustin’s advice, advancing an argument for the therapeutic value of the “cultural”

that remains attentive to how such thinking is implicated with, and in, relations of power and oppression it may concurrently hope to cure.

Ultimately, the possibility that such transformation may be limited must be kept in mind. The aim of object relations theory, to facilitate “mature relationships,” arguably leaves existing social structures unchanged. Frosh outlines the imperatives: “the issue is, that any espousal of positive aims needs explicitly to theorise the limitations of these aims under particular social structures” (1999, 267). Frosh is speaking specifically about the aims of object relations psychotherapy, but his point needs to be borne in mind when object relations thinking is used to theorize the therapeutic potential of cultural institutions and objects as well. The arts alone may well prove incapable of altering oppressive social structures, however, that does not mean that the insights gleaned from Winnicott’s environmental-aesthetic thinking should be ignored. Change is required at the level of social policy, what is needed is a return to the ideals of care-cure and welfare which Winnicott himself was involved in establishing, and which seem to be increasingly threatened in contemporary political life.<sup>16</sup> However, whilst Frosh is correct to note the significance of “structuring factors,” these factors do not completely determine the possibilities of a life. People are the means through which change might occur, therefore the role of the cultural environment in fostering the capacity for judgement and action shouldn’t be underestimated.

The chapters which make up this thesis move from the idea of psychoanalysis as a “cultural cure” – a method and discourse drawing on, and feeding into, a broad conception of cultural life – towards a notion of “culture as cure” informed by Winnicott’s theory of the environment. The first chapter, “(De)Mythologizing Culture: Freud,” considers Freud’s refusal to distinguish between “culture” and “civilization.” This refusal is fundamental in understanding how Freud thinks about cultural production, sexuality and power, however,

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<sup>16</sup> See Sinfield (2004); Alexander (2013).

whilst this is radical and productive, it complicates a positive assessment of, and assertion of, cultural value. Though Freud's refusal is important, it might be possible to read visions of "culture" as "cure" in his own work and that of certain revisionists. The second chapter "(Re)Mythologizing Culture: Winnicott" tries to decide whether Winnicott's cultural thinking subordinates politics to aesthetics. I argue that, whilst his thinking may be convincingly viewed in these terms, his understanding of the relationship between creativity and health in fact poses a challenge to the status quo and offers valuable directions for thinking about social justice. Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* offers ways to bring together and extend the concerns of the first two chapters ([1932] 1994). In "'That interval of time between desire and its consummation': Culture, Infancy and *Brave New World*," I consider the ways in which psychoanalysis has been, and might be, used to think about the novel's presentation of a totalitarian world. Beginning with pleasure and Oedipus, I move on to a reading attendant to technology as mother, and consider the parallels between Huxley's familial politics and Winnicott's own. The fourth chapter, "Therapeutic Reflections: Psychoanalysis and *In Treatment*," turns to the recent HBO hit series in order to explore the themes of reflection and recognition (2008-). I argue that the series represents a sophisticated engagement with the politics, and therapeutics, of reflection and recognition, and is concerned with a politics of the image; however, it may ultimately perpetuate the very image politics it sets out to undermine. Finally, "'A Spectator to Other Lives': Reading 'Culture' and 'Cure' in *Saturday*" examines McEwan's nuanced intervention into debates concerning the capacity of culture to cure (2005a). Though the text pivots around a scene of reading, I argue that the novel is less concerned with the powers of literature than with the importance of reading as a mode of public engagement. In conclusion, I suggest, *Saturday* invests in the social necessity of revivifying practices of care-cure. Readers may note a chronological distortion in the progress of the chapters: McEwan's novel was written before *In Treatment* first aired. The chapters



have been arranged so as to end with an air of hope, and a return to the idea of care-cure with which this introduction began.

Social change will require more than the theorization and creation of a “good-enough” environment of artistic and creative forms, but turning to such forms to think about the relationship between psychoanalysis, culture and cure seems – to me at least – a good place to start.

## Chapter One

## (De)Mythologizing Culture: Freud

It is easy to imagine [...] that certain mystical practices may succeed in upsetting the normal relations between the different regions of the mind, so that, for instance, perception may be able to grasp happenings in the depths of the ego and in the id which were otherwise inaccessible to it. It may safely be doubted, however, whether this road will lead us to the ultimate truths from which salvation is to be expected. Nevertheless it may be admitted that the therapeutic efforts of psycho-analysis have chosen a similar line of approach. Its intention is, indeed, to strengthen the ego, to make it more independent of the super-ego, to widen its field of perception and enlarge its organization, so that it can appropriate fresh portions of the id. Where id was, there ego shall be: it is a work of culture – not unlike the draining of the Zuider Zee. (Freud 1933, 79–80)

When Freud famously compares the work of psychoanalysis to a large-scale project of civil engineering, and claims both as the “work of culture” [*Kultur*], he offers one way of thinking about what it might mean to call psychoanalysis a “cultural cure,” and it follows naturally that Freud’s comparison raises the question of Enlightenment, and the relationship of psychoanalysis to it. Rustin remarks that the discipline “came late in the historical succession of projects of rational enlightenment” (developing from the sixteenth century onwards) which sought “to extend the domain of reason to the sphere of the emotions, and of the residues of irrationality which were not readily comprehensible within rationalistic categories” (2001, 12). When Freud terms psychoanalysis a “work of culture,” this reading suggests, he explicitly aligns its project with the progressive advancement of reason against the forces of superstition and myth (he even refers to the “mystical practices” psychoanalysis has drawn on and superseded in its quest for the “truth”).

Whilst such a way of thinking might describe the aims of psychoanalytic therapy, it also characterizes moments of Freudian cultural intervention. The rationalistic Freud is clearly apparent, for instance, in *The Future of an Illusion*, where he holds to the possibility of reconciling humanity to the necessity of moral precepts: “historical residues have helped us to view religious teachings [...] as neurotic relics, and we now may argue that the time has

probably come, as it does in an analytic treatment, for replacing the effects of repression by the results of the rational operation of the intellect" (1927, 44). The task of psychoanalysis as a form of cultural intervention with curative potential here parallels the work to be done with the neurotic. Freud is rightly tentative – "the pathology of the individual does not supply us with a fully valid counterpart" (43) – but, in both instances, psychoanalysis offers itself as a tool capable of undoing the work of illusion-delusion which afflicts the "patient."<sup>17</sup>

"Where id was, there ego shall be," however, has proved a deeply divisive aphorism, a point David Hillman summarizes succinctly: "is this a conquistador's triumphal slogan implying that the ego (aided by psychoanalysis) will slowly but surely take control of the unconscious, or is it rather – as Lacan avers – a tragedian's realization that the ego or 'I' is doomed forever to struggle to maintain its footing in the quicksand of the id?" (2012, 148–9). Should we believe Freud is championing a process of rational appropriation, or perceive him to be setting out our essential subjection and the unknowability of the mind? The answer must be, as Phillips suggests, that Freud is more than one thing: "the Enlightenment Freud, like Socrates, can help us remind ourselves of who we are, of what we once and always knew (and wanted). But the post-Freudian Freud – the man who was always ahead of himself and who we are beginning to catch up with – was the ironist of exactly this Enlightenment project. He was an expert in the impossibility of self-knowledge, on the limits of expertise" (1995, 6).

The equivocal nature of the psychoanalytic cure – and its relation to culture – can easily be gleaned. Similarly to building a big dam, the task of psychoanalysis is to "strengthen the ego, to make it more independent of the super-ego, to widen its field of perception and enlarge its organization, so that it can appropriate fresh portions of the id" (1933, 80). We

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<sup>17</sup> Ernest Gellner congratulates Freud on dismantling the existing order of repression: "Freud provided the tools for articulating or privately negotiating a more flexible new set of, no longer commandments, but, how shall we put it, indicative guidelines. Flexible self-knowledge (in fact: guided and negotiated self-choice) replaces the Tables of the Law" (1995, 93). Gellner claims, however, that Freud provides the social contract of liberal consumerism: "he helped prepare the phrasing of one particular basic constitutional law, that of modern, liberal, permissive, consumerist society" (92).

might note that Freud is asserting a link between the id and the ego, pitting them both against the super-ego. “Freud regarded the law as one of his oldest enemies,” writes Eagleton, “and much of his therapeutic project is devoted towards tempering its sadistic brutality, which plunges men and women into madness and despair” (1990, 269). The “work of culture,” then, is to turn id into ego, but this has the dual sense of undoing repressions (becoming independent of the super-ego), and taming instincts (appropriating the id). Additionally, to become more independent of the super-ego is also to become more independent of social/cultural demand; to undo some of the “work of culture,” as it were. As John Brenkman suggests, Freud’s “modernism” – his focus on facilitating individual expression and self-determination – seems “to erode the moral and ethical claims that tradition, religion, and community make on the individual” (2004, 173).

Brenkman goes on to suggest that such a focus on “enlightened autonomy” removed the mind from “the web of social relationships in which individual identity and desire are actually shaped” (186-7), yet Freud – as we saw in the introduction – was always aware of the impact that the social world might exercise on psychic life. Culture, in one sense, *is* the demand of the super-ego – or rather the super-ego is the internal representative of cultural demand. At the same time, however, the “work of culture” is something more than this; it is a kind of response to that cultural demand. Noting the tension surrounding the “work of culture,” we might suggest that something is happening around the word “culture” in this famous passage. The message is complicated, the idea of “culture” unstable. What is “culture” here: creation or prohibition? For Freud this is a distinction which doesn’t stand.

Comparing the work of psychoanalysis to the draining of the Zuider Zee highlights Freud’s attitude to the definition of “culture.” “I scorn to distinguish between culture and civilization,” he famously wrote at the beginning of *The Future of an Illusion* (1927, 6). The editors of that text claim Freud’s insistence permits them to forego the “tiresome problem of

the proper translation of the German word ‘*Kultur*’ (4). It is indeed a daunting task, and one I will not attempt comprehensively here, but the fact that the word is troublesome – that it connotes a range of divergent and contested meanings – is partly what makes Freud’s refusal so interesting. Eagleton suggests that Freud’s refusal leaves him without the means of evaluation and unable to argue against existing forms of socio-political life (1990, 284). What, then, does this refusal to distinguish mean for understanding psychoanalysis as a theory of culture, and for the possibilities of “cultural cure”?

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Freud, as Paul Ricoeur points up, scorns a distinction that is “well on its way to becoming classical” (1970, 248–9). One of the first metaphorical uses in German of the word “*cultura*” (meaning personal cultivation) occurs in a book titled *Eris Scandida* by Samuel Pufendorf, dating from 1686 (Labrie 1994, 97). Following Hobbes, Pufendorf distinguishes culture from nature, judging the latter a form of barbarism, but one that might be overcome in an ordered, or civilized, society. For Pufendorf, “culture” is synonymous with “civilization”; Kant, however, made an important distinction between civilized behaviour and inner cultivation which signalled a parting of the terms: “we are civilized, perhaps too much for our own good – in all sorts of social grace and decorum. But to consider ourselves as having reached morality – for that, much is lacking. The ideal of morality belongs to culture; its use for some simulacrum of morality in the love of honour and outward decorum constitutes mere civilization” ([1784] 1963, 21). Over time in Germany, “Zivilisation” – French in origin – comes to be associated more and more with the “negative aspects of modernity,” and “Kultur” comes to mean “high culture” (Labrie 1994, 106–7). At the same time, another important meaning develops, as the word is pluralized – famously first by Herder – providing a means to criticize Eurocentrism and imperial expansion (R. Williams 1985, 89). Eventually, the term “Kultur” becomes used to distinguish German culture from the degraded “Zivilisation” of both France and England.

It may well be an understatement to say that Freud's refusal to distinguish requires considerable understanding. One important interpretation might note that he eschews a nationalism with which he was likely uncomfortable, namely the elevation and glorification of a specifically German "Kultur" which became central to an exclusionary politics during the First World War and, later, featured heavily in the ideology of the Third Reich. Such concerns might underwrite his desire to define a "larger notion of *Kultur* in which the particularities of different national and cultural identities are transcended in order to devise a general psychological history of the development of human civilization" (Winter 1999, 307). Freud's refusal, then, is an anti-nationalist gesture that resists the tendency to distinguish between a German "Kultur" and a degraded "Zivilisation" characteristic of France and England.

Another important point of interpretation: Freud resists the Romantic critique – already taking shape in Kant – for which a degraded civilization becomes the antithesis of a truly human culture. Humanity's increasing technological domination over nature and "social progress" were perceived to coincide with the dehumanization of individuals, who are reduced to cogs in a machine, alienated from nature, others and themselves. Schiller's development of this position influenced both Marx and Hegel, and provided the basis for understanding civilization as a mode of oppression (Labrie 1994, 105–6). Though Schiller is a defining figure for Freud – the source of his first instinct theory, Freud eventually admits – the refusal to distinguish between culture and civilization sets Freud at a distance from the Romantic poets he so admires, and consistently cites.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, Freud's allusions to Romantic artists – Goethe and Schiller are the most esteemed – appear as Romantic eruptions into the classical Freudian text; moments of spontaneity within an otherwise dower and revelatory discourse.<sup>19</sup> In this

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<sup>18</sup> "In what was at first my utter perplexity, I took as my starting point a saying of the poet-philosopher, Schiller, that 'hunger and love are what moves the world'" (Freud 1930, 117).

<sup>19</sup> Freud's relationship with Romanticism – both German and British – has received considerable attention. Jack Spector notes Freud's proximity to Romantic theory and his continuation of a Romantic preoccupation with the unconscious of "buried wish and feeling" allied with the imagination (1974, 184). Graham Frankland provides a detailed exposition of Freud's relationship with German

context, Joan Riviere's decision to translate Freud's major work on the topic of culture, *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*, as *Civilization and its Discontents* introduces a Romantic, even modernist, sensibility into Freud's text (1930). But it may well be just that – an introduction. In spite of the moments of rationalistic optimism evident, for instance, in Freud's "treatment" of religion, Freud is, finally, less concerned with critiquing modernity than with developing a general phylogeny of human development.<sup>20</sup> This is a key point: in essence, human existence is inherently tragic for Freud not because industrial modernity has produced previously non-existent forms of alienation, but because the conflict between desire and social demand renders us perpetually unfulfilled or "uncomfortable" in our lived existence (*"Unbehagen"* can be translated as "discomfort").

Freud's refusal of the culture/ civilization distinction is increasingly pronounced and tragically inflected. In *Civilization and its Discontents*, his ultimate – and ultimately pessimistic – interpretation of collective life, Freud voices an uncomfortable realization: civilization is a complex mix of both threat and resource:

We come upon a contention which is so astonishing that we must dwell upon it. This contention holds that what we call our civilization is largely responsible for our misery, and that we should be much happier if we gave it up and returned to primitive

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*Naturphilosophie* and idealism (2000). Also of note, Sabine Prokhoris considers the function of Goethe's word's in Freud's thinking in depth, arguing that Goethe "erupts" into Freud's texts and inspires his metapsychology (1995).

<sup>20</sup> When Freud, in *The Future of an Illusion*, stresses the need for the rational acceptance of moral precepts, instead of a morality based on fear of God, we might suggest that he echoes Kant's idea of "inner cultivation," however, as Gellner points out, it is possible to read that cultivation as having contributed to processes of marketization and materialism. John Deigh notes that there is something decidedly utilitarian about the optimistic vision of human possibility which Freud here presents. Keeping in mind that the altruistic and egoistic motives which utilitarians identify have to be translated respectively into the sexual and self-preservative instincts of Freud's first instinctual ontology, Deigh suggests that: "by making this substitution, one can say that, like classical utilitarians, he saw the possibility of enlightened human beings, by revising morality's prohibitions and requirements, rearranging their social relations in ways that, while preserving social cohesion, served their interests in happiness" (1991, 294). It is on such a basis of rational and reasonable self-interest that the viability of a reconciliation between humanity and civilization depends. Freud is all too aware that he may be "chasing an illusion" in his commitment to what might be achieved through the educational nurture of the rational ego, but we find him in this text committed to a vision of human nature as perfectible and changeable, so long as it can be educated to appreciate the benefits of instinctual renunciation (1927, 48).

conditions. I call this contention astonishing because, in whatever way we may define the concept of civilization, it is a certain fact that all the things with which we seek to protect ourselves against the threats that emanate from the sources of suffering are part of that very civilization. (1930, 86)

Freud formulates his refusal of the dualism and evokes our lived pursuits as responses to social demand. The strategies we use to cope with nature and the restrictions placed on us by our need to live with others are derivatives of that very civilization itself: the two cannot be disentangled. What might be considered the creative realm of the cultural is a response to, a means to cope with, the restrictions civilization necessitates.

In refusing to distinguish between culture and civilization, Freud aligns himself with those who subscribe to a broad definition of the cultural field. He defines *Kultur* as “all those respects in which human life has raised itself above its animal status and differs from the life of beasts” (1927, 6), a move that is both holistic and inclusive. In essence, Freud repeats the gesture of the British cultural evolutionist E. B. Tylor who, in 1870, defined culture-civilization is a “complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, laws, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (1958, 1). There is a politics at work here, which takes the form of a levelling of the cultural field. Tylor refused to elevate certain aspects of life above others, insisting on the inherent sameness of art and custom, high culture and lived experience. Thorsten Botz-Bornstein notes that “by declaring culture to be “merely” civilization [...] Tylor freed culture from its elitist connotations” (2012, 11), a comment which might equally apply to Freud, who evokes culture in terms of a broad range of lived pursuits – both high and low – which constitute techniques for living. There is, however, another dimension to the “levelling” Freud carries out, and it centres on the work of demythologization enacted by Freud himself.

Implicitly at stake in the refusal is the possibility of elevating the “cultural” (specifically high culture) above the merely “civilizational.” Freud denies the artistic and intellectual possession of the lofty heights they had come to inhabit. The cultural achievements that



religion, morality and the arts represent are, for Freud, part of civilization, and cannot be uncomplicatedly separated from it and set against it as a sacrosanct sphere of possibility and value. There is no refuge – spiritual, artistic or otherwise – which stands outside and unimplicated in the process of survival which civilization represents. As Eagleton puts it: “there is no cultural value absolved from the aggressive drives by which civilization is constructed” (1990, 264–5). Given the pull of instinct and adaptation in his thinking, Freud might well be considered a sociobiologist, in the tradition of Hobbes and Nietzsche; however, Freud is far from a simple iconoclast. The process of unravelling a mode of thought which insists on the superiority of the arts and philosophy takes place in complex relation with those phenomena themselves. Psychoanalysis takes up a position relative to “culture,” articulating and forming itself in and through a relation to the European intellectual and literary tradition which Freud’s work concurrently interrogates.

The idea that psychoanalysis is, in some complicated form, a continuation of the European literary project is widespread. In an early letter to his friend and correspondent Wilhelm Fliess, known as “Draft N,” Freud remarked that “the mechanism of fiction is the same as that of hysterical fantasies,” a comment which supports Lionel Trilling’s claim that “the Freudian psychology [...] makes poetry indigenous to the very constitution of the mind” (Freud 1985, 251; Trilling [1950] 1979a, 50). In his *Gradiva* essay Freud writes that “it certainly never [...] occurred to me to look for a confirmation of my findings in imaginative writings” (1907, 54), a point somewhat undermined by his consistent use of allusion, and the seminal status of *Oedipus Rex* and *Hamlet* in his presentation of the Oedipus complex.<sup>21</sup> In spite of the arguable

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<sup>21</sup> As Frankland has noted, Goethe is the most referenced figure in Freud’s oeuvre; only Shakespeare comes even remotely close – Freud references fifteen of his plays all in all, but over half of his references are to *Hamlet*. “There is nothing eccentric,” writes Frankland, “about the kind of work to which Freud tends to allude,” these works are central to the canon of his age, and to the European cultural tradition more broadly (2000, 6). Freud’s allusions to these texts often call on the authority of that tradition as a means to justify the insights of psychoanalysis. Phillip Armstrong summarizes the situation, noting how “Freud’s ambition to invent and patent psychoanalysis as a scientific discipline remains haunted by an anxiety regarding the necessity of – and the difficulties of providing – empirical

iconoclasm which his thinking will effect, literature serves the function of truth-telling for Freud, and his use of it points up his consistent, if complicated, proximity to accepted ideas of cultural value predicated on claims to universal truth and insight.

In a letter to Jung written shortly after the *Gradiva* essay, Freud claims his engagement with the text yields nothing new (1974, 262), an assertion which implicitly admits (through negation) that literature might play a more active role than Freud realizes. In fact, according to one pervasive view, literature functions as the “unthought-out shadow of psychoanalytical theory”; both its “condition of possibility” and its “self-subversive blind spot,” a constitutive presence (Felman 1982, 10). Freud’s writing is considered as fiction, his ideas are used in narratology, or reading itself is thought on the model of transference (Marcus 1987; Brooks 1995; Brooks 1994). Theorists from diverse positions argue that Freud’s ideas, not to mention his methods, originate in his engagement with great works of literature (Deleuze and Guattari 1977, 55; Goux 1993; Bloom 1994; Prokhoris 1995; Garber 1997). Mark Robson even convincingly suggests that Freud’s pairing of *Oedipus Rex* and *Hamlet* was a far from original move, and followed an established pattern in German letters (2011), a fact which locates him firmly within this (high) cultural tradition.

Literature features prominently in Freud’s writings, and his attempts at “demystification” – his dubious pursuit of symbolism – have been read as expressions of fear and jealousy. Summarizing the literature, Frankland suggests that psychoanalytic literary criticism offers Freud a means of revolt and a defence against the powers of the artist: the process of rationalizing and unravelling the content of creative work defends against its capacity to affect (2000, 94–6).<sup>22</sup> However, it might be possible to suggest that the artist offers

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evidence of its conclusions.” In order “to underwrite his authority at key points [...] Freud invests in a kind of cultural capital different from that offered by science – namely, that of art” (2001, 18).

<sup>22</sup> Tim Dean makes the same point with reference to the more recent “hermeneutic” criticism of Žižek, but it is a point with broad applicability: “the concept of the unconscious licenses interpretation as an

to exemplify a broader process for Freud. The aesthetic is “a detonator of profound discharges which unmask the human subject as fissured and unfinished” (Eagleton 1990, 263). The aesthetic itself is riven with, and illustrative of, a profound otherness at the heart of the human itself, a point Jones makes powerfully: “man’s belief that he is a self-conscious animal, alive to the desires that impel or inhibit his actions, is the last stronghold of that anthropomorphic and anthropocentric outlook on life which has so long dominated his philosophy, his theology, and above all his psychology” (1976, 51). Jones suggests, and Anthony Elliott insists, that for psychoanalysis “the essence of being lies not in the cogito, but in the vicissitudes of desire” (Elliott 1999, 27).

That the “work of culture” is both the social demand itself *and* a response to it is an idea present, if implicit, from the time of Freud’s early letters to Fliess. From its beginnings, psychoanalysis encountered resistances, dreams and the psychopathologies of everyday life which make the reality of repression evident (Ricoeur 1970, 179). Freud’s early work, for example *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), focused on content and means – on what is repressed and through what mechanisms. It was only later that his attention shifted to the agent of repression itself: to what does the repressing and on what basis (Ricoeur 1970, 180). The fact of the dreamwork raises the question of why and how repression occurs, and the idea that the mind is “exactly a poetry making faculty” evokes the complex interrelation of psyche, creativity and society (Trilling [1955] 1966, 92). As I mentioned in the introduction, Freud had long been aware of the effects of restrictive morality, but his early work assumes the workings of a repressing agency rather than explaining it. That culture is connected to repression, however, is the intrinsic point.

The theory of the Oedipus complex introduces the fateful conflict between desire and the demands of civilization, and Freud’s formulation of cultural authority takes shape in

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interminable enterprise that permanently defers analysis of the disruptive impact aesthetic experience may have on us” he writes (2002, 39).

relation to the literary text. *Oedipus Rex* and *Hamlet* first come together in a well-known letter to Fliess of 15th October 1897. After giving his first allusion to the Oedipus complex – “I have found in my own case too, [the phenomenon of] being in love with my mother and jealous of my father, and I now consider it a universal event in early childhood” – Freud moves almost immediately to Oedipus:

If this is so, we can understand the gripping power of *Oedipus Rex* [...] The Greek legend seizes upon a compulsion which everyone recognizes because he senses its existence within himself. Everyone in the audience was once a budding Oedipus in fantasy and each recoils in horror from the dream fulfilment here transplanted into reality, with the full quantity of repression which separates his infantile state from his present one. (1985, 272)

The effect of the play rests on its gratification of a wish, but Freud isn't done yet. The idea occurs to him, “fleetinglly,” that these wishes may “be at the bottom of *Hamlet* as well. I am not thinking of Shakespeare's conscious intention, but believe, rather, that a real event stimulated the poet to his representation, in that his unconscious understood the unconscious of his hero” (272). Freud moves quickly next, inaugurating a mode of psychoanalytic psychobiography. He actually calls Hamlet a “hysteric,” aligning the Danish prince with the illness through which psychoanalysis itself took shape, asking “how does he [Hamlet] explain his irresolution in avenging his father by the murder of his uncle...? How better than through the torment he suffers from the obscure memory that he himself had contemplated the same deed against his father out of passion for his mother” (272–3). Allusion here serves as a mode of proof. Just like Freud's hysterical patients, Hamlet “bring[s] down punishment on himself” in the form of a visible madness which results in him “suffering the same fate as his father by being poisoned by the same rival.”

However, in spite of this fall into character analysis, this early reference to *Hamlet* offers a way of thinking about the creative impetus. Freud, somewhat unhelpfully, refers to a “real event,” but in this context this can only be the “real event” of desire – love for the

mother and jealousy towards the father.<sup>23</sup> It is this “event” which works in and through the play *Hamlet*. When Freud suggests a mode of unconscious communication taking place between Shakespeare and his most famous protagonist he posits the oedipal desire as belonging to the artist, rather than the character. It is this repressed desire which, he suggests, finds an outlet in the actions of Hamlet. The reference to the repressed desire of the author inscribes cultural production itself in relation to repression. Freud’s allusion to *Hamlet* is an important indication not only of the means through which psychoanalysis will attempt to secure its cultural authority, but also of repression as a process predicated on cultural norms, and tied to the formulation of culture.

*Oedipus Rex* and *Hamlet* make their first appearance together in Freud’s published writings in connection with the “Typical Dream,” in relation to the most persistent and significant of these dreams, “Dreams of the Death of Persons of whom one is Fond” (1900, 248). Unlike the personal dream, when a dreamer recounts a typical dream their associations dry up and the analyst must make use of their knowledge of symbols – of cultural life – to work out the meaning of the dream. “It is the fate of all of us, perhaps,” Freud writes, “to direct our first sexual impulses towards our mother and our first hatred and our first murderous wishes towards our father” (262). “The story of Oedipus is the reaction of the imagination to these two typical dreams” (264). Following his discussion of *Oedipus Rex* Freud turns to *Hamlet*:

Another of the great creations of tragic poetry, Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, has its roots in the same soil as *Oedipus Rex*. But the changed treatment of the same material reveals the whole difference in the mental life of these two widely separated epochs of civilization: the secular advance of repression in the emotional life of mankind. In the *Oedipus* the child’s wishful phantasy that underlies it is brought into the open and realized as it would be in a dream. In *Hamlet* it remains repressed; and—just as in the case of a neurosis—we only learn of its existence from its inhibiting consequences. (264)

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<sup>23</sup> Freud’s formulation of the Oedipus complex came to displace his wholesale belief in the reality of child sexual abuse as the defining aetiological factor in hysteria. Prior to abandoning the seduction theory, Freud held that hysterics suffer not from the consequences of unacceptable desire, but from “reminiscences.” The reality of the “real event” of sexual abuse has been at the heart of much controversy. See, for example, Masson (1984); Rand and Torok (1997).

In making this comparison between the two plays, Freud forwards an understanding of mental life with specific historical resonance; the plays constitute *different* reactions to the imagination and speak of “the secular advance of repression.” In his seminar on desire and its interpretation, Lacan claims that “Freud himself indicated, perhaps in a somewhat *fin de siècle* way, that for some reason when we lived out the Oedipal drama, it was destined to be in a warped form, and there’s surely an echo of that in *Hamlet* [...] this justifies and deepens our understanding of *Hamlet*, as possibly illustrating a decadent form of the Oedipal situation, its decline” ([1958-9] 1977, 44–5). If *Hamlet* represents Oedipus in decline, then it raises the question of where – or when – the “real” Oedipus complex was. Here the question of history exerts pressure on a psychoanalytic model with claims to universal, or trans-historical, appeal. The typical wishes of a child, it seems, do not change, but what happens to them, the specific “reaction of the imagination” which they prompt, does. The wish must be disguised and encoded in *Hamlet* much like in the dreamwork: forced, through processes of condensation, displacement, representation and secondary revision into the latent spaces of the text.<sup>24</sup> The creative artist, in the forms of Sophocles and Shakespeare, provides an example of the “typical,” and of cultural production as a response to the unacceptability of typical dreams.

“Why Oedipus?” asks Christopher Bollas, answering that the play is a “theatrical metaphor” for the essential psychic conflict of the individual that dramatizes human complexity: the mythic, psychic, civic and cultural components which form the pieces of a life lived (1992, 218). It is perhaps this – the ways in which the familial and the civic meet and conflict within the play – which constitutes its significance for Freud. Nevertheless, other critics

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<sup>24</sup> Many critics have commented on the foundational importance of *Hamlet*, over *Oedipus Rex*, in the evolution of Freud’s thought. Jonathan Crewe writes that “it is because Hamlet’s desire is repressed, because he has *not* murdered his father or slept with his mother, that, through the play, the *discovery* of oedipal desire can be (re)effected” (cited in Lupton and Reinhard 1993, 15). In his preface to Freud’s *Writings on Art and Literature*, Neil Hertz also notes that “Jean Starobinsky has shown that *Hamlet* in particular was crucial to the elaboration of Freud’s thought because it allowed him to apply the mythic oedipal model, as Sophocles had presented it, to the actions of someone who, precisely, had *not* murdered his father or slept with his mother, to someone like Freud himself or his patients” (1997, p. xiii). See also Marjorie Garber’s work on Shakespeare and his “ghost writers” (1987, 168, 171).

have asked, both implicitly and explicitly, “why *only* Oedipus?” The play is part of a rich world of dramatic myth from which Freud chooses in highly selective ways (Goux 1993; Jacobs 2007). Yet is it only Oedipus? The “Freudian myth,” to borrow Ricoeur’s term (1970, 209), may be impossible to formulate without *Hamlet*. In fact, the repeated interplay of these texts is part of the complex process of paternal mythologization which Freud’s cultural theory effects. However, whilst the *Interpretation of Dreams* transcribes the discoveries recorded in Freud’s letters to Fliess, “the cultural import of those discoveries is concealed” (Ricoeur 1970, 191). Freud fails to emphasize that “repression, which belongs to the individual’s history of desire, coincides with one of the most formidable institutions, the prohibition of incest.” The oedipal scenario to which the plays lend their authority demonstrates that “repression and culture, intrapsychic institution and cultural institution, coincide” (190–1). However, Ricoeur does not point out here that repression and culture only coincide in one sense, in the form of prohibition. Freud’s references to creative productions demonstrate that “culture” is both a repressing agency and a response to, or product of, the demand for repression.

As I mentioned in the introduction, Freud’s early letters to Fliess reveal an abiding preoccupation with the interface between psychic pain and social life. In his published writings, the important paper “‘Civilized’ Sexual Morality and Modern Nervous Illness” (1908) is Freud’s first clear statement of the relationship between cultural production and sexual restriction, and the antagonism between civilization and instinctual life which seems to lead to such unhappiness. Freud begins the paper by noting a paradox or double-bind which anticipates the reading of culture he puts forward some years later in *Civilization and its Discontents*: the civilized sexual morality brought into being in order to promote the cause of civilization may make us so unhappy that its cultural benefits may be placed in jeopardy (181). Freud suggests that the sexual instincts, meeting the demands of civilization, can follow two paths: either they are repressed (in general with some lack of success, leading to the neuroses

and their symptoms), or they are sublimated into cultural achievements (Freud mentions great art, literature and science) (191, 187).

The term “sublimation,” which Freud coined for psychoanalysis (though he notoriously never wrote – or perhaps destroyed – an essay on the topic), licenses the discourse as a philosophy of culture, as well as, in many instances, a method of cultural analysis (Bersani 1990, 30). Freud writes in the *Three Essays* that “historians of civilization appear to be at one in assuming that powerful components are acquired for every kind of cultural achievement by this diversion of sexual instinctual forces from sexual aims and their direction to new ones – a process which deserves the name of ‘sublimation’” (1905a, 178). As Laplanche and Pontalis note, Freud’s use of the term has a dual aspect. On the one hand, it evokes the “sublime,” used to refer to works which are “grand or uplifting.” Concurrently, it draws an inference from chemistry, where it describes “the procedure whereby a body is caused to pass directly from a solid to a gaseous state” (1988, 432). Linked to both art and science, “sublimation” repeats the psychoanalytic attachment to both poetry and the *Zuider Zee*.

The energies which are drawn into cultural work derive from the polymorphous elements of infantile sexuality. This process of diversion relies on the social demand to repress instincts deemed unserviceable to civilization, those which do not serve the aims of reproduction – the “perverse” instincts of infantile sexuality connected with orality and anality – but it also ties sexuality to the possibilities for creativity and culture itself. The Oedipus complex, or more correctly its resolution, precipitates the repression of infantile sexuality. In the earlier editions of the *Three Essays*, Freud identifies the stages of orality and anality, which establish the important distinction between the “sexual” and the “genital,” the former predating and exceeding the latter (1905a, 199). Following theoretical developments set out in “The Infantile Genital Organization” (1923a), namely the introduction of the “phallic” stage as a third phase of infantile sexuality, Freud is able to describe the link between infantile sexuality



and the threat of castration. Henceforth the passing of the Oedipus complex can be explained in terms of this threat and the phallic stage's relative lack of organization in comparison to the mature (gendered) distinction of the full genital organization.

"Doesn't every narrative lead back to Oedipus?" Roland Barthes famously asked. "Isn't storytelling always a way of searching for one's origin, speaking one's conflicts with the Law, entering into the dialectic of tenderness and hatred?" (1975, 47). This would certainly seem to be the case for Freud; in *Totem and Taboo* he explicitly claims that the origins of religion, morality, society and art converge in the Oedipus complex (1913, 156), and the point is reiterated in *Group Psychology*, which offers a highly tendentious suggestion about the origins of the "creative impulse" in relation to parricide. Having killed the proto-father of the Primal Horde, one of the Band of Brothers, Freud suggests, "may have moved to free himself from the group and take over the father's part. He who did this was the first epic poet; and the advance was achieved in his imagination [...] He invented the heroic myth" (1921, 136). This is a highly suspect argument, not least because Freud is projecting the Oedipus complex back in time to explain the origins of myth, narrative and prohibition. Freud imagines a primitive scene in order to justify his thinking, positing another "real event" – parricide – in order to explain the development of conscience. Freud's theory of the Primal Horde, set out in detail in *Totem and Taboo*, is itself both deeply tendentious and mythical, yet the link between the Band of Brothers and the birth of epic poetry foregrounds a connection between the Oedipus complex and cultural production that is fundamental to Freud's thinking about culture.

Across this theoretical work, the sexual, the social and the cultural interlink and coalesce in important ways. We wouldn't have "every kind of cultural achievement," Freud suggests, without the necessity to repress inherent drives. In a passage worth quoting at length, Žižek describes Adorno's reading of this naturalization of the drives (Adorno 1967; 1968):

Although one finds in Freud some passages which point towards the historical 'mediation' of the drives, his theoretical position nonetheless implies the notion of the drives as objective determinants of psychic life. According to Adorno, this 'naturalistic' notion introduces into the Freudian edifice an irresolvable contradiction: on the one hand, the entire development of civilization is condemned, at least implicitly, for repressing drive-potentials in the service of social relations of domination and exploitation; on the other hand, repression as a renunciation of the satisfaction of drives is conceived as the necessary and insurmountable condition of the emergence of 'higher' human activities – that is to say, of culture. One intra-theoretical consequence of this contradiction is the impossibility of distinguishing in a theoretically relevant way between the *repression* of a drive and its *sublimation* [...] There is thus a radical and constitutive *indecision* which pertains to the fundamental intention of psychoanalytic theory and practice: it is split between the 'liberating' gesture of setting free repressed libidinal potential and the 'resigned conservatism' of accepting repression as the necessary price for the progress of civilization. (1994, 12)

As Žižek points out, however, Adorno does not seek to resolve this contradiction, but instead construes the contradiction as an "*immediate index*" of the "*antagonism*" that "*pertains to social reality itself*," namely, that all higher achievements are paid for by the repression of drives which serves social domination: the observe of every sublimation is a form of oppression (Žižek 1994, 13). This reading sets out the double-bind of Freudian theory, and the ways in which the possibility of change is circumscribed, if not inherently compromised, within such thinking.

Eagleton puts this evocatively: "the aesthetic is what we live by; but for Freud as opposed to Schiller, this is at least as much catastrophe as triumph" (1990, 262). Given the reality of prohibition, the production and consumption of culture offer two "techniques for living," two means through which we can navigate our relationship with the law (1930, 81). Freud deigned not to theorize creative genius, describing it as "unanalysable" (1928, 179) but something of his sense of what constitutes "great art" can be gleaned from his essay on Leonardo da Vinci, where he suggests that, in artistic work, the libido escapes repression through sublimation. The artist is able to achieve some form of mastery of the repressed material which finds controlled expression in art (1910b, 80). Art, then, is construed as a form of self-treatment with the capacity to perform a social role through its address to an audience. What the artist aims to do, Freud suggests in *The Moses of Michelangelo*, is to "awaken in us

the same emotional attitude, the same mental constitution as that which in him produced the impetus to create" (1914a, 212).

Freud illustrates this in "Psychopathic Characters on the Stage," a central text in his limited engagement with the question of the consumption of culture (1905b). The novelty of Freud's subject aside, in this text he examines what Sarah Kofman describes as "the means used by dramatists to move the public" (1988, 107). To begin, Freud makes a connection between an Aristotelian theory of reception and his own:

If, as has been assumed since the time of Aristotle, the purpose of drama is to arouse 'terror and pity' [*Mitleid*] and so 'to purge the emotions,' we can describe that purpose in rather more detail by saying that it is a question of opening up sources of pleasure or enjoyment in our emotional life, just as, in the case of intellectual activity, joking or fun open up similar sources, many of which that activity had made inaccessible. In this connection the prime factor is unquestionably the process of getting rid of one's own emotions by 'blowing off steam;' and the consequent enjoyment corresponds on the one hand to the relief produced through a discharge and on the other hand, no doubt, to an accompanying sexual excitation. (1905b, 305)

It is worth noting the way in which Freud here demythologizes aesthetic experience, by positing the pleasure which it arouses in sexual terms, a move which flies in the face of a notion of disinterestedness. Drama heightens tension, providing the "fore-pleasures" (310) of excitement and terror, whilst also facilitating the spectator's enjoyment, offering a sense of safety and the possibility to master experience through "illusion" (306). The spectator may suffer in sympathy, but they will also remain aware that, though they identify with the hero, neither is it really them on stage, nor is the action really taking place (305). Freud asserts that "being present as an interested spectator at a spectacle or a play does for adults what play does for children, whose hesitant hopes of being able to do what grown-up people do are in that way gratified" (305). Here Freud aligns spectating with playing, and the spectator with the child at play who uses the activity to master a certain kind of unfamiliar experience in a controlled way. This analogy between the spectator and the child returns in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, where Freud abandons the equation of dream with wish fulfilment, forced into such a move by the dreams of trauma sufferers, whose "compulsion to repeat" traumatic

moments complicates the idea of pleasure. Freud compares the compulsion to repeat with the famous game played by his young grandson, *fort/da* (1920, 8–9), arguing that, through this game, the child is attempting to “master the anxiety of separation from his mother by ‘staging’ her absences and presences” (Ellmann 1994, 7). He compares the game to tragic drama which, whilst inflicting the painful experience of loss upon the audience, also provides them with pleasure, derived from an aesthetic mastery of the experience (1920, 11).

If aesthetic experience (either the production or consumption of culture) is able to both discharge excitation and offer aesthetic mastery, to what extent does it approach the status of “cultural cure”? Freud’s reading of *Hamlet* is useful in this instance. For Freud, the play is an example of a “psychopathological drama,” a drama where “the suffering in which we take part and from which we are meant to derive pleasure” comes from a conflict between “a conscious impulse and a repressed one” (308). Crucially, in contrast to our engagement with *Oedipus*, where our repressed desires are laid bare through dramatic revelation, there is a “necessary precondition” to this form of drama: “the impulse that is struggling into consciousness, however clearly recognizable, is never given a definite name,” in this way, the process which takes place in the protagonist also occurs in the spectator, but it is “carried through with his attention averted, and he is in the grip of his emotions instead of taking stock of what is happening.” In spite of the vacancy, or absence, from self which the idea of averted attention connotes, the spectator gains pleasure from “the revelation and the more or less conscious recognition of a repressed impulse” (309). On this analysis, Shakespeare has sidestepped repression and sublimated his libido into the play. At the same time, such impulses are liberated in a form which brings both pleasure and self-knowledge for the audience. As a route to self-knowledge, the function of art, and here specifically tragic drama, becomes analogous to that of psychoanalysis itself. Both forms perform the “work of culture” which Freud describes, in his much later phrase, as the appropriation of “fresh portions of the id.”

The status of culture as revelation, however, is far from straightforward. Of *Hamlet* he writes that “it would seem to be the dramatist’s business to induce the same illness in *us*; and it can best be achieved if we are made to follow the development of the illness along with the sufferer. This will be especially necessary where the repression does not already exist in us but has first to be set up; and this represents a step further than *Hamlet* in the use of neurosis on the stage” (1905b, 310). The cultural object itself, it appears, is capable of making us sick. *Hamlet* works to induce a neurosis in its audience by calling on them to mime what they see, it causes psychological changes, shaking up the repressed and forcing its audience into a neurotic defence.<sup>25</sup> But Freud goes even further, suggesting that some cultural phenomena might be capable of establishing repressions, thus taking on the function of prohibition. The idea that the artwork might be able to offer some form of subversive revelation is compromised by its concurrent function of containment. We might conclude that “the psychotherapeutic value of artistic creation thus resides in its simultaneous revelation and repression, disclosure and closure, of unconscious desires and fears” (P. Armstrong 2001, 29). In his reading of the play, Otto Rank argues that artistic creation allows: “not only the author himself, but also most normal persons, to gratify in a psychically hygienic and therefore socially approved and highly valuable manner those repressed emotions that the dreamer sometimes lives out in his inner life and that the paranoiac, assisted by his delusion, can only partially master” ([1912] 1992, 50). Armstrong claims that Rank describes something like a

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<sup>25</sup> This way of thinking about *Hamlet* – as capable of setting in motion a neurotic response in those who watch it – is taken up powerfully by Nicholas Abraham in his “Sixth Act” (1988). *Hamlet*, Abraham claims, “initiates an unconscious process, keeps it alive, yet fails to put it to rest. The state of mind that is provoked endures long after the play has ended; it forces itself upon us like some inescapable necessity emanating from some unknown source” (2). Whilst Abraham’s poetic supplement to Shakespeare’s play works mainly to advance his theory of encryption (Abraham and Torok 1994), his articulation foregrounds the capacity of culture to penetrate its audience to pathological effect. Like the “stranger within” (3) who Abraham believes to reside, entombed, within the play’s characters (old Hamlet’s use of poison to defeat the King of Norway is the unknown knowledge which all of the characters contain, he claims), *Hamlet*’s secret invades its audience and continues to work its unconscious effects long after the final curtain has come down. What Abraham sets out to do – treading in the self-aggrandising footsteps of Freud, it must be said – is to “‘cure’ the *public* of the covert neurosis that the Tragedy of Hamlet has, for centuries, inflicted upon it” (4).

psychoanalytic revision of the Aristotelian concept of catharsis. He goes on to suggest, therefore, that “tragedy’s social value parallels that of the individual need for psychoanalysis” in that “both offer a form of psychic hygiene in which the repressed can be gratified safely and without threat to either the social order or the individual ego” (2001, 29). We might question whether this representation of psychoanalysis as gratifying wishes is really accurate – Freud believed the treatment should occur in a state of frustration, after all – whilst accepting that Freud’s insistence on the inherent sameness of culture and civilization makes the idea of subversion inherently complex, and always already, even unwittingly, an exercise in consolation and control.

However, if culture offers a way to deal with the libido of unacceptable desire, it might be construed as the embodiment of something approaching “human nature,” precisely that which “civilization” curtails. Artistic production, on Freud’s analysis it seems, reveals the “truth” of our nature. It insists – to quote Elliott again – that the “essence of being” resides in “the vicissitudes of desire.” To what extent, then, does Freud’s characterization of culture as a mode of substitute satisfaction unwittingly align him with a tendency to distinguish between “culture” and “civilization”? Certainly there is some proximity to Allan Bloom’s description of “culture,” which, he claims, “restores the lost wholeness of first man on a higher level, where his faculties can be fully developed without contradiction between the desires of nature and the moral imperatives of his social life” (cited in Botz-Bornstein 2012, 18). For Freud, culture represents, at least in part, a means of channelling unacceptable desire, offering an alternative to the repression of the drive which social morality demands. Though Freud may not construe culture as embodying an unambiguously idealized vision of human nature, his belief in its capacity to foster well-being by mitigating the demands of social life links him to a tradition which sees culture, somewhat mythically, as that which could “sustain us” (Arnold [1888] 1970, 340). However, the consolation which the arts offer is only fleeting. Freud writes that “people who are receptive to the influence of art cannot set too high a value on it as a source

of pleasure and consolation in life. Nevertheless the mild narcosis induced in us by art can do no more than bring about a transient withdrawal from the pressure of vital needs, and it is not strong enough to make us forget real misery" (1930, 81). For Freud, then, the capacity of the arts to transform reality is limited. They may offer a form of palliative care, but they cannot put right the miseries of the world. Those elements of life which fall within a narrow conception of culture cannot be detached from the process of civilization and, whilst they are a response to its vicissitudes, they cannot reconfigure its fundamental, inherently antagonistic, form.

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Recent revisions of Freud's theory of culture have offered different takes on the relationship between "culture" and "cure." Leo Bersani, for instance, has linked Freud's preoccupation with aggressiveness in *Civilization and its Discontents* – his ultimately pessimistic reading of the social relation – to the question of cultural production (1986). Musing on the status of social regulation as a source of suffering, Freud writes that: "we cannot see why the regulations made by ourselves should not [...] be a protection and benefit for every one of us. And yet, when we consider how unsuccessful we have been in precisely this field of prevention of suffering, a suspicion dawns on us that here, too, a piece of unconquerable nature may lie behind—this time a piece of our own psychological constitution" (1930, 86). This unconquerable nature Freud considers to be a "primary mutual hostility" which perpetually threatens civilized society with disintegration (112). The reality of this aggression, Freud claims, necessitates restriction; only through inhibition can society function. "The interest of work in common would not hold it together, instinctual passions are stronger than reasonable interests." This is a fact of no small significance: regardless of how just society is, or how "hospitable [the] environment" (Deigh 1991, 293), aggression is instinctual and will not disappear and the possibilities of "cultural cure" are heavily circumscribed.

Humanity thus cannot be reconciled to the demands of civilization, as a consequence of the instinctual nature of aggression, and the mode of its regulation. For Freud, the super-ego comes into being through a process of identification and internalization. Intimately linked to parental cathexis, the connection between love and the law merges into love *for* the law. However, the super-ego isn't solely an internal representative of parental authority which could be dissipated if that authority itself were made more lenient, it draws its energy from a primary aggression, something like a "pure culture of the death instinct" (Freud 1923b, 53). Every bit of aggressiveness which the subject renounces can be taken up by the super-ego to increase its aggressiveness (Freud 1930, 129). The relationship between the ego and the super-ego is the return, worked over by a wish for violence, of the ego's relationship with, and attitude towards, the external object. This process of possessing the authority by means of an identification is not carried out "in order to continue its punishments internally, but rather in order to possess it, on the inside, as the object or victim of its own aggressive impulses" (Bersani 1986, 22). As Bersani notes, the ego, rather than the super-ego, here becomes the representative of the father and can be attacked by the child's own aggressiveness, which the super-ego represents. The severity of the super-ego appears to bear little relation to the severity of the actual paternal authority. Freud goes on to claim that it would be wrong to exaggerate this independence, stating that "in the formation of the super-ego and the emergence of conscience innate constitutional factors and influences from the real environment act in combination" (1930, 130), however, locating the origin of conscience and the super-ego primarily in an innate aggressiveness limits the capacity of the intellect to mitigate their severity, placing the enlightening aims of psychoanalysis in question. "Civilization," at least as it takes the form of the super-ego, is identical with an aggression it is designed to quell. The answer to Freud's question – "can the death drive be tamed?" – is ambivalent: "yes," it can be "sent back to where it came from" (1930, 123).



Freud is keen to insist that this aggressiveness is not erotic; however, Bersani questions the plausibility of the endeavour, citing Freud's description of the experience of satisfied aggression. Freud writes that "even where [the death instinct] emerges without any sexual purpose, in the blindest fury of destructiveness, we cannot fail to recognize that the satisfaction of the instinct is accompanied by an extraordinarily high degree of narcissistic enjoyment, owing to its presenting the ego with a fulfilment of the latter's old wish for omnipotence" (1930, 121). Based on these references to narcissism and omnipotence in the pleasures of violence, Bersani argues that aggressiveness is identical with the "oceanic feeling" Freud so famously discusses at the opening of *Civilization and its Discontents*, where he writes that "originally the ego contains everything, later it separates off an external world from itself" (1930, 68). Bersani asserts that "suddenly aggressiveness is beginning to sound bizarrely like – of all things – the oceanic feeling, which, as we have seen, was an ecstatic sense of oneness with the universe, a breaking down of the boundaries between the ego and the world traceable to the 'limitless narcissism' of infancy. Like the oceanic feeling, aggressiveness includes an intense erotic pleasure" (1986, 19). However, whether the oceanic feeling necessarily involves an intense erotic pleasure is something we should keep in mind. Bersani continues:

The work of civilization involves a certain removal of man from nature, an ability to differentiate his own body from other 'bodies' in his environment. It involves, we might say, a sharpening of the boundaries between the ego and the world, a willingness to forego the enjoyment of the 'oceanic feeling,' which, we are beginning to see, may conceal under a benign 'sensation of eternity' a considerable amount of destructive aggression towards the world. (15)

"Civilization" involves the formation of identity in contradistinction to an experience of omnipotence or merger with the world. In fact, it is startling how close Bersani comes here to object relations-based theories which conceive development in terms of gradual separation and ego formation. Indeed, it is worth asking whether the "wish for omnipotence" is necessarily a sexual wish, and mentioning that Bersani may be confounding two versions of

“narcissism” here – one a reference to the infant as a kind of “biological monad,” and the other to an intermediate stage between auto-eroticism and object-choice involving the libidinal cathexis of the ego (Laplanche 1976, 70).

For Bersani to make his claims for the identity of the oceanic feeling and a sexualized destructiveness he must hold to a theory of sexuality as “self-shattering,” and equate this with a wish for omnipotence premised on the diffusion of the self as a kind of will to power. In the context of his discussion of sexualized aggression, Bersani claims that “*destructiveness is constitutive of sexuality*” (1986, 19–20), a point which can only be understood by way of the thesis that there are two distinct ontologies of sexuality. In addition to the “teleological” or genital ontology of sexuality, understood as the progressive achievement of stages on a quest for the release of orgasm, in certain passages of the *Three Essays*, Bersani contends, Freud seems to be circling around the idea that the pleasurable/ unpleasurable tension of sexual excitation occurs when “the body’s ‘normal’ range of sensation is exceeded, and when the organization of the self is momentarily disturbed by sensations or affective processes somehow ‘beyond’ those compatible with psychic organization” (1986, 38). On Bersani’s analysis, sexuality, in its nascent state, involves the finding of pleasure in the increase and repetition of a tension which is not released but instead “shatters” or exceeds the self in an act of auto-violence which legitimates the claim that destructiveness is constitutive of sexuality. In formulating this position, Bersani is drawing on Laplanche, who argues that “every activity, modification of the organism, or perturbation is capable of becoming the source of a marginal effect, which is precisely the sexual excitation at the point at which that perturbation is produced” (1976, 87–8). Laplanche foregrounds sexual excitement and the release of tension as distinct, with the former understood in terms of a nascent form of self-destruction – or shattering.

In making this claim for “shattering,” Bersani – in essence – rearticulates the idea that the “energy” of civilization is drawn from the polymorphously perverse elements of infantile sexuality. He goes on to ask a series of questions: “what has happened to civilization? More pertinently, *what is civilization?*” It would appear that civilization, that which imposes restrictions on the exercise of the death drive (sexual or, well, sexual), is identical with that death drive itself; it draws its energy from it, in fact, as do all “cultural activities.” Bersani puts it in starkly formulaic terms: “sexuality = aggressiveness = civilization” (1986, 21–2). Civilization is not simply that which imposes itself as a regulatory mechanism on the innate hostility of the individual, it may well be “a *region of discourse* coextensive with the erotically charged aggressiveness which Freud perhaps mistakenly opposes to civilization [...] In a very important sense, civilization in Freud, at least that aspect of it which he thinks of as a socialized superego, is merely a cultural metaphor for the psychic fulfilment in each of us of a narcissistically thrilling wish to destroy the world” (23).

Drawing its energy from the polymorphously perverse elements of infantile sexuality, the post-oedipal super-ego, Bersani claims, “transforms the masochistic origins of our sexuality into a cultural and ethical imperative” (98). If the “nature” of sexuality is identical to destructiveness, it finds expression in civilization as a will to power, a furious desire for domination. It is worth noting that Bersani’s investment in “self-shattering” is a post-structural response to the notions of subjectivity and identity perceived to be dominant features of modernity, the “ego’s era” we might say. “Civilization” may be coextensive with the energy of this shattered sexuality, but it continues to represent a process of binding which requires us to renounce this experience in the interests of self-consolidation. A certain cultural pessimism is arguably the consequence of such an understanding of the relationship between desire and the cultural field. If civilization and culture are the same thing, there seems little room to argue against existing conditions, and an imperative to accept culture as a derivative of (a desire for) violence. But Bersani asks whether there might be a mode of “civilized discourse” which could

“at least partially dissipate our savage sexuality by the mode in which it would mistakenly replicate it?” In so doing, he gestures towards the possibility of a culture/civilization distinction, for he locates the possibility of such civilized discourse in “certain works of art” (24). These are works, we will learn (they include a poem by Mallarmé, some ancient Assyrian sculpture, the works of Freud himself), that channel and repeat something of the “uncompleted narratives,” the irresolution, the eternal oscillation, of the first ontology of sexuality.

Two points need to be made here. Firstly, as Brian Duren suggests in a review of *The Freudian Body*, “not only is civilization not the cause of man's aggressivity, but it offers, through culture, a means of living with – without repressing – one's murderous sexuality,” which leads him to categorize the text as “an apology for sublimation” (1988, 62). However, there is something more at stake than a claim that our putatively violent sexuality might be both repeated and tamed in (certain, basically modernist, works of) art. As Tim Dean puts it, this vision of sex as masochism corrodes identity and thus provides a way of resisting aggressive projects which are waged in the name of identity (2010, 388). There is an ethical point here: the works of art Bersani champions apparently challenge the self-importance of a gratified and consolidated ego. In so doing, they appear to approach the status of a (high) “cultural cure,” the corrective to “the ego's era,” as it were. However this is not only a cure available to their producers, the works of art can function for their receivers as a cultivated antidote to the vicissitudes of contemporary Western civilization, achieved through a shattering and dispersal of the self. Bersani's cultural cure is, in essence, the avant-garde.

In *The Culture of Redemption*, Bersani sets out to theorize the genesis of the ego in relation to such shattering, masochistic experience (1990). In “On Narcissism” Freud introduces the idea of “an original libidinal cathexis of the ego,” positing narcissism as a necessary intermediate stage between autoeroticism and object love, a stage at which the ego

itself is a libido-charged object of desire (1914b, 75). Freud's aim is to explain the development of the ego: "we are bound to suppose that a unity comparable to the ego cannot exist in the individual from the start; the ego has to be developed. The auto-erotic instincts, however, are there from the very first; so there must be something added to auto-eroticism – a new psychical action – in order to bring about narcissism" (76-7). We see Freud, then, making a connection between the self, sexuality and creativity. The ego comes about through some kind of transformation of infantile sexuality, but the nature of this process remains obscure. It falls to Bersani to extrapolate the nature of this psychical mechanism, a task he undertakes with reference to his own reading of Freud's *Three Essays* in *The Freudian Body*.

The pleasure of tension rather than release describes the nature of autoeroticism. At some point, autoeroticism is altered in such a way that the experience of shattering becomes a source of pleasure and the object of desire. Bersani reads the need to repeat the experience of shattering as the first sublimation, a move to a "higher" aim here understood not in moralistic terms, but as a move from "fragmented objects to totalities" (1990, 37). Ego development involves "a form of self-reflexiveness. It is as if a certain split occurred in consciousness, a split that paradoxically is also the first experience of self-integration. In this self-reflexive move, a pleasurable shattered consciousness becomes aware of itself as the object of its desire" (37). The object of desire, then, becomes to repeat the activity of an eroticized, pleasurable shattered, consciousness. The ego comes into being through an awareness of a desire to repeat a sensation, not an activity. The model of desire is thus established: to repeat the experience, irrespective of the act which produces it. Indeed, Bersani writes of how non-fixated sublimated energy attaches itself to ego interests and activities. The pleasures of work and play derive from their ability to revive a primary narcissism in which the self – and its shattering – becomes the object of desire (43); sublimation is no longer an alternative to repression, but a self-reflexive activity through which desire multiplies itself (49). Because the aim of desire is this experience of shattering, anything, Bersani claims, can "do the job" (40), a

point of no small significance, and one that, Dean notes, “redefines, as well as dramatically expands, what the term *art* signifies and indeed, in what aesthetic subjectivity might be said to consist” (2010, 388).<sup>26</sup> What it might mean to call psychoanalysis a theory of culture is changed, radically expanded, by the notion that all of our cultural pursuits are infused with the energy of sexuality in ways which bear no necessary relation to repression. Culture itself becomes “a type of sexualized production” which is not a substitute satisfaction for repressed desires, but rather the continuation, in a different form, of those desires themselves (35). Culture is the continuation of a non-referential sexual energy, and in its offer to repeat the experience of shattering, it functions as a cultural cure.<sup>27</sup>

It seems impossible to avoid a certain perplexity with Bersani’s account of ego formation, a perplexity, however, which is in itself productive. On Bersani’s analysis, the self takes shape in the moment of its own shattering, paradox indeed. It seems worth asking: if consciousness didn’t exist before this moment, what exactly is shattered? It’s an impossible question, and the problem lies in Bersani’s desire (at this stage of his thinking at least) to derive everything from an endogenously emerging sexuality. In positing sexuality as a masochistic instance of self-shattering, or ego dispersal, Bersani is sexualizing Freud’s description of the oceanic feeling – “originally the ego contains everything, later it separates off an external world from itself” (1930, 68) – in short, Bersani appears to eroticize “helplessness,” the mythical state of infantile merger with the mother. In fact, to perceive

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<sup>26</sup> Whilst *any* activity might be able to produce sexual excitement, Bersani’s insistence on a distinction between the pleasures of excitement and satisfaction suggests that this may not *quite* be the case. If the Freud of “On Narcissism” argues, as Bersani suggests, that the ego emerges from a form of sexual excitement, a feeling of tension, then tension takes up central significance in mental development, becoming something of a necessary good. The argument leads to the logical conclusion that tension, difficulty, some form of struggle, might be an essential part of creativity itself; a premise which might have implications for the kind of engagements which might be designated “valuable.” Though Bersani does not pursue these implications, they are everywhere apparent in his predilection towards art which blurs form and identity, allowing us to experience a “pure excitement” (37).

<sup>27</sup> As Bersani acknowledges, Laplanche arrives at a similar position regarding the possibility of sublimation without repression in his lectures on the subject, published in French in 1980 under the title *Problematisques III: La Sublimation*. An excerpt from those lectures is translated as “To Situate Sublimation” (Laplanche 1984). Bersani, however, offers a way to read ego development which is not identical to that of Laplanche.

“cultural cure” in terms of an experience of ego dispersal calls to mind an understanding of aesthetic experience closely aligned with object relations theory, as we shall see.

Phillips has also noted that Bersani’s ideas resonate with a story of early development with which he rarely engages explicitly (2008, 104). Though Laplanche’s work is a consistent source of inspiration for Bersani, the version of sexuality proposed in both *The Freudian Body* and *The Culture of Redemption* does not conjure a sense that even “if the individual is henceforth governed, in classical psychoanalytic theory, by the unknown drives of the unconscious, this ‘id’—however strange it is supposed to be—is nonetheless not an alien. It is supposed to dwell *at the center* of the individual, whom it governs in its own way, even if it has dethroned the ego. One sovereign in place of another, but well and truly installed in the keep of the castle” (Laplanche 1999, 135). The way out of this tendency to essentialize the id, Laplanche claims, involves a return to the seduction theory that Freud largely abandoned in 1897 upon discovering the Oedipus complex. Laplanche refers to Freud’s abandonment of seduction as a “disaster” because “it is the abandonment of a theory of human sexuality as exogenous, intersubjective, and intrusive” (1999, 197).

Laplanche’s theory of general seduction revises the Freudian scheme in order to place the (m)other at the heart of drive theory and subjective constitution. The theory also impacts on how we might think about culture and cure. According to Laplanche, the adult caregiver communicates to the child verbal, non-verbal and behavioural messages loaded with unconscious (sexual) significations, or enigmatic signifiers (1989, 126). Laplanche is not suggesting the adult abuses the child; rather the fact of the adult unconscious makes this form of communication inevitable: “the primal relationship is therefore established on a twofold register: we have both a vital, open and reciprocal relationship, which can truly be said to be interactive, and a relationship which is implicitly sexual, where there is no interaction because the two partners are not equal” (103). The archetypal example of this is the mother feeding

the child at the breast. Unconsciously, Laplanche claims, the mother cannot disavow that the breast is a sexually-invested organ. An unformulated awareness of this cathexis raises questions for the child: “what does this breast want from me, besides suckling?” (126). The child is confronted by an enigma which she must negotiate and try to understand.

This process is significant for an understanding of both sexuality and culture for several reasons. Laplanche maintains that sexuality is originally masochistic, claiming that the enigmatic messages of the (m)other must be experienced as a kind of pain. “The ‘drive’ is to the ego what pain is to the body [...] the source-object of the drive is ‘stuck’ in the envelope of the ego like a splinter in the skin – this is the model which one should constantly keep in mind” (1999, 209). The drive is experienced “in a masochistic way as the painful assault of an *internal foreign body*, in relation to which the ego is passive and permanently in danger of being invaded” (206). The sexuality which is implanted through parental care retains the characteristics of the first ontology of sexuality; at its beginning, sexuality remains a form of masochism.

Secondly, psychic development occurs in relation to this experience. Dominique Scarfone focuses on the fundamental significance of translation: “translation [...] is a *process* during which the child’s ‘I’ has both to emerge as a subject (a centre of action) and be constituted into a coherent ego, whereas the residues left behind by the partial failure of translation constitute the repressed” (2005, 43). Laplanche suggests that the address of an other launches development as a creative act of attempted translation. Yet there is always something which resists translation, the unconscious, the unknown, and this causes a pain to the ego; agitating it, spurring it on to know, “to translate, to reprise and rework the enigmatic and exciting messages, to substitute its own signifying sequences, fantasies, ‘infantile sexual theories,’ to interpret the blanks in the parental discourse, *to sublimate by symbolising otherwise*” (Fletcher 2002, 9 my italics).



Sublimation, on Laplanche's analysis, is not a response to a cultural demand for repression, but the process through which the ego and the unconscious take shape. Referring to the "sublime," he writes that "Freud, as we know, takes this term up in his own way by defining the alchemy that allows the drive to be sublimated, regulated by aims that are socially valorised. This definition in terms of the 'social,' which introduces a whole field of questions, cannot, when it is Freud who uses the term, be considered to be secondary or extrinsic to the process itself" (2002, 31). Pursuing his hermeneutic strategy of charting a profound affinity between the formation of Freudian theory and that of the subject – the mirroring by theoretico-genesis of ontogenesis – Laplanche suggests that the second dualism of the drives cannot replace the first. The two dualisms represent, rather, different moments in human development. From the basis of care (self-preservation), sexuality emerges, and that sexuality is originally "unbound," the "untameable and anarchic" death drive (34). Eros, the life drive, represents the bound part of sexuality, bound with an object, or bound into the ego-object. This idea has consequences:

Sublimation, the mutation of the drive as regards its aims and its object, would in fact appear to be the transference or transposition of the sexual energy of the death drive to the life drive, the taming or binding of a drive that was originally anarchic or destructive. Such a conception, I would insist, means that we must understand Eros, the demiurge of Freud's second vision that aims to bring about ever greater forms of unity, as no longer to be simply identified with the sexuality, both fragmented and fragmenting, of the *Three Essays*. (36)

Eros is no longer to be equated with sexuality at all, in fact. Sexuality is "fragmented and fragmenting," a shattering rather than consolidating phenomenon, an exciting, pleasurable pain. Although sublimation is generally viewed as the process through which the pregenital remnants of sexuality are dealt with, genitalization, for Laplanche, is only a part of the binding process, it occupies no special position: "the Oedipus," he writes, "is fundamentally non-sexual and desexualising" (37).

If sublimation is binding, it appears to be identical to the processes of both individual and social development: "we should note how much the factor which Freud termed

'social valorisation' changes its status here: from being a supplementary element, it becomes something intrinsic to the very process of binding, with the notion of cultural process" (37). On this analysis, civilization remains linked to a destructive sexuality, a masochistic desire for self-shattering which underwrites any binding and self-consolidation, but a sexuality which originates in the other and in their enigmatic communication. Out of the enigma of an exogenous sexuality will come the ego and culture, or the ego as our first cultural production. Laplanche brings this back to Freud's notorious phrase, "*Wo Es war soll Ich werden*," – "where id was, there ego shall be" – where the death drive was, there the life drive will be.

Laplanche's theory moves beyond the idea of endogenous desires encountering restriction, beyond a form of infantile individualism, and it carries out its own forms of "demythologization." Culture is no longer seen as a mythic narrative of paternal prohibition; rather than an endogenous desire which is thwarted and harnessed by civilization, desire is understood to be implanted and structured through social interaction. The cultural, the social, is something always already there; an environment in which we are constituted. Thus Laplanche completes Freud's "Copernican revolution," whilst radically reconfiguring how the human is understood. On Laplanche's analysis, there is no necessary, species-level, antagonism between human nature and social demand: the possibility of cultural cure is not precluded.

Laplanche offers a radical reformulation of drive theory, and his thinking also impacts on how we might think about culture and cure. Psychoanalysis – *like* culture, *as* culture – provides the opportunity for psychic change. Laplanche writes that "the analytic setting is the space for reactivating the relation to those enigmas coming from the other, this process can only be carried out through a deconstruction, a de-translation of myths and ideologies by which the Ego is constructed to confront these enigmas" (1997, Paragraph 16). Conceptualizing sublimation as attempted (re)translation not only provides a way to theorize the production of art, it also speaks of what might be at stake in all forms of cultural

experience. If sublimation and development are understood as attempts to translate the messages of an other, we might suggest that all our cultural engagements are acts of sublimation – attempts to bind enigmatic messages into a form we can understand, recentring meaning on ourselves in a move that repeats the development of the ego.

Laplanche's understanding of transference conjures powerful affinities between infantile development and the analytic situation, whilst suggesting that the consulting room might not constitute the principle and "privileged" location of transference: "if one accepts that the fundamental dimension of transference is the relation to the enigma of the other, perhaps the principle site of transference, 'ordinary' transference, before, beyond or after analysis, would be the multiple relation to the cultural, to creation or, more precisely, to the cultural message" (1999, 222). Alison Stack has argued, alongside Laplanche, that "cultural reading," "like an infant's attempts to respond to and assimilate the messages of an external, alien other [...] is always a *response*" that has the power to "provoke psychic development" (2005, 67). Stack continues:

Because of this radical potential to effect psychical changes, Laplanche claims that 'the site of the cultural, as the site of an enigmatic interpellation, with many voices and ears, remains privileged.' Thus Laplanche draws a direct correspondence between the relational asymmetry that characterizes the human infant's relation to the adult world *and* the asymmetrical relation between all human subjects and the enigmatic cultural messages that bombard them.

Stack focuses in particular on reading literature, but we might wonder about how narrow the definition of a "cultural message" needs to be. Laplanche writes that "what can be isolated here as characteristic of the cultural is an address to an other who is out of reach, to others 'scattered in the future,' as the poet says" (1999, 224). "Cultural reading," is not necessarily limited to a narrow range of objects – recall that Laplanche refers to many ears and voices – and it is radically unpredictable: because everyone has their own enigma, it is impossible to determine, in advance, the effect the message will have. Positing cultural reading as an

instance of transference, Laplanche radically extends the ways in which culture might produce psychic change, the ways in which it might “cure.”

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Freud’s refusal to distinguish between culture and civilization is an achievement which allows him to articulate the important idea that “culture” is both enabling and pathologizing; it also permits him to demythologize an unexamined dualism and to resist the tendency to elevate, unquestioningly, certain objects and behaviours. Eagleton, however, is right to suggest that it leaves him without the means to argue forcefully against existing forms of social life. Eagleton writes that “‘culture’ is at once a descriptive and evaluative concept: if it designates on the one hand that without which we are factually speaking unable to survive, it is also a qualitative index of the form of social life which really does shield the weak and welcome the stranger, allows us to thrive rather than simply subsist” (1990, 285). Eagleton makes the important point that the fateful development of desire, the “potential catastrophe” so fundamental to the Freudian vision of culture, “could never have occurred had we not been cared for as infants.” Quoting the playwright Edward Bond, Eagleton sets out the “biological expectations” with which we are born, the expectation that the infant’s “unpreparedness” – her prematurity in an adult world – “will be cared for, that it will be given not only food but emotional reassurance, that its vulnerability will be shielded, that it will be born into a world waiting to receive it, and that knows *how* to receive it” (cited in Eagleton 1990, 284). This, Bond proposes, would signify a true “culture,” and it is the absence of such a situation which leads him to refuse the term to contemporary capitalist civilization. Bond presents a vision of the relationship between infancy and culture in which the latter becomes an environment with the right to its name only if it fulfils certain criteria of care and nurture.

Offering a vision of culture grounded in infancy, Bersani and Laplanche may also provide a revision of Freudian theory which makes space for this evaluative understanding of

culture. Bersani, as we have seen, suggests that certain forms of culture might dissipate our “savage sexuality” through both their production and reception, whilst he maintains the identity of culture and civilization at the level of the drive. Laplanche moves beyond the idea of an essential human nature defined by a shattering desire, offering a broad definition of culture, and he insists that we think cultural experience beyond pragmatics. However, there is a sense in which the culture/civilization distinction may return in his thinking. He distinguishes between “implantation” and “intromission” as modes of address between adult and child (1999, 133–7). For Laplanche, in the process of implantation the signifiers of the adult are fixed onto the surface of the fledgling subject and become “the object of the first attempts at translation, residues of which are the primally repressed” (136). In addition to implantation there is its “violent variant” – intromission. Whilst implantation allows an active, creative response of translation and repression, intromission introduces “an element resistant to all metabolization,” something which cannot be translated. This “short-circuits the differentiation of the agencies in the process of their formation.” Messages that do not allow the child to be creative can have a seriously detrimental – pathological – effect on the development of subjectivity, but Laplanche also claims that the super-ego message is introduced in this unmetabolizable form. Can social demand, then, be distinguished from “culture” as creative response? If Laplanche might be read as offering an evaluative idea of “culture,” it would appear intimately bound to the form of infant care and the possibility of creation. Such thinking leads naturally onto Winnicott, to whom I will now turn.

## Chapter Two

## (Re)Mythologizing Culture: Winnicott

I have used the term cultural experience as an extension of the idea of transitional phenomena and of play without being certain that I can define the word 'culture.' The accent indeed is on experience. In using the word culture I am thinking of the inherited tradition. I am thinking of something that is in the common pool of humanity, into which individuals and groups of people may contribute, and from which we may all draw *if we have somewhere to put what we find*. (D. W. Winnicott 1991b, 91)

D.W.W Oh God! May I be alive when I die!<sup>28</sup>

In his introduction to an important collection of essays concerning his literary “uses,” Rudnytsky claims Winnicott’s cultural thinking subordinates politics to aesthetics (1993, xiv). Noting his attachment to paradox – the prayer set out above is a good instance, though perhaps not his best known – Rudnytsky suggests an affinity with the New Criticism and the purchase of Keats’ idea of “Negative Capability.” Winnicott’s investment in paradox is akin to the quest for an “equilibrium of opposed impulses” (I. A. Richards [1924] 2001, 235) which leads to a “critical technology of tensions, ambiguities and resolutions” (Connor 1992, 206). In his paper on “The Manic Defence” Winnicott does express an aesthetic preference for writers “who can tolerate depressive anxiety and doubt” ([1935] 1958c, 130), which certainly sounds like Keats’ description of Negative Capability: a willingness to remain in “uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason” (1899, 277). Keats goes on to elaborate the concept in line with a form of conservatism: “this pursued through volumes would perhaps take us no further than this, that with a great poet the sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration,” which certainly seems to subordinate politics to aesthetics, as Rudnytsky suggests.

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<sup>28</sup> The epigraph is a prayer written by Winnicott on the inner flap of the notebook he was using to write his autobiography, intended to be titled *Not Less Than Everything*, prior to his death. It is given by Clare Winnicott in her “Reflection” on his life and work ([1978] 1988, 19).

Winnicott, Rudnytsky argues, is also heir to Kant in considering art irreducible to “sublimation” and locating its occurrence in an “autonomous domain” (1993, xiii). In a pivotal formulation of his idea of aesthetic experience Winnicott sets out his distance from Freud in precisely these terms:

Where are we when we are doing what in fact we do a great deal of our time, namely, enjoying ourselves? Does the concept of sublimation really cover the whole pattern? Can we gain some advantage from an examination of the matter of the possible existence of a place for living that is not properly described by either of the terms ‘inner’ or ‘outer’? [...] It will be observed that I am looking at the highly sophisticated adult’s enjoyment of living or of beauty, or of abstract human contrivance, and at the same time at the creative gesture of a baby who reaches out for the mother’s mouth and feels her teeth, and at the same time looks into her eyes, seeing her creatively. For me, playing leads on naturally to cultural experience and indeed forms its foundation. (D. W. Winnicott [1971] 1991b, 106)

Note Winnicott’s impatience, here, with the concept of sublimation as an explanation of creativity. In calling attention to the “location of cultural experience,” he challenges Freud’s focus on the production of culture, and turns attention to the nature of reception. This alone makes his thinking of importance in the history of psychoanalytic aesthetics. Many of his champions seek to abandon Freud’s thinking and deride his aesthetic sense. Susan Deri, for instance, claims that Freud “acknowledged that he felt unable to experience ‘aesthetic emotion,’ that his main interest in the visual arts was the subject matter” ([1978] 1988, 47). However, it is worth recalling that the concept of sublimation enables Freud to theorize the relationship between creativity and power. To what extent are Freud’s iconoclastic gestures swept away by a move that appears *progressive* within psychoanalysis, but which also looks like a *regression* in the history of aesthetic theory? Does Winnicott make the aesthetic boringly benign? Does his thinking subordinate politics to aesthetics?

John Turner agrees with Rudnytsky that the politics of Winnicott’s cultural thinking are severely limited, a restriction he also connects to the influence of a certain cultural tradition:

The work of Wordsworth and Coleridge, and of Burke before them [...] the work of their Victorian descendants, especially with Matthew Arnold’s *Culture and Anarchy*; and [...] the subsequent work of the Bloomsbury group at the start of this century, professing what Raymond Williams has called ‘the supreme value of the civilized *individual*, whose

pluralization, as more and more civilized individuals, was itself the only accepted social direction.’ (1993, 182)

Through an association with this tradition, Turner claims, Winnicott falls foul to its weaknesses which, premised on “a certain tenderness toward things as they are,” lead on to “an undervaluation of anger at injustice, of that political passion whose aim is precisely to transform things as they are [...] it seems to me that those looking for a language with which to explore injustice will look [to Winnicott] in vain” (1993, 184–5). The idea that “individuals” might be “civilized” by the powers of culture serves the status quo, because it aims to bring those “anarchic” elements into line with, and acceptance of, the prevailing situation. As an heir to this tradition, the argument goes, Winnicott’s vision construes culture as site and source of reconciliation, a corrective to the social world, but not part of it, as Eagleton might put it (1983, 42). As we will see, it is more than possible to read Winnicott’s cultural thinking as a legitimization of the status quo. However, although he inhabited an elite culture – his analysis with James Strachey placed him on the edge of Bloomsbury itself – his work (specifically his *cultural* thinking) opens up a space to think culture beyond elitism. In this sense there is an affinity between his thinking and that of Freud: both men refuse to make a hard and fast distinction between creativity and social life. This may be precisely what complicates the idea that Winnicott subordinates politics to aesthetics.

In what follows, I consider Winnicott’s relation to some of the cultural ancestors – and contemporaries – Rudnytsky and Turner identify. Certainly his “romantic” sensibility has been much noted. Strenger names him “the arch romantic of psychoanalysis,” and “one of the most enthralling poets of the psychoanalytic tradition,” descriptions which foreground his relationship with a vision of humanity and human possibility considerably at odds with certain currents in Freud’s thinking. The “romantic vision” which Winnicott emblemizes invests in nurture in pursuit of the spontaneity and inherent relationality of the self. As I will discuss below, Winnicott’s emphasis on spontaneity and creativity is historically specific and his



investment in the Romantic tradition guides his specific understanding of psychoanalysis and what he believes it might do.

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Understanding the nature of Winnicott's thinking about infantile development is important in assessing his relationship with the cultural antecedents Rudnytsky and Turner set out. Phillips suggests that, whilst for Freud culture prohibits, like a father, for Winnicott it enables development, like a mother (1988, 7). Crucially, for Winnicott, development can go right or wrong, and the environment which surrounds the child plays a central role in determining the success or failure of this process. The development of the self depends on care, and on the ability of that care, through its form, to nurture or impede the growth of the "true self." Strenger notes that Winnicott "has a utopia: it is called the good-enough mother (a modest title for a utopia...). The good-enough mother need not be perfect; she must be capable of protecting the child from impingement which breaks the child's capability of maintaining its own, natural rhythm, its true self" (1997, 232). This "utopian" formulation is useful because it makes a connection between his developmental thinking and socio-cultural life. The mother's task is at least in part – like psychoanalysis for Winnicott – to "aid socialisation," but the socio-cultural world itself also possesses the capacity to nurture or impede. This attention to the environment is indicative of Winnicott's place within a "tradition of humane liberal thought" which holds that "man can be truly himself and fully human only if he is in accord with his cultural environment, and, also, only if the cultural environment is in accord with the best tendencies in himself" (Trilling [1955] 1966, 108–9).

Winnicott forwards the main premise of object relations thinking, that the self always comes about through its relations with others, by drawing attention to the significance of the behaviour of those others in the development of the self during the earliest period of life. At a Scientific Meeting of the British Psycho-Analytical Society in 1942, Winnicott found himself

jumping up from his seat and exclaiming – “rather excitedly and with heat” he writes some years later – “there is no such thing as a baby!”

I was rather alarmed by hearing myself say these words and tried to justify myself by pointing out that if you show me a baby you certainly show me someone caring for the baby, or at least a pram with someone’s eyes and ears glued to it. One sees a nursing couple...before object relations the state of affairs is this: that the unit is not the individual, the unit is an environment-individual set-up. The centre of gravity of the being does not start off in the individual. It is in the total set-up. (D. W. Winnicott [1952] 1958d, 99)

Without the mother’s care the infant cannot come into existence, the mother and child are, at this stage, both essential components in the evolution of the child’s self.

Winnicott’s thinking shifts the focus of attention from intrapsychic conflicts linked to repression onto the role of external objects in the development of the self, a fact which leads André Green to deem him “the analyst of the borderline” (1986, 68). His work with juvenile delinquents and borderline/psychotic patients deepened his appreciation of the roles of environmental care and infantile dependence in child development, a connection first proposed in his early paper, “Primitive Emotional Development,” read before the British Psycho-Analytical Society ([1945] 1958e). Drawing attention to the earliest period of life, the first few months of an infant’s existence, Winnicott notes significant dimensions of emotional development – integration, personalization and realization – and links their failure to sufficiently occur to deficiencies in the “technique of infant care” received by the child (150). In this paper, Winnicott also makes a distinction between “unintegration” and “disintegration.” The former refers to a primary state prior to the coming together of the self, one which might be re-experienced in the healthy states of being alone and relaxing at later dates under adequate maternal care ([1960] 1990e, 44). The latter describes the result of a failure on the part of the mother to provide what Winnicott later terms “ego coverage” for the child, a process in which the mother’s ego supplements and implements the infant’s, offering a sense of continuity that allows the child’s ego to integrate ([1962] 1990f, 60). The mother’s physical and psychic *holding* of the child is the primary means of integration. The mother must dose

reality so the child can experience a “going on being,” a feeling of consistency which provides the basis for the acquisition of a personal psychic reality (1990e, 46–7). For Winnicott, the infant resides “on the brink of unthinkable anxiety” (1990f, 57); on the brink of a disintegration, or loss of self, which can only be managed through maternal care. Such anxiety takes the forms of going to pieces, falling forever, having no relation to the body and no orientation to the world, experiences which Winnicott describes as schizophrenic. Failures in care can lead to distortions in ego organization, resulting either in these schizoid forms or in self-holding: the formation of a false self, a defence based on reaction to external impingements (1990f, 58–9). Unlike the true self which Winnicott believes adequate maternal care to nurture, “the false self cannot [...] experience life of feel real” ([1956] 1958f, 297). As Phillips puts it, Winnicott became aware of the need for an adult to “hold together the threads of [the child’s] experience,” offering a form of continuity and support which might facilitate emotional development (1988, 66).

This focus on the environment, and its capacity to succeed or fail, sets Winnicott at a distance from Freud and Klein, and constitutes the core of what we might consider his “romantic” psychoanalysis, attuned as it is to notions of creativity and authenticity. Freud and Klein, Winnicott argues, “took refuge in heredity” (cited in Glover 2009, 108), emphasizing instinct and drive rather acknowledging the importance and implications of infant care. Winnicott makes an explicit engagement with Freudian theory in “The Theory of the Parent-infant Relationship,” questioning to what extent Freud can be argued to have addressed the question of early childhood at all: “at first sight it would seem that a great deal of psychoanalytic theory is about early childhood and infancy, but in one sense Freud can be said to have neglected infancy as a state” (1990e, 39). Winnicott demonstrates Freud’s failure using a footnote to “Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning” in which Freud *does* engage with infancy in terms Winnicott *might* recognize. In that footnote, Freud concedes the impossibility of positing a being with “an organization which was slave to the pleasure-

principle.” Such a being, neglectful of the outside world: “could not maintain itself alive for the shortest time, so that it could not have come into existence at all. The employment of a fiction like this is, however, justified when one considers that the infant – *provided one includes with it the care it receives from its mother* – does almost realise a psychical system of this kind” (1911, 220 *my italics*). In this footnote, Winnicott finds Freud paying “full tribute to the function of maternal care” (1990e, 39). The mother allows the infant to be “slave to the pleasure principle,” to know and expect satisfaction in a way it could not bring about alone, but Winnicott’s reference to Freud – and Freud’s reference to the pleasure principle – points up what is at stake in Winnicott’s departure from drive-based psychoanalysis. For Winnicott, the infant seeks not only instinctual gratification from the mother, but also contact, intimacy and continuity. On the basis of this ostensibly non-sexual relationship, an ego capable of having urges and experiencing drives can form.

At the beginning of life, Winnicott proposed a stage of intense maternal care in which the infant’s dependence on the mother is absolute. During this stage of “primary maternal preoccupation”: “if the mother is able to be preoccupied with her task she is able to provide the setting for the start of excited relationships, because she is biologically orientated exactly to this job” (1988, 100). Winnicott is suggesting that maternal care underwrites the possibilities of an instinctual self, an idea echoed in Laplanche’s re-working of Freudian theory. The period of primary maternal preoccupation is conceived as an essential prerequisite to instinctual development, but that instinctual development does not alone define human nature, which Winnicott construes along the lines of a highly “romantic” creative spontaneity.

Winnicott considers creativity to be foundational to health, and he locates its origins in what he terms the “theoretical first feed,” a “build-up of memories of events” rather than a “single happening.” At this first feed “the baby is ready to create, and the mother makes it possible for the baby to have the illusion that the breast, and what the breast means, has been

created by impulse out of need.” At the first feed “something very simple happens” (1988, 100–2):

By reason of an aliveness in the infant and through the development of instinct tension the infant comes to expect something; and then there is a reaching out which can soon take the form of an impulsive movement of the hand or the movement of the mouth towards a presumed object. I think it is not out of place to say that the infant is ready to be creative. There would be a hallucination of an object if there were memory material for use in the process of creation but this cannot be postulated in consideration of the theoretical first feed. Here the new human being is in the position of creating the world. The motive is personal need; we witness need gradually changing over into desire. (102)

It is very important theoretically that the infant *creates* [the nipple], and what the mother does is to place the nipple of her breast just there and at the right time so that it is her nipple that the baby creates. It is no doubt very important for the mother that the baby discovers the nipple in this way, creatively. (103)

The arrival of need provokes the infant to *expect* something and the placing of the nipple before the infant at exactly the right time makes possible the illusion that the infant has created what it needs. For Winnicott this is the basis of all creativity, a concept he invests with a life – or aliveness – giving potential. The adaptive mother ensures that there is no gap between the arrival of a “vague need” and its satisfaction, allowing the infant the illusion of a certain godlike omnipotence in which it is possible to believe that she creates what she needs. This is a madness of a special kind that is “conceded to babies” ([1971] 1991b, 71), a megalomaniac delusion of self-sufficiency in which the infant perceives herself to be the locus of all. For the infant, the main fact of this stage of development, which he terms “absolute dependence,” is that she has no sense of that dependence. The infant considers the mother to be part of herself because she receives what she needs and believes she causes it.

The mother, at the beginning, by an almost 100 per cent adaptation affords the infant the opportunity for the *illusion* that her breast is part of the infant. It is, as it were, under magical control. The same can be said in terms of infant care in general, in the quiet time between excitements. Omnipotence is nearly a fact of experience. The mother’s eventual task is gradually to disillusion the infant, but she has no hope of success unless at first she has been able to give sufficient opportunity for illusion. (1991b, 11)

This process is, however, precarious; it depends on the mother placing “the nipple of her breast just there and at the right time.” Only if this takes place can the baby “come to feel

confident in being able to create objects and to create the actual world” (1990f, 62). It is because the mother allows the child the illusion that he or she creates the world that a creative and meaningful relation to that world can eventually develop. Gradually, over time, the breast is withheld for longer and longer periods, in line with the baby’s growing ability to wait, and the child gradually encounters the existence of the external world. As this process of disillusion occurs, however, there begins another stage of illusion, for the encounter with the outside world is mediated through a third area between inside and outside, represented by the transitional object, both created and found, which preserves and sustains the space of control and limited omnipotence. Such objects and phenomena “start each human being off with what will always be important to them, i.e. a neutral area of experience which will not be challenged” (1991b, 12).

In terms of the psychoanalytic genealogy of his thinking about the “third area,” or “potential space,” Winnicott acknowledges the important influence of Marion Milner on his own understanding. Winnicott explains how, through conversations with Milner during the 1940s (an important period in the development of his ideas on space and separation), she was able to convey to him “the tremendous significance that there can be in the interplay of the edges of two curtains, or of the surface of a jug that is placed in front of another jug” (1991b, 98). Winnicott’s reference is to Milner’s picture, “Two Jugs” which featured on the cover of the first edition of *On Not Being Able to Paint* ([1950] 1981). The significance of this image as a symbolic rendering of the inherent interrelation of objects, the between-space which joins them, was shared by Milner and Winnicott (Glover 2009, 174). In the glossary of psychoanalytic terms which concludes one of her later works, *The Hands of the Living God*, Milner provides a definitive account of what she herself terms “moments of illusion,” dating her conception of the idea to 1952: “ILLUSION, moments of: necessary for symbol formation, moments when the me and the not-me do not have to be distinguished. Moments when the inner and outer seem to coincide. Needed for restoring broken links, bridges to the outer

world, as well as forming the first bridges. As necessary for healthy living as night dreams seem to be—and as playing is” ([1969] 1988, 416). Milner describes a “moment of illusion” as an apparent fusion of subject and object which serves several essential functions. Winnicott makes the same point in his famous 1951 paper on “Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena,” which are described as “the early stages of the use of illusion, without which there is no meaning for the human being in the idea of a relationship with an object that is perceived by others to be external to that being” (1991b, 11). For both Milner and Winnicott, the possibility of all relationship is premised on the satisfactory experience of merger in the early relationship with the mother.

Turner argues that Milner’s and Winnicott’s thinking can be distinguished by an unexamined dualism. For Milner, he claims, two kinds of “thinking and seeing” are operative as distinct modes characteristic of infancy and adulthood respectively (2002, 1071). Milner suggests that moments of illusion represent a way of thinking and seeing to which adults have access through artistic production and aesthetic experience, but which remains antithetical to the procedures of the rational conscious mind. It is Winnicott, he argues, who holds out the possibility of an intermediate area in which subject and object remain in constant rapport, a potential space in continuous operation.

Certainly, the idea that moments of illusion in adult life occur through engagements with cultural objects is present in Winnicott’s thinking. The mother’s task, according to Winnicott, is to disillusion the child through what Peter Rudnytsky describes as “gradual failures of empathy” (1993, xiii) and Winnicott calls “de-adaptation.” On the basis of the success of this process, transitional objects and later culture itself can assume the specific role of constituting an area where illusion might be re-experienced. Rudnytsky sums up this stance when he writes that art is a lifelong refuge where “we can turn to negotiate our precarious oscillations between illusion and reality” (xiii). Winnicott at times supports this reading: “no human being

is free from the strain of relating inner and outer reality, and [...] relief from the strain is provided by an intermediate area of experience which is not challenged (arts, religion, etc.)” (1991b, 13). On this analysis, aesthetic experience is specific to certain activities. Not everyone is sympathetic to this position. Commenting on trends within contemporary psychoanalytic aesthetics, Meg Harris Williams asserts that “Winnicott’s is currently the most popular view: regarding cultural pleasure as basically escapist, but as a necessary relief from the real world and its troubles” (2008, paragraph 19), a reading which casts his cultural thinking as a refusal, or obfuscation of, the political. If our “little madnesses” offer only an escape, our enjoyment of them may well serve to perpetuate the status quo.

Earlier, however, I used a quote to illustrate Winnicott’s impatience with the concept of sublimation, but I held off from offering much analysis of its broader implications. The quote demonstrates how Winnicott oscillates between linking experiences of illusion to cultural pursuits – the enjoyment of beauty, for instance – and life more broadly – the enjoyment of living. Similarly, in “Creativity and its Origins,” published in 1971, Winnicott asserts that “everything that happens is creative except in so far as the individual is ill, or is hampered by ongoing environmental factors which stifle his creative process” (1991b, 68). In this way, Winnicott construes creativity as constitutive of a healthy relation to the world, broadening the understanding of its place in everyday life.

This understanding of creativity also suggests a broad understanding of “culture.” In a sense, Winnicott subscribes to a definition of “culture” which extends beyond the arts – or high art, evidently the kind of definition on Raymond Williams’ mind when he asks: “what kind of life can it be, I wonder, to produce this extraordinary decision to call certain things culture and then separate them, as with a park wall, from ordinary people and ordinary work?” (2001, 12). To restrict the definition of culture to high art forces it into an isolated position and denies the imagination the dynamic function it might represent, Williams argues: “there are other



forms of skilled, intelligent, creative activity: not only the cognate forms of theatre, concert and picture gallery; but a whole range of general skills, from gardening, metalwork and carpentry to active politics" (1958, 311). In making this claim, Williams comes very close to Winnicott, who insists on the need "to separate the idea of the creation from works of art" (1991b, 68). For Winnicott, art is not, of necessity, creative; "it would perhaps be better to say that these things could be creations," he writes, but the creativity which concerns him "is a universal. It belongs to being alive" (67). Creativity is there, Winnicott claims, whenever "*anyone* – baby, child, adolescent, adult, old man or woman – looks in a healthy way at anything" (69).

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The oscillation in Winnicott's thinking between a narrow and a broad definition of cultural experience and creativity begins to point up his complex relation with a tradition of cultural thought that has often employed, and even instituted, a division between the spheres of high culture and everyday life. Industrialization is intimately linked with the evolution of the concept of "culture" in Britain, which comes to denote the antithesis of a social sphere increasingly characterized by mechanized production (R. Williams 1958, xiii–xviii). Over the course of the nineteenth century, the word "culture" came to refer to the religious, artistic and intellectual aspects of a society, whilst "civilization," French in origin, increasingly described the political, technical and economic components of social life. In this process, "culture" takes on a moral authority which is increasingly denied to the mechanical and functional aspects of life with which "civilization" is aligned (Jenks 1993, 7–9; Eagleton 2000, 9). A distinction between the utilitarian and the realm of value is inscribed in the rendering of these terms.

Winnicott's theory of a creative relation to the world, a mode of perception which is subjective and illusory, resonates with the Romantic conception of the mind as a "lamp," an entity engaged in a deep rapport with its environment (Abrams 1971, 58). As M. H. Abrams

points out, whilst this concept of creative perception often involved an image of the mind projecting life, physiognomy and emotion into the universe, Wordsworth and Coleridge did not imbue nature with a life and soul, but rather saw outer life as in a constant and reciprocal relationship with the observer (1971, 64–5); a point famously exemplified in *The Prelude*, where Wordsworth describes the visual exchange between mother and child as one which “irradiates and exalts/ Objects through widest intercourse of sense” ([1850] 1959, lines 239–40).

Romantic thinkers developed the idea of the creative imagination as a corrective to Locke’s notion of the *tabula rasa*, and its implicit formulation of the mind as a reflecting and recording surface engaged in a passive relation with the world.<sup>29</sup> However, as Turner suggests, Locke’s idea of *secondary* and *imputed* qualities, such as light and colour, also provided a means of understanding the role of subjectivity in the perception of the world (2002, 1067). Such a move was at least in part undertaken as an attempt to overcome the vision of an alienated humanity perceived to characterize the philosophy of Descartes and Hobbes. Winnicott’s thinking about “creative looking” places him within this Romantic tradition wherein the idea of vision as both creative and contributory provides a means of describing the contours of a non-alienated mode of relationality.

Wordsworth offers a defining illustration of the ways in which the Romantics established the imagination as a counterforce to mechanization. The rise of industry saw the artist and the artwork come to be redefined as the source and locus of imaginative truth, strategically positioned as the embodiment of certain human values which industrial civilization was perceived to be eroding (R. Williams 1958, 36). This elevation of the artist is impossible to disarticulate from a burgeoning antipathy towards the “public” – a term

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<sup>29</sup> For Locke and the British empiricist tradition in which he figures, our knowledge of the world is based on experience, and the importance of experience in Winnicott’s understanding of development ties him to this tradition.

associated with the vulgar and the mechanistic – from the early nineteenth century onwards.

The sentiment found its most extensive expression in Wordsworth:

Still more lamentable is his error who can believe that there is anything of divine infallibility in the clamour of that small though loud portion of the community, ever governed by factitious influence, which, under the name of the PUBLIC, passes itself upon the unthinking, for the PEOPLE. Towards the Public, the Writer hopes that he feels as much deference as it is entitled to; but to the People, philosophically characterized, and to the embodied spirit of their knowledge...his devout respect, his reverence, is due. ([1814] 1914a, paragraph 37)

Such a way of thinking allowed Wordsworth to distinguish between the “Public” of actual readers, who might make their opinions of the work known and felt, and the notion of an “ideal reader” who embodied, even if only in fantasy, a standard of taste and judgement above and beyond the necessities of the market. In such a way, a writer could esteem his (it was almost exclusively “his”) own work outside of any “senseless iteration of the word *popular*,” in terms of an ideal standard impervious to whether it sold or not (Wordsworth 1914a, paragraph 36). Such a way of thinking, at least in part, came to give substance to the notion of “culture” as a locus of real value, against and above the prevalent mores of industrial society.

Wordsworth believed that the principles in terms of which the new society was organized were actively hostile to the essential principles of art, the general humanity of which was not a matter of “amusement and idle pleasure” but of authentic, meaningful experience (Wordsworth [1800] 1914b, paragraph 18).

In the appendix added to the *Lyrical Ballads* in 1802, Wordsworth sets his vision of the nature of the poet and his social function:

Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge, it is the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all science. Emphatically may it be said of the Poet [...] he is the rock of defence of human nature, an upholder and preserver, carrying everywhere with him relationship and love [...] the Poet binds together the vast empire of human society, as it is spread over the whole earth and over all time. (1914c, paragraph 20)

For those who held to this form of Romanticism, the endeavours of the emerging artist signified a corrective to the deadening values of a mechanized civilization. Romantic artists came to see themselves as facilitators of the “revolution for life,” and their works were

considered to offer a reflection of an ideal of human perfection which was to play a central role in defending against “the disintegrating tendencies of the age” (R. Williams 1958, 42). Such an emphasis on the humanistic qualities of “relationship and love” was conceived as a necessary countermeasure, arising in response to the emergence of a new kind of mechanized society in which instrumental value seemed to be the defining standard. The creative imagination, as Williams claims, “may be seen as an alternative construction of human motive and energy, in contrast to the assumptions of the prevailing political economy” (42). Williams captures in essence the politics at the heart of such Romantic endeavours, which sought in “poetry” a means through which to transform the world. As Eagleton puts it, “literature has become a whole alternative ideology, and the ‘imagination’ itself [...] becomes a political force. Its task is to transform society in the name of those energies and values which art embodies” (1983, 17). Yet the imagination also offers a form of withdrawal; an idealization and reification of the creative mind. The ability of such art to transform society sits in potentially uneasy relation to the separation which it effects *between* art and society. Williams describes the consequences of the Romantic antithesis thus:

The primary effect of this alternative was to associate culture with religion, art, the family, and personal life, as distinct from or actually opposed to ‘civilization’ or society in its new abstract and general sense. It was from this sense, though not always with its full implications, that “culture” as a general process of ‘inner’ development was extended to include a descriptive sense of the means and works of such development: that is, ‘culture’ as a general classification of ‘the arts,’ religion, and the institutions and practices of meanings and values. Its relations with ‘society’ were then problematic, for these were evidently ‘social’ institutions and practices but were seen as distinct from the aggregate of general and ‘external’ institutions and practices now commonly called ‘society.’ The difficulty was ordinarily negotiated by relating ‘culture,’ even where it was evidently social in practice, to the ‘inner life’ in its most accessible, secular forms: ‘subjectivity,’ ‘the imagination,’ and in these terms ‘the individual.’ (1977, 14–5)

On this analysis, the constituents of culture are distinguished from society in their capacity to cultivate the subjective elements of life, offering repair and transformation where the imagination, or the individual, were found wanting. “Culture” aims to foster the imagination, the living self, as a means to battle the alienation characteristic of industrial civilization, creating both an image and an experience of the interrelation of inner and outer, an

embodiment and facilitation of creative perception. It is worth pointing out that, understood in terms of what it might achieve – namely the facilitation of the inner life – there is no *necessary* circumscription of the realm of “culture.” That such a fettering *did* take place is undeniable, but that it *should* is not.

Nevertheless, though the British tradition of cultural thought is not a unitary or homogenous phenomenon, it is a tradition often associated with a firm sense of the importance of the arts in actualizing some form of personal, or social, salvation. Making reference to the poetry of Keats, Shelley, Coleridge and Wordsworth, Barbara Schapiro suggests that “we would perhaps do well to look to the Romantics, for they were grappling with our own condition” (1983, 131). The condition to which she refers is narcissism, and Schapiro suggests that the work of the British Romantics provides a “glimpse into the struggle necessary to resolving ambivalence and conflict, to finding a way back to the objects outside the self, to moving out of narcissistic isolation and into mature object relations” (131). For instance, at the end of his elegiac stanza on Peele Castle, Wordsworth writes:

But welcome fortitude, and patient cheer,  
And frequent sights of what is to be borne!  
Such sights, or worse, as are before me here –  
Not without hope we suffer and we mourn.  
([1806] 2012, lines 57–60)

Schapiro argues that here Wordsworth describes a process whereby, through an experience of depression, faith in the human capacity to withstand and endure a painful reality is borne, along with the possibility of finding real and loving relationships (1983, 114).

There are two things that I want to use Schapiro to illustrate. Firstly, Schapiro is linking the British Romantics to narcissism, a pathological psychic organization located on the spectrum of psychotic disorders, a range of conditions considered to originate in the child’s earliest relationships with others, and characterized by distortions in one’s experience of self. Schapiro accepts the position, put forward by Ernst Kris, that psychoanalytic approaches to art

have often failed to take into account the role of tradition and art history in influencing artistic production, but she goes on to assert the importance of the poets' real life object relations in producing the feelings of isolation and desertion she perceives to characterize the poems (Kris 1952, 15; Schapiro 1983, xi). In making such a move, however, Schapiro gives up the most interesting aspect of the narcissistic trope, namely the way in which this state of self, perceived to be characteristic of a certain experience of modernity, can be, to quote Frosh, "used as an index of the psychological adequacy of the cultural order" (1991, 5). Narcissism has long been considered a key diagnosis in cultural pathology, reaching something of a zenith of popularity in the mid to late twentieth century, and its generalization as a heuristic device in figuring the experience of modernity functions as a critique of existing – consistently mechanical and technological – environmental conditions.<sup>30</sup>

Secondly, Schapiro gestures towards the capacity of the work of the Romantics to offer an image, a kind of working through of pain, as part of the process of achieving maturity. We might recall that, for her, the Romantics offers a "glimpse into the struggle necessary to resolving ambivalence and conflict, to finding a way back to the objects outside the self, to moving out of narcissistic isolation and into mature object relations." In her analysis, Schapiro follows Kris in conceptualizing art as an expression of the struggles of the ego; a form of creative auto-therapy for the poets themselves – "a work of art," she writes, "is the manifestation of the emotional dynamics and conflicts of the artist's internal world" (1983, x). At the same time, however, Schapiro's reference to what a contemporary audience might glean from an engagement with the works of the Romantics demonstrates that a potential

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<sup>30</sup> The work of Christopher Lasch has become synonymous with such thinking (1979), though his argument had been anticipated. For instance, in the description of the mirror stage, Lacan provides an account of the modern ego, an ego, as Brennan suggests, "with a vested interest in flattening everything that exists into a grey mirror that reflects it" (Lacan [1949] 2001; Brennan 1993, 23). If Lacan's theory is construed as an accurate rendering of the pathology of modernity as he intended, then it can be understood as a description of the forms of looking and self produced by, and complicit with, industrial modernity. For a review of narcissism as a diagnostic tool in cultural criticism see Frosh (1991, 63–125).

therapeutic experience might be available to the reader as well. Literature is considered to offer its audience a vision of what needs to happen in order for mature object relations to be achieved. Schapiro offers an image of literature as that which might resolve alienation and antagonism; that which might make the world cohere. This is a view that suggests the therapeutic capacities of literature extend beyond catharsis, offering instead the opportunity for integration and repair. Whilst the therapeutic implication is evident, it is also not difficult to find a more negative interpretation. Literature, on this analysis, becomes a means of reconciliation. Understood as a remedy for society's ills at the level of individual integration, literature leaves social conditions unchanged. It is this dual aspect that I want to explore further in relation to Winnicott.

Turner describes the theory of the potential space as Winnicott's most important contribution to psychoanalysis, because it offered a way of "healing the split between inner and outer that had bedevilled Western thinking since Descartes" (2002, 1073). This point is of no small significance because it demonstrates how Winnicott might contribute to the long-running debate over the subject-object relation, "the fraught narrative of their couplings and splittings, their matchings and misalliances" (Eagleton 1990, 70). "Healing" that split, however, has a dual implication; it suggests at once a necessary development in epistemology and the capacity to repair a form of experience defined by the detachment and isolation perceived to characterize modernity. In both instances, the mode of relation which Winnicott's potential space conjures is not restricted to the experience of high art. In fact, the formation of a sense of connection with the world becomes, on Winnicott's analysis, the task of psychoanalysis itself, through the facilitation of "play."

*Psychotherapy takes place in the overlap of two areas of playing, that of the patient and that of the therapist. Psychotherapy has to do with two people playing together. The corollary of this is that where playing is not possible then the work done by the therapist is directed towards bringing the patient from a state of not being able to play into a state of being able to play. (1991b, 38)*

Noting Winnicott's abiding concern with the interplay of the internal and the external, André Green describes his focus as "the area of the intermediate, and the failure to create it" (1986, 68). "A sign of health in the mind," writes Winnicott, "is the ability of one individual to enter imaginatively and accurately into the thoughts and feelings and hopes and fears of another person; also to allow the other person to do the same to us" ([1970] 1990a, 117).

In his later writings on play and creativity we find the analyst surrounded by patients who are unable to play, who have not experienced the two-and-fro of interpersonal exchange necessary to support a feeling of aliveness. Winnicott describes the somewhat irregular treatment of a patient who needed sessions of indefinite length, providing an example of a session as a way to get at what he wants to say. In the session, the patient communicates a sense of her life experience: "I don't seem quite able to BE – not me really looking – a screen – looking through glass – imaginative looking isn't there," and notes that in her childhood she tried to find some meaning in the world by attempting to fit what she perceived to be the expectations of others (1991b, 59).

When the task of the therapist is to facilitate the ability to play, what is it that is being cured? It would seem, given the historical context, that the Winnicottian technique sets out to cure the patient of the experience of modernity itself. As Winnicott puts it, in a statement which illustrates the naturalism and humanism of his position: "the natural thing is playing, and the highly sophisticated twentieth century phenomenon is psychoanalysis. It must be of value to the analyst to be constantly reminded not only of what is owed to Freud but also what we owe to the natural and universal thing called playing" (1991b, 41). In spite of this seeming naturalness and universalism, what psychoanalysis sets out to do, for Winnicott, is decidedly historically precise: to foster the in-between space of play which mechanical-industrial reification has undermined. In spite of his claims for the universality of play, Winnicott is aware of the historical specificity of his own thinking. He writes, with obvious perceptivity:



In some way or other our theory includes a belief that living creatively is a healthy state, and that compliance is a sick basis for life. There is little doubt that the general attitude of our society and the philosophic atmosphere of the age in which we happen to live contribute to this view, the view that we hold here and that we hold at the present time. We might not have held this view elsewhere and in another age. (1991b, 65)

Winnicott foregrounds psychoanalysis as a historical and ideological discourse; a particular “work of culture” (to reiterate – hopefully not yet too doggedly – the significance of Freud’s term). Winnicott’s belief that health is synonymous with creativity is a social construction. Its work is performed in dialogue with the British cultural tradition and its specific vision of creativity understood as the antithesis of mechanized production. It is that interrelation which colours the specific kind of work which Winnicott is asking psychoanalysis to do.

Though Schapiro links the study of Romantic poetry to overcoming narcissism, the cultural tradition and its commentators also offer uncanny echoes of the language of psychosis. We might recall that Williams positions the Romantics in opposition to “the disintegrating tendencies of the age,” a description which calls to mind an image of the psychotic “going to pieces” and “falling forever.” We find, also, a resonance of disintegration in Matthew Arnold’s juxtaposition of culture with anarchy, the former a kind of integrative binding which sits in fraught opposition with a vision of disorder which retains a sense of fragmenting disconnection. Perhaps the most evocative instance of such a metaphor comes from I. A. Richards: poetry “is capable of saving us; it is a perfectly possible means of overcoming chaos” (1926, 82–3). I give these examples because they are striking, but also because they suggest that culture might possess the ability to produce a form of social cohesion understood through a metaphor or psychosis. If poetry is capable of repairing destructiveness and overcoming hate, and psychosis is – from one perspective – the failure to achieve a state of maturity coextensive with a certain vision of a moral life, then the social resonance of Winnicott’s comments on poetry and the psychotic (set out in the introduction) is quite stark. Winnicott’s comments might be read as a repetition of the cultural tradition’s apprehension of literature in terms of its civilizing mission. In line with the critiques with which

I began, I am positing Winnicott's comments on culture and psychosis as a move which subordinates politics to aesthetics.

The idea that culture, specifically literary culture and education, came to fill the space left vacant by the decline of religion during the nineteenth century is well-known. Matthew Arnold is the exemplary liberal humanist of Victorian letters who conceives culture – in particular poetry – as a civilizing force, one which must be brought to bear on social life: “more and more mankind will discover that we have to turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us. Without poetry, our science will appear incomplete; and most of what now passes with us for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry” ([1888] 1970, 340). Arnold insists on the necessity of poetry as a means to negotiate life, as the provider of instruction and the cultivator of the self. Poetry – good poetry, that is – can do the work of “forming, sustaining and delighting us,” and it is “not satisfied till we *all* come to a perfect man” (1970, 342; [1869] 1990, 69).

*Culture and Anarchy* was composed during the fallout from the Hyde Park riots of 1866, when more than 10,000 Londoners took part in a march to Hyde Park to protest in favour of the extension of suffrage proposed by the Reform Bill. Upon arriving at the park, the protestors found the gates locked. Whilst the majority moved on peacefully to Trafalgar Square, a small minority remained, expressing their resentment by tearing down the railings and trampling the flowerbeds. Arnold writes of the “Populace”: “He comes in immense numbers, and is rather raw and rough [...] And thus that profound sense of settled order and security, without which a society like ours cannot live and grow at all, sometimes seems to be beginning to threaten us with taking its departure” (Arnold 1990, 82). The “practical benefit” which culture offers here is “to counteract the tendency to anarchy” by offering an illustration – bringing “light” – of the premise that “there is nothing very blessed in merely doing as one likes.” A convincing reading might well suggest that, in advancing culture as a route to

integration and emotional development, Winnicott invests in the humanizing and socializing powers of literature and culture in unthought-out ways which repeat the tendency to see culture as “a solution to social problems, not part of them” (Eagleton 1983, 42).

The affinity between Winnicott and the aesthetic norms of his time is starkly evident in his idea of the potential space and its role in social life, a notion which finds a close parallel in the work of F. R. Leavis, who writes that:

It is in the study of literature, the literature of one's own language in the first place, that one comes to recognize the nature and priority of the third realm (as, unphilosophically no doubt, I call it, talking with my pupils), the realm of that which is neither merely private and personal nor public in the sense that it can be brought into the laboratory and pointed to. You cannot point to the poem: it is “there” only into the recreative response of individual minds to the black marks on the page. But—a necessary faith—it is something in which minds can meet. (1962, 28)

Noting a startling similarity between this and Winnicott's thinking, John Fielding describes a shared “emphasis on cultural experience, the importance of tradition and of course on spontaneity” (1985, 60). Leavis's description of the “third space” as a site between the subject and the text in which meaning is created does indeed offer a “remarkable echo” of Winnicott's presentation of cultural experience in *Playing and Reality*, where he writes that:

I have tried to draw attention to the importance both in theory and in practice of a third area, that of play, which expands into creative living and into the whole cultural life of man. This third area has been contrasted with inner or personal psychic reality and with the actual world in which the individual lives, which can be objectively perceived. I have located this important area of *experience* in the potential space between the individual and the environment, that which initially both joins and separates the baby and the mother when the mother's love, displayed or made manifest as human reliability, does in fact give the baby a sense of trust or of confidence in the environmental factor [...] The potential space between baby and mother, between child and family, between individual and society [...] can be looked upon as sacred to the individual in that it is here that the individual experiences creative living. (1991b, 103)

On the basis of this, Fielding makes some notably bold claims, insisting that we replace the Freudian vision with one derived from Winnicott who, he claims, “has effected a profound shift in thinking about art” (1985, 61). In Winnicott's hands, Fielding writes, “psychoanalysis, from the point of view of its use as a conceptual tool in cultural studies, comes of age.

Winnicott makes culture no longer ‘faute de mieux,’ no longer a neurotic substitute for

instinctual satisfactions but the essential realm in which life is constituted.” Despite the breadth of Winnicott’s description of culture, for Fielding, it seems that psychoanalysis comes of age when it aligns itself with the terms and values of the New Criticism, and this involves a narrow definition of the realm in which “life” is constituted: namely the sphere of high art.

Winnicott, of course, is not preoccupied with the creation of works of art, but with the nature and texture of one’s relationship with, and experience of, the world, and he is not obviously prescriptive or elitist about the kinds of activities which might foster the third area, describing creative perception as coextensive with “healthy” living. For Leavis, certainly, the third area which might be experienced in reading literature is resolutely not available in and through an ever-more pervasive and alarming consumer culture. Whilst Leavis takes his distance from the unexamined assumption that all works of literature are of equal value, he does insist on their fundamental importance as a means to survive the alienating experience of modernity. As Eagleton puts it, “some works ‘made for life,’ while others most assuredly did not” (1983, 29), a comment which pulls back towards an equation of life, spontaneity and creativity with which Winnicott is so famously associated. For Leavis, literature was essential to survival, a central constituent in a process of moral maturation considerably eroded by exposure to newspapers, the cinema and “bad books” (Leavis [1930] 1979, 14). I will return to the question of cultural value and its relationship with ideas of infantilization in the next chapter, so I refrain from further consideration of this issue here. Rather I want to focus on the significance of an increasing sense of cultural impoverishment, an estimation of culture – especially literature – and the relation which they bear to Winnicott.

In relation to time, psychosis represents for Winnicott a form of arrested development; the process of emotional maturation is put in ice as it were, frozen into those environmental failure situations which psychoanalysis and poetry might be able to thaw. Emily Sun sets out the relationship between this situation and the production of potential space:

What arises, then, in place of creative illusion that makes communication possible and keeps inner and outer reality separate yet interrelated are defence organizations, illusions that block or impede the process of interrelating inner and outer reality—that block the self’s communication with and experience of the world. As a price for the protection that defence organizations afford, *betweenness* disappears. (2007, 63)

The task falls to psychotherapy – and art – to make possible the creation of a potential space of illusion and imagination, in essence, to bring about psychic change. Psychoanalysis is like poetry, or perhaps better, psychoanalysis is a form of poetry, if the latter is conceived in terms of its ability to generate and give access to the potential space which is an essential constituent of the child coming to have any form of social relationship; any rapport with an “object that is perceived by others as external to that being” (1991b, 11). Winnicott is, ultimately, referring to the capacity of culture to offer a space of holding or containment which might repair the damage of a fragmented self. He is investing in the capacity of culture to cure. This raises the question of what psychotherapy (and culture) does, how it functions, what kind of process it enacts: to what extent is psychotherapy a process of “remothering?” To what degree can it be understood as the source and site for corrective emotional experience? Winnicott himself wrote that “the setting of analysis reproduces the early and earliest mothering techniques” (1958a, 286), and Phillips insists that, on this model, the analytic setting “*is the mother’s care*” (1988, 88); concurrently, however, as Steven Groarke puts it, “the analyst cannot become the mother whom the infant never had” (2011, 403). As one elderly patient informed him: “you can’t give me a crash course in childhood.” If the “good-enough” mother is able to provide forms of holding which allow the infant self to coalesce around an experience of being, the “good-enough” therapist (or artwork?) strives to “unfreeze” the environmental failure situations, enabling the metabolization of what Kenneth Wright usefully refers to as “unrealized” experience (2009, 9).

Wright’s phrase is useful because it suggests an unmetabolized form, the paradox of an experience which has never actually been experienced as such. This is a situation Winnicott dwells upon in one of his last papers, “Fear of Breakdown,” one that, significantly, begins with

his calling upon poetic authority. "If what I say has truth in it," he writes, "this will already have been dealt with by the world's poets" ([1974] 1989b, 87). In the paper Winnicott suggests that a fear of breakdown on the part of a patient is actually "*the fear of a breakdown that has already been experienced*" (90). Acknowledging that "breakdown" is a somewhat "vague" term, Winnicott clarifies that, with reference to the "more psychotic phenomena" that he is examining, he is using it to refer to "a failure of a defence organization," a "breakdown of the establishment of the unit self" which has come about as a response to an "unthinkable state of affairs," the return of which would constitute the "breakdown" itself. The fear, then, is a fear of the failure of the defensive ego-organization brought into existence in order to cope with the original unthinkable situation (88).

This fear is one specific defence organization brought into effect in order to deal with trauma. In "The Location of Cultural Experience" Winnicott writes: "trauma implies that the baby has experienced a break in life's continuity, so that primitive defences now become organized to defend against a repetition of "unthinkable anxiety" or a return of the acute confusional state that belongs to disintegration of nascent ego structure" (1991b, 97). Returning to "Fear of Breakdown," it would perhaps be better to speak of a breakdown that has already happened, rather than an experience, for the failure of this event to cohere as experience is key to its traumatic character. The patient remains worried about this situation which "belongs to the past" because it has never been experienced. "What is not yet experienced did nevertheless happen in the past," Winnicott writes, and if the patient can accept "this queer kind of truth" then "the way is open for the agony to be experienced in the transference, in reaction to the analyst's failures and mistakes" (1989b, 91). Winnicott writes that:

The patient needs to 'remember' [...] but it is not possible to remember something that has not yet happened, and this thing of the past has not happened yet because the patient was not there for it to happen to. The only way to 'remember' in this case is for the patient to experience this past thing for the first time in the present, that is to say, in

the transference. The past and future thing then becomes a matter of the here and now, and becomes experienced by the patient for the first time. (92)

Whilst the analyst does repeat a form of mothering and maternal failure, the latter comes in “doses that are not excessive” and can be dealt with by the patient; gradually the original failures are gathered into experience and the original failure situations are “unfrozen” (91).

In order to get at the significance of this mode of thinking in understanding Winnicott’s relationship to the cultural tradition, it is useful to draw together two works of criticism. Firstly, Bersani’s description of a “culture of redemption” which assumes, he claims, that the representation of experience in art repairs a damaged or valueless experience; that art is capable of performing a reconstructive function in culture, redeeming life through repetition (1990, 1). Secondly, Groarke’s presentation of the case for “the redemptive potential of psychoanalysis and poetry alike,” in which he connects Winnicott’s work with that of T. S. Eliot (2011; 2014, 31–58). The influence of Eliot on Winnicott’s later work is attested both biographically and bibliographically. Brett Kahr notes Winnicott’s interest in Eliot, and his enjoyment of hearing Clare (his second wife) recite his poetry (1996, 106). Phrases from Eliot also find their way into Winnicott’s texts, even their titles. The title of Winnicott’s unfinished biography, “Not Less Than Everything,” is a quote taken from the last movement of “Little Gidding,” and a collection of his essays took its name from “East Coker”: “Home is where we start from” (T. S. Eliot 1963, 223, 203). Presenting a Winnicottian vision of time in which analysis holds out the possibility to reclaim experience which was never experienced as such, Groarke argues that Eliot “provides a literary framework for the time-frame of reclamation” (2014, 41). In spite of the distance he assumed from figures like the Romantics and Matthew Arnold, Eliot shared their pervasive concern with the barrenness of industrial-capitalist civilization, a preoccupation which, once again, draws Winnicott’s clinical thinking into relation with its historical context. Eliot’s belief that a “dissociation of sensibility” became perceptible in English literature sometime in the seventeenth century invokes a psychotic state in the

sphere of cultural tradition, a dissociation of language and experience which his own work and redefinition of the cultural tradition will attempt to redeem. From Milton on, Eliot claims, literature dissociates thought and feeling, degenerating into forms of Romanticism and Victorianism which served industrial civilization through their individualist and liberal ideology. It falls to Eliot and those poets he esteems to “Redeem/ The time. Redeem,” “in accordance with the inherited tradition which extends from the Metaphysical poets through Hopkins and Eliot to contemporary poets as different from each other as Geoffrey Hill and Seamus Heaney” (T. S. Eliot 1963, 100; Groarke 2014, 40).

On Groarke’s reading, analysis and poetry take on analogous tasks in facilitating the redemption of lost time and experience. Analysis provides the patient with a way to imagine the past: “where life has failed it is down to the work of the imagination to amend the situation and to reclaim the capacity for aliveness” (Groarke 2014, 38). In the situation of dissociation, the analyst cannot help the patient to remember, but must instead make possible and support an imagining of experience: “the enactment of imaginary resurrections. Nor is it simply a matter of putting things into words; there are experiences for which words cannot be found. To conjure a world out of the fragments of being requires a particular work of the imagination, including receptivity to states of mind without representation” (2011, 411). As Groarke elaborates: “destructiveness, hatred, and fragmentation—indeed, disgust at life itself—are seen as redeemable through a principle commitment to maturity predicated on the primacy of creativity” (2014, 39). This investment in the powers of the imagination demonstrates, Groarke claims, Winnicott’s engagement with “central aspects of the imaginative tradition of modern English literature.”

It is important to note that Groarke considers a Leavisite reading of Eliot, the former’s specific framing of what the latter achieves, to underwrite and reinforce the relevance of Eliot to Winnicott. Leavis provides, Groarke claims, “ahead of Winnicott [...] the criteria of maturity,



aliveness, and the true self" (2014, 42). Leavis's conception of maturity as in opposition to the cultivation of daydream and withdrawal informs Winnicott's understanding of temporal redemption.

The mark of an 'adult mind,' according to Leavis's set of principles, is evident above all in the poet's need to 'communicate something of his own.' For Leavis, maturity goes together with originality and independence, the expression of 'an intensely personal way of feeling.' This in turn confirms the idea of the important poet as someone 'who is more alive than other people, more alive in his own age.' Thus, maturity is coupled with the idea that the 'potentialities of human experience in any age are realized only by a tiny minority.' Eliot realized his potential for creativity to an incomparable degree, according to Leavis, who judged Eliot's 'modes of feeling, apprehension, and expression' as a 'new start' in English poetry. Based on an ideal of critical thinking, Leavis mediates the criterion of maturity in a way that makes Eliot even more important for Winnicott, giving weight to the central Winnicottian idea of creative apperception as the developmental basis of cultural experience. (2014, 43)

Here Groarke links Eliot and Winnicott in terms of a specific maturity evident in poetic work which favours what must be something like engagement over withdrawal, and his point is useful in confirming the purchase of a notion of maturity in relation to the imaginative resurrections of psychoanalytic space. The ability of the analyst to enable the patient to creatively experience the past is construed on an axis of increasing maturity which might mitigate "destructiveness, hatred, and fragmentation." For the psychotic, to recover spontaneously through "poetry" can be understood as a description of the aligned redemptive capacities of the imagination in both the poetical work and in psychoanalytic treatment. Perhaps most significantly, however, for Winnicott such experience is not only available to "a tiny minority," but potentially to anyone offered access to psychoanalysis; though even the definition of what counts as analysis appears to be less and less secure.

Thinking Winnicott in relation to poetry alone, then, risks cossetting his vision of culture within the narrow definition of the arts. Notwithstanding the creative force which psychoanalysis – as poetry – acquires in Groarke's sophisticated reading, it is certainly possible to perceive in Winnicott's broader oeuvre a vision of the arts as little more than a consolation for the damage wrought by the world, the preservation of the status quo, or worse – as I have

suggested – as a coercive means of fostering social submission. The “tradition,” which originated as a counter-cultural antidote to the vicissitudes of mechanization – the estimation of poetry and a belief in the aligned powers of the poetic and political imagination – was also, and became more so over time, a form of retreat which sought not to change social conditions but to foster the imagination as an antidote to social engagement (Eagleton 1983, 17, 29; Sinfield 1986, 11–21; Sinfield 2004, 32; J. Turner 2002, 1067, 1070). Though Arnold might have perceived culture as a means of extending socialization and mutual sympathy, this was in the interests of maintaining a certain status quo. Despite Leavis’s reticence towards Bloomsbury and its urbane privileges – he once referred to the group as part of “an established tradition of coterie-power” (1951, 50) – he shared, if not their sense of class privilege, then their belief in the need for a minority to “keep the torch of culture burning” (Eagleton 1983, 29).

There is a tension, then, between seeing culture as a tool which might be used in the interests of social cohesion – civilizing the masses, as it were – and the equally important perception of culture as something not for everyone: the purview of a select few. Such thinking was radically complicated by the Second World War, which precipitated unprecedented moves towards equality and social justice in Britain. Discussing the status of the arts in the post-1945 settlement, Sinfield describes their place within wider processes of democratization: “culture, in welfare-capitalism, is one of the good things (like economic security and healthcare) that the upper-classes have traditionally enjoyed, and it is now to be available to everyone,” going on to note how, in reality, this state of affairs extended culture’s use as a means to “civilization” and class distinction (2004, 56, 64).

The kernel of this idea offers, I think, the most progressive dimensions of Winnicott’s thinking about the concept of “culture.” We must recall that, for Winnicott, “poetry” or “the arts” do not exhaust the cultural. Though he shares an investment in creative apperception and the existence of a “third realm” with an established tradition of English letters, he does

not share a restrictive vision of “culture,” or when and where it might occur. The “aesthetic” nature of Winnicott’s thinking is not limited to what goes on between someone and a work of (high) art. It is worth repeating his claims about the nature of the cure for the psychotic, which were set out in the introduction: Winnicott writes that the means to cure might be found “apart from organized psychotherapy, for instance, in friendship, in nursing care that may be provided on account of physical illness, in cultural experiences, including some that are called religion” or in “various healing phenomena of ordinary life, namely friendships, nursing during physical illness, poetry, etc., etc.” ([1961] 1990c, 106; [1954] 1958a, 284). Winnicott says that the psychotic’s recovery is not necessarily premised upon poetry, but on an experience of “culture”; an idea that opens up a space for a critical reading of the relationship between his thinking and the British cultural tradition, because, for Winnicott, all pursuits, both “high” and “low,” might be considered as forms of cultural experience; Winnicott does not put up a park wall around a cultural Elysium, and he thus provides a way of thinking culture beyond elitism, in terms of a broad range of experience.

There is, however, another related dimension which opens Winnicott’s cultural thinking to politics. Through his therapeutic consultations, as well as his work with delinquents, Winnicott came to theorize the significance of the environment in making possible “creative living,” or fostering a creative relation to the world. “What is life about?” we might recall, is the question that the psychotic poses for Winnicott (1991b, 100). He goes on to describe how “our cultural experiences” – the mode of creative seeing which characterizes them – offer a glimpse of what is “life and death to our schizoid and borderline patients.” What I perceive Winnicott to mean here is that, in our cultural pursuits, we have the chance to apprehend the specificity of what constitutes life, that which for the psychotic patient is not guaranteed. Psychotics reveal “*what life itself is about*,” what it means to “feel that life is real, to find life worth living” (1991b, 98). This is not quite the idea that “cultural” experience makes life worth living – though it may well do so for some people – but rather that the kind of exchange which

“healthy” individuals have with cultural objects tells us something fundamental about life and aliveness which is not specific to that particular form of exchange.

There is more at stake in the connection Winnicott makes between creativity and health than might be gleaned by focusing on the arts in the lives of healthy individuals. Lesley Caldwell describes Winnicott as “the pre-eminent psychoanalyst of health and of what it means to be a healthy individual, a perspective often lacking in psychoanalysis’s concern for treatment modalities and the understanding of the mind of difficulty” (2013, xvi), yet it is precisely his attention to a concept of health which makes his work useful in thinking about the mind in difficulty. Winnicott might have shared the literary outlook of his time – he is certainly not radical in that sense – but his thinking about the aesthetic extends beyond the arts, and provides a means to theorize what environmental provision needs to be present for aliveness – which is Winnicott’s version of flourishing – to be a possibility. As I have already asserted, Winnicott’s equation of creativity with health is a construction, no more real than the idea that “man is a wolf to man,” but it proves an immensely useful construction because it allows for the theorization of criteria which facilitate “health,” it permits an assessment of what factors – specifically socio-economic factors – might impede aliveness. We may recall that Williams claims the “cultural” refers to all areas of experience which foster the inner life and the imagination. For Winnicott, this extends across the institutions of collective life – the arts, education, social services, health care – which complicates the interface between aesthetics and politics in his thinking.

The critique of industrialization which the literary imagination signifies is paralleled in object relations psychoanalysis. Several critics draw on Winnicott in order to give both voice and form to a critique of mechanized modernity. “The fluctuating and complex modern economy,” writes Gal Gerson, “does not constitute a caring environment” (2004, 788).<sup>31</sup> As

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<sup>31</sup> See also Gerson (2005).

Gerson illustrates, Winnicott's belief in the connectedness of emotional development and environment provides a means through which to critique prevalent forms of socio-economic organization. The alienating and unpredictable nature of industrial modernity is deemed incapable of providing the kind of care needed for life. In a similar vein, Eric Santner characterizes modernity as an aporia of intimate exchange, the absence of a form of interaction traceable to the preverbal rapport between mother and child (1990). Modernity signals a catastrophe, advancing "an assault on human need" (Frosh 1991, 47), because it "destabilises the good-enough communal structures that are required for the constitution of human selfhood" (Santner 1990, 127), undermining the modes of interaction which form the foundation of a living self. Modernity fractures the "presumed naturalness of contact between mother and child" due to the "rampaging demands" of its own instrumentality (Frosh 1991, 47).

The emphasis here could fall on actual mothers and the vicissitudes of social life within a system which demands that they leave the home and pursue work in the interests of consumerism and the necessities of capitalist accumulation. The role which such a presumption of "naturalness" in the relation between mother and child might play in a normative construction of motherhood is all too apparent. As Vicky Lebeau notes, "does it have to be the mother?" is a question which remains both crucial and troubling to any critical engagement attentive to feminist concerns (2009, 37). Without dismissing such concerns, Santner's articulation opens up a space beyond the mother-child dyad, yet intimately linked to it; whilst Lebeau implicitly conjures the potential plurality of sites of care. What is at stake in these analyses is a judgement of the sufficiency of the social world in providing care. In both instances, the environment itself is not conceived to be good-enough. The discourse of authenticity and illusion is positioned as a critique of this environment, and as a technique through which resistance, and change, might be effected.

Winnicott's implication in the status quo is thus complex. He insists on the importance of the traditional family structure as the optimum environment for nurturing and producing individuals capable of taking an active part in civic life. "The main activity for promotion of [the] democratic tendency is a negative one: avoidance of interference with the ordinary good home," he writes at the end of his article on the meaning of democracy ([1957] 1986b, 259). This position has been much critiqued by feminists, who have questioned its intentions and outcomes, Winnicott's attention to the mother and the maternal role is often judged less as an advance than as a reinforcement of traditional gender roles, even more dangerous because it is delivered with the authority of a medical professional (Riley 1983; Kahane 1993; Dever 1998). However, Winnicott consistently reiterates that the maternal function need not be performed by the biological mother (though it most often is).

Alexander writes that "like other intellectual architects of the welfare state [...]" Winnicott was not a socialist but a liberal" (2013, 154). His thinking, along with that of other object relations theorists such as John Bowlby, informed the creation of the welfare state, and was instrumental in grounding a vision of a benevolent, caring capitalism.<sup>32</sup> This state of affairs has a dual aspect. Gerson, for instance, follows his negative judgement of the "fluctuating and complex modern economy" by noting the need that it be "balanced by other institutions" which mitigate the potential for economic insecurity to "invade the home to make parents anxious and undermine their capacity to hold their children" (2004, 788). In an article focused specifically on Winnicott and welfare, he extends this point: "if the family is the child's facilitating environment, then society, through its welfare apparatus, should be the family's facilitating environment" (2005, 122). On this analysis, "culture" mediates between the family and a hostile environment in order to enable the former to flourish, and it must be pointed

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<sup>32</sup> Barry Richards describes the contribution which object relations psychoanalysis made to the process of reconstitution after the second world war: "this contribution centred upon the translation of war-time practices into wide-ranging civil objectives to reform capitalism by applying theoretical insights into the infantile dimension of adult psychology to practices in welfare and industry; in short to humanise capitalism according to psychoanalytic principles" (1984, 13).

out, and accepted, that this leaves the broader question of economic transformation unposed.

“The attraction of welfare-capitalism,” writes Sinfield, “was that we might yet socialize – humanize – the system without having to go to the improbable length of overthrowing it” (Sinfield 2004, xxxii). Sinfield also suggests that the rationale behind welfare capitalism was never wholly, or even largely, altruistic, but rather an attempt to “head off the mass discontent that had given opportunities to fascism and communism” (2004, xl). Does the “aesthetic” – I have been implicitly claiming the welfare state as “culture” – here work to quell political dissent?

The conservative interpretation of Winnicott’s position has, however, been placed in question and his ideas put to more progressive ends. Margaret and Michael Rustin, for instance, write that “this is not necessarily an argument for the functions of the biological mother against other kinds of divisions or sharing of ‘mothering’ functions among parents or others. What is fundamental is the presence of intimacy and stability in the relationships between infants and a very small number of caregivers” (1984, 209). A call for a politics of care – for the provision of structures of care – in fact challenges the imperative of capital accumulation, as it argues for care provision to be viewed as a social responsibility. As Johanna Brenner writes, “shifting care from an individual to a social responsibility [...] requires today a redistribution of wealth from capital to labor” (2014, 36). In short: more money would need to be spent paying people to look after children, the sick and the elderly, preventing funds from being amassed as profit. An emphasis on care, then, is in contradiction with a neoliberal politics of accumulated profit.

The implication here is that Winnicott’s thinking contributes towards a politics of care, and is progressive in drawing attention to what is necessary for life, defined as a form of creative spontaneity. In summary: “we find either individuals that live creatively and feel that life is worth living or else that cannot live creatively and are doubtful about the value of living.

This variable in human beings is directly related to the quality and quantity of environmental provision at the beginning or in the early phases of each baby's living experience" (D. W. Winnicott 1991b, 71). On this basis, "care" becomes a human right and Rustin is correct to argue that object relations-based "psychoanalysis *has* contributed towards a broader and richer conception of 'social justice' in many important and often indirect ways" (1991, 55).<sup>33</sup>

The prevailing political economy in Britain does not constitute a caring environment, nor does it seek to provide an environment, in the form of a functioning welfare system, which might shelter the vulnerable from forms of unthinkable experience. In an insightful article which sets out to find common ground between Winnicott and Lacan, Mari Ruti notes that Winnicott's notion of the "true self," with its emphasis on authenticity and spontaneity, is somewhat difficult for post-structuralists to swallow because it evokes an essentialism antithetical to a deconstructive understanding of how meaning and subjectivity are negotiated (2011, 360). Ruti, however, insists this is a misreading of Winnicott's concept, which does not describe a fixed content but rather a way of relating to the world, a fluidity, which enables the fending off of psychic rigidity (361). She also notes how a Lacanian emphasis on the critique of the ego and its "era" makes it difficult to address those times when the ego is deeply wounded by oppression and its narcissistic abilities are destroyed. In contrast, she asserts that the concept of the facilitating environment makes it possible to think about oppressive socio-economic conditions which necessitate a focus on survival, at the expense of other, more

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<sup>33</sup> Though, once again, Winnicott's personal relationship with the question of social justice is complex. For instance, in a paper on adolescent development, he writes that "we now look at slums and poverty not only with horror, but also with an eye upon the possibility that for a baby or a small child a slum family may be more secure and 'good' as a facilitating environment than a family in a lovely house where there is an absence of the common persecutions," namely "overcrowding, starvation, infestation, the constant threat from physical disease and disaster and the laws promulgated by a benevolent society" (1991b, 142). In this instance, Winnicott makes an important point against an absolutist social determinism, and speaks against any tendency to demonize the poor – or their care-culture. Whether he concurrently sidesteps the question of social justice, however, is a moot point, is he suggesting the "common persecutions" are of no consequence?



flexible or creative, forms of life (370–1). The title to this section of her article seems to me an important articulation: Ruti poses there the question: “Who Can Afford Creative Living?” (368).

Winnicott himself draws attention to the potentially catastrophic effects of deprivation and oppression. Thinking freedom in relation to the concepts of health and creativity, he writes that “no one is independent of the environment, and there are environmental conditions which destroy the feeling of freedom even in those who have enjoyed it” ([1969] 1990g, 232). Though he asserts that “it is probably wrong to think of creativity as something that can be destroyed utterly,” he goes on to discuss the situation of those who are “dominated at home, or spending their lives in concentration camps or under lifelong persecution because of a cruel political régime.” In these situations, he contends, “one feels that it is only a few of the victims who remain creative.” The rest “have lost the characteristic that makes them human, so that they no longer see the world creatively. These circumstances concern the negative of civilization” (1991b, 68).

Against that negative, Winnicott sets “culture,” an optimistic vision of that “form of social life which really does shield the weak and welcome the stranger, allows us to thrive rather than simply subsist” (Eagleton 1990, 285). Crucially, this “culture” is not restricted to the arts, but encompasses all the institutions of social life, which have the capacity to nurture or impede the development of the inner life, of a creative apperception which is the antithesis of compliance (1991b, 65). The qualitative evaluation of culture is made on the basis of its capacity to foster the “true self,” to facilitate creative aliveness. Importantly, this evaluation is extendable to any aspect of life: poetry, religion, psychoanalysis, but also social care, gardening, the cinema. The true self and creative apperception may be myths, but perhaps they are necessary myths. They speak in the language of nurture and care, they resonate with that old idea of “cultivation” – an optimistic idea – and they speak of a cycle of reciprocity. If culture is “good-enough” we may be able to contribute to it, we may be able to live

“creatively,” but only if it has, first of all, helped us to create in ourselves a place to put what we find. Does Winnicott subordinate politics to aesthetics? Perhaps the answer, paradoxically, must be both yes and no.

## Chapter Three

“That interval of time between desire and its consummation”:  
Culture, Infancy and *Brave New World*

How pervasive and deeply rooted is the notion that power may be gained by suffering. (Trilling [1949] 1979b, 158)

Is not this contribution of the devoted mother unrecognized precisely because it is immense? (D. W. Winnicott [1957] 1986b, 124–5)

During their trip to the Savage Reservation in New Mexico, Bernard Marx and Lenina Crowne find themselves in the pueblo of Malpais, confronted by the “spectacle of two young women giving the breast to their babies” (Huxley [1932] 1994, 100). Lenina is scandalized, “she had never seen anything so indecent in her life,” but Bernard, determined to override his conditioning, insists on the poetry of the scene: “‘what a wonderfully intimate relationship,’ he said, deliberately outrageous. ‘And what an intensity of feeling it must generate! I often think one may have missed something in not having had a mother. And perhaps you’ve missed something in not *being* a mother, Lenina. Imagine yourself sitting there with a little baby of your own...’” (100). Bernard’s reverie is cut off by Lenina’s indignation – “Bernard! How can you?” Loyal to the precepts of the World State, she cannot entertain his pseudo-sophisticated response to the “vivaporous scene.”

In the civilized regions of the world, as anyone with even a cursory knowledge of Huxley’s most famous work well knows, “mother” is a foreclosed term. Babies are not born but “hatched”: created in test tubes and brought to term in bottles before being decanted into the world. There are no such things as “parents,” an empty term which occupies a tenuous position somewhere between “smut and pure science” (20). Both having and nursing children has become impossible in the World State, where infants are reared in state-run institutions providing uniform care. So what is this *tableau vivant* of motherhood doing in *Brave New*

*World*? What does Huxley's staging of this encounter reveal about the World State, and what it has lost?

Huxley's novel addresses questions of desire and social control, mechanization and creativity, themes which coalesce around the image of the breastfeeding mother; a tableau which stages the interface between childhood experience and social life. Mothers, along with all notions of the family, have been abolished in the World State, and the alarm which their appearance provokes in Lenina (and Bernard) reminds us of what has replaced such forms of care, namely machines and state-run institutions. David Bradshaw writes that the World State was clearly conceived as "a satire on the global diffusion of the American way of life," though he notes that composition was difficult for Huxley, who was "unsure [...] whether he was writing a satire, a prophecy or a blueprint" (1994, paragraphs 6, 12). Huxley, however, also emphasised the novel's prescience of the nightmarish future portended by Soviet Communism. The distinction, however, may not be so hard and fast: Stalinism was a totalitarianism which worked not through fear and punishment, but via freedom and reward (at least for the upper strata of society) (Huxley [1958] 2004, 5–6). Given the obvious political urgency of *Brave New World*, how is the mother, and the maternal role, figured in relation to the vision of totalitarianism with which the novel grapples?

Huxley shares with psychoanalysis a common interest in the role played by the family in the development of the self. Pushing state intervention into the production and bringing up of children to its (il)logical conclusion, *Brave New World* offers a nightmarish rendering of increasingly common concerns about the undesirable consequences of the erosion of the family, concerns which were already present in Huxley's writing before the publication of *Brave New World* in 1932. In 1930, in a short piece entitled "Babies – State Property," Huxley laments that "the family has ceased to be the divine and inevitable institution it was," blaming a burgeoning parental individualism for a reduction in the size of the family and the erosion of

its authority (1995, 47). Parents increasingly think of their children as people who have rights, he complains, (hence the slide in discipline), and believe in their own right to freedom and self-expression, which leads them to “resent the weight of family responsibilities” (and a fall in the number of offspring they are prepared to raise). The consequences are judged to be dangerous: the loss of the family of four or five children – wherein each child might experience “the world in miniature” – necessitates the employment of “the State-paid professional educator” whose role it is “to take the place of the parents” (48). Individuality, however, does not serve the interests of the state: “circumstances are rendering it increasingly necessary for all States to guard against the dangers of insurgent individualism. Human standardisation will become a political necessity.” As the state assumes a parental function it will increasingly strive for standardization and the eradication of individuality: “Psychologists have shown the enormous importance in every human existence of the first years of childhood, the State will obviously try to get hold of its victims as soon as possible. The process of standardisation will begin at the very moment of birth – that is to say, if it does not begin before birth!” (49).

In *Brave New World* these deep fears about standardization are realized through advanced reproductive techniques, as Bülent Diken puts it, “the setting is a global welfare state” where “the main political instrument is biological engineering” (2011, 154).<sup>34</sup> “We predestine and condition,” Henry Foster tells the inductees on their tour of the Hatchery “we decant our babies as socialized human beings, as Alphas or Epsilons” (1994, 10–1). In spite of the scientific advances which make one’s future a given fate, the long period of human maturation remains a stumbling block; “if the physical development could be speeded up till it was as quick, say, as a cow’s, what an enormous saving to the Community!” (12). This is a feat which has yet to be achieved, but “maturity” itself is an ambivalent thing in the World State, which desires subjects who are “adults intellectually and during working hours” but “infants

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<sup>34</sup> It should be noted that Huxley’s attitude towards individuality is deeply ambivalent: he holds it responsible for changes in family structure which he perceives to be negative, yet towards the end of the “Babies” essay, and in *Brave New World*, it represents the foil to state oppression.

where feeling and desire are concerned” (84). Even for Alphas, who are conditioned to be capable of mature behaviour, the “duty to be infantile” remains (88). Diken sums up the situation: “*Brave New World* is an allegory of regressive evolution [...], in control societies, ‘you never finish anything.’ That includes childhood [...] the conduct of the nursery becomes generalized throughout the society. So the governmental imperatives in the brave new world are the same as those of the nursery: play, learning, stability and happiness” (2011, 154).

In what follows, I examine the World State’s assumption of the “parental function” and consider how the novel both mirrors and anticipates psychoanalytic concerns with infantile development and politics. Shortly after completing the novel, Huxley wrote to his father, describing the work as: “a comic, or at least satirical novel about the Future, showing the appallingness... of Utopia and adumbrating the effects on thought and feeling of such quite possible biological inventions as the production of children in bottles, (with the consequent abolition of the family and all the Freudian ‘complexes’ for which family relationships are responsible)” (1969, 351). Huxley insists on a connection between prevalent modes of “thought and feeling” and the familial structure, whilst gesturing towards a psychoanalytic vision of development predicated on the existence of “complexes” which we might assume to be Oedipal, but which are resolutely Freud’s.<sup>35</sup> *Brave New World* manifests deep fears about the erosion of family structures – in particular the effect of both the waning of paternal authority and the transposition of the maternal function from woman to technology – on the viability of individuality itself.

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<sup>35</sup> That Huxley places those “complexes” in inverted commas demonstrates something of his reticence towards the discipline of psychoanalysis. “I was never intoxicated by Freud as some people were, and I get less intoxicated as I go on,” he stated in an interview in 1960. Such comments are read by some – Jerome Meckier is an example – as a denial, on Huxley’s part, of any psychoanalytic affinities. Others, such as Brad Buchanan, read such statements as evidence of some form of interest during his youth, if never the heady excesses of intoxication reached by some. See Meckier (1978, 37) and Buchanan (2002, 76).

Regarding the spectacle of the breastfeeding mothers of Malpais, Bernard, we may recall, laments that he is ignorant of the intensity of feeling such a relationship must involve. The World State maintains authority, famously, by keeping “that interval of time between desire and its consummation” where “feeling lurks” to a minimum. “Shorten that interval, break down all those old unnecessary barriers” (Huxley 1994, 38–9). The image, “spectacle” is Huxley’s word, of the mother and child becomes a place holder for intense forms of experience which Huxley’s novel suggests threaten the World State, a highly administered future dystopia, wherein “stability” constitutes “the primal and ultimate need” (38). How we might think this state of affairs in relation to psychoanalysis is the question this chapter will now pursue.

#### Oedipus and Individuality

“Freud,” Huxley famously writes, “had been the first to reveal the appalling dangers of family life” (1994, 36). As Freud noted, the family poses a risk to the social, threatening to absorb its members’ cathexes and inhibit their participation in wider spheres of relationship. When the family existed there were “mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters. But there were also husbands, wives, lovers. There were also monogamy and romance [...] everywhere exclusiveness, everywhere a focussing of interest, a narrow channelling of impulse and energy” (35). For the World State, the intensity and intimacy of the family group represent a threat, and its abolition, at least in part, aims to secure something like unconditional love for the State.

Freud is a looming presence in *Brave New World*, comprehensively implicated in the erosion of family life which the novel pushes to its (il)logical extreme.

Our Ford – or Our Freud, as, for some inscrutable reason, he chose to call himself whenever he spoke of psychological matters – Our Freud had been the first to reveal the appalling dangers of family life. The world was full of fathers – was therefore full of

misery; full of mothers – therefore of every kind of perversion from sadism to chastity; full of brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts – full of madness and suicide. (36)

The slippage between the terms “Ford” and “Freud” does much to evoke the complex ways in which psychoanalysis has found itself embroiled in the advancing consumerism of the twentieth century. Huxley’s novel takes place in “The Age of Ford,” whose autobiography, *My Life and Work* (1924), appears under its own name, published by the Society for the Propagation of Fordian Knowledge. This Ur-text constitutes what Nicholas Murray has described as “the Bible of the new age of standardized human production” in which the making of babies mirrors the manufacturing process of the Model “T” Ford, which was in unceasing production from September 1908 until October 1927 (2012, 1). Rachel Bowlby suggests that the play on Ford/Freud demonstrates that, by the 1930s, “it is feasible to imagine a partnership to the point of identification between on the one hand a psychology typified by psychoanalysis and on the other the mass production and consumption suggested by the car” (1993, 1), whilst Eli Zaretsky reiterates the “fatal convergence between Fordism and Freudianism”: the latter provided a model of the mind capable of perpetuating mass production by naturalizing the “inner longings of the worker” as a matter of inherently desirous human nature (2005, 138–40).

It is unclear whether Huxley had read *Civilization and its Discontents* prior to writing the novel, but the influence of Freud’s thinking is clearly apparent.<sup>36</sup> Brad Buchanan has ventured that “the Oedipus complex is deemed such a dangerous and powerful force [by the World State] that it (along with the family structure that produces it) has been eliminated from civilized life as far as possible” (2002, 76). By “controlling all aspects of a child’s birth and upbringing and by keeping adults in a condition of infantile dependency on a larger social body, Huxley’s imaginary state has taken over the role of parent and robbed the child of his or

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<sup>36</sup> Whether Huxley holds Freud responsible for the fall into consumerism is a moot point. Adorno claims Huxley gets Freud wrong when he ascribes to “the world of the future the encouragement of infantile sexuality, in complete misunderstanding, incidentally, of Freud, who all too orthodoxly adhered to instinctual renunciation as a pedagogical aim” ([1967] 1982, 104).



her Oedipal potentialities" (77). The suppression of the Oedipus complex might be the "principle tool of social stability practised in this future," but, in essence, it is no more than the logical conclusion of the prohibition of parricide and incest, "even the unconscious energies produced by repressing such desires are dissipated" (77).

In a related vein, Gavin Miller argues that Huxley draws on Freud in endorsing a link between repression and social control (2008). Miller sets out to demonstrate the purchase of Freud's economic model of the psyche within the text, drawing attention to World Controller Mustapha Mond's use of "hydraulic" metaphors to describe feeling and experience. "Think of water under pressure in a pipe," Mond instructs the new students touring the London Hatchery during the novel's famous opening sequence, "'I pierce it once... What a jet!' He pierced it twenty times. There were twenty piddling little fountains" (Huxley 1994, 36). The novel's schema is predicated upon there being a link between repression and social antagonism; by eradicating "Mother. Monogamy. Romance," the authorities keep psycho-social pressures to a minimum. The fountain trickles, no longer "fierce and foamy the wild jet" (36). Miller notes a central feature of the Freudian economic model which assures its hold within the novel: "emotion [...] appears only when a desire is unfulfilled; the bare consciousness of a striving becomes something stronger, and more distinct, in the self's failure to find immediate satisfaction" (2008, 19). The absence of sexual prohibition frees the World State's inhabitants from the need to feel strongly; the tensions which might lead to discontent are removed and social cohesion seemingly guaranteed. "Consider your own lives," Mustapha Mond instructs the new recruits. "Has any of you ever encountered an insurmountable obstacle? [...] Has any of you ever been compelled to live through a long time-interval between the consciousness of a desire and its fulfilment?" One of the boys speaks up, informing the group that he once had to wait "nearly four weeks before a girl I wanted would let me have her"; a state of affairs which produced the "horrible" experience of a strong emotion (Huxley 1994, 40). There is "a certain validity to the belief that the individual has a fund of

undifferentiated energy which presses the harder upon what outlets are available to it when it has been deprived of the normal number,” writes Lionel Trilling, echoing – quite startlingly – the language of Mustapha Mond ([1949] 1979b, 157–8). Trilling is, of course, well-versed in the “psuedo-psycho-hydraulics” Gellner attributes to Freud, a way of thinking about desire which has had a profound impact on critical thought ([1985] 2003, 92–3).<sup>37</sup>

Despite their preoccupation with the interface between desire and social control, neither Buchanan nor Miller mentions that Huxley’s thinking resonates, in several ways, with the work of the Frankfurt School, or more recent thinking at the interface of psychoanalysis and Marxism. For instance, in imagining a world order which functions by permitting rather than prohibiting pleasure, Huxley comes close to Herbert Marcuse’s idea of “repressive desublimation”:

Libido transcends beyond the immediate erotogenic zones—a process of nonrepressive sublimation. In contrast, a mechanized environment seems to block such self-transcendence of libido [...] it also reduces the need for sublimation. In the mental apparatus, the tension between that which is desired and that which is permitted seems considerably lowered, and the Reality Principle no longer seems to require a sweeping and painful transformation of instinctual needs [...] The organism is thus being preconditioned for the spontaneous acceptance of what is offered [...] One might speak of ‘institutionalized desublimation.’ The latter appears to be a vital factor in the making of the authoritarian. (1964, 74)

Marcuse describes the effects of a society where there is “no leisure from pleasure, not a moment to sit down and think”: the process of sublimation is inhibited and compliance secured by permitting pleasure (Huxley 1994, 49). Huxley notes in his Foreword that a “really efficient totalitarian state” could forego practices of coercion, because its population of slaves would have learnt to “love their servitude”:

As political and economic freedom diminishes, sexual freedom tends compensatingly to increase. And the dictator (unless he needs cannon fodder and families with which to colonise empty or conquered territories) will do well to encourage that freedom. In conjunction with the freedom to daydream under the influence of dope and movies and

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<sup>37</sup> Miller provides an example from Robert Young’s *Colonial Desire* to support the latter claim: “the prime function incumbent on the socius had always been to codify the flows of desire, to inscribe them, to record them, to see to it that no flow exists that is not properly dammed up, channelled, regulated” (G. Miller 2008, 25).

the radio, it will help to reconcile his subjects to the servitude which is their fate. (1994, paragraph 11)

In the World State, promiscuity is encouraged from an early age. Mond reiterates the move towards permissiveness, recounting the “amazing truth” that “before the time of Our Ford,” and even after it, “erotic play between children had been regarded as abnormal (there was a roar of laughter); and not only abnormal, actually immoral (no!)” (28). The World State is a prescient illustration of the interaction of permissiveness and power and their effect on thought and feeling.

The relation of the individual to society is a concern shared by Huxley and the Frankfurt School, who perceived a decline in paternal authority to be fuelling a shift towards conformity and submission. If, for Freud, maturity is predicated upon the internalization of a paternal authority which becomes the basis for an autonomous individuality, the Frankfurt School place the possibility of such individuality in question, a result of the perceived erosion of paternal power under the conditions of industrial modernity. As Marcuse puts it, “through the struggle with father and mother as personal targets of love and aggression, the younger generation entered societal life with impulses, ideas, and needs which were largely their own [...] the formation of their superego, the repressive modification of their impulses, their renunciation and sublimation were very personal experiences” ([1955] 1966, 96). Barry Richards summarizes the argument:

During the late capitalist period there has been a radical decay of the major cultural achievement of early, liberal capitalism, namely the moral agency of the individual. Restricted though it was to the bourgeois strata, this liberal self, forged in the heat of the oedipal conflict, was the embodiment of some positive values of self-determination. Freud’s structural theory, they argued, subtly described this conflicted but powerful self, and thus provided a model to use in tracing its decline as the combined forces of mass culture and the administrative state left less and less social space for a strong, autonomous ego to establish itself and ally itself with healthy superego functioning. (1994, 149)

In place of a strong ego forged through adversity there is narcissism and ego weakness. In the essay “How to look at television,” for instance, published in 1954, Adorno refers to David

Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd* to highlight a distinction between the (American) individual of "earlier generations" who is "inner-directed," a reality assured by his "internalization of adult authority" and the contemporary subject who is "other-directed" and "in a characterological sense more the product of his peers" (cited in Adorno 1991, 139). Due to the erosion of paternal authority, so the argument runs, the common personality type conforms to external standards, rather than internalizing authority in a move necessary for the later rejection of that authority by a strong ego.<sup>38</sup>

*Brave New World* links the decline of both culture and individuality to the erosion of paternal authority, presenting a vision of modernity wherein the regressive and the infantile loom large; a position which anticipates the "objective decline of paternal authority in the bourgeois family" which the Frankfurt School theorized (Huyssen 1988, 22). In fact, the influence which Huxley exerted on the work of Adorno and Horkheimer in particular has been "considered immense," Angela Holzer writes, though it is "quite difficult to gauge" (2008, 120). David Garrett Izzo assumes that Adorno and Horkheimer "agree with Huxley more than Orwell" and that "their essays, particularly the well-known 'Culture Industry' were influenced by Huxley's *Brave New World*" (cited in Holzer 2008, 120). The veracity of this influence is difficult to confirm, however; Huxley is not mentioned in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, though Holzer does suggest that the figure of the loner, first mentioned in "Culture Industry" "might be inspired by Huxley."<sup>39</sup> However, in the first of his lectures on history and freedom, delivered over the course of 1964-5, Adorno makes a reference to *Brave New World* which – perhaps unwittingly – evinces a belief in a connection between the Oedipus complex and individuality. It is in the context of a critique of Hegel's idealist conception of history, the progress in the

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<sup>38</sup> For an in depth consideration of the Frankfurt School's theories concerning paternal authority see Benjamin (1978).

<sup>39</sup> In Edmund Jephcott's translation, the section which Holzer translates directly from the German to support her point is translated thus: "But anyone who goes hungry and suffers from cold, especially if he once had good prospects, is a marked man. He is an outsider, and—with the occasional exception of the capital crime—to be an outsider is the gravest guilt" (Horkheimer and Adorno [1947] 2002, 121).

consciousness of freedom, where Adorno suggests that “a direct progress towards freedom cannot be discerned” and is indeed impossible, due to the “increasingly dense texture of society in both East and West; the growing concentration of the economy, the executive and the bureaucracy has advanced to such an extent that people are reduced to more and more to the status of functions” (2006, 5). Even in the sphere of consumption we have no freedom, “goods are not produced for their own sake, and their consumption satisfies people’s own desires only very indirectly.” Freedom is “impoverished, jejune, and is reduced to the possibility of sustaining one’s own life” (6). Even “captains of industry” are caught in this prevalent logic, “working through mountains of documents” instead of “ignoring office hours and reflecting in freedom.” Where “an optimum of freedom seems to have survived people cannot avail themselves of it. If you were to sit down, reflect, and make decisions, you would soon fall behind and become an eccentric, like the Savage in Huxley’s *Brave New World*.”

This reference to John the Savage draws Adorno’s vision of individuality and freedom back towards an oedipal scheme. The individual is an anomaly in the modern administered society, because he – it would seem, in general, to be a “he” – has achieved a form of independent thinking. Freedom involves the capacity for reflexivity, which, incidentally, Adorno suggests is first exemplified in the character of Hamlet (2006, 229–238). This is a state of existence Holzer describes in terms of the capacity to be a “torn individual,” to exhibit the “melancholic temperament of the intellectual, indexing a mode of reflexivity in modern life that does not gloss over the agonistic, unmediated abysses it is confronted with” (2008, 125).<sup>40</sup> To turn to Hamlet as an emblem for a mode of subjectivity or consciousness is an oft repeated act.<sup>41</sup> In the context of the present discussion it is important – though almost unnecessary – to

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<sup>40</sup> Adorno, incidentally, holds that freedom – and by extension political praxis – “calls for theoretical consciousness at its most advanced, and, on the other hand, it needs the corporeal element, the very thing that cannot be fully identified with reason” (2006, 238). It is because the administered society does not permit reflection, instead prompting human beings “to regress to the reactions of amphibians,” that it renders them “incapable of will, impulse or spontaneity” (235).

<sup>41</sup> See, for example, de Grazia (2002), Grady (2006).

reiterate the centrality of Hamlet to Freud's formulation of the Oedipus complex, and the role played by *Hamlet* in *Brave New World* is also imperative: it is through his encounter with the play, in his battered copy of the works of Shakespeare, that John comes close to something like the oedipal scenario, attempting to murder Popé, the father-figure, while he sleeps in bed with John's mother, Linda. The text itself functions as a kind of paternal prohibition, serving to inculcate the necessary restrictions – the book “explained and gave orders” (Huxley 1994, 120). *Brave New World* invests in the necessity of the Oedipus complex, whilst the presence of *Hamlet* aligns maturity with high art. John's maturity, the reflective capacity which Adorno attributes to him, is predicated upon his exposure to Shakespeare and paternity. Both Huxley and Adorno link maturity to a form of intense experience caught up in a logic of paternal authority which cuts across the terms father/culture. For Adorno, Hamlet and John become emblems of a reflective individuality rendered unobtainable in the absence of intense experience and paternal prohibition.

If high culture is implicitly aligned with maturity, mass culture has long borne an association with regression. As Andreas Huyssen notes, “the culture industry is seen as one of the major factors preventing such ‘healthy’ internalization and replacing it by those external standards of behaviour which inevitably lead to conformism” (1988, 22). In the short essay, “Transparencies on Film,” written in 1966-7, Adorno draws on the epithet “Daddy's cinema,” coined by the Oberhausen group, to describe the products of commercial, Hollywood, cinema (1991, 154). The term functions as a kind of shorthand for the assumption of the paternal function; commercial cinema, Adorno suggests, has come to occupy the space left vacant by the decline of paternal authority. However, under its command, the function of prohibition vanishes. Such cinema is “repulsive” because of its “infantile character”; it is an instance of “regression manufactured on an industrial scale” (154). Vicky Lebeau describes the father which commercial cinema represents for Adorno in terms of perversion: “the temporal contortion of Adorno's critique [...] describes a cinema that assumes a paternal function and

then regresses—not just to adolescence but to an infantilism which is repulsive because it requires a debasement of that paternity, even its perversion, in the polymorphous sexuality characteristic of infancy” (1995, 29). The maturity which the Oedipal prohibition ostensibly guarantees is rendered impossible by a cinema father who prescribes, rather than prohibiting, pleasure. For Adorno, the cinema plays a complex role in bringing about this regression, failing to foster internalization by holding out the offer of a gratification which antedates oedipal renunciation. The culture industry is so dangerous because it inhibits the formation of an autonomous, individual ego based on the perceived necessity of the internalization and rejection of paternal authority. In *Brave New World* the “feelies” promote and act out the “official sexual routine” which “turns pleasure to fun and denies it by granting it” (Adorno 1982, 104–5).<sup>42</sup>

In a short essay entitled “Pleasures,” dating from 1923, Huxley writes with a palpable disdain common in such reflections of the time:

Of all the various poisons which modern civilization, by a process of auto-intoxication, brews quietly up within its own bowels, few, it seems to me, are more deadly (while none appears more harmless) than that curious and appalling thing that is technically known as “pleasure.” “Pleasure” (I place the word between inverted commas to show that I mean, not real pleasure, but the organised activities officially known by the same name) “pleasure”—what nightmare visions the word evokes! [...] The horrors of modern “pleasure” arise from the fact that every kind of organized distraction tends to become progressively more and more imbecile [...] In place of the old pleasures demanding intelligence and personal initiative, we have vast organizations that provide us with ready-made distractions—distractions which demand from pleasure-seekers no personal participation and no intellectual effort of any sort. To the interminable democracies of the world a million cinemas bring the same balderdash [...] Countless

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<sup>42</sup> “Today,” as Todd McGowan puts it, “the old ‘entry fee’ into the social order that Lévi-Strauss emphasized has undergone a transformation: the social order no longer explicitly demands a sacrifice of enjoyment, but instead demands enjoyment itself as a kind of social duty” (2004, 35). Drawing on Žižek, McGowan reiterates Adorno’s claims for a regressive father, now considered “anal,” who both signifies and demands “enjoyment.” Žižek suggests that today the father embodies enjoyment in a mode never before possible, one which contains its own temporal distortion. With reference to the “primordial” father of *Totem and Taboo*, he writes that, rather than being a figure from our prehistory, the “‘primordial father’ is a later, eminently modern, post-revolutionary phenomenon, the result of the dissolution of traditional symbolic authority” (1994, 206). Though the anal father’s demand for enjoyment can never be met, and thus symbolic authority, paradoxically, persists, such work demonstrates a continued adherence to paternal prohibition as a defining element in achieving autonomy.

audiences soak passively in the tepid bath of nonsense. No mental effort is demanded of them, no participation; they need only sit and keep their eyes open. (1971, 46–9)

Significantly, Huxley casts the problem in terms of the kind of pleasure which different activities elicit. “Real” pleasure is intellectually demanding and individual, whilst the pleasures of mass culture are passive and collective, “ready-made” for their audiences to consume. Effort and difficulty are set against receptivity and distraction.<sup>43</sup>

In *Brave New World* Huxley stages these two pleasures in stark and predictable terms. The fear of mass culture is deeply caught up with a notion of passivity, and the association of reception – the sphere of consumption – with a derided notion of femininity, in contrast to a masculine monopoly on “production.” Tania Modleski reminds us, with reference to the purchase of this distinction over the course of the twentieth century, “too often politically-oriented criticism invokes ‘production’ as an ideal pure and simple, without concerning itself with what is being produced” (1986, 42). *Brave New World* does not leave the question of value unposed – recall Helmholtz’s poem about women’s bottoms – but the novel does consistently align the capacity for individuality and intelligence with male characters (and family triangles). Deanna Madden points out that only the male characters engage in any form of intellectual discourse – think of the crucial discussion, as the text draws to a close, between John and Mustapha Mond concerning the value of high culture and the nature of the good. Linda and Lenina, Madden quite convincingly suggests, “seem incapable of an original thought and are concerned only with the pursuit of pleasure and with avoiding unpleasantness and physical discomfort” (1992, 291). This stands in distinct contrast to Bernard’s desire for something approximating “pain and terror”: “often in the past he had wondered what it would be like to be subjected (*soma*-less and with nothing but his own inward resources to rely on) to

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<sup>43</sup> Huxley is far from alone in making such distinctions, which were a prominent aspect of modernist thought and early twentieth century resistance to mass culture. Unsurprisingly, such thinking persists in the work of the Frankfurt School, and finds expression in the postmodern turn to the “sublime,” see Connor (1992), Modleski ([1986] 2004), Frost (2013, introduction).



some great trial, some pain, some persecution, he had even longed for affliction" (Huxley 1994, 93).

Bernard apes the Romantic artist, seeking an experience of intensity, preferring a walk in the Lake District (where else?) alone with Lenina to a round of electro-magnetic golf.

"Walking and talking – that seemed like a very odd way of spending an afternoon" (80), Lenina comments, with reference to the possibility of the Lake District walk, but walking and talking constitute the very activities which fall outside of the pervasive norms of consumption within the World State. They are activities which also evoke the famously peripatetic practices of the ancient philosophers, who often formulated their philosophical debates whilst walking and talking; a fact which reiterates the gulf separating the World State from "thought and feeling."

Eventually Lenina is able to persuade Bernard, "much against his will," to fly over to

Amsterdam to watch the Semi-Demi-Finals of the Women's Heavyweight Wrestling

Championships. As they return, by helicopter, Bernard stops over the Channel "within a

hundred feet of the waves" and commands Lenina to "look." Confronted by "the rushing emptiness of the night" she is "appalled," and implores Bernard: "Let's turn on the radio.

Quick!" Reaching for the dial and turning it "at random," she is allowed only a few seconds of the comfort provided by "sixteen tremoloing falsettos" before Bernard turns it off, "wanting to look at the sea in peace." "One can't even look with that beastly noise going on," he remarks.

"But it's lovely. And I don't want to look," she replies (80–81). The poetry of this "rushing

emptiness" recalls the poem "Dover Beach" (by Huxley's great uncle, Matthew Arnold) – the sea's "melancholy, long, withdrawing roar/ Retreating, to the breath /Of the night-wind"

(Arnold 1965, 239–243) – figuring Bernard as poet, or at least reader of poetry, in contrast to

Lenina, the representative mass consumer. Somewhat pompously, Bernard seeks a moving

encounter with the poetry of the sea, whilst Lenina wishes to retreat to the comfortable

falsettos of the commercial radio. Bernard's resistance to the radio and Lenina's apparent

need for it stage the predictable gendering of high culture persistent in theories of the

aesthetic since at least the eighteenth century, and one pervasive in mass culture debates:

“real” culture is associated with men and takes up a relation with a sublime sphere characterized by, if not pain and terror, at least some form of intensity and struggle constitutive of “mind.”<sup>44</sup> Women, on the other hand, are relegated to the realm of the merely beautiful, the undemanding, the infantile and the mass.<sup>45</sup>

The association of woman with the aesthetic and the beautiful, the realm of feeling, friendship and love – as well as pleasure and compassion – reaches back across the Western tradition. As Isobel Armstrong puts it, unequivocally: “the aesthetic is a woman” (2000, 31). Christopher Bollas extends the point, describing maternal care as the child’s first “aesthetic”; the mother’s behaviour constitutes an “idiom” which will influence (cultural) experience in adult life. For Bollas, aesthetic experience “occurs as a moment” which feels “familiar” and “uncanny,” the “aesthetic induces an existential recollection” conveyed through the “affects of being” (1993, 40–1). The aesthetic moment “actualizes a deep rapport between subject and object [...] and provides the person with a generative illusion of fitting with an object” (1993, 40). Pondering the Kantian distinction between the beautiful and the sublime, Eagleton spells

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<sup>44</sup> Thomas Weiskel draws sublime experience into dialogue with Freudian psychoanalysis, describing the Kantian sublime as “the very moment in which the mind turns within and performs its identification with reason. The sublime recapitulates and therefore re-establishes the Oedipus complex,” reason is assigned the role of the super-ego, the agency generated by sublimation, and “an identification with the father” is “taken as the model” (1976, 92). It is through this process of identification, apparently, that the mind takes shape. Neil Hertz describes the sublime in terms of a “moment of blockage” which might have been self-loss, but instead becomes an opportunity for establishing “the unitary status of the self” (1985, 53).

<sup>45</sup> What begins to emerge here is not only a distinction between the male and female along the lines of consumption-gratification-mindlessness in contrast to production-struggle-mind; there is also a denigration of the masses themselves through a feminine association. When Nietzsche describes what “the herd” want in *Beyond Good and Evil* – “universal green-pasture happiness [...] with security, safety, comfort and an easier life for all” – he expresses a common idea, and comes very close to articulating the apparently inferior concerns of the female characters – who emblemize the mass stereotype – in *Brave New World* (2008, 41). Freud also famously associates the masses with women in terms of a relation to authority based not on internalization but on fear. See, for example, Lebeau (1995, 57–86). Woman and mass culture are presented in terms of their distance from the concept of mind, cut off from an authentic culture which must be marked with difficulty and remains the terrain of men.

out the perceived inferiority of the aesthetic in specifically maternal, and psychoanalytic, terms:

The beautiful representation, like the body of the mother, is an idealized material form safely diffused of sensuality and desire, with which, in a free play of its faculties, the subject can happily sport. The bliss of the aesthetic subject is the felicity of the small child playing in the bosom of the mother, enthralled by an utterly indivisible object which is at once intimate and indeterminate, brimming with purposive life yet plastic enough to put up no resistance to the subject's own ends. (1990, 90–91)

The aesthetic object is like the body of the mother, offering an experience akin to maternal plenitude and a form of self-other unity. He goes on to illustrate the danger of this form of experience, and reiterates the necessity, for the (male) subject, of passing through this developmental stage in pursuit of an autonomous individuality:

The subject can find rest in this cloistral security, but its rest is strictly temporary. For it is travelling to that higher location where it will find its true home, the phallic law of abstract reason which quite transcends the sensible. To obtain full moral stature we must be wrenched from the maternal pleasures of Nature and experience in the majesty of the sublime the sense of an infinite totality to which our feeble imaginations will never be equal. (91)

Maturity, on this analysis, depends on the subject's capacity to pass out of the imaginary associated with the mother and into the symbolic space of the phallic law. It is only through a form of intense feeling, a blockage brought about by the separation which that law demands, that the subject can pass beyond the dangerous relationship with the maternal, and achieve individuality. The achievement of "culture" then, is possible only through a relationship with the paternal; the maternal is something pre-cultural, almost primitive in fact. However, Eagleton's ironic tone suggests that more might be at stake in the maternal relation, that the mother, and maternal care, might play a more significant role than an investment in paternal injunction allows for. As Benjamin puts it, "the idea that the father is required for individuation [...] is based upon a confusion of gender identification with separation-individuation," which

“denies the possibility of a maternal nurturance which actually encourages autonomy” (1978, 51). Or, potentially, impedes it.<sup>46</sup>

#### Mother, Maturity, Mechanization

*Brave New World*, then, anticipates a body of theoretical work which, drawing on Marxism and psychoanalysis, figures political oppression in terms of pleasure permitted. According to such work, the apparent passing of the paternal injunction makes full maturity elusive because one no longer has to negotiate the renunciations demanded by the law. Instead, one is compelled to “enjoy” in ways which perpetuate a form of infantilism and make (even the thought of) revolt impossible. However, to base the totalitarianism at work in *Brave New World* solely on the absence of paternal prohibition would be to miss a large part of the parental politics which the novel sets up. Benjamin points out that Horkheimer, for instance, does not ignore the mother, but considers the “decline in maternal nurturance” to be an important cause of change (1978, 49). *Brave New World* advances a vision of a dystopian future which transposes the maternal function from woman to technology. The gestation of babies in bottles exercises an extreme form of bio-power in the interests of production and profit. However, the inhabitants of the World State are subject to the dictates of human maturation, and thus require a prolonged period of care and additional socialization.

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<sup>46</sup> With reference to the Freudian vision of internalization, we must recall that Freud’s deduction of the post-oedipal super-ego is notoriously unsatisfactory. The boy’s identification with the father and the girl’s with the mother “are not what we should have expected since they do not introduce the abandoned object into the ego” (Freud 1923b, 32). In acknowledging the failure of psychoanalysis to adequately account for introjection, “Freud nearly overthrows the entire psychoanalytic account of the Oedipus complex” (Bersani 1986, 98).

Huxley's investment in the scene between mother and child mirrors changes which were, at that time, taking place in psychoanalysis itself, as analysts – particularly in Britain – paid increasing attention to the pre-oedipal period and the mother's role in development.<sup>47</sup> But whilst object relations theorists gave the mother immense psychic power, "no one," writes Sally Alexander, "gave the mother as much psychic power as Winnicott" (2013, 166). "The mental health of the individual," Winnicott insists, "is laid down by the mother who, because she is devoted to her infant, is able to make active adaptation," one of his starkest statements of maternal responsibility ([1949] 1958g, 189). For Winnicott, whilst the father plays a role in administering authority and securing sexual difference, his main task is to support the mother, mediating between the mother-child couple and the external world and guarding their relationship from impingements. "Father is needed to give mother moral support, to be the backing for her authority, to be the human being who stands for the law and order which she plants in the life of the child" (D. W. Winnicott [1945] 1991c, 115). As well as locating authority in the maternal role (suggesting the mother may play her own part in internalization), Winnicott also insists on the importance of the form of the mother's care. He suggests that the "good-enough" mother can say to her child "I am reliable – not because I am a machine, but because I know what you are needing; and I care, and I want to provide what you need. This is what I call love at this stage of your development" ([1968] 1987, 97–8). Here Winnicott specifically codes the capacities of the mother in contrast to technology, raising the question of what it would mean for a machine to take on the role of a mother or, to push the point, for a mother to be like a machine. It is this nexus which draws his thinking into dialogue with Huxley's *Brave New World*.

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<sup>47</sup> For the history of this process see Sayers (1991). Madelon Sprengnether provides a thorough excavation of the mother in Freud's thought, as well as an overview of more recent theoretical attitudes towards the mother in psychoanalytic theory (1990). Rehabilitating the mother from "the shadows of our culture" has been a project within feminist psychoanalysis for some time (Irigaray 1991, 34). Whilst father may wish to be "the sole creator" (41), the potential generative capacity of the mother and maternal subjectivity have become key questions for feminist psychoanalysis. See, for example, Kristeva (1986), Benjamin ([1988] 1990a), Irigaray (1991), Brennan (2004), Jacobs (2007).

Winnicott describes the mother's being "good-enough" in terms of her difference to a machine. In the World State, not only are babies grown in bottles, they also receive a mechanistic form of care. During the tour of the Hatchery, for instance, Mustapha Mond lectures the recruits on normal infant procedure: when "the decanted infant howls," he tells them, "at once a nurse appears with a bottle of external secretion. Feeling lurks in that interval of time between desire and its consummation. Shorten that interval, break down all those old unnecessary barriers" (Huxley 1994, 38–9). In many ways, what I am describing bears similarity to the argument developed above, which focused on the coercive effect of permitting, rather than precluding, pleasure. However, I am moving attention from the absence of paternal prohibition to the form of care which the child receives, whilst suggesting that the specific nature of that care figures prominently in Huxley's vision of totalitarianism, which is premised upon more than the absence of the paternal interdiction. Huxley prompts us to think about the connection between pre-oedipal infant care and political oppression and, in doing so, his thinking finds parallels in Winnicott.

In the previous chapter I spoke of the importance of creative apperception for Winnicott in understanding what makes life worth living, noting that this capacity defends against the possibility of "compliance," a relationship in which "the world and its details [are] recognized but only as something to be fitted in with or demanding adaptation" ([1971] 1991b, 65). Compliance "carries with it a sense of futility for the individual" who lives "uncreatively, as if caught up in the creativity of someone else, or of a machine." Implicitly, mechanization is akin to being overwhelmed by another's creativity, there is something about the incessant regularity of the machine which undermines both need and spontaneity. Machines, it would seem, are never good enough to be mothers, and a mother who is like a machine will never be "good-enough."

Huxley shared Winnicott's attitude towards mechanization, writing in an essay, published in 1929, that machines relieve humanity "not merely of drudgery, but of the possibility of performing any creative or spontaneous act whatsoever" (1970, 49). Machines, in both labour and leisure, do too much of the work, it seems, leaving those who engage with them passive and – potentially – compliant. Put simply – and here we once again approach the argument about desire – there is something like a frustration of frustration, a "lack of lack," in a more Lacanian vocabulary, and "lack is the underpinning of everything which is potentially innovative about human life" (Ruti 2011, 358).

The citizens of the World State are "never alone" (214), Lenina is uncomfortable with Bernard's "mania [...] for doing things in private. Which meant, in practice, not doing anything at all. For what was there that one *could* do in private. (Apart, of course, from going to bed: but one couldn't do that all the time.) Yes, what *was* there? Precious little" (79). Private space which might offer a place for differentiation is co-opted, limited to a means of obtaining satisfaction. Helmholtz chooses "deliberate solitude, the artificial impotence of asceticism" (61) as a way of exploring his own social disaffection, but his self-enforced isolation is causing problems: "you can't imagine what a hullabaloo they've been making about it at the college," he tells Bernard. Indeed, part of the neo-pavlovian conditioning carried out on children involves training them to hate both books and nature (18-9). Reading, an arguably anti-social activity which can be done alone and in private, is charged with the potential to undermine social control, and not only because "there was always the risk of their reading something which might undesirably decondition one of their reflexes" (19). Being alone represents a threat to social stability because it constitutes a space of absence in which both self and desire can take shape.

If machines can rob the creativity of adults, their effect on children can be assumed to be worse. *Brave New World* presents a world in which "too-good" maternal care functions as

the means to ensure power. We may recall that, for Winnicott, “at the beginning, by an almost 100 per cent adaptation [the mother] affords the infant the opportunity for the *illusion* that her breast is part of the infant” (1991b, 11). Thanks to the mother’s care, the child can believe “I am the breast” and experience a form of illusory omnipotence which masks a radical dependence. The infant’s absolute dependence on the mother during the earliest stages of life resonates with Freud’s “oceanic feeling,” a primitive period of development wherein “originally the ego contains everything, later it separates off an external world from itself,” which it “gradually learns to do [...] in response to various promptings” (1930, 68, 67). For both Freud and Winnicott, the ego and the external world come into separate being on the basis of a gap between the emergence of need and its relief.

Already in *The Project for a Scientific Psychology*, Freud sets out a scheme locating the origins of thought and feeling in the experience of the infant (1895b). Left alone and faced with a need for food but unable to assuage this need by herself, the child becomes tense, and tries to reduce this feeling of tension by screaming or crying. This technique has the added value of drawing the attention of an “experienced person,” a caregiver, who can then provide the food or attentiveness the child requires, leading to a reduction in the level of tension the child is experiencing (1895b, 318). This total event, Freud theorizes, constitutes an “*experience of satisfaction*.” The next time a present need leads to an increase in tension, the child will be able to recathect a memory of this experience of satisfaction to temporarily allay their distress. The psychical mechanism which aims to bring back the satisfaction through the cathexis of the remembered experience Freud calls “wish,” and it is a mechanism which signals the birth of the mind as separate from its environment.

It was Winnicott, however, who drew out the significance of the child’s caregiver in this process. Winnicott theorizes a period of primary maternal preoccupation during which the child is allowed to live in the fantasy that it creates what it needs, without any help from the



environment. But he also theorized the need for the caregiver to gradually deadapt, making the child wait a short time for her need to be met, so she might come to realise the fact of her dependence, gaining access to external reality through a process of disillusionment. If the nurse with her bottle of “external secretion” always appears “at once,” Winnicott claims, we will never become separate, remaining, instead, caught in an illusion of merger which actually constitutes the basis of a compliant self.

“Full maturity for the individual,” writes Winnicott, “is not possible in an immature or ill social setting” (1990h, 84). For Winnicott, the best way to ensure maturity is to safeguard the home. In a world where women continue to give birth to children (and care for them, on the whole), this might suggest that a “sick society,” perhaps one unable to care sufficiently for its members, would fail to provide the support necessary to enable parents to nurture and bring their children to maturity. If the necessary welfare provisions are absent, experiences of insecurity and uncertainty are liable to have negative effects on parents and their capacity to care for their children. This is important because, for Winnicott, the principle of maturity extends beyond the individual, “a democratic society is ‘mature,’” he writes, “that is to say, that it has a quality that is allied to the quality of individual maturity which characterizes its healthy members” ([1957] 1986b, 240). What produces an “innate democratic tendency” is, he claims, “very difficult for people to recognize,” “the essential of a democracy really does lie with the ordinary man and woman, and the ordinary, common-place home” (246–7). A welfare state is needed to optimize the chances that children will develop to maturity, and then be capable of taking an active role in social and political life. Parental care, with the support of the state when necessary, must be “good-enough,” so that it might create individuals who are spontaneous, differentiated, and creative. Winnicott examines what needs to be in place if democracy is to be fostered, but concurrently he offers a vision of what kind of conditions might lend themselves to totalitarianism.

Across Winnicott's work we find scattered references to the "too-good" mother. He writes, for instance, that "an infant does not thrive on perfect adaptation to need. A mother who fits in with a baby's desires too well is not a good mother" ([1950-5] 1958h, 216-7). In his famous paper on "Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena" he says that:

There is no possibility whatever for an infant to proceed from the pleasure principle to the reality principle or towards and beyond primary identification, unless there is a good enough mother. The good enough 'mother' (not necessarily the infant's own mother) is one who makes active adaptation to the infant's needs, an active adaptation that gradually lessens, according to the infant's growing ability to account for failure and to tolerate the results of frustration. (1991b, 10)

He also suggests that "the infant can actually come to gain from the experience of frustration, since incomplete adaptation to need makes objects real, that is to say hated as well as loved" (11). The failure of the mother to adequately deadapt can result in either "a permanent state of regression and of being merged with the mother" or the staging of "a total rejection of the mother, even of the seemingly good mother," who may be experienced as a "witch" because of her too perfect care ([1960] 1990e, 51-2). This reading depends on accepting Winnicott's idea of an early stage of merger between mother and child which is gradually relinquished, an idea which Daniel Stern questions and suggests is a "pathomophic, retrospective, secondary conceptualization" (1985, 105). Whether real or imagined, the idea of merger finds purchase in the World State, a society whose motto, "Community, Identity, Stability" insists on the collective and "the same." This state of affairs is reinforced by the pervasive propaganda that "everyone belongs to everyone else." Though this piece of sleep-teaching has an obvious sexual reference, it also suggests a society premised on a lack of differentiation, a kind of infantile merging without clearly defined limits between self and other.

In the World State, oppression doesn't work through fear and insecurity, rather the state functions by assuming – quite literally – the maternal function, and then refusing to fail, or deadapt. Referring to the standard citizen of the World State, Mond insists that "even after decanting, he's still inside a bottle – an invisible bottle of infantile and embryonic fixations.

Each one of us, of course [...] goes through life inside a bottle" (Huxley 1994, 203). The World State gets rid of the maternal womb in order to instate society as womb, as a kind of perfect environment which presents no struggle and asks little of its inhabitants. Juliet Hopkins notes that the "deprivation of frustration" effects the capacity of a child to develop a sense of agency (1996, 415). "A baby who is comforted at once has no chance to become aware of what upset her, or of the intention and desire to mend it, and no means to discover how to put it right," a certain – limited – amount of negative experience is deemed necessary for mental growth. The kind of (mechanical) care available in the World State teaches an infant "to be passive and dependent in response to distress" (415). That society is totalitarian and, as T. S. Eliot puts it: "totalitarianism appeals to the desire to return to the womb" (1948, 68).

Mond has a particularly deep contempt for mothers; could we speculate that this is because, if their care is "good-enough," they may produce non-compliant citizens? We may recall Winnicott's belief that the "main activity" necessary to promote the "democratic tendency" is the "avoidance of interference with the ordinary good home," and that the "devotion" of the "ordinary good mother" founds "the capacity for eventual emotional maturity" ([1957] 1986b, 259). Mond's fear is apparent in his description of home as "squalid psychically" and "physically," an animalistic space – a "rabbit hole, a midden" – "hot with the frictions of tightly packed life, reeking with emotion" (Huxley 1994, 33). The relationships within the home are not only "insane obscene" but "dangerous," and the mother "brooded over her children (*her* children) [...] brooded over them like a cat over kittens; but a cat that could talk, a cat that could say, 'My baby, my baby,' over and over again." The passage requires some unpacking. The idea of oedipal desire is present here in the mention of "that unspeakable agonized pleasure" between mother and child, as is the idea that the maternal and the domestic are separate from a genuinely social/paternal space – these are *her* children. However, Mond also iterates the significance of maternal care, verging on presenting the mother as active within the scene of desire, which recalls Laplanche's theory of the enigmatic

signifier. Within the scene of feeding between mother and child, it is the mother, Laplanche claims, who brings the breast into view, and transmits the messages which found the drives and the superego. Even approached from the perspective of sexuality, Huxley's text attests to the mother's active, structuring role.

In *Brave New World*, as we have established, the maternal role has been mechanized, offering a form of perfect adaptation, a vision of a technologically-mediated infancy which metaphorizes the perceived erosive effects of mass cultural forms. The World State is a society which gets rid of the mother and ends up with "the feelies," a cinema which touches and titillates.<sup>48</sup> "Ours" is a culture which retained the mother and got the "talkies." This is another state of affairs which requires some unpacking, because it foregrounds a link between technology and maternal care with considerable resonance and purchase across the twentieth century. Huxley's imagining of a reproductive process which eschews human parenting in favour of the machine is a nightmarish reimagining of the effects the new mass technologies were already perceived to be having. *Brave New World* has been described as the "classic denunciation of mass culture in the interwar years" (Carey 1992, 86), and that denunciation is, at least in part, articulated in and through an analogy between mother and mass culture with what seems to be a perennial, if not always acknowledged, appeal.

Huyssen charts this bifurcation in the gendering of culture and value through the growth of mass culture over the course of the nineteenth century, describing "a notion which gained ground" during that period: "mass culture is somehow associated with woman, while real, authentic culture remains the prerogative of men. The tradition of women's exclusion from the realm of 'high art' does not of course originate in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but it does take on new connotations in the age of the industrial revolution and cultural modernization" (1988, 47).

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<sup>48</sup> This is clearly Huxley's parodic rendering of "the talkies," or sound film, which achieved commercial maturity in *The Jazz Singer*, released in 1927, as Huxley extends the sonic innovation of synchronized sound to the senses of touch and smell.

The “association” of mass culture “somehow” with woman takes various forms. Women are believed to be largely responsible for the production and consumption of mass culture – the “mobs of scribbling women” damned by Nathaniel Hawthorne, and the “spinsters, schoolteachers, women secretaries, proprietresses of teashops” whose taste for West End productions incited Louis MacNeice’s contempt (cited in Carey 1992, 52). In addition to these pervasive associations, mass culture itself takes on particular features, appearing “monolithic, engulfing, totalitarian, and on the side of regression and the feminine” (Huyssen 1988, 58). In fact, mass culture is not “only” a woman, but a woman in the role of mother. To align mass culture with the feminine is to cast the experience in terms of the imagined oneness and plenitude of a halcyon, perfect – if also dangerous and consuming – interaction with the mother.

Of the early critics of mass culture, it is probably Barbara Low, an early follower of Freud, who comes closest to explicitly articulating an association between cinema and the mother. In an article published in the journal *Close Up* in September 1927, Low writes that “humanity, in all ages, has pursued its pleasure and will continue to do so, in the mass aiming at the greatest amount of satisfaction with the least output of effort, a goal most satisfactorily achieved via the path of the ‘Pictures’” (1998, 247). The “magic” of the cinema is the greatest source of its danger, she claims, because it prolongs what Ferenczi termed “the period of unconditional omnipotence,” during which the child’s “dearest needs and wishes” are taken care of by “some mysterious external source, without human effort.” She continues: “it is clear that such a condition is an actuality in the earliest months of life, a little later this stage is sadly left behind and the child must learn through bitter necessity that achievement is reached only through effort; yet there remains still, and throughout life, some of this ‘omnipotence’ wish” (249). The cinema’s appeal, on this analysis, resides in its ability to replicate the experience of early infancy, to come good on the wish for unconditional omnipotence, to facilitate what Winnicott refers to as a special kind of madness which is “conceded to babies” (1991b, 71), a

megalomaniac delusion of self-sufficiency in which the infant perceives herself to be the locus of all.

The threat of mass culture, then, has something to do with its capacity to replicate a “golden age,” the time in the womb perhaps even more so than the earliest weeks or months of life, a form of existence which is pervasive within the World State. Huxley insists on this equation of culture and womb, though his aim of critique leads him to push the analogy to an extreme: in the World State, the “womb” itself is bottle on a (re)production line. The grotesque products of mass culture which Huxley imagines incessantly reiterate their drive for regression, the “Sixteen Sexophonists,” for example, play an old favourite tune – “There ain’t no Bottle in all the world like that dear little Bottle of mine” (Huxley 1994, 67). Lulled by the music and intoxicated with a considerable amount of *soma*, Bernard and Lenina “might have been twin embryos gently rocking together on the waves of a bottled ocean of blood-surrogate.” The drug has “raised a quite impenetrable wall between the actual universe and their minds,” it allows them to forget the world.

Laura Frost notes that the consumption of mass culture is frequently described as “intoxication, addiction, deluded reverie and gluttony” (2006, 445), analogies which speak of visceral invasion and soporification. The cinema, however, takes on another particular association; its threat is frequently described in terms of an experience of hypnosis. In 1925 Huxley wrote an article for *Vanity Fair* entitled “Where Are the Movies Moving?” where he states that “the darkness of the theatre, the monotonous music” bring about in the audience “a kind of hypnotic state” (2000, 176). Leavis famously writes that films “involve surrender, under conditions of hypnotic receptivity, to the cheapest emotional appeals, appeals all the more insidious because they are associated with a compelling illusion of actual life. It would be difficult to dispute that the result must be serious damage to the ‘standard of living’” ([1930] 1979, 10). Before considering the value judgement which Leavis and Huxley are making, it is

worth stopping for a moment to consider what is at stake in these references to hypnosis, because, unwittingly, they once again align mass culture with a notion of maternal care.

Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen insists on the central, though elided, place of hypnosis within psychoanalysis (1993, 39). Hypnotism, as well as suggestion, sympathy, mimesis and contagion, were prevalent terms and much discussed in the latter part of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. The early practice of Franz Mesmer and James Braid highlighted both a susceptibility to influence and a form of absence from self which became defining features of nineteenth century theories of “crowd” psychology. Glossing Gustave Le Bon’s vision of the status of hypnosis within crowd behaviour, Borch-Jacobsen writes that “the other’s discourse might be said to function in him without him (and yet it is ‘he’), and irresistibly.” Freud considered hypnotism in some detail in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, whilst attempting to understand the bonds which permit groups to cohere (1921). Wary of the circularity of Le Bon’s emphasis on hypnotic suggestion, Freud – true to form – deigns to derive the social tie from the libido. The text’s main thesis is simple – the cohesion of the group is guaranteed by the member’s love of the same object, the leader, who they place in the position of their ego ideal: “*a primary group [...] is a number of individuals who have put one and the same object in the place of their ego ideal and have consequently identified themselves with one another in their ego*” (1921, 116). The possibility of suggestion depends, for Freud, on this pre-existing libidinal tie; subjects allow themselves to be bonded by suggestion out of love for the leader.

However, as Borch-Jacobsen demonstrates, Freud’s accounting for the social, or emotional, tie in terms of libido encounters problems. In instances of panic, for example, the love tie to the leader disappears, but the group remain bound together by the very panic itself. Borch-Jacobsen suggests that the spreading affect of panic is based on a sympathetic communication from ego to ego, an “affective contagion” in the course of which the ego is

overflowed by the affects of another in a “mimetic, contagious, epidemic narcissism” (1989, 166–7). Freud had tried to explain mimetic relations through the libido, but mimetic relations appear in states of panic, which are not libidinous. “The sympathetic (suggestive, imitative) bond,” Borch-Jacobsen writes, “is precisely what *remains* when the libidinal element has been removed from the crowd.” Borch-Jacobsen thus argues that human psychology is characterized by a radical suggestibility, unconsciousness and emotional malleability to which hypnotism attests. Hypnosis is itself a regression to an earlier psychological state, and even Freud concurs: “hypnosis has something positively uncanny about it; but the characteristic of uncanniness suggests something old and familiar that has undergone repression” (1921, 125). Borch-Jacobsen’s intention is to move an understanding of the “emotional tie” back in time to a period predating the oedipal scenario and its resolution, using hypnosis as a model. Hypnosis, he states, is a regression; but a regression to what exactly? To the child’s earliest bond with her mother, “a union more ancient than any individuation” (Borch-Jacobsen 1989, 141). Freud’s desire to secure the relevance of the oedipal scenario to the social tie at all costs explains his refusal to face the mother (1989, 181).

Borch-Jacobsen’s argument depends on a particular interpretation of primary identification. In *The Ego and the Id*, Freud writes that “at the very beginning, in the individual’s primitive oral stage, object-cathexis and identification are no doubt indistinguishable from each other” (1923b, 29), however, in a posthumously published note, “Findings, Ideas, Problems,” dating from 1938, he suggests that the earliest object relation is expressed in terms of an identification, “I am the object.” Having the object is a later development of this. Freud gives the example of the breast, firstly the child believes “I am the breast,” “the breast is a part of me,” only later does this become “I have it,” that is, “I am not it” (1938, 299). Here primary identification represents a mode of relation with the mother, rather than the father, “before the differentiation of ego and *alter ego*” (Laplanche and Pontalis 1988, 336). In the twilight of his career Freud became increasingly aware of his own



lateness in realizing the implications of the early relationship between mother and child.

“Everything in the sphere of this first attachment to the mother seemed to me so difficult to grasp in analysis – so grey with age and shadowy and almost impossible to revivify – that it was as if it had succumbed to an especially inexorable repression” he famously wrote (1931, 226). However, he personally remained committed to the centrality of the oedipal scheme. Borch-Jacobsen, however, judges this relationship constitutive not only of the social tie, but of subjectivity itself. The ego takes shape in relation to the mother through a mode of hypnotic rapport and receptivity wherein self and other merge.

The “regression” so commonly associated with mass culture – and pervasive within the World State – is consistently cast in terms of a form of merger which echoes a pre-egoic state. The description of cinema as enacting a form of hypnosis refers back to such a relation, conjuring the experience as a mode of suggestion or contagion, and foregrounding, once again, a relationship between this symbol of mass culture and early experience with the mother. I will come in just a moment to the purchase of such thinking within theories of cinema, but for now I want to return to Huxley and *Brave New World*. In the World State, children are exposed to processes of sleep-teaching that plant notions, in the form of suggestions, which prove excellent in forming the mind. Indeed, “the child’s mind *is* these suggestions, and the sum of the suggestions *is* the child’s mind” (Huxley 1994, 25). The child takes on and identifies with the ideas which are suggested in the hypnopaedic process; in fact, the mind itself, Huxley claims, is formed through identification with those very ideas, the taking of them for one’s own. Huxley suggests that the mind is formed through identification with an other on the basis of non-differentiation. The problem, in the World State, is that this situation is never surpassed.

The point might also be extended, and brought back to the cinema, with reference to “the feelies,” the World State’s own version of the cinema which offers up images and

experiences both “dazzling and incomparably more solid-looking than they would have seemed in actual flesh and blood” (151). Equally viscerally, the feelies feature metal knobs attached to the arms of the viewer’s chair capable of generating “feely effects,” or sensual titillation. When the actors on the screen kiss, for example, “the facial erogenous zones of the six thousand spectators in the Alhambra tingled with almost galvanic pleasure” (152). The Alhambra was, incidentally, a popular theatre and music hall located in Leicester Square, completed in 1854 and demolished in 1936 to make way for the Odeon cinema which still occupies the site. Films had, in fact, been shown there on occasion since the latter years of the nineteenth century, which adds a “reality-effect” to Huxley’s negative utopia. To return to the experience which Huxley describes, Frost is right to note its visceral quality and thus Huxley’s affinity with theories and theorists who emphasize the haptic quality of both vision and cinematic experience (2006, 444).<sup>49</sup> As she also notes, hypnosis affects both the mind and the body. What I want to focus on, however, is the way in which Huxley’s feelies manifest and literalize identity in terms of a profound otherness.

The fundamentally multi-sensory nature of the experience of the feelies casts cinematic experience in terms of merger. When the stars on the big screen kiss, the spectators are able to feel the sensation as if it were their own. To go back to Borch-Jacobsen’s description of hypnosis, the idea “they are kissing” becomes “I am kissing”; the spectator comes into the place of the other and identifies with them in an act of mimesis or merger. In addition to the visceral sensation which the feely is able to produce in its audience, it is accompanied by a synchronized scent organ, a contraption which pumps out symphonies of smell intended to complement the depicted scene. During the kissing scene, for example, the scent organ “breathed pure musk” (Huxley 1994, 152). Whilst this is a stage beyond mimesis or suggestion

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<sup>49</sup> As Frost suggests, Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer as early exponents, and Miriam Hansen, Jonathan Crary, Tom Gunning and Ben Singer offer more recent examples. For a survey of work on haptic vision and visuality see Elliott (2011).

– we assume that particles are actually floating towards the audience – it captures perfectly an association of cinema with regression and merger. Of smell, Adorno and Horkheimer write:

In the ambiguous partialities of the sense of smell the old nostalgia for what is lower lives on, the longing for immediate union with surrounding nature, with earth and slime. Of all the senses the act of smelling, which is attracted without objectifying, reveals most sensuously the urge to lose oneself in identification with the Other. That is why smell, as both the perception and the perceived – which are one in the act of olfaction – is more expressive than other senses. When we see we remain who we are, when we smell we are absorbed entirely. ([1947] 2002, 151)

Adorno and Horkheimer cast smell as a form of merger or pre-differentiation between self and other. The presence of the scent organ in the cinema, then, serves to reiterate a vision of cinematic experience in terms of a deeply sought-after mode of de-differentiation, mimesis and self-absence.

There are (at least) two things which need to be clarified here. Firstly, Huxley and Leavis's resistance to cinema might be viewed as a refusal of what the act of cinema spectatorship reveals about subjectivity and subjective constitution. Their resistance to cinema, premised on notions of hypnotic identification and merger, is arguably a resistance to something more fundamental, namely the maternal origin of the social tie and relationship itself. Huxley and Leavis resist cinema "in the name of the father," so to speak, as a means of disavowing the role of the maternal in structuring subjectivity and experience. Understood to offer an experience of primary identification linked to the maternal, cinema places the idea of a subject constituted through an identification with paternal authority in question. At the same time, in demonstrating the persistence of forms of primary identification in adult life, cinema foregrounds the radical alterity and suggestibility of the subject in their relation with the world.

Secondly, Adorno and Horkheimer's reference to an "urge" to achieve de-differentiation begins to address the question of the specific attraction of the cinema itself. Something like a need to repeat as experience of merger was clearly apparent to Freud. In

*Civilization and its Discontents*, we may recall, he suggests that a “primary ego-feeling” of “limitlessness and of a bond with the universe,” the “oceanic” feeling identified by his correspondent Romain Rolland, may coexist “side by side with the narrower and more sharply demarcated ego-feeling of maturity” (1930, 68). Rolland identifies that feeling as the source of religious sentiments, claiming it provides the “source of the religious energy which is seized upon by the various Churches and religious systems.” Religions, he claims, channel the persistence of this feeling into adult life to their own ends, but do they also, perhaps, offer an opportunity to experience it afresh? Huxley seems to suggest that they might. The Solidarity Service which has come to replace religion in the World State involves an experience of communal *soma*-taking coupled with Solidarity Hymns. The twelve members of the group are assembled “ready to be made one, waiting to come together, to be fused, to lose their twelve separate identities in a larger being.” Each member, in downing their *soma* tablets, drinks “to my annihilation,” under the effects of the drug and the music, “even Bernard felt himself a little melted” (Huxley 1994, 72–3). Religion, as Freud asserts, is modelled on an infantile need for care and protection, and even he admits that the mother is the child’s first protector (1927, 24). With the demise of religion over the course of modernity, the future of its illusion may be argued to reside, at least in part, in the mass technologies of which cinema is the emblematic instance, which might in turn go some way towards accounting for its appeal.

Theorists of spectatorship, even those who lean heavily on the Oedipus complex in explaining the draw of cinema, have noted the pertinence of such experience in thinking cinema’s appeal. Beginning his seminal intervention into the question of spectatorship, “The Imaginary Signifier,” written in 1974, Christian Metz makes a reference to the “definitive imprint of a stage *before* the Oedipus complex” in cinematic experience, and notes the “subterranean persistence of the exclusive relation to the mother,” an unelaborated yet tantalizing allusion to an abiding, and important, idea (1982, 4). Similarly, Jean-Louis Baudry describes the attraction of the cinema as a “return towards a relative narcissism, and even

more towards a mode of relating to reality which could be defined as enveloping and in which the separation between one's own body and the exterior world is not well defined" (1976, 119). In fact, he goes on to reiterate that what he wants to describe is a "more archaic mode of identification, which has to do with the lack of differentiation between the subject and his environment," a "model which we find in the baby/breast relationship" and one which is not identical with the "specular regime of the ego" which both Baudry and Metz had identified as central to the pleasures and dangers of cinematic spectatorship (Baudry 1976, 120).<sup>50</sup>

In a more sustained fashion, Gaylyn Studlar has argued that the lure of cinema be understood precisely in terms of the opportunity which it offers for an experience of de-differentiation. Studlar writes, quoting Margaret Mahler, that:

The spectatorial position duplicates the infant's passive, dependent position. The viewer [...] adopts the 'formless body image of the infant' and the feeling of animistic omnipotence that accompanies the infant's sense of oneness with the mother. Omnipotence is not experienced as the power of the separate self but as the self fused with the environment in symbiotic attachment. Speaking within the framework of her study of symbiosis, Mahler theorizes that 'the essential feature of symbiosis is hallucinatory or delusional somatopsychic *omnipotent* fusion with the representation of the mother and, in particular, the delusion of a common boundary between the two physically separate individuals.' (1988, 187)

The symbiosis or fusion which Mahler describes involves a crucial reference to hallucination or delusion; self and other merge in a moment of illusory unity. Here lies one of the sources of the status of the cinema as both relief and threat. Richard Rushton argues that "cinema is a matter of placing oneself where one is not, of becoming someone or something one is not. That is, cinema [...] offers the possibility of becoming other than what one is, of being someone (or something) else" (2009, 51). This possibility "throws down a quite extraordinary and risky challenge: that we lose control of ourselves, undo ourselves, forget ourselves while in front of the cinema screen" (53). To let go of conscious control, to allow ourselves to be held and overtaken by what we see seems a legitimate description of the attraction of watching films, but this attraction is concurrently the danger: what forms of influence might work through us

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<sup>50</sup> The screen/mirror analogy is well-known and made by Baudry (1974) and Metz (1982).

in such a state? The experience of cinema, viewed as a form of hypnotic merger, a return to a maternal relation, is both dangerous and useful, a threat and a resource.

In a recent unpublished paper entitled “Film as a Good Mother,” Emily Cooper thinks about the experience of film in terms of illusion. Cooper renders film the “good mother”; “far from creating the film ourselves,” she writes, “the joy of film is to be presented with a meaningful world which has all been created for us,” this is how “film holds us [...] by inviting us to regress to an infantile state whilst firmly containing us” (cited in Sabbadini 2011, 23).

Citing Cooper, Andrea Sabbadini writes that:

Cooper relates Winnicott’s concept of *unintegration* [...] to the experience of watching a movie, ‘which invites you to feel a one-ness or fusion with the emotional force of the film [...] to feel the feelings of the film as though they were your own.’ As to narrative film, Cooper states that its primary task ‘is to feed us information at the pace at which we can digest it, and at precisely the moment we desire it [...] The magic of timing in film is crucial.’ This she links to the baby’s legitimate experience of omnipotence, whereby ‘the breast is created by the infant over and over again [and] the mother places the actual breast just there where the infant is ready to create and at the right moment.’ (2011, 24)

Cooper is concerned with describing film in terms of a regressive experience which makes possible moments of illusion, wherein the viewer can encounter something like a mode of primary identification. Faced with the cinema, she claims, we take its images for our own in an act of looking which approaches a form of consolation. Matt Hills suggests that the theoretical perspective Cooper adopts is one which construes entertainment in terms of an available order, in which narrative movement becomes a way for the viewer to repair the damage done to her by her own disorder, lack of power and everyday failure (2013, 108). Faced with the realities of modern life, we seek solace in the cinema, where at least we may be held and our anxieties contained.

In linking cinema with a period of illusory merger with the mother, Cooper advances a positive critique of the value of cinematic experience as a mode of escape and restoration. Cooper describes narrative film as feeding its audience “at precisely the moment we desire it,”

a comment which recalls the mode of maternal care provided in the World State, and which raises anxieties about speed and availability which have long dogged theories of cinema. Low, for instance, writes that “it is the *method* of the moving picture which brings about so vividly the sense of wish-fulfilment as by magic [...] the film’s simplifications and problem-solving creates the fantasy that the spectator’s wishes are or can be, fulfilled, and this helps to maintain his omnipotence and narcissism, leading to a regressive attitude” ([1927] 1998, 248–9). Attentive to the particular quality of cinematic regression, Low defines it in terms of *how* the cinema shows, as much as *what* it shows. The cinema, she claims, trades in resolution and ease whereas “real life is complex, unselective, often baffling to our curiosity and regardless of our desires.” Low is concerned by the effects of this functioning: “can we be satisfied that the cinema is a method of promoting mind growth rather than one of mechanizing mentality?” (249–50).

The critique of the culture industry, as J. M. Bernstein notes, is articulated from a perspective concerned with “its relation to the possibility for social transformation” (1991, 2). The regression that the culture industry manufactures is problematic because it offers an experience antithetical to critical thought and subjective disillusionment. As Adorno and Horkheimer put it, with clear despair and vitriol: “to be entertained means to be in agreement [...] Amusement always means putting things out of mind, forgetting suffering, even when it is on display. At its root it is powerlessness. It is indeed escape, but not, as it claims, escape from a bad reality but from the last thought of resisting that reality” (2002, 116). The culture industry, basically, produces as a subject a Winnicottian baby who never grows up, and it is this failure to pass out of the stage of illusion and into a state of disillusion which commentators hold to be the greatest threat.

In *Brave New World* the form of life is built on the premise that “there’s no self-denial” (Huxley 1994, 216). Whilst this includes sexual licence, it also refers to the way in which the

World State keeps its citizens in a state somewhat like Cooper's cinema goer, fed when they want it, even before they know they want it. Work is "light" and "childishly simple. No strain on the mind or muscles. Seven and a half hours of mild, unexhausting labour, and then the *soma* ration and the games and unrestricted copulation and the feelies" (204). Yet "mummy's cinema" might not be so clearly defined. "Regression will cease when the camera acquires a personality," wrote L. Saalschutz in *Close Up* in 1929 (1998, 260). There is an echo of maternal deadadaptation here, the idea that the mother moves out of the state of primary maternal preoccupation and begins to resume her normal life (D. W. Winnicott [1960] 1990e, 50). In short, her subjectivity, her personality, re-emerges in her relationship with her child. This evokes a cinema capable of disillusioning its audience, and, by implication, an understanding of "maturity" in terms of "maternity." Sabbadini describes instances when "spectators may be made conscious of the existence of the camera [...] drawn, as it were, "behind" the film by a filmmaker's deliberate self-reflective gesture." He continues: "the authorial voice sometimes makes itself audible through a deliberately emphatic use of certain filming techniques [...]. This is perhaps much as the growing baby renouncing his primary narcissism eventually realizes that there is a real person behind the breast" (2011, 24–5). Sabbadini describes the possibilities of an auteur or avant-garde cinema in terms of the capacity to facilitate a form of maturity, to actualize the disillusionment which commercial cinema is generally conceived to refuse. Hills has argued that such films "present audiences with an "excessively enigmatic," and so disillusioning, diegetic world" (2013, 118), enacting a mode of disillusionment which commercial cinema is traditionally considered to inhibit.

In many ways, such thinking about the possibilities contained in cinematic experience repeats longstanding attitudes towards, and judgements of, aesthetic value. We are back with Huxley and the "old pleasures" which are so much better than the "new pleasures"; those which demand "intelligence and personal initiative," rather than providing what Huxley terms "ready-made distractions" and Adorno and Horkheimer "ready-made clichés" (2002, 96).



There is an acceptance here of a model wherein tension, ambiguity and irresolution, as well as the experiences of frustration or difficulty, are assigned more value than the restorative merger, or hypnosis, judged to be characteristic of the productions of the culture industry. Thinking some of this through psychoanalysis provides a way to understand what is at stake in these debates, that what is feared when mass culture is conceived as a particular kind of mother is the absence of the achievement of the critical capacity initiated by the experience of deadaptation.

*Brave New World* invests in the danger of, and need to renounce, illusion, charting a form of technological totalitarianism which works by (re)instating the womb; all experiences of illusion serve coercive ends by foreclosing the possibility of maturity. However, despite what many consider to be the novel's incontestable prescience, Adorno criticises Huxley for mourning the effects of a utopia which is yet to be achieved and which cannot be achieved whilst wretchedness persists in the world: "full of fictitious concern for the calamity that a realized utopia could inflict on mankind, he refuses to take note of the real as a far more urgent calamity that prevents the utopia from being realized. It is idle to bemoan what will become of men when hunger and distress have disappeared from the world" (1982, 116). Huxley's presentation of John demonstrates his allegiance to a certain way of thinking about experience, what Adorno terms the "cult of suffering" (107). The kind of happiness on offer in the World State is contrasted with John's belief in the need for pain and suffering: "'what you need,' the Savage went on, 'is something *with* tears for a change. Nothing costs enough here'" (Huxley 1994, 218). Carey suggests that Huxley is committed to the idea that without suffering, life would be meaningless; that the human spirit is dependent on an experience of pain which is necessary in order for it to prove itself (1992, 88), whilst Adorno laments Huxley's seeming investment in the notion that "the happiness produced by the transgression of taboos could ever legitimate the taboo" (1982, 104).

We can, perhaps, distinguish between notions of “suffering” and suggest that, whilst John might seem to legitimate the “need” for suffering, what *Brave New World* fears is the absence of all frustration and its consequences. The reality, in our own world however, of real wretchedness nuances how we might think about the “pleasures” available through the culture industry. Most of us have experienced the frustrations necessary to achieve a sense of reality and self and, within this context, the experience of illusion may be useful. An estimation of the relief which cinema affords its audiences is detectable across the twentieth century. Whilst Lou Andreas-Salomé appears self-conscious about her enjoyment of cinema – “I always have to laugh at this activity in which we indulge” – she also remains convinced that “only the film is in itself able to provide some faint trace of artistic experience for both the workman in the stultifying monotony of his daily work and the intellectual worker bound to his vocational or mental treadmill” (1964, 101). Dorothy Richardson describes those “condemned, with no prospect of change to a living death [...] lifted for a while into a sort of life” by the experience of cinema ([1928] 1998, 181). Richardson was writing two years before the introduction into Hollywood filmmaking of the Motion Picture Code of 1930, which set out the task of entertainment to “recreate and rebuild human beings exhausted with the realities of living” (cited in Powdermaker 1950, 57). In offering the opportunity for moments of illusion, the cinema proffers an experience of “limited transcendence” (Silverstone 1994, 19).

The “new pleasures” of the culture industry are a response to, and respite from, the strain of industrial modernity. We should remember Marx’s judgement of that earlier institution, religion, which may be illusory, but “is a protest against real wretchedness” (cited in Sinfield 2004, 33). The promise of escape from the experience of industrial modernity – its speed and shock, its incessant repetitiveness – may be one of cinema’s defining lures. Susan Buck-Morss lists the qualities which define the experience of modern life – shattered nerves, nervous breakdown, going to pieces, fragmentation of the psyche; the result of an “excess of stimulation” and the “incapacity to react to the same” (1992, 19). These terms bear an

uncanny resemblance to Winnicott's description of the psychic effects of premature maternal failure; once again, modernity is characterized as an insufficient "holding" environment. As Buck-Morss goes on to suggest, this situation, which is brought about by the ever-faster development of technology, is treated through the production, over the course of the nineteenth century, of "phantasmagoria" which "immersed" those who encountered them in "a total environment." The relevance of this articulation to understanding the value of phantasmagoria – and what is cinema if not this? – in maternal terms is clear. The "new pleasures" in short, offer a necessary "technique for living," a way to cope with the pressures and disappointments of the world by returning to a state of illusory omnipotence and merger with an object that holds and contains. This, however, is double-edged. The "extended childhood" offered by the new pleasures is prepared for adults so that "they might function in all the more 'adult' a fashion" in their everyday life (Adorno 1991, 54).

More than this, however, is at stake; this discussion raises fundamental questions about the basis of the social tie and the possibility of achieving individuality. The idea that mass forms offer an experience that is in some sense "hypnotic" begins to underwrite the role of mimesis and affect more broadly in the development of subjectivity; undermining the oedipal explanation of the social tie and the constitution of reflexive subjectivity. In addition to this, the discussion of disillusionment casts the attainment of "maturity" in relation to the specific nature of maternal care. The distinction may not necessarily be between a paternal "culture" and a maternal "nature," but between functions of illusion and disillusion which both possess a maternal connection.

Through *Brave New World*, Huxley provides a way to reflect on the gendering which takes place in relation to "culture," in both its broad and narrow definitions. For when, near the end of the novel, he is faced with the realities of the World State, John is beyond consolation – "it's too easy," he claims. However, it is not the paternal which comes to mind:

“he was suddenly silent, thinking of his mother” (1994, 218). In that space between technology and mother, Huxley’s novel opens the way to interrogate the contours of the gendering of culture and experience, and to see the work of illusion and disillusion in decidedly maternal terms.

## Chapter Four

Therapeutic Reflections: Psychoanalysis and *In Treatment*

Even though mental health colleagues would frown upon Dr Weston's comportment, I know of numerous individuals who have become attracted to psychotherapy (in the widest sense of the term), in part as a direct result of watching the programme with great interest. During a first consultation with a prospective patient, I asked whether this person had ever had any previous experience of therapy. To my surprise, the new patient replied: "No, but I've watched *In Treatment*. Does that count?" (Kahr 2011, 1053)

Writing in the *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* of the acclaimed television series, *In Treatment* (2008-), Brett Kahr recounts an incident that, catching him by surprise, also throws the question of the relationship between culture and therapy into particularly sharp relief. *In Treatment* stages the individual psychotherapy sessions of Dr Paul Weston (Gabriel Byrne). It's about therapy – it presents therapy as entertainment – so the question is apt. However, the fact that the show is entertainment, and that it articulates the therapeutic in relation to *mass* media, places the viewer's individual encounter in relation to a more collective experience. How might watching a television series constitute an experience akin to therapy, and might that "therapeutic function" work on both an individual and a collective level? Additionally, how does the show contribute to thinking the relationship between therapy, the social and mass technologies of the image? *In Treatment* does more than explore scenes of personal suffering; it brings the political – the national and international – into both the consulting room and the living rooms of its audience.

"The rise of the therapeutic," writes Barry Richards, "is occurring in all social spheres, from the intimate to the international" (2007, 5). Richards is describing a change in "the social scripts, lenses and vocabularies through which people understand themselves and their lives" (B. Richards and Brown 2011, 19); a change about which Richards is tentatively positive – unlike Frank Furedi (2004) – and of which *In Treatment* is clearly emblematic. In June 2012, the executive producer of the show, Hagai Levi, took part in a Mosse Lecture at Humboldt

University in Berlin with Elisabeth Bronfen entitled “Is Television Series the New Psychological Treatment?” (Levi and Bronfen 2012). Levi finds it strange that so many countries, particularly those of Eastern Europe which lack a strong therapeutic tradition, have chosen to remake the show.<sup>51</sup> Noting the involvement of HBO – the show’s producer in the USA – in these local remakes, Levi theorizes the appeal in terms of a mutual therapeutic enthusiasm. In disseminating the show, HBO enacts what he terms a “benevolent imperialism” premised on the perceived rights of Eastern Europeans to therapy. Rather than being itself the “psychological treatment” to which the lecture title refers, for Levi, the series is a kind of advert for the therapeutic, a tool in the (benevolent imperial) dissemination of the ethos of therapy itself. Above all, Levi worries that screening psychotherapy might not be a good thing, that this vision of the therapeutic will lead Eastern Europeans into an obsession with happiness, well-being and narcissism. Levi is not sure if the “therapeutic ethos” is such a good idea after all.

Kahr also shows ambivalence. He views the programme as a significant cultural event because it has generated an interest in psychoanalysis beyond the consulting room. Both the Israeli original and the HBO remake have garnered considerable public and critical attention, as well as receiving substantial industry recognition. In Israel, the original incited what Noa Tishby (the LA-based actress who brought the show to the attention of producers in the USA) describes as “complete addiction” (Rochlin 2008). Gabriel Byrne won a Golden Globe for his performance, and the series has garnered what Gilbert describes as “a trunk-load of Emmy and Golden Globe awards and nominations” (2009). Kahr is not surprised by the possibility that someone might be prompted to seek out psychotherapy as a consequence of watching this particular programme. He has known “of numerous individuals” for whom this has been the

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<sup>51</sup> The series was originally an Israeli production named *Be’Tipul*, to which HBO bought the US rights, it has been taken up by major television buyers around the world, airing in over seventy countries, and has been remade for local markets in places including Holland, Serbia, Italy, Russia, Slovenia, Argentina, Romania, the Czech Republic, Moldova and Slovakia.

case. What troubles Kahr is how to read and respond to the situation: “should we be worried [...] or should we celebrate the fact that this programme has begun to generate an interest in the confidential and unpublicized work that we do in our cloistered cabinets?” (2011, 1053).

Unpublicized, confidential, cloistered. Anxiety about the ways in which the series misrepresents psychoanalysis points up a desire to police the border between inside and outside the consulting room. Dr Paul Weston – the show’s protagonist – sometimes behaves badly. He lashes out, physically attacking a patient who taunts him with hurtful information about his wife and daughter. He declares his sexual interest in an attractive doctor who regularly recounts her own fantasies about and feelings for him, inexcusable (though not exactly unheard of) behaviour for a therapist. The depiction of a therapist acting in such a way is, at least in part, what troubles Kahr:

One cannot help but wonder whether Weston’s unsanctionable conduct exerts any influence on current public perceptions of those who practise the “talking therapies.” After all, what would a prospective patient think about psychotherapy or psychoanalysis after watching an episode of *In Treatment*? Perhaps a sensible person would dismiss Weston as simply a dramatic construction, while a cautious person might stay away from mental health professionals altogether; and a masochistic person might, perhaps, sign up immediately! (2011, 1052)

The depiction of psychotherapy in the show might lead people to make judgements about the nature of psychotherapy itself, affecting its reputation, damaging its “public face” (1055). Worse still, it might attract the wrong kind of patient, one in search of an abusive relationship. These anxieties are in fact exacerbated by the realism of the series, “the psychotherapy sessions conducted by Weston seem so very life-like that the line between clinical truth and dramatic embellishment becomes very blurred indeed” (1054).

Kahr is also concerned about the “muddling” which takes place in the show between psychoanalysis and psychotherapy. Whilst Weston has read the works of Bollas, studied at “the Institute,” and uses terms like “transference” and “projection,” as Kahr notes, he doesn’t practise “classical Freudian psychoanalysis” (1054). His patients face him across a low coffee

table and engage in forms of dialogue in which Weston reveals details of his own life – his dream material, the approximate value of his house – which are at odds with classic analytic norms, if not, perhaps, with more recent evolutions in psychoanalytic practice.<sup>52</sup> He seems, rather, to be a psychotherapist who employs psychodynamic concepts and methods. However, as Kahr puts it, “in the mind of the public, psychiatrists, counsellors, psychologists, social workers, psychotherapists, and psychoanalysts all become the proverbial ‘shrink’” (1055). Such blurring makes it difficult to maintain control of what is inside and outside at all.

Kahr’s reference to “cloistered cabinets” evokes analysis as a closed space; an image I have been working pretty hard to destabilize. Indeed, it is somewhat surprising to read Kahr suggest that the show has “begun” to raise interest in what goes on in the “cloistered cabinets” of the psychoanalyst – as if psychoanalysis had not before been in the public eye – and as if those cabinets are not always already involved with what goes on “outside.” In a telling, if literal, example, Levi notes a significant impact of the original, *Be’Tipul*, on therapy in Israel: “in the series, patients paid 400 shekels – approximately \$100 – which is quite high in Israel, so automatically, almost every therapist raised his rate” (Wood 2009). *In Treatment* reflects analysis, and analysis – it seems – reflects, and reflects on, *In Treatment*. Kahr both recognizes and doesn’t want to recognize the therapeutic as a space contested across, and beyond, the walls of the consulting room.

Reflection, recognition. These are going to be key terms. In what follows, I argue that *In Treatment* offers a series of close-ups: it looks at the lives of its characters, but it also invites a look at psychoanalysis, and its place in public life. The show represents a complex engagement with the idea that cultural forms and objects – specifically television media – might function as sites of therapeutic reflection and recognition. However, there is another narrative, working more obliquely, concerning the risks of recognition and the politics of the

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<sup>52</sup> Many analysts offer their patients the choice between the couch and a face-to-face encounter, and the significance of countertransference, and countertransference interpretations, has long been noted.



image. Offering up an “environment of images” (Burgin 2004, 65), *In Treatment* prompts reflection on the environment of images of which it is a part. It thus undermines another opposition: “the opposition by means of which politics is pitted against psychoanalysis: the opposition between public and private space (the people versus analytic space) and between the social and the psychic” (Rose 1993, 90).

## Ψ

Kenneth Wright uses reflection as a trope to theorize aesthetic experience in therapeutic terms, particularly the experience of art (2009). Though Wright finds resonances of mirroring and reflection in Bion’s work on projective identification and the maternal function of containment (the process through which the  $\beta$ -elements of raw experience are processed through the mother’s  $\alpha$ -function), he finds Bion unable – or unwilling – to theorize the primary mirroring relation in terms of the mother’s active work of seeking out, through “imaginative identification,” a sense of the child’s experience (Bion [1959] 1988a; Bion [1962] 1988b; Wright 2009, 82). Wright claims that Winnicott’s paper on the “Mirror-role of Mother and Family” “breaks new ground” in psychoanalytic theorizing, because it gives forms of non-verbal – and non-corporeal – communication a central position in emotional development (D. W. Winnicott 1991b, 111–8; Wright 2009, 6). Wright argues that Winnicott offers a productive addition to a psychoanalytic theory of reflection because he draws attention to the importance of maternal reflection for both the development of the self and of symbolization.

“Psychotherapy,” Winnicott writes in that paper (first published in 1967), “is not making clever and apt interpretations; by and large it is a long-term giving the patient back what the patient brings. It is a complex derivative of the face which reflects what is there to be seen” (1991b, 117). The face to which Winnicott refers belongs to the mother of the child, and Winnicott draws attention to its significance during the early stages of development. Though prompted to write on the mirror-role by Lacan’s famous “*stade du miroir*” paper ([1949] 2001),

Winnicott is clear: “Lacan does not think of the mirror in terms of the mother’s face in the way that I wish to do here” (1991b, 111). Visual metaphors pervade Lacanian theory – the mirror stage and the gaze are key ideas – pointing to a preoccupation with the visual and its role in the formation of subjectivity. For Lacan, the self founded by the mirror, though it will “always remain irreducible for the individual alone,” is a “mirage,” a depthless surface definitive of the experience of modern subjectivity ([1949] 2001, 2). Identifying with an image initiates a process of interpellation through which subjectivity takes shape, but this is a process of alienation and subjection. Lacan is highly concerned, as Armstrong puts it, with “an image left by the mirror” (2000, 11).

This is a far cry from the mirror-role Winnicott envisages for mother, and later family, in which the beneficent gaze of the mother offers the child a subjective, empathetic reflection through which the “true self” can evolve. Unlike Lacan, he sets out to foreground the vital importance of reflection in the constitution of a non-pathological self.<sup>53</sup> “What does the baby see when he or she looks at the mother’s face?” he writes, “I am suggesting that, ordinarily, what the baby sees is himself or herself. In other words, the mother is looking at the baby and *what she looks like is related to what she sees there*. All this is too easily taken for granted” (1991b, 112). The mother reflects the child’s expressions and thus the child comes to learn that it exists, and how it feels, through reflection, glosses Phillips (1988, 128). As Victor Burgin puts it, the child’s self can only “take place” as a projection of the mother’s regard (2004, 48), the child’s sense of self rests precariously on the mother’s look. On Winnicott’s analysis, the infant finds herself through the structuring form of the reflective maternal look, but this is only the case if the mother is able to provide such forms of reflection; the treatment which the child receives is a vital part of the form which the infant’s self takes on, or takes in.

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<sup>53</sup> Read as a description of universal identity constitution, Lacan’s investment in narcissism pathologizes normality. However, as I mentioned in chapter two, read in more historical terms, it pathologizes modernity. For comparisons of Lacan and Winnicott’s approaches to the mirror – and to the self formed in relation to it – see Rustin (1991, 185–6), Rudnytsky (1991, 80), Hirsch (1997, 155–8), Burgin (2004, 46–9), Lebeau (2009) and Coulson (2013).

Teresa Brennan suggests that a notion of “living attention” might evoke what the successful mother is able to give her child, a way of thinking which captures the vital importance of their exchange. As Brennan puts it, “there is a difference between an open, receptive vision and the gaze by which one projects” (2004, 169). When living attention is absent, the self may develop in a false – or fictional – direction, internalizing the mother’s own regard, mood, or rigidity as constituent of the self. When the mirror is neither open nor receptive, Winnicott writes, the child can “grow up puzzled about mirrors and what the mirror has to offer,” they may “not look except to perceive, as a defence” (1991b, 113). As Lebeau suggests, “the mother’s being there, being present, is not in itself enough. The baby can lose himself *in* the mother’s face; the mother’s face, *as face*, can intrude on the infant by failing to reflect him” (2009, 38).

Lacan does not distinguish between kinds of reflection. In one sense, the scheme presented in “le stade du miroir” always speaks about the failure of reflection just described. The image the infant sees in the mirror is an objectification of the self; a promise of an ideal self that Lacan believes will haunt the subject with fantasies of perfection from then on. Although Lacan believes the super-ego comes into being when the child internalizes the paternal law and enters the Symbolic realm of language, the ego-ideal precipitated through the look in the mirror could seem like a proto-super-ego, inaugurating both identity and compliance to ideas of coherence and mastery. For Lacan, introjection is taking place from the time the child comes to regard its image in the mirror. In contrast to Lacan, for Wright, a pathologically false self emerges if the child is confronted by the “Other’s gaze” too early, resulting in a feeling of dislocation from the self (1991, 36). For Wright, in ideal development, the child would have time to nurture a sense of self before finally – and necessarily – being confronted by the judging and objectifying parental look. This look introduces the idea of a bad self that is disapproved of by a parent who no longer looks with the child, but at them (26-7). At this juncture, the child becomes aware of herself as an object, introjecting an external

image formed from the other's view. Whether we accept Wright's temporal scheme or not, he usefully articulates the role of the maternal look in both the development of the self and the process of subjectivization. The mother's look is always a risk, both a threat and a resource.

With regard to the developmental status of reflection, Stern extends Winnicott's thinking beyond the visual to all sensory modalities, but their perspectives are linked by a sense that the self coalesces through reflective or feedback processes between mother and child which allow the child to gain a sense of her experience. Stern defines such forms of maternal "attunement" as the "recasting [...] of an affective state," a form of processing where the mother does not repeat the infant's emotional state, but responds to it (1985, 161). Wright summarizes the situation: "the mother portrays the "shape," or essence of the infant's affective state, as she experiences it, within the intuitively created form that she creates for her baby. This gives the baby the possibility of seeing his own subjective state portrayed within the "shape," or "objective" pattern that the mother provides" (2009, 7). For Wright, Stern's work offers a way of understanding how "*maternal response*, through internalization, could become the rudiments of *mental structure* in the infant." He is quick to point out that the child's ability to perceive a link between these maternal patterns and his own psycho-somatic feeling states will develop in gradual and complex ways, but he does suggest that, prior to this awareness, the child "is likely to *feel* a connection with the mother's forms by means of *resonance*" (7). "Resonance" is "the felt recognition of vital resemblances [...] a feeling of affinity between related forms"; a description which recalls Bollas' understanding of aesthetic experience. Drawing on the work of Susanne Langer, however, Wright wants to suggest that aesthetic experience contains a potential for more than the "nostalgic" repetition of forms of maternal handling; "the work of art is a complex symbolic rendering of emotional life in a form that enables *apprehension of its being* rather than *comprehension of its meaning*" (8). If art is imagined to offer a representation of emotional life, then its function is coextensive with that of the reflective, or attuned, mother. Art does not only repeat, it offers the possibility of

change by providing forms of emotional experience that have been, until the moment of this encounter, unavailable. In this way, art is considered capable of “providing containing forms for unrealized elements of [...] emotional life” (9); rendered able to reflect emotional experience in ways that facilitate a sense of being. In his analogy between the mirror-role of the mother and the function of psychotherapy itself, Winnicott suggests that therapy has the capacity to alter self-experience by offering the patient previously unavailable forms of reflection. When considered to function in terms of reflection or resonance, aesthetic experience approaches a form of psychotherapy, functioning to give back to the patient what the patient brings, facilitating a process of metabolization.

The idea of psychoanalysis as a process of reflection – through which the patient may come to recognize, and “realize” herself – operates on both metaphorical and literal planes. On the one hand, the idea denotes a change in therapeutic technique. Freud famously described the function of the psychoanalyst in terms of a “well-polished mirror,” reflecting back to the patient only what she brings. Freud was concerned to emphasise that the analyst’s own personality, and counter-transference, should not intrude into the consulting room, but he was also speaking of psychoanalysis as a mirror which might provide insight through interpretation (Rayner 1991, 210). As Wright notes, “interpretation constitutes a highly differentiated form of reflection that assumes considerable maturity in the patient,” suggesting that patients on the psychotic spectrum require a different form of reflection (2009, 35). Winnicott writes that, with certain patients, there needs to be “a certain quantity of reflecting back to the individual on the part of the trusted therapist” in order for the patient to “come together and exist as a unit, not as a defence against anxiety but as an expression of I AM, I am alive, I am myself” (1991b, 56). In this way, the therapist’s response to the patient becomes a verbal form of reflection which allows the self to come into being.

More literal changes have also taken place in therapeutic technique: the analyst and patient have increasingly come to regard each other, foregoing the analytic couch and invisibly-positioned analyst so widely associated with classical psychoanalysis. Erik Erikson, for example, found that patients suffering psychotic symptoms were sometimes unable to tolerate the “facelessness” of the traditional psychoanalytic situation (Wright 1991, 4). Harold Searles, a pioneer of the analysis of schizophrenics, also realized the significance of the face, noting that patients of a severe schizophrenic disposition often recovered after spending hours staring at his face “with all the absorbed wonderment and responsive play of facial expressions of a child immersed in watching a fascinating motion picture” (Wright 1991, 5). Green has also written of the significance of reflection, and his comment cuts across both metaphorical and literal modes: “the presence of someone just watching, acting as a mirror, gives to the scattered parts a unity that is reflected to the patient and becomes part of him” (2005, 23).<sup>54</sup>

“Why is it” asks David Morgan, “that the contemplation of images exerts the power to arrest the mind and deliver it from the anxieties which fragment consciousness and bind it to such invented torments as frustration, rage, jealousy, or obsession?” (2005, 2). Whether the torments are invented or not, the idea that an image can absorb our mind and transform our experience resonates with Wright’s description of the therapeutic function of the work of art. Of course, as Morgan is well aware, “this benevolent effect is not confined to images,” but, that images perform this role in a “powerful way” for many people, perhaps particularly so in a culture as “ocularcentric” as our own (Jay 1993), seems beyond doubt. Central to Buddhist meditation is the task of focusing on an image, in the process stilling the “shifting fabric of representations” which constitute consciousness. “If the mind takes the shape that occupies its elastic space,” Morgan writes, “an image of someone whom we respect or cherish will have

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<sup>54</sup> Malcolm Pines offers the definitive text on the place of the mirror in psychoanalysis, and his work has been “reflected” on, and extended, by Victor Schermer (Pines 1984; Schermer 2010). Sabine Melchior-Bonnett offers a fascinating history of the mirror which captures both its role in the evolution of the modern “self,” and its status as a technique of surveillance (2001).

a salutary effect—on mind and body. This is the regenerative effect of relaxation.” This might also, Morgan suggests, “provide a clue to the comfort of television, that glowing electronic hearth whose sounds and flashing images readily become a soothing presence in the home.” Offering the occasion for absorption in, and by, an image, an experience of deep rapport in which the self is “held” by what it sees, television lays claim to the legacy of the reflective maternal look, Morgan seems to suggest. This may well be the case; television, in offering the opportunity to switch off, even when this takes the form of “a mind-numbing distraction that passes time,” might well have “its own regenerative effects” (Morgan 2005, 3). Offering moments of unintegration and relaxation, it may also provide opportunities for forms of integration and metabolization with therapeutic effect.

Morgan’s comments on the benign qualities of television viewing stand contrary to prevalent trends in the theorization of audiovisual technologies, largely judged not only incapable of such “auratic” reflection, but also prime agents of the subjectivizing gaze; tools of ideological interpellation. Cinema is like the mirror, Metz famously asserts, but this is a Lacanian mirror which structures the subject in line with a symbolic view, albeit one mediated by the imaginary (1982, 2). Walter Benjamin famously defines the camera as a technical apparatus incapable of “returning our gaze” and thus implicated in the “decline of the aura”; going on to describe the eyes which approach the camera as ones which have “lost their ability to look” ([1940] 1999a, 184–5). As Buck-Morss notes, “of course, the eyes still see,” but they register nothing from the flow of fragmented impressions which show too much (1992, 18).

Eric Santner reinforces the distinction between the reflective look and the kinds of reflection available through the culture industry. “Home,” Santner writes, is the place where “one finds the aura constituted by eyes that return a gaze” (1990, 121). Benjamin’s understanding of “aura” is most often associated with the aesthetic, with a form of beautiful

semblance on the wane over the course of modernity,<sup>55</sup> but Santner reiterates its relation to a look which takes place between two people. Or, more poignantly, does not take place. “Home” represents a form of mutuality, a reciprocal exchange of looks which Santner asserts has increasingly gone missing in the modern world; a spatial-temporal moment characterized by a public space in which “one is systematically trained not to return the gaze of the other” (123). A certain way of looking and being seen is lost; the modern subject is defined by “homesickness” (130), a yearning for a form of exchange antithetical to the social formations of modernity, which depend on processes of instrumentalization which exist in contradiction to a deep craving for mutuality and rapport.

“In the movie theater,” writes Ira Konigsberg, “we may perceive, but we also feel as if we are being perceived – indeed we desire to be perceived” (1996, 884). The erosion of the space of the reflective gaze provokes an interminable search. We find substitutes for it, Santner claims, in the culture industry, which offers a space in which the gaze can be imagined, but never found. These are “substitute satisfactions” which promise a form of regression, a symbiotic union which appeals to a “primal nostalgia,” a “yearning for a space of specular mutuality” (1990, 125, 120–2). The need for eyes that return a gaze may well, Santner claims, constitute the basic “libidinal fuel” of the various technologies of vision which populate the spaces of modernity, yet herein also resides their threat. Whilst the need for such technologies is propped on the failures perceived to be endemic to modernity, their inability to satisfy the need to which they cater means that they participate in the re/production of the very instabilities which made them necessary. Born of the break-up of good-enough communal structures, they end up exacerbating and perpetuating their destruction. Ultimately, both Benjamin and Santner illustrate a widely held belief in the nonauratic, deadening and violent nature of technology in its “mass” incarnation vis-à-vis the intersubjective, mutual and highly Romantic possibilities of the work of art. Modernity and its technological manifestations

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<sup>55</sup> The reference is to Benjamin ([1936] 1999b). See also Hansen (2008, 336–8).



destroy the aura, and fail to offer the kinds of reflection which might enable metabolization and self-recognition, it would appear. Instead, mass technologies are coercive, oppressive, Lacanian mirrors.

Articulating what is at stake in contemporary audiovisual representation, Lebeau suggests that “there is a form of death at work in present regimes of the image: death of feeling and thought, imagination and time” (2009, 42). A point echoed by Sabine Melchior-Bonnet, who writes that “a forest of mirrors, or a ‘desert of mirrors,’ overwhelmed the twentieth century” (2001, 268). It’s a comment that pulls in opposing directions – the life of the forest sits in contrast to the apparent lifelessness of the desert – but it captures both the proliferation of the mirror, or the image technologies which might invoke it, and a certain aridity. In fact, the comment calls to mind Baudrillard, who once notoriously asserted that television lends itself to an analogy with Auschwitz. The medium is “cold, radiating forgetfulness, deterrence, and extermination in a still more systematic way, if that is possible, than the camps themselves” (1994, 49). Both the medium and the concentration camp are means through which humans can be turned into dead things. But what would an image have to be like to be capable of turning its audience into dead things? What does a vision of the viewer as caught in a state of living death suggest about the modes of reflection available through contemporary audiovisual technologies? Contemporary media might be there, dependable, but what kinds of reflections, of self, of world, do they provide?

To bring this back to psychoanalysis, Michael Eigen writes that “it seems likely that certain basic ego defects may have their origins in the facial expression (or lack of expressiveness) of the primary object” (2004, 50). The constitution of human “selfhood” depends on being seen; suggesting that the kind of look received is of consequence. Extending the idea of non-reflection, Green describes the effect of the “dead mother,” not a reference to the real death of the maternal figure, but rather “an imago which has been constituted in the

child's mind, following maternal depression, brutally transforming a living object, which was a source of vitality for the child, into a distant figure, toneless, practically inanimate" (1986, 142). Are film and television like this dead mother? Or – perhaps better – what does the idea of the dead or non-reflecting mother allow to be said about contemporary image technologies? What does it mean (not) to see and be seen?

Such thinking could easily lead to an argument about image technologies and narcissism, however, this is not the argument I want to pursue. Instead I want to draw on the critical possibilities of reflection and recognition. If the media might be construed as a kind of "dead mother," we can suggest they represent sites of failed recognition, a concept that finds purchase in both Lacan and Winnicott's thinking, and which has been extended and put to work by – amongst others – Jessica Benjamin, Axel Honneth, Juliet Mitchell and Judith Butler (J. Benjamin 1990b; Honneth 1995, 95–107; Mitchell 1998; Butler 2004). Benjamin draws attention to the duality of recognition, arguing that theories of infantile development often emphasize the need for the child *to be recognized*, leaving the significance of mutual recognition understated. Benjamin sets out to foreground the capacity, developed in relation to being recognized, to – in return – recognize the other "as animated by independent though similar feelings" (1990b, 37). Benjamin's thinking is useful because she provides a way to approach the politics of seeing and not seeing through the idea of a refusal of recognition; like the infant, we may decide not to grant recognition to (certain) others. Drawing on Winnicott and Benjamin, Honneth outlines the fundamental purchase of recognition for political thinking – "one can count as the bearer of rights of some kind only if one is socially recognized as a member of a community," a comment which brings to the fore the social function of (non)recognition, the way in which it serves to guarantee social existence and political agency (1995, 109). From a different perspective, Mitchell points to non-recognition as a potential source of trauma; one can be haunted by the memory of not being recognized (1998, 122). Though Mitchell suggests that an experience of "primal nonrecognition" may to some extent

be part of everyone's experience, she draws attention to nonrecognition as psychic trauma in ways which resonate with social implication (124). In a related vein, attentive to the centrality of recognition in both psychic and social life, Butler insists that we consider the social restraints which might influence subjectivity: "the 'I' who cannot come into being without a 'you' is also fundamentally dependent on a set of norms of recognition that originated neither with the 'I' nor with the 'you' [...] the task is [...] to think through [humans'] primary impressionability and vulnerability with a theory of power and recognition" (2004, 66). What takes place in these theoretical moves is something of a synthesis of a positive (Winnicott) and negative (Lacan) reading of recognition.<sup>56</sup>

As sites of social and collective negotiation, the media play a defining role in processes of recognition, guiding certain identifications and preventing others, determining, as Butler puts it, who can be seen as human, and who can therefore be mourned (2004, 140–3). In relation to this, they are liable to be complicit in processes of visualization and effacement, admission and denial, which bolster forms of social oppression and state power. The "deadness" of the image might be considered to describe its failure to offer those who look upon it an auratic experience, and its concurrent role in ideological interpellation, but it may also refer to pervasive blindnesses with regard to human suffering and complicity in violence.

Mirroring, reflection, recognition; these are terms shared across psychoanalysis, *In Treatment* and the politics of representation. Dealing with the intimate space of the individual psychotherapy session, the series stages persistently, and invests heavily, in eyes that return a gaze, exploring the capacity of television to mediate such an experience. However, staging the look so emphatically ultimately raises the question of who, or what, is being reflected; who can find themselves in this image, and how? Such are the questions of a politics of recognition. *In Treatment*, I suggest, allows us to explore the dimensions of (non)reflection and

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<sup>56</sup> For more on the cleavage of approaches to recognition, with specific attention to Hegel, Kojève and Rousseau see Todorov (1996).

(non)recognition which I have here set out. The series poses questions about the capacities of media technologies to provide reflection and a therapeutic metabolization of experience. Across its episodes, some things are able to be seen. However, whilst the show concerns itself, at moments explicitly, with the politics of reflection and recognition, there are facets of American state politics which remain persistently invisible. It is to exploring these complex issues that I now turn.

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“Two people sitting in a room talking can be a terrific show.” When Carolyn Strauss, president of HBO entertainment, made this comment in an interview with the *New York Times* in 2008 readers might have been forgiven for being sceptical (Rochlin 2008). The show to which she refers – *In Treatment* – records the one-to-one (or two-to-one) psychotherapy sessions of Dr. Paul Weston. It takes place in a single room where two people sit and ... just talk. It’s a far cry from the fast pace and elaborate staging common to television drama, and a premise US critic Alessandra Stanley thought about as enticing as an “all-you-can-eat haggis buffet” (2008). Even the cast was concerned; Elizabeth Davidtz, who played the character of Amy, describes a common fear: “how do we make this interesting? How do you make a two-page speech about what you were like when you were a kid compelling?” (Rochlin 2008). As Margy Rochlin noted in *The New York Times*, “a cast concentrating on bringing to life long, complicated monologues while remaining seated” is not something you see much of on television. Gerard Gilbert summed things up succinctly in *The Independent*: “outwardly nothing much happens in *In Treatment*” (2009). The characters sit and talk, at the end of the session one of them – the patient – leaves, the show ends. What is the audience getting from this? What exactly is there to see?

If “outwardly” nothing much happens, *In Treatment* seems to capture something authentic, or definitive, about the consulting room, a location Frosh describes, with a touch of

rye humour, as “a space in which nothing happens, for ages” (2013, 53). Given the time pressures which dominate modern life, psychoanalysis, Frosh suggests, “is at odds with the buzz and pace of Western urban life that gives so much of the hectic ‘feel’ to contemporary culture” (53). If analysis stands in tangential relation to the temporal imperatives of modernity, *In Treatment* takes up this position in relation to television. Much like analysis, the show runs the risk of boring its audience with the static and repetitive scene of a consulting room where nothing appears to happen. In this sense, at least, television series and analysis may be doing the same thing!

An affinity with the therapeutic consultation was inscribed in the show’s original scheduling, which mimed the temporality of a classical analysis. The first season was screened over five nights, Monday to Friday each week, over nine weeks. Each episode stands for one self-contained session and each day of the week was reserved for a particular patient, so on Monday viewers could see Paul’s sessions with Laura, whilst Tuesday was reserved for Alex, and so on, until Friday, when Paul would pay a visit to his own therapist-cum-supervisor, Gina. Though the “hour” of the televisual session lasted only thirty minutes (in contrast to the analyst’s fifty), the series mimicked a psychoanalytic encounter for its audience, who returned at an allotted time each day, five days a week. The popularity of the series, uniformly deemed a hit by critics, might point up a “thirst for therapy” in the culture at large. However, in spite of this critical enthusiasm, viewing figures in the USA suggested a different attitude. In its first week, the show attracted 316,000 viewers, yet by week four this figure had fallen to 196,000. Caroline Bainbridge suggests this decline points up the possibility that “the schedule was too demanding or perhaps too harrowing” for some viewers, who may simply have given up, or chosen to watch the show in their own time, using HBO’s online platform (2012, 158). The intensity of the show – both in terms of scheduling and content – distance it from “light” entertainment. Watching *In Treatment*, similarly to undergoing therapy, is not necessarily an easy experience!

As might be expected for a show about therapy, *In Treatment* focuses on the emotional and relational problems of its characters, which demonstrates both its “therapeutic intention” and its place within a broader culture of emotional expressivity.<sup>57</sup> Levi has explained that he created the series in order to promote a therapeutic sensibility, to “take out the stigma, it was very important for me to show that the patients are ordinary people” (Wood 2009). Emotional experience and turmoil constitute central orientating tropes within the show. To give just a few examples: season one presents the audience with a storyline about a couple who disagree about whether to terminate a pregnancy. We also encounter a young gymnast whose childhood experiences, coupled with the pressures of her career, have driven her to attempt to take her own life. Seasons two and three both feature storylines relating to cancer, and season three also broaches the topic of cultural difference and alienation through the story of Sunil, a retired mathematics professor from Calcutta, who has come to live with his son in New York.

Bainbridge reiterates the role played by the media in “shaping the emotional disposition of our time,” suggesting that “in an increasingly mediatised environment, we internalise the media as an object and use their representations as a way of traversing the complexities and contradictions of contemporary emotional life” (2012, 51–2). This point is echoed by Richards and Brown, who hold that cultural forms might be able to facilitate psychic health by functioning as resources with which to think about – and work through – experiences of loss, desire, anxiety and guilt; in the process offering the opportunity, akin to an analysis, of an introduction to ourselves; an occasion for moments of self-recognition (2011). “I do think [*In Treatment*] compels the viewers to examine their own lives more closely,” Steve Levinson, one of the show’s producers has said, “and who couldn’t benefit from that?” (Wood 2009). What has become unthinkable – for Levinson at least – is the idea that we might be better off

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<sup>57</sup> On the emotionalization of self-understanding and public life, see the edited collection *Emotion: New Psychosocial Perspectives* (Day-Sclater et al. 2009).

not knowing about ourselves, yet, as Phillips puts it, “there are other satisfactions than the satisfactions of personal history” (2008, 3).

The show is structured so that each “Friday” session is Paul paying a visit to his own therapist, a plot device which provides a space where Paul can reflect on his sessions, his life, and his abilities as a therapist. Ultimately, they offer the audience reflections on reflections, a kind of doubling of the reflective process experienced across the week’s episodes. His patients would “run to the hills,” Paul candidly suggests in the first of these sessions, if they could see what goes on inside his head, but the viewer has access to this information, and is thus offered an extended form of processing and mediation. The decision to structure the show this way not only serves dramatic ends – allowing the viewer access to privileged information (Paul’s thoughts, for instance) and a mode of experience that, Bainbridge points out, they would never be able to get in a real therapeutic encounter: *In Treatment* “offers us a vision of the psychotherapist that it would be impossible to gain through participation in therapy, as a patient, alone” (2012, 160). By having Paul undergo another “tranche” of therapy, the series reinvests the authority of the analyst and of analysis. Derrida suggests that the “problem of the *tranche*” touches “to the quick” the “problem of untermiated or interminable analysis” (1987, 505). A part of the analyst always remains unanalysed, which limits the possibilities of self-revelation whilst concurrently perpetuating the need for, and the pertinence of, the therapeutic consultation.

Bainbridge has suggested that the “therapeutic potential” of *In Treatment* might be linked to “the broader cultural experience that lacks intimacy and the kind of secure connections we supposedly have available to us in therapy culture that are increasingly hard to find” (2012, 165). The second season of the show interrogates the place of feeling and emotion in American life; indeed, a concern with an absence of feeling is palpable across this season’s episodes, which appear to take up the task of “treating” the USA itself. Drawing on

the work of Hollander and Gutwill, Lynne Layton considers the USA as a kind of traumatogenic environment which “has increasingly retreated from providing any functions that might contain anxiety and trauma” (2008, 69). Layton makes it possible to think about media forms as constituent parts of American life which fail to offer the kinds of reflection or attunement necessary for raw experience to be processed. Numbness can be a form of defence, a protection against an unthinkable experience, an experience which has never been processed through an adequate form. If this were the case, deadness, disintegration and an absence of feeling might be defining terms in contemporary experience, and this is the kind of situation the second season of *In Treatment* depicts.

In one of his last sessions with a patient called April, an architecture student who has developed lymphoma, Paul comments that, in the United States, the idea of maturity is understood in terms of an ability to forego emotion, to control and suppress feeling, to obscure need and vulnerability. Paul is responding to April’s unwillingness to tell her parents about her illness, a form of self-silencing which illustrates her discomfort with the idea of both having and sharing feelings. In one of his own sessions in this season, when asked by Gina what he would like to feel, Paul responds “I just want to feel.” If analysis offers to foster a therapeutic sensibility, this ideal may well be at odds, or even as Layton puts it, in “radical opposition,” to prevalent versions of subjectivity currently dominant in the USA (69). In contrast to the first season, Levi describes the second as “much more of an adaptation” which “works better artistically and allows us to delve into distinctly American issues” (Pfefferman 2013). In place of dialogue based on the English subtitles of the Israeli series, playwrights were hired to write original scripts. By choosing to address “American issues,” the series sets itself up, potentially, as a corrective to the deadness and absence of feeling it perceives to characterize the dominant form of life in the USA, offering itself as a “complex symbolic rendering of emotional life,” and a locus of reflective holding.



On 1<sup>st</sup> April 2013, Italy began screening its own homemade version of *In Treatment* on Sky Cinema, yet more proof of widespread interest in the format. In an article on the Italian series, however, Pietro Bianchi approaches what he sees as the show's failure. In *In Treatment*, Bianchi laments, the analyst and his patients "look at each other as they talk. And it is precisely this which makes you totally miss the encounter with the real protagonist of psychoanalysis: the unconscious" (2013). For Bianchi, the face-to-face encounter presented in *In Treatment* – which follows the classic or "invisible" style of editing (based on the structure of shot/reverse-shot) – misses the point of analysis. By portraying the look returned, the series, Bianchi claims, uncritically repeats a common sense belief in the transparency of communication which psychoanalysis places in question. The use of the shot/reverse-shot structure unwittingly undermines the reality of communicative failure, suggesting that unequivocal interpersonal communication is possible, yet nothing is more in doubt.

Bianchi's articulation raises the question of the face-to-face exchange in ways that cut across audiovisual representation and clinical technique. In terms of the clinical, the use of the face-to-face encounter reflects the changes in technique which I described above. Analyst and patient have come increasingly to face one another. In the context of a television drama, the decision to have analyst and patient face each other meets audience expectations about the form of dramatic interaction normal to television and film. One can wonder about what might replace the shot/reverse-shot if the characters did *not* look at each other; perhaps a two-shot with the analyst visible behind the analysand? This is certainly a technique employed by Huston in *Freud* and, more recently, by Cronenberg in *A Dangerous Method* (Huston 1962; Cronenberg 2011). One could also wonder about what it would be like to experience the unnerving reverse-shots of eyes that do not meet – the back of a head? A blank wall? These are intriguing possibilities. Certainly the strangeness, the unfulfilled expectation held out by the absence of the face would point up how fundamental processes of reflection and

recognition seem to human experience. To withhold the face could go some way towards pointing up such a need, and suggesting that it might be unfulfilled.<sup>58</sup>

At the same time, Bianchi introduces a dissonant tone, suggesting the show's investment in the reflective and the testimonial might be, in some way, double-edged. As Bainbridge puts it: "*In Treatment* may well provide reassurance for viewers by depicting the experience of isolation, disconnectedness and emotional upheaval as commonplace and normative" (2012, 165), a comment which captures the ways in which the recuperative possibilities of psychotherapy and the media exist in a fraught and potentially precarious relation with the risk of adaptation and pathological defence. We cannot know the effect of such representation on individual viewers, but we can say that, in *In Treatment*, through the tropes of mirroring and reflection, the therapeutic and the audiovisual are brought together in ways which have implications for our thinking about both.

Mirroring, reflection, recognition. When I started watching the series, my first thoughts concerned the kinds of looking which the show licenses. Writing in *The New York Times*, Alessandra Stanley describes the show in terms of "a concentration that bores deep without growing dull," whilst Tasha Oren notes its "raw intimacy" (Stanley 2008; Oren 2008), comments which go some way towards articulating the form of living attention potentially on offer here, the kind of gaze which might be available. Certainly, within the series, looking is sustained and heavily invested. As nearly all of the scenes in the show take the form of two people sitting and talking, looking and listening take centre stage as the key determining forms. In fact, the show sets up an equation between what is happening on screen, what happens in therapy, and what the audience are doing: namely looking and listening, suggesting that these activities are inherently therapeutic in some way.

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<sup>58</sup> Lebeau has explored this subject in her recent work (2008; 2009).



Figures 1-5. The opening shots of the first episode of *In Treatment*. Paul and Laura.

Paul Coates notes a long-standing and persistent relationship between faces and human misery: “directors deeply concerned with the face appear also to be preoccupied with suffering” (2012, 46). Such concerns are often mediated by the close-up, a shot consistently claimed to generate affect, to elicit compassion, to foster identifications, yet which is in possession of a telling duality: enacting “a dialectic of modernist fragmentation and nostalgia

for the aura of wholeness” (24).<sup>59</sup> The close-up severs the head from the body at the same moment as it calls those who regard it into an intense intimacy.

*In Treatment* invests heavily in the close-up. The opening shot of the first episode of the first season seems to happen abruptly. Before the opening credits have rolled, the audience is presented with a close-up of the face of a crying woman, a patient of Paul’s, Laura. She cries into her hands, before a cut to a close-up of Paul, who watches her intently, with what appears to be a steady concern. Another close-up of Laura crying is followed by a medium shot of Paul, still looking at Laura, as he nudges a box of tissues towards her across the coffee table between them. The final shot of the sequence is a two shot in which Laura takes a tissue. All of this occurs in silence. Then the credits roll.

This short opening scene captures what will be the defining visual dynamic of the series, the alternation of close-up shots of Paul and his patient, but the scene also stages something like a form of therapeutic reflection or attunement in visual terms. By pushing the tissues across the table, Paul is acknowledging Laura’s distress; her pain is processed and fed back to her across sensory modalities. The scene establishes Paul as the one who, by really looking – by offering a particular form of attention or engagement – might be able to begin to repair a damaged self.

Both Paul’s therapeutic technique and the show’s visual dynamic evoke a form of “relational” analysis, privileging interaction and the aesthetic quality of the analytic experience. As mentioned before, Paul has read the works of Bollas, well-known for emphasizing the analytic encounter in aesthetic terms (1987; 1992). The great majority of shots in each episode are close-ups which alternate the perspectives of Paul and his patient(s). The editing style, coupled with the restriction of the *mise-en-scène* of any given episode to one

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<sup>59</sup> Early theorists of the close-up include Benjamin ([1936] 1999b) Balázs (1970) and Kracauer (1960). For more recent approaches see Doane (2003), Coates (2012) and Rushton (2012).

room (the office of Paul's therapist/supervisor or his own) places considerable stress on both the face and the look. The cuts between close-ups often take place when Paul responds to his patients' speech, or makes an interpretation. This is not in itself an unusual phenomenon, however, in the situation of therapy, Paul's responses often aim to mirror and reflect the patient. This particular visual strategy thus takes on added significance; inscribing and actualizing a particular process of reflection on both a visual and an interpretative level.

In his second session with new patient Sophie, a sixteen-year-old gymnast who has come to see him following a cycling accident in which she broke both of her arms, we find a clear example of this merging of interpretative and visual mirroring. Sophie had arrived for her session soaking wet and, unable to change out of her clothes without help, Sophie asks Paul if he is going to help her. Aware of the risks of such a move, Paul calls on his wife, Kate, to help Sophie change. Near the end of the session, Paul offers an interpretation, telling Sophie that when she arrived, and asked him to help her change, he had thought to himself "someone in your life has broken the rules." This part of the interpretation is accompanied by a close-up of Paul's face and hands, a shot which has a religious, or confessional, quality; a resonance of the "sacred gaze" to which Morgan refers, perhaps. The wooden doors behind him suggest the intimate space of the confessional, in fact.



Figure 6. Paul listening to Sophie.

As Paul continues to speak, there is a cut to a close-up of Sophie; the camera registers her subtle reaction to his words. Paul explains that when she had needed help to change clothes and had gestured that he might aid her, he felt that she was testing him, and that if he

had helped her, he would have been breaking the rules too. During this shot, Sophie glances down occasionally, but her eyes remain mostly trained on Paul.



Figure 7. Sophie looking at Paul.

Something happens in this space between the image and the therapeutic response. Through his words, Paul offers Sophie a reformulation of what she has communicated. Once again this is a cross-modal translation, as Sophie's gestures to Paul – through which she asked him to help her undress – return, changed, in the form of his words. The work of return, the process of receiving something the same, but different, is repeated in the sequence of images. When the camera looks at Paul, he occupies the right of the shot, the opposite position to Sophie, who is placed on the left when the camera looks at her. This inversion attests a process of reflection; not only does it allude to the distortion endemic to the mirror image – we always see things the wrong way round – but it casts that distortion as constitutive difference. Apart from their occupying different places within the shot, the images of Paul and Sophie are closely aligned; they take a comparable distance from the camera, the backs of their chairs create equivalent horizontal lines across each image, their expressions portray a resonant concern.

Writing in 1992, Sandy Flitterman-Lewis noted that television is often thought to offer more fluid forms of identification than those available to the film spectator. Unlike in the cinema, where the shot/reverse-shot structure encourages the spectator to adopt the point of view of particular characters, in television productions, Flitterman-Lewis claims, close-ups often appear from nowhere; "we look at faces, not through eyes" (1992, 230). Since Flitterman-Lewis made this assertion, the norms of television have in many ways come closer

to those of the cinema, a change which *In Treatment* exemplifies. The shot/reverse-shot structure is maintained, yet it takes a specific form in the series. Because the characters sit and look at each other, each shot is also a reverse-shot. A shot of Sophie, for instance, is the reverse-shot of Paul. Shot and reverse-shot are one; reflection is built into the visual dynamic. The two shots between Paul and Sophie are repeated, producing a kind of reflective rhythm, a pattern of giving and taking. The scene enacts a mode of exchange which raises the question of what might count as psychoanalysis; evoking “the possibility of de-professionalizing and perhaps universalizing [...] the conditions of an analytic exchange” (Bersani and Phillips 2008, 27)

During this exchange Paul suggests that, at the start of the session, Sophie had needed to check that “the same things which happen out there [outside the session] don’t happen in here.” With the camera trained on her face, Sophie opens her mouth to speak but doesn’t. Instead, the scene plays out through a sustained, silent exchange of looks which lasts for over fifteen seconds. When Sophie eventually breaks the silence, she describes her experience in the ambulance, after her accident. As the ambulance sped along, she wanted to look out of the window; she wanted to see the expressions of interest and concern on the faces of the people outside as the ambulance raced past. The paramedic was unable to lift her, but found a mirror which she tried to angle so Sophie could see outside, but it didn’t work, all Sophie could see was herself reflected back.

This moment stages a desire, on Sophie’s part, for a particular form of engagement with other people. By looking out of the window, she hopes to experience the reflective response of those outside; she seems to seek to gain, through this encounter, a sense of the significance and validity of her experience of pain. Instead of this reflection, however, Sophie finds herself looking into a mirror in which she can only see herself. She doesn’t get what she needs back from the environment, but instead encounters herself as the object of a different

kind of look. The form of her interaction with Paul gestures towards the absence of eyes that return a gaze in the earlier situation. Sophie receives what she desired in the mirror of Paul's reflective, therapeutic interpretation.

In such intimate moments, *In Treatment* recalls Santner's description of the full human gaze in terms of "home." But can such scenes provide a "full human gaze"? And what are the consequences of such an offer? Patricia Mellencamp places television on the list of the "homely" – and there is something very poignant about the idea that we might seek out substitutes for contact, employing technology as a means through which to mitigate loneliness. She continues: "TV pinpoints our loneliness by providing companionship, advice, consolation, prayer and therapy, assuring us we are not alone" (1990, 245, 262). Coates also suggests that the spectatorial "at-homeness" generated by the close-up facilitates an illusion of intimacy – Jessica Evans offers the useful term "'as if' intimacy" – with potentially negative implications (Coates 2012, 25; Evans 2009). "Facing an isolated face takes us out of space," Béla Balázs writes, "our consciousness of space is cut out and we find ourselves in another dimension; that of physiognomy." The face has the capacity to make us forget the world, to lose sight – both literally and metaphorically – of the space beyond the frame, and the dialectical relation between what is inside and outside (1970, 61). "Faces can become so overwhelming, so unexpectedly large, as to forestall any questioning," writes Coates (2012, 25). The face has the capacity to become, as James Elkins puts it, a "center of power," a term which speaks of the complex ways in which the face and faciality might complicate a therapeutics of reflection and recognition (cited in Coates 2012, 26). *In Treatment* may produce a look reminiscent of "home," but home can mean retreat, closing doors, shutting out the world.

Though offering television as a potential site of therapeutic recognition, the show also points towards the possibility that reflection might fail. There are moments, for instance, when

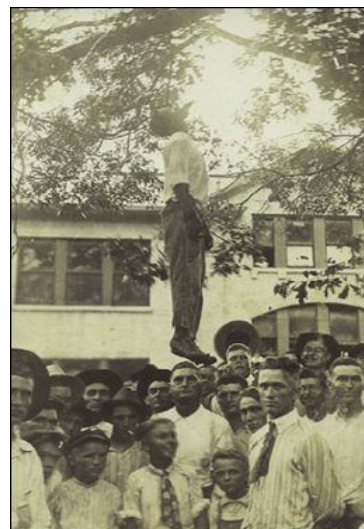


the mirroring goes wrong. During a session with the couple, Jake and Amy, who are struggling to decide whether to terminate a pregnancy, Paul becomes so frustrated by the couple's bickering that, when urged to reveal his opinion about the decision, he blurts out that he thinks they should get rid of the child. Similarly, when seemingly provoked by a patient's persistent attempts to demean his wife and daughter, Paul lashes out, physically assaulting the man. Perhaps these moments simply add the dramatic tension which a drama series periodically needs, but they also complicate the show's investment in reflection, and thus point up a more critical engagement with mirroring and recognition which is pursued most forcefully across the "Alex" storyline.

As I have already mentioned, *In Treatment* originates in the hit Israeli series, *Be'Tipul*. Initially, in remaking the show, the producers followed a basic process of translating the Hebrew scripts word-for-word, using the services of an Israeli subtitling company (Pfefferman 2013), a fact which leads Virginia Heffernan to claim that the series "is American only on the surface. Its psyche is entirely Israeli" (2008). What this might mean isn't immediately clear, though I think Heffernan is foregrounding the fact of direct translation. However, as production progressed, executive producer Rodrigo Garcia notes how the remake parted ways with its model: "every week we diverged more and more. We kept the central outline of the characters, but the perceived nature of their problems changed from week to week as we were influenced by our own productions. It is the genius of *Be'Tipul* that the psychological issues are rich enough that we were able to mine them so well" (Pfefferman 2013).

Certainly, translation was necessary, particularly in relation to the story of a fighter pilot who has dropped a bomb on a school. In fact, at a conference on *Be'Tipul* and *In Treatment* held at UCLA in 2009, respective episodes of this storyline from both series were screened back-to-back because it was judged to be most illustrative and emblematic of the forms of translation at work (Pfefferman 2013). In the Israeli original, the pilot, Yadin, has

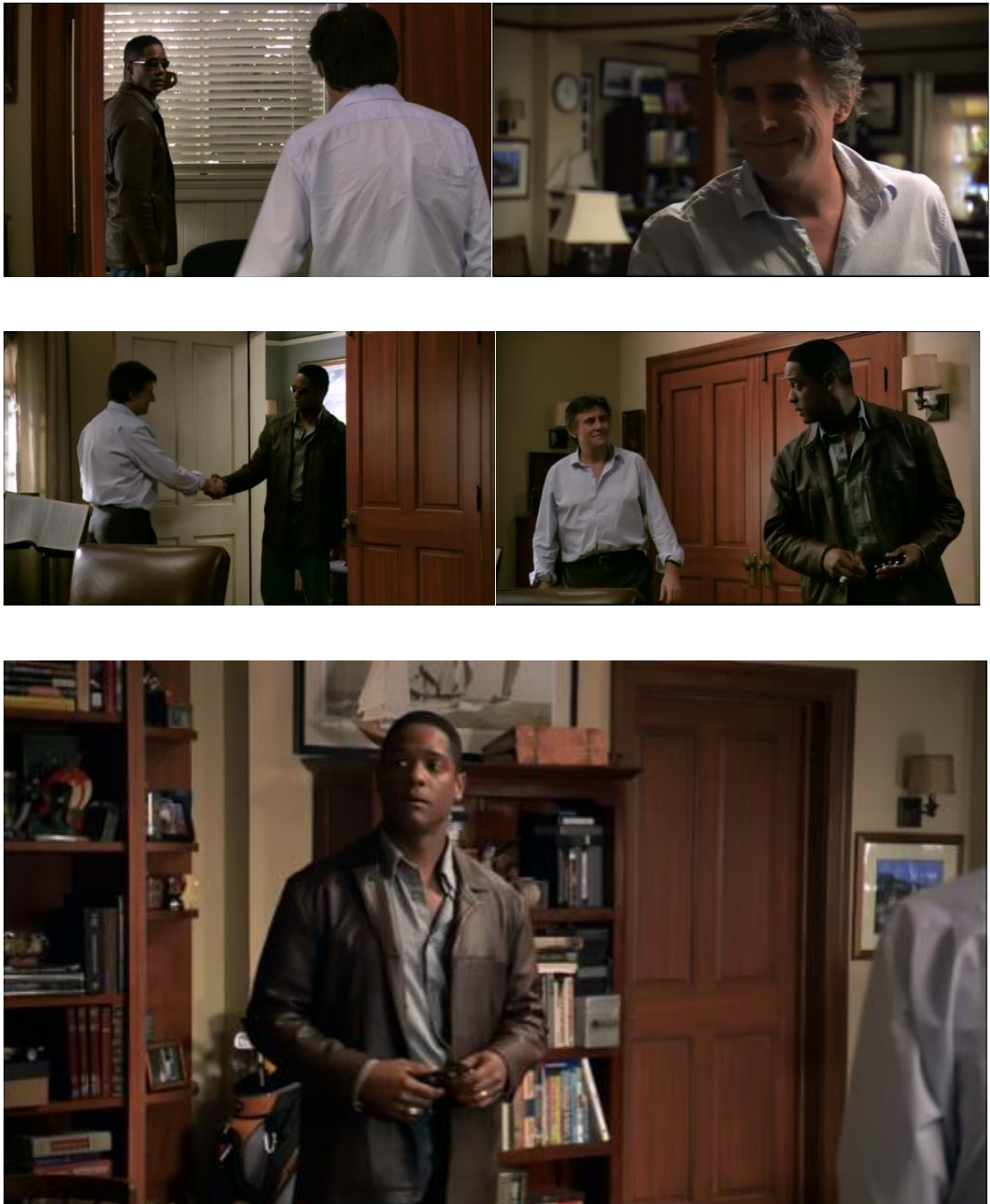
dropped a bomb on a Palestinian nursery school, whilst his equivalent in the remake is a Navy pilot recently returned from Iraq where his target had been a madrasa. There is also translation at work in the back-stories of the two characters. Whilst Yadin's father played "the Holocaust ticket" in order to excuse his life-long selfish behaviour, Alex's father survived the Jim Crow laws of the American South and the racist violence which accompanied them. The decision to make the character of Alex an African-American takes on a particular cadence in this context, bringing an additional layer of social reality into play – the racial history of the United States. Gaby Wood reasons this decision as an attempt to capture "the oppressed inflections of the original" (2009), but to end analysis on such a conciliatory note forestalls some of the most interesting and important questions which this translation raises. The processes of displacement and condensation at work in the reimagining of the series between Israel and the USA provide significant insight into a specific racial-cultural imaginary. Not only does Iraq figure as the Palestine of the USA, but the displacement of national guilt onto an Afro-American soldier resuscitates undead dimensions of American cultural history which the series, at least in part, attempts to exorcize.



Figures 8 and 9. Frontispiece, by Francesco Bartolozzi, from Stedman ([1798] 1813). The lynching of Lige Daniels. 3<sup>rd</sup> August 1920, Centre, Texas. Postcard.

Within the US (though also beyond its borders), specific scopic regimes have typically governed the representation of black people, men perhaps in particular, calling upon them to perform a script, to embody the dark projections of racist culture (Marriott 2000, xiv). The history of race in the United States can be construed, David Marriott claims, as a history of whites looking at themselves through images of desolated black bodies, and of a black identity dispossessed by the same act of looking. Such a narrative of racialized, or – perhaps better – racializing, spectacle finds its beginnings in the transatlantic slave trade, but it reached a particularly grim zenith in spectacles of lynching, common in the early to mid-twentieth century, their effect perpetuated by photographic recording, a pertinent example of the overlapping spheres of violence and technology. The camera – the mass produced Kodak – functioned as part of the show, as a tool for making meaning and controlling representation, the guarantor of the reality of the event.

The translation of the Holocaust into the Civil Rights Movement – a substitution which provides a link to a traumatic past – is also a telling distortion. The Holocaust is the defining trauma of recent Jewish history; it provides a backdrop for the on-going conflict between Israel and Palestine, not a justification but a form of context. The spectre of the Holocaust in the Israeli series casts the Israel-Palestine conflict in relation to unthinkable trauma, and draws a parallel between a traumatic past and the horrors of the present. Perhaps the American series does the same, however the relationship between the history of racism in the USA and retaliative actions taken since 9/11 seems somewhat less secure. The Civil Rights Movement is not in any straightforward way a “cause” of those retaliative actions, though it is possible to perceive the proximity between a past and a present characterized by racialized violence. The references to the Civil Rights Movement might provide the audience with forms of working through in which America must come to terms with, and recognize, the unacknowledged traumas of its past and the persistence of a racialized, if now global, politics which continue to determine who lives and dies, what lives count as liveable and grievable.



Figures 10-14. Alex's first meeting with Paul.

However, the idea that Alex might function as a site for projection – and thus gesture towards broader processes of racial projection and othering – is explored in the series at the level of the image, and is succinctly illustrated by the first few moments of Alex's initial meeting with Paul. As the episode begins, the camera pans with Paul as he crosses the room, heading for the door. Paul seems tired, his crumpled shirt and brief touch of his hand to his

forehead suggesting the fatigue of a busy therapist. As Paul opens the door, the camera takes up a position behind him, in a move that aligns its gaze with his. The door opens to reveal, and frame, Alex, to the left of the shot, his body half turned away from the camera and leaning against the window ledge. Alex's head is the only part of him turned towards the now open door. Although the camera is positioned behind Paul, his presence in the shot, coupled with the framing of Alex in the doorway, serves to reiterate the sense of looking with him. Framed in such a way, Alex is constituted as the one to-be-looked-at, the object of the first look, the first impression, which ties together the therapist and the viewer the scene works to produce. The ensuing reverse-shot of Paul is a medium close-up which is too proximate to Paul to replicate Alex's point of view. As the two men shake hands, the camera offers a two-shot in which the screen is literally divided: half is filled with the white paint of the open door, which is echoed in Paul's white shirt, the other half is characterized by the brown interior wood of the door frame, repeated in the tan of Alex's leather jacket. As Alex's arm reaches across the threshold to take Paul's, there is a sense of his entering unknown territory.

Alex's entry into the series/ Paul's consulting room takes place at the start of the show's second episode; Alex enters a space with which the viewer (who has seen the first episode) is already familiar, and the visual encoding of its alienness for him only reiterates the established rapport between the viewer and Paul. The camera stays with the scene as Alex enters the room, moving towards the camera which remains static, before cutting to a medium long shot of Alex from what approximates Paul's point of view. From this vantage point, Alex appears suddenly vulnerable, removing his sunglasses, his face mawkish as he scans the room, unsure what to do. Paul's shoulder is in view on the extreme right of the shot; the camera is positioned over his shoulder.

This pattern of medium, static close-ups of Paul and longer shots which follow Alex and seem to take place from Paul's point of view continues for the entirety of the short

opening sequence. In this way the camera establishes Alex less as a subject than as an object, acting out – subtly it must be admitted – the desubjectivization of the racialized “other.” To make Alex an Afro-American, then, opens up a history of racial representation; a history of the technological mediation of race both within and beyond the borders of the USA. The image of Alex approximates what Victor Burgin has theorized as the “sequence image,” a present moment of perception “seized” by “association with past affects and meanings” (2004, 21). Burgin’s theorizing of this concept comes as a response to the desire to understand the close imbrication of personal memory and experience with films and images seen, the way in which visual associations of this kind short circuit any easy delineation of the personal and the public. Though Burgin focuses on the iconic images of the cinema, it is equally plausible for images from other media forms to become lodged as sites and sources of memory, and to suggest that such images may function at a collective, as well as an individual, level.

Alex’s first session with Paul begins quite starkly: “So, do you recognize me?” Alex asks. The question sets the tone of their encounter, and points up a more critical engagement with the tropes of both reflection and recognition in this particular storyline. The reason Alex asks if Paul recognizes him is, on the surface at least, more worldly than metaphysical because Alex is, as he is quick to tell Paul, the “Madrassa Murderer”: the naval pilot who recently dropped a bomb on a religious school on the outskirts of Baghdad, which had been erroneously identified as an insurgent safe house, killing sixteen children. Alex isn’t asking Paul for an intimate-auratic experience, but outlining the obverse side of recognition; put in basic terms, it is not always good to be recognized. The symbolic inscription of an image within public discourse is what Alex thinks Paul might register. He is asking about his status as a site of projection. Alex has become recognizable, infamous; his face has come to signify the ruthlessness, the dangerous detachment, of technologized warfare. Within the spaces of the media, Alex has come to symbolize the governmental and military agencies which organize and orchestrate acts of violence. But not only that, Alex’s status as an Afro-American doubles the

question of recognition, intensifying his status as “an object in the midst of other objects” (Fanon 2008, 82). It is hard not to think of Franz Fanon’s description of the white world’s recognition of the black man, “woven [...] out of a thousand details, anecdotes, stories” actualized in that encounter with the exclamation: “look, a Negro!” (84). The guarded question with which Alex begins stages an encounter between a globalized politics of the image and the historical reality of racialized looking and spectacle in, and beyond, the United States.

As I mentioned above, the series makes recourse to the Civil Rights Movement, an event that was intimately involved in a racialized image politics. The movement coincided with an explosive increase in the visibility and availability of audiovisual media. The 1950s saw Americans become “an eye-minded people,” whose claims to knowledge rested on seeing and believing (Dos Passos cited Goldsby 1996, 255). During the civil rights struggle, audiovisual media functioned as sites wherein the meanings of race were forged and contested. For many Americans, the movement was experienced as a visual spectacle; watched on TV, depicted in newspapers, the rhetorics and ideologies which informed the media shaped audience response and guided memory.

The pertinence of the politics of representation for the civil rights struggle adds an additional layer of reference to the probing of those politics in *In Treatment*. Somehow – probably through “another intelligence fuck up,” as he terms it – Alex has been identified as the pilot on the mission and his picture has come to appear on what he refers to as “fundamentalist” websites. Alex has a copy of the old photo – taken when he was eighteen on a school trip to Utrecht – on his mobile phone, which he shows to Paul as he imagines the aforementioned fundamentalists using his face as a dartboard. It is important to note that publicity appears to be the main problem confronting the USA and Alex here. It is not so much the fact that Alex dropped the bomb, as the fact that he is known to be the one who dropped the bomb. This information, this giving face to tragedy, comes to displace the event itself.

Alex's face has become a weapon in the image war between the USA and its opponents, who have increasingly taken on the politics of the spectacle with which the USA has so long been involved (Retort 2005, 16–37).

To an extent, the issue of Alex's culpability becomes a site for reflection on feelings of guilt and blame which circulate within the United States around the retaliative actions taken since 9/11. Though he claims he doesn't feel guilty about what happened – he accomplished his mission with an accuracy he describes as “surgical” and “sleeps like a baby” – Alex wants to return to the site he bombed. Paul wonders about the safety of taking such a trip, “won't someone recognize you?” he asks. Once again, being recognized becomes a risk; it is a moment which evokes recognition in terms of a mode of interpellation in which one is fixed and subjectivized. The danger that recognition might represent is clear here: to be recognized in Iraq could easily lead to Alex losing his life. For a moment, recognition is implicitly distanced from life-giving spontaneity, and cast as a potentially deadly mode of alienation.

A week later, Alex appears for his next session, once again sporting the dark glasses which materially encode his own reticence towards seeing. The visit to the madrasa, he claims, “didn't do what it was supposed to,” though what this might be is left for the audience to decide. Alex describes the location of the bombing as “like a bombsite after the Blitz,” evoking it in the terms of what Allen Feldman has called an all-too-familiar “scenography of the Other” (2005, 208), the pervasive mediated representations of distant others in “war-scapes, famine-scapes, degraded urban environments” which serve to constitute public conceptions – and modes of recognition – of the unfamiliar and unknown. Alex's act of seeing, then, is staged through a pre-established lens, a way of looking which forestalls, or at least predetermines, any attempt to “get the picture” of what he encounters.

Taken to a make-shift hospital by the Red Cross, Alex describes his experience in the language of his job: “it was like being 10,000ft up in the air, I was just watching.” This distant,



detached act is coupled, in Alex's account, with his failure to feel anything for the people suffering around him. "The system did a great job on me," he quips. Alex had "wanted to see what happens when I come down from that top view," but nothing happened. The alignment of Alex's perspective with that of the photographic devices on board a fighter jet imbricates the act of looking with both visual and military technologies, whilst his response to this kind of seeing encodes the possibility that the technologies and discourses which mediate our experience might inhibit emotional development. In this way, through a metaphorical association, the show casts the media in familiar terms, as (re)producers of a particularly detached and vacant self brought about by sustained exposure to a deadened form of looking.

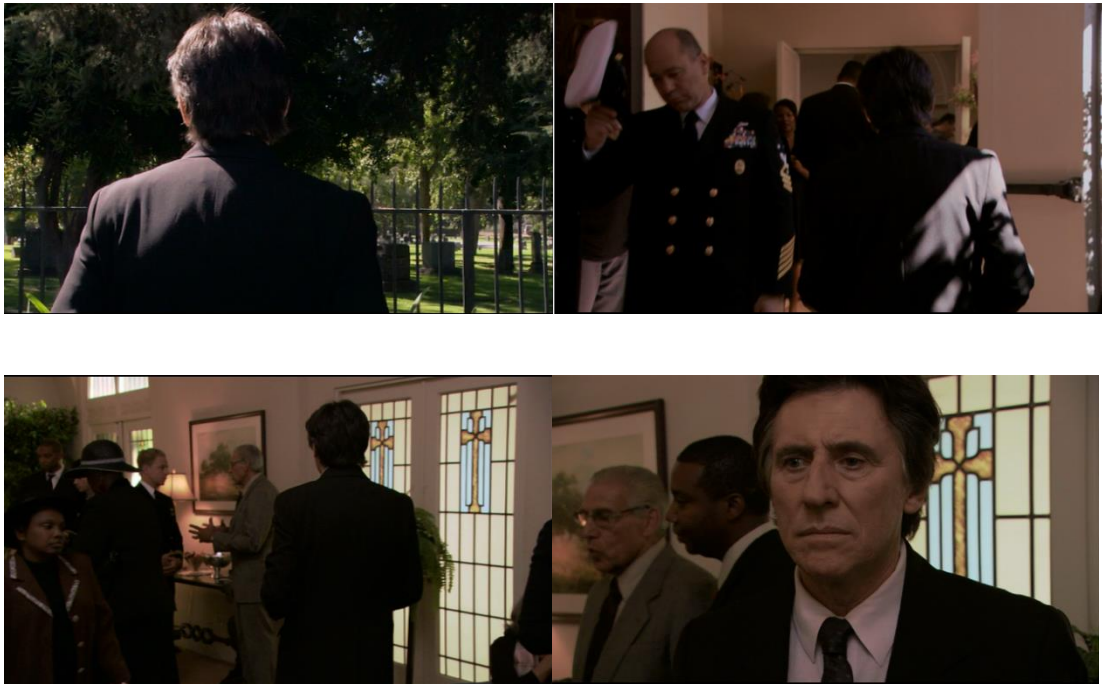
Bringing the topic of race into proximity with the "war on terror," Alex comes to stand for and highlight the growing prevalence of a virulent form of racial coding in the post-9/11 USA. As Feldman writes, "risk classifications in the United States, particularly since 9/11, have been arbitrarily fused with categories of race, class, ethnicity, religion, immune system status and political geography" (2005, 206–7). Feldman's analysis extends to categories in excess of race, but I want to emphasise is his notion of a "risk object" as the product of a "specialized scopic regime." The latter term signifies "the agendas and techniques of political visualization: the regimens that prescribe modes of seeing and object visibility and that proscribe or render untenable other modes and objects of perception [...] an ensemble of practices and discourses that establish the truth claims, typicality and credibility of visual acts and objects and politically correct modes of seeing" (Feldman 1997, 29–30). These regimes inhibit certain ways of looking and seeing, precluding the possibility of recognizing certain others as animated by similar, though separate, thoughts and feelings. Feldman's articulation brings the political significance of scopic regimes to centre stage, foregrounding the ways in which techniques of visualization become central to how we perceive and experience the world.

The “othering” of Alex which takes place through the use of this racial frame is clear to see, and a central point of interpretation must be to decide how to judge this coding. After several weeks of intense sessions, Alex decides to return to work against Paul’s advice, wishing to resume a certain perspective akin with his job, “it’s much simpler up there,” he says, “this is not for everyone, this self-examination, some of us just need to live our lives.” Alex’s sessions fall on a Tuesday, but the next week (Monday) begins with Paul attending a funeral, which we quickly discover is for Alex. Significantly, Alex’s death happens off stage, and the situation surrounding it is unclear. Upon returning to work, Alex had undertaken a flight demonstration for a group of new recruits. It was in the course of this mission that his plane crashed and he was killed. The status of this death – was it an accident or suicide? – hangs over the final episodes of the first season.

There is an air of familiarity, of *déjà vu* even, to this staged death of a black man, although, unlike the spectacular deaths – the lynchings and beatings – of which it bears the trace, this death is decisively unseen. Alex’s screened-off death encodes the many other deaths, both within and beyond the borders of the United States which, though often spectacularly visible, go largely unrecognized and unmourned; remaining, in some crucial and difficult way, invisible. In keeping with historically established norms, Alex – a black male – pays the price for American aggression and fear, becoming the locus of national guilt, a site for the projection and containment of fear and anxiety. As a related and additional point, Alex’s death evokes the debilitating fantasy that “risk objects” might just disappear under the weight of their own self-hatred and internalized guilt.

Is Alex’s life sacrificed to appease national guilt? In raising such a prospect, the show reflects on both historical and contemporary instances of violence, carrying this over into the image itself. When Paul arrives at Alex’s funeral, the camera follows him into the building; it is positioned behind his head, over his shoulder. At this moment – a moment which is sustained

for over a minute as Paul negotiates the entrance hall and corridors of the funeral home – the viewer is denied access to his face. What we have instead is the staging of what Lebeau has termed “the image not seen, the look that does not happen,” the absence, or failure, of recognition which speaks across moments of personal experience and national history (2009, 37).



Figures 15-19. Shots of Paul attending Alex's funeral.

It seems plausible to argue for this as some kind of therapeutic moment in itself, and examine why. As we may recall from chapter two, in the paper “Fear of Breakdown,” Winnicott sets out the therapeutic co-ordinates which might repair damaged experience. “What is not yet experienced did nevertheless happen in the past,” Winnicott writes, and if the patient can accept “this queer kind of truth” then “the way is open for the agony to be experienced in the transference, in reaction to the analyst’s failures and mistakes” ([1974] 1989b, 91). To recap, Winnicott writes that:

The patient needs to ‘remember’ [...] but it is not possible to remember something that has not yet happened, and this thing of the past has not happened yet because the patient was not there for it to happen to. The only way to ‘remember’ in this case is for

the patient to experience this past thing for the first time in the present, that is to say, in the transference. The past and future thing then becomes a matter of the here and now, and becomes experienced by the patient for the first time. (92)

This discussion is significant in clarifying the nature of psychotherapeutic reflection; the therapist does not necessarily, or not only, supply a perfect form of mothering with the aim of mitigating past traumas, but instead provides a form of care which mirrors the patient's present experience. Discussing Winnicott's thinking on fear of breakdown and psychotherapy, Sun writes that: "insofar as for Winnicott psychotherapy derives from the maternal face that 'reflects what is there to be seen,' its efficacy will depend in cases on the precarious reflection precisely of maternal failure, of the traumatic breaks in life's continuity that, as Adam Phillips succinctly puts it, 'were formative by virtue of their eluding the self'" (2007, 74). Read in tandem with this articulation, the staging of the failure of recognition through a sustained shot of Paul's back potentially provides a reflective moment in which past traumas – as well as more contemporary ones – are repeated and may be processed. The show offers a moment when trauma might be apprehended in "*its being*" rather than comprehended in "*its meaning*" (Wright 2009, 8). This shot of the look not returned thus speaks to, metabolizes perhaps, a sense of the countless deaths both in the United States and beyond its borders which have gone unmarked and unmourned, or have been offered in distorted forms which render them ungrievable.

If we take for granted that *In Treatment* is aware of the provocation implicit in making the character of Alex an Afro-American, then the show offers various levels of engagement with notions of reflection and recognition. Firstly, it uses the image of Alex to pose a political question about the absence of acts of recognition and reflection at different historical moments: in relation to both historical racial prejudice and contemporary practices of othering both inside and outside the USA. Secondly, the staging of such moments potentially permits a form of reflective metabolization in audience members, who may gain an opportunity to

apprehend something of the significance of these realities through their verbal and visual processing.

However, read in these terms, the show's silences and refusals become as interesting as its utterances, is it possible that what is made visible in the series masks something else? Certainly, across its translation, any sense of the "special relationship" between the USA and Israel disappears, and this disappearance metaphorizes image as a mode of disappearance. Writers from the Retort collective discuss that relationship in pertinent terms, evoking Israel as a "spectacular mirror" of the US. Noting their "image co-dependency," they suggest that the United States' attachment to Israel might be understood as "rooted in self-recognition – that Israel functioned most deeply as an image, and justification, of the US's own culture of endless arms build-up and the militarization of politics" (123, 129). If this is the case, then it is an image which has become increasingly unseen in recent years. Is it possible that "the phantasm of Israel as projection of the West has come to an end?" (123). The elision of this dimension of the original show can be convincingly explained by the demands that the American series reflect pressing aspects of American life; however, it also seems to suggest that the Israel-Palestine conflict has become something that the United States no longer wishes to recognize, let alone metabolize, and this has consequences for how we might think about – and theorize – exactly what it is that *In Treatment* is doing.

"The device *par excellence* for screening out the real is the image," writes Max Silverman (2007, 247). It is difficult not to perceive *In Treatment*, despite its obvious – if equivocal – political commitment, as a kind of mask, a text marked by a blind spot, a stain. For all its reflection and recognition, something decisive remains invisible. We might suggest that *In Treatment* operates as part of the complex visual machinery which renders the relationship between the USA and Israel unseen. On a broader note, we might read it as contributing to the machinations of the spectacle which controls and mediates visibility as such. Discussing

filmmaking as a form of “Lazaréen art,” Silverman suggests that the most mundane objects can reveal “a disavowed unconscious life (both psychic and social) in the normalized and commodified appearance of the everyday,” a comment which I feel finds purchase in *In Treatment* (2006, 12). Something is hidden within and behind its homeliness in close-up, masked by its enthralling reflections. Whilst the series is deeply aware of the politics of the image, one can’t help feeling that it participates in a process of effacement. Is it too much to say that the faces of *In Treatment*, and the racialized politics of the image to which it attends, serve to displace not only the “special relationship” between the USA and Israel, but all that which the state wishes to render unseen? Does its use of the image make it less a form of therapy, or critique, and more a means to power? In short: does therapeutic reflection become a mask? Is the mirror a screen (Copjec 1989)?

Winnicott paradoxically tells us that the route to success may be failure. *In Treatment* offers an illustrative actualization of the kinds of techniques which might need to be in place for the media themselves to function “therapeutically” – that slowing down, that capacity to pause, perhaps also the ability to tolerate and sustain contradiction, to eschew the terms of perfection and consolation. In short, to fail. *In Treatment* demonstrates this need for failure, whilst also failing in one specific and difficult way, by failing to metabolize forms of political violence which the United States would prefer to remain unseen. Perhaps it is this complexity, ultimately, which makes the show such an important locus for reflection on the therapeutic.

## Chapter Five

“A Spectator to Other Lives”: Reading “Culture” and “Cure” in *Saturday*

The central moment in Ian McEwan’s novel *Saturday*, the point around which the work turns, is a scene of reading (2005a). As his family assemble for a reunion, the home of the protagonist, neurosurgeon Henry Perowne, is invaded by a man named Baxter and his accomplice, Nigel. Perowne is acquainted with the men, having encountered them earlier in the day in a minor traffic collision, a situation he escaped by fabricating a story about a cure for Baxter’s – incurable – Huntington’s disease. After punching his father-in-law in the nose, drinking several glasses of gin and putting a knife to the throat of Henry’s wife, Rosalind, the invading pair settles on his daughter, Daisy, ordering her to strip naked with the intention of raping her. Her nudity, however, reveals that she is pregnant, and Nigel loses enthusiasm for the plan. Baxter, unsure how to proceed, catches sight of a collection of Daisy’s poems and orders her to read one, a reading of “Dover Beach” ensues (Arnold 1965, 239–43).

Daisy, of course, did not write “Dover Beach.” Her reciting the poem comes at the subtle suggestion of her grandfather, who instructs her to “do one you used to do for me,” an allusion to Daisy’s childhood practice of learning poems by-heart in return for pocket money. The suggestion is a welcome one; Baxter has demanded Daisy recite a poem from her own first collection, the title of which, *My Saucy Bark*, has given him hopes as to the nature of its contents. Read “something really filthy,” Baxter orders (2005a, 220). In place of filth, Baxter gets “Dover Beach.” As Daisy finishes reciting for the second time – Baxter orders her to repeat the poem – Henry notices that “Baxter appears to be elated” (222). Soon he is congratulating Daisy on the poem – “it’s beautiful. And you wrote it.” The poetic word intervenes, calls a halt to violence, ushers in wonder and awe. Transformed, seemingly by the poem, Baxter forgets all thoughts and threats of rape and morphs “from lord of terror to amazed admirer. Or

excited child" (223). In this state of euphoria, trembling with "exalted feeling" (224), Baxter recalls the tale of cure Perowne had invented to avoid a serious beating. Baxter – transformed, and seemingly with a new thirst for life – decides he wants to go on the fictitious trial that Henry made up to avoid a serious beating. Stating that the details are in his office, Perowne leads Baxter upstairs. Nigel leaves in disgust, and Baxter – no longer angry but elated, hopeful and somewhat off his guard – is rushed by Henry's son, Theo, taking a serious fall. Having suffered a head injury, Baxter is taken to hospital in need of neurosurgery, and it isn't long before Perowne receives the inevitable call and makes his way to the hospital to perform the procedure: "despite various shifts in his attitude to Baxter, some clarity, even some resolve, is beginning to form. He thinks he knows what he wants to do" (233).

This scene, in which a pregnant woman recites a poem which transforms a man's experience of the world, brings the concept of environment – here literature as environment – to the fore, whilst the presence of a poem (*this poem*) at such a pivotal moment raises perennial questions about what literature does: can it offer a "cultural cure"? Baxter is held by the poem, transformed through lyrical intimacy, perhaps, from agony and rage to "fullness and contentedness" (Bollas 1993, 42). Sebastian Groes also notes this troping, arguing that at the heart of *Saturday* is "a topos as old as storytelling itself—the transformation of the self" (2009, 102). However, the extent to which the novel invests in this topos is a central contention; certainly self-transformation is held in sustained tension with the prospect of wider social transformation. The concept of the environment brings certain issues to the fore – power and politics, the personal and the collective, commitment and withdrawal.

Needless to say, critics are divided over the meaning of this scene and the presence of "Dover Beach" in McEwan's novel. For several critics, the poem signals the elevation of the personal over the political. Andrew Ross insists that the poem "appeals for a withdrawal from the deceptive, strife-ridden, massified modern scene" (2008, 81), a retreat to the private



sphere in the face of social change, a reading Paul Gilroy – in a discussion unconnected to

*Saturday* – supports:

[Arnold's] apprehensions were aligned with those of the larger social body, but as he heard and felt the shingle start to move beneath his feet, he opted to turn away from those public concerns and seek consolation in the private and intimate places where romantic love and fidelity would offset the worst effects of warfare, turbulence, and vanished certitude. The accompanying inward turn was a defensive gesture, and it was morally justifiable only when it promoted a self-conscious struggle with the historic sources of the tendency to become sad and pensive in the face of the empire's demanding geopolitical responsibilities. (2005, 91)

Reading withdrawal, Gilroy turns to the environment of the poem's writing, the fading light of empire, a context which speaks to *Saturday's* own *mise-en-scène*. The novel was written within the time of, and in response to, 9/11, an event which challenged the West's perceived invulnerability and global hegemony.

If "Dover Beach" advocates withdrawal to places both private and intimate in the face of social turmoil, *Saturday* seems to stage a comparable gesture. The novel is set in London, on 15<sup>th</sup> February 2003, a day of worldwide protests against the proposed, and ensuing, invasion of Iraq which the *New York Times* described as a "global daisy chain" and "the largest, most diverse peace protest since the Viet Nam War" (Mcfadden 2003). In spite of the significance of this day, in *Saturday* the protests appear only obliquely. McEwan focuses on a neurosurgeon, who does everything he can to avoid the march and the political itself. "Politics" mainly happen off-stage in *Saturday*, yet they are curiously central, despite their absence, to the environment of the novel, its composition and its reading.

Henry's metaphorical desire to avoid the political – "isn't it possible to enjoy an hour's recreation without this infection from the public domain?" he asks himself at one point (2005a, 108) – is echoed, then, in McEwan's use of "Dover Beach," if the latter is perceived to advocate a retreat from the public sphere. Across Henry's day, and arguably in Arnold's poem, we witness what Todd McGowan considers a broad turning away from wide-scale political

activity towards forms of personal transformation (2004, 6). John Banville describes the novel's politics as "banal," a reading which Richard Rorty contests: "Banville is off the mark [...] the book does not have a politics. It is about our inability to have one—to sketch a credible agenda for large-scale change" (Banville 2005; Rorty 2005, 92). Yet that the novel *cares* about the political is evident from its epigraph, taken from Saul Bellow's 1964 novel, *Herzog*, which provides a paratextual setting in which questions of social responsibility come to the fore. Herzog ponders "what it means to be a man. In a city. In a century. In transition. In a mass," in a world "transformed by science," a society in which there is "no community" and one which has "devalued the person," a "condition caused by mechanization. After the late failure of radical hopes" and characterized by "savagery and barbarism in its own great cities," yet where there remains some remnant of a yearning for change:

At the same time, the pressure of human millions who have discovered what concerted effort and thought can do. As megatons of water shape organisms on the ocean floor. As tides polish stones. The beautiful supermachinery opening a new life for innumerable mankind. Would you deny them the right to exist? Would you ask them to labour and go hungry while you yourself enjoyed old fashioned Values? You – you yourself are a child of this mass and a brother to all the rest. (Bellow 2001, 201)

It is Perowne's son, Theo, Rorty claims, who verbalizes the subject of McEwan's book (2005, 92), namely a certain retraction from the public sphere resulting from "the late failure of radical hopes," but also from the sense of powerlessness in the face of global affairs:

The bigger you think the crappier it looks. Asked to explain he said, 'When you go on about the big things, the political situation, global warming, world poverty, it all looks really terrible, with nothing getting better, nothing to look forward to. But when I think small, closer in – you know, a girl I've just met, of this song we're going to do with Chas, or snowboarding next month, then it looks great. So this is going to be my motto – think small.' (McEwan 2005a, 34–5)

McEwan's decision to focus on a day in the life of a man as he plays his weekly squash game, visits his mother and shops for the ingredients to make fish soup whilst keeping only half an eye on the anti-war protests would seem to actualize, at the level of narrative, this trope of thinking small. In her reading of *Saturday*, Laura Salisbury argues that over the course of the novel "the events of September 11, 2001, the 'War on Terror,' and the largest political

demonstration in the UK's history against which Henry's narrative is initially staged, all gradually [...] recede in favour of the 'backbone' of the plot" (2010, 908). As the text proceeds, an initial engagement with the specific historical and political environment of the text's production gives way to more "intimate" scenes of family life and personal reflection. There is a general shift from the "public" to the ostensibly "private," yet whether this is read as a structural *failure* within the novel, or as the structural *means* through which the text enacts the very process which it sets out to draw to attention, seems a moot point. Certainly the novel points up its own retreat. As the narrative settles into the Perowne home, attention turns to the refusal this "retreat" might represent: "these heavy curtains, closed by pulling on a cord weighted with a fat brass knob, have a way of cleanly eliminating the square and the wintry world beyond it" (2005a, 181). It is a refusal, ultimately, which leads to, or at least towards, violation.

Ross notes that the trope of a "defective vision" is a defining motif within *Saturday* from its opening pages, when Henry initially mistakes the burning plane he sees from his window for a meteor, and then a comet (2008, 80). The trope illuminates the novel's concern with a failure of the political imagination, but Ross goes on to suggest that the novel's ultimate attitude is to advocate withdrawal – that mode of thinking "small" – a retreat to the comforting and consoling spaces of the familial and the cultural: "we find our collective salvation by taking refuge in the hermetic Elysium of the cultured" (77). Yet, as Ross argues, this "we" is tentative, and its parameters somewhat narrow. He cites a review of the novel by Michiko Kakutani in the *New York Times*: "Mr. McEwan has [...] fulfilled a very primal mission of the novel: to show how we—we privileged few of us, anyway—live today" (2005). The Perownes are a formidable clan. Henry is a medic, both Daisy and her grandfather are successful poets, Theo is a blues musician and Rosalind a successful lawyer associated with a newspaper. They are a family marked by "professional skill, literary and artistic distinction, and affluence" (Ross 2008, 77). Though Henry imagines that his father-in-law, the poet John

Grammaticus, most likely perceives him to be a “tedious and uncultured medic” (McEwan 2005a, 195), at least in part as a result of his lack of interest in, and appreciation of, literature, Perowne is aligned with his “too literate” relatives (6), who are all in possession of a distinct cultural advantage. Zoe Heller cuts to the heart of this cultural consolation:

His day is spent shuttling from one privileged, embattled sanctuary to another [...] But McEwan is not interested here in satirizing yuppie solipsism...In lieu of any larger social cohesion, McEwan suggests, such private joys, carved out from the clamorous world, are what most sustain us. They are our fleeting glimpses of utopia; the ancient ideals of *caritas* and community in microcosm. (2005)

There is certainly an echo here of the “little madnesses” of cultural life which allow us a mode of escape and regeneration, yet might concurrently be construed as a refusal of the world and its troubles. *Saturday* points up the possibility that cultural engagements might produce parallel *disengagements* from social life and our broader roles and responsibilities as citizens. This remains a fraught possibility, but the fact that the novel permits the cultural to be read as a form of both retreat and restoration demonstrates its concern with “culture” and what exactly it might do.

Ross is not alone in foregrounding an affinity between *Saturday* and “Dover Beach.”

Elaine Hadley argues that the texts partake in a mutual genealogy, through “their presentation of a shared faith in the liberal cultivation of the self as in itself a good” (2005, 94); a cultivation which “uses literature and private love as its primary vehicles for engaging with the consciousnesses of others” (Ferguson 2007, 44). Hadley holds *Saturday* accountable for its investment in a regressive, masculine, detached, liberal subject, and writes with clear indignation: “are other readers as taken aback as I am by the use of “Dover Beach” in a post-9/11 novel? Does it seem to others that McEwan, the Homeland Security Chief of the Novel, has offered up duct tape and plastic sheeting as a response to the unknown agents and unpredictable consequences of the new world order?” (2005, 97). The poem cannot bear the weight of necessary transformation. McEwan, she seems to suggest, turns to the aesthetic and away from the political.

That turn, as Hadley is well aware, has a politics of its own. As noted in chapter two, Arnold composed *Culture and Anarchy* in the aftermath of the Hyde Park riots of 1866. Given that *Saturday* is so powerfully anchored in recent history, and that the mooring should also reference *mass* demonstrations in Hyde Park, the text articulates an anxiety about the prospect of popular protest and revolt. Groes notes several intertextual references to *Culture and Anarchy* in *Saturday*, and reminds us that the former is engaged with the “growing tensions within the English class system” (2009, 109). Culture, as I outlined in chapter two, becomes a means to mitigate this threat. In *Saturday*, this situation is repeated, Baxter is apparently pacified in what appears to David Amigoni to be “a parody of literature’s civilizing mission” (2008, 162). Parody is the right word, the transformation is described in deeply ironic terms – Baxter is changed from “from lord of terror to amazed admirer. Or excited child” (McEwan 2005a, 223) – which problematize the idea of a simple endorsement of the transformative powers of literature. Rather, McEwan rehearses an argument which positions culture as an exercise in pacification and control, the pacification of Baxter as a representative of that “enfeebled army haunting the public places of every town” (172).

That *Saturday* stages such an apparently allegorical scene of material disparity and poetic transformation suggests that it might offer something other than a straightforward endorsement of a detached liberal self and the powers of literary “cultivation.” Frances Ferguson, for instance, argues that the novel does not champion liberal values but challenges them, placing in question the ideas of relationship and love by invoking professional, over familial, ties. “Nothing in the novel,” she writes, “offers us a cure” (2007, 51). The reference is to the diseases which feature prominently in the text – Huntington’s, dementia – but it has wider resonance, because Ferguson is arguing that the novel does not invest in the transformative powers of literature, or in “culture and love as deep understanding” (47). She does, however, suggest that the professionalism of both Henry and his poet relatives might offer “something with the feel of love” (51). I wish to leave this point hanging, for now, and

explore further *Saturday's* "scene of reading," a term with multiple inflections: the pivotal scene with "Dover Beach," the environment of the text's composition and the text itself, as object to be read, and within a particular context. The centrality of a scene of reading in *Saturday* points up an abiding interest in the possibilities of reading, as such. Ferguson may prove to be right that nothing in the novel offers a cure, but her vision of professionalism, and the novel itself, gesture towards a version of "cure" as "care" which extends beyond the bounds of our engagements with the arts.

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From its opening pages, *Saturday* makes plain its interest in both "culture" and "cure." The novel charts a day in the life of a man whose job involves nothing less than "saving lives" (McEwan 2005a, 28). These "medical images of comforting, healing and repairing which recur throughout the novel," Andrew Foley claims, "resonate powerfully in a world marred by destructive violence" (2010, 154). The medical seems to offer a powerful metaphor and implicates the text with an old question – how might we make the world a better place? – but it sits in tension with Henry's resistance to literature, "he thinks he's seen enough death, fear, courage and suffering to supply half a dozen literatures" – and its value at this particular historical moment: "the times are strange enough. Why make things up?" (McEwan 2005a, 6, 66). This juxtaposition of "art" and "science" is a prominent trope, and the narrative voice does, at moments, take its distance from Henry's train of thought:

A man who attempts to ease the miseries of failing minds by repairing brains is bound to respect the material world, its limits, and what it can sustain – consciousness no less. It isn't an article of faith with him, he knows it for a quotidian fact, the mind is what the brain, mere matter, performs. If that's worthy of awe, it also deserves curiosity; the actual, not the magical, should be the challenge. (67)

What is evident in this prose is a mode of juxtaposition, and a form of provocation. As Groes suggests, the novel raises questions about the value of scientific materialism as a means of

understanding the world, whilst concurrently interrogating the role of the arts and of literature in the public sphere. Pertinently, it doesn't offer any easy answers (2009, 114).

Though McEwan has denied the novel is allegorical (Gauthier 2013, 14), many critics express a deep wish that *Saturday* endorses the transformative powers of the aesthetic, a wish Hadley believes is "implicit [...] for twenty-first-century academics and artists, who need to believe that intellectual and creative work matters, especially in a world context where they seem to count for so little" (2005, 100). Given the problems of investing in Baxter's transformation, many critics turn their attention to Henry. Often one begins by considering the novel's opening scene, where Henry finds himself the unwitting and uncertain spectator to a burning plane (we might recall Ross's point about the trope of defective vision here), before moving through the novel chronologically, to arrive at the climactic confrontation with Baxter.<sup>60</sup> Such an approach usually focuses on Henry's failures as a reader (a shorthand for a form of moral blindness), and his need, through exposure to literature, to develop what Nussbaum has termed "good ways of seeing" (2001, 233). In much of its critical reception the path to a better way of seeing, a more ethically sound attitude to the world, is repeatedly understood in relation to the cultural experience which the reading of "Dover Beach" represents. As Henry – arch Philistine – listens to the poem, he makes imaginative journeys into the lives of others; "slipping through the words into the things they describe" (2005a, 220). Firstly he imagines the poem represents a scene between Daisy and her lover. On second hearing he imagines "Baxter standing alone [...] listening to the waves "bring the eternal note of sadness in," he hears the sea "through Baxter's ears" (221). Foley suggests that Henry learns to appreciate "literary imaginativeness," whilst Susan Green argues that McEwan is asserting the value of literary knowing (Foley 2010, 154; S. Green 2010, 70); the novel's allegorical potential has led it to be described as both a "lesson in aesthetics" and a "lesson in reading" (Wall 2008, 757; Winterhalter 2010, 338). Whilst the first of these descriptions accompanies a

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<sup>60</sup> See, for example, Amiel-Houser (2011), Foley (2010), Green (2010), Wall (2008), Winterhalter (2010).

reading which sees the novel as a valuable illustration of, and paragon to, the “need for beauty” (to borrow from the source-text’s title), the second focuses more closely on Henry’s journey to learn *how to read*, his negotiation of the process of relating to others and ultimate attainment of an “ethical” mode of interaction.

This last point is important because, though literary transformation is central to many readings, critics often disagree over what kind of change Henry’s encounter with “Dover Beach” brings about. Henry either develops an empathic sensibility compatible with a benevolent liberal humanism,<sup>61</sup> learning to appreciate the perspective of the other and imagine their position, or he is taught a postmodern lesson by the poem, namely to recognize the essential and important otherness of people, the impossibility of reducing them to “the same.”<sup>62</sup> Ultimately, the difference between these positions may be more a case of emphasis than opposition; one either stresses sameness of difference, valorizes the imagination, or fears its violence. The attempt to understand and to imagine must be balanced with the refusal of a totalizing gesture; as John Ellis notes, “there is quite literally a world of difference between recognizing individuals as ‘just like us’ rather than just ‘like us’”; to accept bonds of similarity and attempt to imagine is not identical with a gesture of over-identification and blotting out (Ellis 2009, 75–6). The necessary act of imagination involves, as Arendt puts it, “being and thinking in my own identity where actually I am not,” and perhaps never can be (Arendt [1967] 1993, 241).

Emphasis notwithstanding, there is a marked tendency in criticism to invest in the aesthetic as a source of transformation and socialization. Whether one champions the capacities of the imagination or fears it, across all of these readings the cultural object – “Dover Beach,” that is – functions in environmental terms, nurturing the capacities of those

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<sup>61</sup> This argument can be found in Green (2010) and Foley (2010).

<sup>62</sup> This argument is most powerfully made by Amiel-Houser (2011), but it finds purchase in several other critiques, see Hillard (2008), Wall (2008), Winterhalter (2010).



who engage with it to feel and respond. Literature is positioned as an environment capable of repair, one able to cure the modes of dislocation and ethical violence perceived to characterise our contemporary world. A poem, read by a pregnant woman no less, takes on the task of the mother, or perhaps the analyst; once again the aesthetic is associated with cure. Poetry itself, arguably, shifts attention from the meaning of words towards questions of form, rhythm and timbre which resonate with both maternal care and psychoanalytic practice. The sound of the voice, the awareness of breathing and movement, the pauses which punctuate an exchange, are all non-linguistic elements which contribute to the “sound envelope” of both the mother’s holding and the psychoanalytic session (Anzieu 1989). Arnold’s poem calls attention to both the visual and the aural; the light “gleams and is gone” on the French coast, the cliffs stand “glimmering and vast” in the calm bay as he calls his addressee to come to the window, not only to see but to “listen!” to the rhythm and “tremulous cadence” of the stones as they wash back and fore on the beach.

Towards the end of *Playing and Reality*, Winnicott recounts a consultation with a woman patient of forty who suffered the “impoverishment of her life because of her inability to ‘stand in other persons’ shoes,” she “lived in a world that was all the time distorted for her by her own inability to feel concerned with what the other person was feeling” (1991b, 131). This was a way of thinking which made her friends “sensible of something lacking, however intangible, in her personality” (132). In the place of an imaginative or empathic engagement with others, the patient employed projective mechanisms; she “was actually forcing *stuff* into someone else” (134). In order to foster the patient’s capacity for interrelation, Winnicott found the need for “phases of regression to dependence in the transference, these giving experience of the full effect of adaptation to need that is in fact based on the analyst’s (mother’s) ability to identify with the patient (her baby),” in the process “enabling the patient to live and to relate” (137). From this state of merger the patient could then be disillusioned, undergoing “the painful process whereby the object becomes separated off and is placed outside the

omnipotent control of the patient,” ultimately gaining a capacity for empathy, an ability to “begin to stand imaginatively in the analyst’s shoes.” The process Winnicott describes taking place in this analysis is an uncanny echo of the environmental tasks several critics attribute to “Dover Beach.”

As this clinical vignette illustrates, our capacity for imagination, as well as differentiation, is often perceived to arise in early infancy, through something like a “low-level” empathetic response – a form of exchange which developmental psychologists theorize may offer the earliest knowledge of self and other, one made possible by the work of feeling (Gibbs 2010, 198). For Winnicott, the capacity to imagine the other “creatively” – with imagination – develops through our earliest interactions. A “significant exchange with the world,” he writes, depends on an act of creative apperception, “a two-way process in which self-enrichment alternates with the discovery of meaning in the world of seen things.” The child who gets no reflection from the environment will find their “creative capacity begins to atrophy” (1991b, 112–3). If Lacan’s version of the mirror relation inscribes sociality not in the imaginary but in the symbolic, Winnicott’s mirror gives the visual and the pre-verbal a defining role in mediating the social (Jay 1993, 351; Roudinesco 2003b; Coulson 2013). Starting out from a place of intersubjectivity, Winnicott underscores his belief that “seeing” – something different from perception – rests on an act of being seen:

When I look, I am seen, so I exist.  
I can now afford to look and see.  
I now look creatively and what I apperceive I also perceive.  
In fact I take care not to see what is not there to be seen (unless I am tired).  
(1991b, 114)

The ability to see the other “creatively,” to imagine the other’s position, depends, on this analysis, on a prior experience of receptivity, an act of understanding, on the part of the other. “I can see you, because you have shown me to myself” (Coulson 2013, 819). The environment takes on the task of nurturing, or inhibiting, our ability to relate creatively to the other. More recently, Meltzoff and Moore write that: “because human acts are seen in the other and

performed by the self, the infant can grasp that the other is at some level ‘like me’: the other acts like me, and I can act like the other. The cross-modal knowledge of what it feels like to do the act seen provides a privileged access to people not afforded to things” (1995, 55). This capacity for mutual imitation offers a kind of understanding which may be the basis for the empathetic imagination, understood as a “higher-level” response of imaginative exploration of what the other might feel.

McEwan himself has linked this mimetic capacity to the act of reading literature, aligning the reflective engagements of a young child and the experience of reading. “We can say,” he writes, “that our human literature does not define human nature so much as exemplify it” (2005b, 12). He defends this position by quoting Darwin, describing the interaction of his infant son and his nurse:

When a few days over six months old, his nurse pretended to cry, and I saw that his face instantly assumed a melancholy expression, with the corners of the mouth strongly depressed. Therefore it seems to me that an innate feeling must have told him that the pretended crying of his nurse expressed grief, and this, through the instinct of sympathy, excited grief in him. (Darwin cited in McEwan 2005b, 9)

For McEwan, this reference to a baby regarding the face of his nurse provides a metaphor for our engagement with literature. Just as the infant was able to perceive and mime the emotions expressed by the nurse, our ability to respond to literature, he argues, derives from the fact that we share a “common emotional ground” with other people (11). Salisbury reads this comparison as an obfuscation, on McEwan’s part, of maternal care – and psychoanalysis – arguing that McEwan replaces the “socialization” enacted through that care with literature itself (2010, 907). Salisbury suggests that, for McEwan, literature stands *in place of* an actual mother who “gazes at her baby” and thus “forms the conditions for the child to understand both its connection and finally its separateness from others.” Salisbury does not develop this point, but on this analysis, literature takes on the role of the mother in mediating and fostering the reader’s sense of relatedness with the world. Whilst much that Salisbury argues concerning McEwan’s relationship to psychoanalysis is convincing, I feel something is missed in this move

to pinpoint an elision of the discipline, or of a psychoanalytic vision of the developmental process which takes place between mother and child. What Salisbury actually describes is literature “doing the work” of the mother, functioning as a form of maternal care, which helps to demonstrate how a certain form of psychoanalysis lends itself to a liberal humanist belief in the interrelation of the imagination and the aesthetic, a connection which can be extended to include morality as well.

There “is something very intertwined about imagination and morals,” McEwan believes (Z. Smith 2005, 49). Debates about imagining and feeling came to the fore in the eighteenth century, the “age of sensibility,” when the ability to respond emotively to the plight of another – to exhibit sympathetic feeling – was considered a key facet of the enlightened individual (C. Dean 2004, 3). Both David Hume and Adam Smith advance the importance of “sympathy” for moral action, but their understandings of the term diverge – as understandings of the term often do. Hume describes a kind of innate process through which we come to feel the emotion of another person, we “receive by communication their inclinations and sentiments” ([1739] 1965, 316), whereas Smith takes for granted that we cannot experience the feelings of another person, we can only imagine how we should feel in that same situation: “by the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something, which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them” ([1790] 1976, 9).<sup>63</sup> Though the original reference of “sympathy” was likely confined to feelings of pity and compassion for the suffering of others, Smith writes, in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, of how the term “sympathy” can “without much impropriety, be made use of to denote our fellow-feeling with any passion whatever” (10). As his editors suggest, this “unusually wide definition” is a key

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<sup>63</sup> As Amy Coplan and Peter Goldie suggest whilst reviewing the literature on empathy, Hume appears to be thinking of the “low-level” empathetic response – contagion, mimesis, suggestion – whilst Smith is concerned with the “higher-level” capacity of the imagination (2011, xi).

factor in the move Smith makes to foreground sympathy as “the basis for social behaviour” and the core of his explanation of “moral judgement” (Raphael and Macfie 1976, 10, 20–1).

A more recent proponent in this liberal tradition is Nussbaum, and an affinity between her thinking and that of McEwan has been noted (Schemberg 2004; Winterhalter 2010). Nussbaum argues that “imagination is a crucial part of the reproduction of healthy character, and hence of society’s transgenerational stability” (2001, 236), and her insistence on the interdependence of imagination and health demonstrates the influence of object relations psychoanalysis on her thinking. In order to theorize the moral imagination and its place in public life, Nussbaum has taken up an object relations-based vision of infant development to add weight to her engagement with, and refinement of, the liberal tradition. Drawing on Klein’s theory of the depressive position and Winnicott’s understanding of the stage of concern, Nussbaum argues that the young child, expressing aggression towards the parent during the stage of ambivalence, is able to accede to moral behaviour because she possesses the ability to imagine the other’s pain and is thus able to feel guilt for her attack and make amends for her actions (Klein [1935] 1975a; Klein [1940] 1975b; D. W. Winnicott [1963] 1990i). Crucially, Nussbaum argues that this capacity for imagination takes shape within the facilitating environment of parental care. That environment needs to offer the child a sense of the importance of imagination, the parents need to take seriously, and practice, the act of imagining what the other feels. Nussbaum attends to the significance of the form of care which the child receives, and goes so far as to briefly consider the preverbal exchange which takes place between infant and caregiver. Discussing Stern’s photographic studies of motherhood, Nussbaum notes how they “reveal the subtle interplay of eyes and face that characterize most such relationships – and also show how the relationship can go awry, through excessive intrusiveness, overstimulation, or depressive neglect” (2001, 189). Drawing on Winnicott’s detailed account of his treatment of a single patient, B, published as *Holding and Interpretation* (1986c), she outlines the role of the environment in the development of the

imagination and in shaping attitudes to human need. B was a patient consumed by primitive shame and unable to relate to others, which Nussbaum attributes to a failure on the part of his environment to provide adequate forms of reflection: because no one was interested in imagining the experience of others, the child's imaginative abilities were overwhelmed and forestalled (2001, 117). B was unable to imagine the other and hence make reparation for any perceived imperfection, a situation which resulted in a form of moral death. Given that, for both Nussbaum and Winnicott, the ability to imagine the other is central to morality, psychological health becomes coterminous with moral development (222).

Nussbaum moves this investment in the form of the environment over into her consideration of literature, imagination and morality, concretizing the extension of the environment beyond the mother-child dyad, and arguing for closer attention to be paid to the capacities of the personality which different institutions support. On this analysis, culture – the right kind of culture – is conceived as functioning analogously to maternal care, facilitating the imaginative capacities which are seen as a necessary prerequisite for moral action (Nussbaum 2001, 174–237; 2004, 203). Literature is crucial to morality, Nussbaum claims, because it encourages identifications and nurtures the ability to imagine the lives of others with empathy and compassion. In *Hiding from Humanity*, she ponders how the selection of literary, artistic and musical works for the purposes of education might contribute to the production of a facilitating environment for young people. Such an environment would seek to foster “genuine empathy and understanding” (2004, 213). The realist novel in particular, Nussbaum suggests, is valuable because it insists on the distinctiveness of individuals who are different from the reader, but whose lives are presented as important for the basic reason that they are given attention (1995, 27–35). Such a form encourages sympathy, she argues, urging the reader to engage imaginatively in the lives of different others in order to understand the common vulnerabilities and worth of diverse peoples. Significantly, Nussbaum claims that not all works function in the right way, especially ones concerned with the “sophistication of form,” rather

than “human” concerns (2001, 248). In making this last point, Nussbaum is very close to McEwan himself, who has stated that “the artifice of fiction can be taken for granted,” “experimentation in its broadest sense should have less to do with formal factors like busting up your syntax and scrambling your page order, and more to do with content – the representation of states of mind and the society that forms them” (1978, 51). An obsession with form, he suggests, robs the novel of its non-didactic morality, which resides in its capacity to encourage the reader to take part imaginatively in the lives of others by operating in the realm of sensibility.

In specifying the kinds of texts which might function in the right ways to facilitate imagination and thus foster a sense of moral responsibility and the good, both Nussbaum and McEwan construe the arts in environmental terms, as an environment capable of shaping and influencing behaviour in a socially constructive way. But the constructive role assigned to the arts rests on their functioning as a kind of testimony, as a privileged route into other minds. Speaking of his own perception of the novel form, McEwan writes:

I think that quality of penetration into other consciousnesses lies at the heart of its moral quest. Knowing, or sensing what it is like to be someone else I think is at the foundations of morality. I don’t think the novel is particularly good or interesting when it instructs us how to live, so I don’t think of it as moral in that sense. But certainly when it shows us intimately, from the inside, other people, it then does extend our sensibilities. (“Ian McEwan” 2014)

Offering access to a consciousness different from our own, literature, for McEwan, holds out the promise of sociality by allowing us to imagine and feel for a wider range of people. This moral dimension of the literary work lies not in the ideas which the form transmits, but in its offer of an encounter, a kind of empathetic engagement with another whose sameness and value is reiterated by the novel’s sustained attention.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> The kinds of narrative which provide this for McEwan are those which employ a form of psychological realism; *Madame Bovary* and *Anna Karenina*, he claims, offer the “privilege of unmediated contact” (2005b, 5), a comment likely to set off some alarm bells. McEwan seems given over to the fantasy of “bourgeois realism”: the mistaken idea that there is “some sort of equivalence between the narrative

McEwan's claim that fiction should eschew the sophistications of form whilst grounding itself in the realm of sensibility has raised eyebrows and influenced attitudes to *Saturday*. Critics frequently read Henry's claim that "the actual, not the magical, should be the challenge" as McEwan's own (2005a, 67). This equation – Perowne=McEwan – seems borne out by some of McEwan's authorial decisions. He has reported in interviews that in writing the novel he drew on "whatever was to hand," using his home, his son and his mother as elements in the plot (*The Globe and Mail* 2005; L. Miller 2005). In an interview with the Canadian newspaper *The Globe and Mail*, McEwan discussed these decisions: "I'd been wondering how the imagination responds to an event like 9/11, and trying to take the temperature of the aftermath. I thought one way of doing this was to braid the real with the invented, and I would use as much as possible of what was right in front of me, including my house and the square. I wanted to have a documentary sense, at least from my own point of view." This documentary sense precipitates a confusion between McEwan and Perowne, and the novel itself is judged ethically problematic because of its persistent appeal for both referentiality and unmediated access. McEwan, like Henry, *has* expressed impatience with magic realism – "I've always had the sneaking suspicion that once you lift all the constraints and can do anything, as Perowne says, nothing you do really matters. If you don't have the constraints of the material world, if people can turn into a ketchup pot while you're talking to them, then what matters?" (L. Miller 2005) – and his "fiction of science" (so named because of its investment in the neurological and the material) has been criticized for its tendency to perpetuate the status quo (Salisbury 2010, 908). Salisbury argues that "what is lost" in McEwan's decision to describe the world as it is "is the sense that novels might offer utopian spaces to imagine things otherwise [...] that the novel might be able to explore or elicit the creative conditions for imagining a world that could be different, and that even needs to be different, to this one" (2010, 909). In short,

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act and the transparency of consciousness." The suggestion is, as Blanchot puts it, that the narrator is presented simply as "there only to raise the curtain [...] he does not tell, he shows; and the reader does not read, he looks, attending, taking part without participating" ([1963] 1993, 382–3).



McEwan closes down the possibility of seeing literature as more than testimony, as more than a privileged route to the minds of others.

However, McEwan's "documentary sense," which cuts across the novel's narrative style and Perowne's way of relating to the world, places the specific moral and ethical appeals which are made to literary or other "cultural" texts in question. McEwan has taken his distance from Henry – "a character in a novel who expresses hostility towards novels in general should not be seen as an entirely trustworthy mouthpiece of his novelist creator," he reminds us (2007) – but Henry's attitude to literature also poses a challenge to an exclusive association of the arts with the moral imagination. Hillard suggests that Henry passes a large part of his day "reading and interpreting," whilst repeatedly dismissing "literature's significance in the modern setting" (2008, 181). The importance of this point should not be underestimated – the act of "reading" extends beyond the arts and needs to be separated from the idea of artistic creation. McEwan has explained his decision to have Henry lack an appreciation of literature: "I run into masses of people who never read novels or poems [...] they're perfectly capable of moral choices. They're completely sentient and decent and have rich inner lives. I think we have to be careful about our claims for literature" (*The Globe and Mail* 2005). There is, perhaps, an echo of the "Populace" here, but McEwan doesn't suggest that culture is necessarily unavailable to these "masses" he encounters, nor that literature has no value. Rather he is asking about the possibilities – and the limitations – for moral and ethical development both in relation to, and beyond, the literary text. *Saturday* interrogates the ability of literature to function as a site of transformation, tracing the boundaries of the liberal ideology of "culture," whilst drawing attention to the purchase of the idea of "environment" in thinking responsibility and response.

Ferguson expresses something important when she notes that "in the current century [...] emotions move along routes quite different from those that we imagine ourselves to

harness when we think of Austen's Emma Woodhouse and George Knightley coming to be able to understand one another even when they speak in riddles" (2007, 49). Calling to mind a novel concerned with the possibilities and limits of understanding, Ferguson draws attention to the "weight of technological change," and the effect on thought and feeling of increased mediation (43). Ferguson suggests a parallel between Henry's mother's dementia and the norms of contemporary news media: she is able to engage in "affection without understanding," and this mirrors the media's offering of "attention without content" (49). It might also be legitimate, however, to reverse the terms of Ferguson's articulation and suggest that news media offer a surfeit of content capable of generating affect, but what is lacking in this endless stream of information is perhaps sustained consideration which might permit a form of understanding to emerge.

From its opening scene, *Saturday* announces its preoccupation with acts of reading and imagining distinct from the literary. Henry's encounter with the sight of a burning plane stages an instance of looking with significant resonance. The scene references an event that took place less than eighteen months previously: the spectacular sight, mediated for most of the world by television screens, of burning planes and, ultimately, the destruction of the World Trade Centre in New York. "It's already almost eighteen months since half the planet watched, and watched again the unseen captives driven through the sky to the slaughter, at which time there gathered around the innocent silhouette of any jet plane a novel association. Everyone agrees airliners look different in the sky these days, predatory or doomed" (McEwan 2005a, 16). This "novel" association is something like a transformation of perception following the events of 9/11 – no one can look at an aeroplane with quite the same openness or innocence – and this change in some sense belies a broader change in cultural perception precipitated by, though not exactly caused by, those same infamous events.

In an article published on September 12<sup>th</sup> 2001, McEwan reflected on the experience of watching distant catastrophe: “We saw the skyscrapers, the tilting plane, the awful impact, the cumuli of dust engulfing the streets. But we were left to imagine for ourselves the terror inside the airliner, down the corridors and elevator lobbies of the stricken buildings [...] Only television could bring this” (2001). For McEwan and “for most of us,” he writes, “at a certain point, the day froze, the work and all other obligations were left behind, the screen became the only reality. We entered a dreamlike state.” Glued to the screen, viewers impatiently flicked between channels, “hungrily, ghoulishly [...] Numbed, and in a state of sickened wonderment.” If 9/11 constituted a unique media event – these were crimes meant for television which may, or may not, have “radicalized the relationship of the image to reality” (Baudrillard 2003, 26) – the acts of looking which it prompted were an exaggeration and reiteration of already pervasive norms of media engagement. The events of that day produced an extreme version of an ubiquitous act: looking at distant others more generally, specifically “regarding the pain of others,” as Sontag puts it; though the victims were not those we are used to seeing, and the images we saw lacked the graphic frankness which is often common of the “most foreign” images we witness (2004, 55).

For Henry, the spectacle at his bedroom window – the wooden frame echoing the frame of the television screen – repeats an act of watching, it “has the familiarity of a recurrent dream” (McEwan 2005a, 15). While he imagines what it must be like to be part of such a traumatic event, “the screaming in the cabin partly muffled by that deadening acoustic, the fumbling in bags for phones and last words,” he also reflects on the realities of distance: “that is the other familiar element – the horror of what he can’t see. Catastrophe observed from a safe distance. Watching death on a large scale, but seeing no one die. No blood, no screams, no human figures at all, and into this emptiness, the obliging imagination set free” (16). Looking on from a safe distance, Henry finds himself imagining the unseen events in vivid, if sensational, terms: “the fight to the death in the cockpit, a posse of brave passengers

assembling before a last-hope charge against the fanatics. To escape the heat of that fire which part of the plane might you run to? The pilot's end might seem less lonely somehow." As the plane passes behind the tops of the trees, the light of the fire on board is repeatedly obscured by the leaves and "twinkles festively among the branches and twigs" (16). Henry is lost to fantasy, and it takes a moment for him to realize "there's something he should be doing," namely contacting the emergency services. He quickly realizes that by the time he calls, "whatever is to happen will be in the past" (17). Standing at his window looking on, Henry is able to imagine his way into the plane, but his implication in the scene is more elusive. In fact, he makes references which underscore his detachment from it, one of which centres on the random nature of his having witnessed the scene at all:

A simple anthropic principle is involved. The primitive thinking of the supernaturally inclined amounts to what his psychiatric colleagues call a problem, or an idea, of reference. An excess of the subjective, the ordering of the world in line with your needs, an inability to contemplate your own unimportance. In Henry's view such thinking belongs on a spectrum at whose end, rearing like an abandoned temple, lies psychosis. (17)

Henry stands for all those who witnessed the attacks of 9/11: looking, imagining, but – crucially – doing nothing. He articulates what is at stake in our persistent experiences of watching distant suffering: we are implicated in the event by our very presence in front of the screen, yet our watching alone changes nothing.<sup>65</sup> Henry, like the spectator of distant suffering, "feels culpable somehow, but helpless too. These are contradictory terms, but not quite, and it's the degree of their overlap, their manner of expressing the same thing from different angles, which he needs to comprehend." Like those who witnessed 9/11, which also evokes so many other atrocities, "his crime was to stand in the safety of his bedroom, wrapped in a woollen dressing gown, without moving or making a sound, half dreaming, as he watched people die" (22). Henry's "crime" here is less that he doesn't possess the right way of looking – what would be right in such a situation? – than that he does nothing. Looking, imagining but –

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<sup>65</sup> Michele Aaron suggests that spectatorship, "in some ways *is* the ethical encounter" because it "depends upon our intersubjective alignment with the prospective suffering of others" (2007, 112).

crucially – not acting. The familiarity of the scene implicates the reader too, because Henry represents an appetite for a form of disturbing spectacle, complicated by its relation to entertainment, to which we do not know how to respond.

Where the blame lies for our responsive failure is frequently debated, and the media are often considered to not provide the resources for action. Silverstone approaches the media in environmental terms, reiterating their central role in shaping “social, civic and moral space” and proposing the term “mediapolis” to describe such a reality (2007, 5). Silverstone presents the media as “an environment which provides at the most fundamental level the resources we all need for the conduct of everyday life” (13), resources for living, relating and crucially, judging and acting. Because the distinction between the world as it is lived and the world as it appears on screen no longer holds, the media – in which the other “appears” – have become central to the formation of public space, and are thus of prime importance and concern. On his analysis, the media become a space wherein imagination and ethical action can be fostered and might flourish.

In the contemporary world, the “scene of reading” extends beyond the literary. Silverstone argues that the media play a pivotal role in the negotiation of global life, and have an ethical obligation to provide those who engage with them with the necessary “resources for judgement” which can facilitate “thinking, speaking, listening and acting – the basic components of life in the world, and the precondition for the constitution of publicness” (2007, 34–5, 8). Drawing on Arendt, Silverstone argues that the media can facilitate the political imagination by supplying a depth of information, a variety of points of view and suitable contextual detail which will allow the audience to make the judgements which are preconditions for effective action. Silverstone argues that the media must work to produce “proper distance,” resisting the tendencies to either fetishize otherness (and thus preclude identification) or to elide difference through an over-identification which refuses to recognize

the irreducibility of the other. In short, they must foreclose the extremes of numbness and over-identification which Carolyn Dean identifies as key terms in debates about imagining and feeling (C. Dean 2003). If these poles can be avoided, the spectator may engage in “representative thinking,” whereby they imagine what their own feelings would be, if they were placed in the position of the others whom they contemplate (Silverstone 2007, 46–7). On the basis of this act of imagination rests the possibility for judgement and political action, Silverstone claims.

*Saturday*’s preoccupation with the media, and Henry’s engagement with it, evinces a concern with structures of address. The nature and significance of media rhetoric and presence weighs heavily on the novel. After his stint at the window when he witnesses the burning plane, Henry descends to his kitchen to find the news and await a report on what he has seen. His son Theo is already in the kitchen and upon hearing his father report the night’s events, he “turns on the small TV they keep near the stove for moments like this, breaking stories.” Henry’s need to have the story reported demonstrates the extent to which the media function as a constitutive force in, and of, social life; a contention foregrounded by the fact that an engagement with news media was central to Theo’s entry into public life. The attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup> were “Theo’s induction into international affairs, the moment he accepted that events beyond friends, home and the music scene had bearing on his existence” (2005a, 31). It might be possible to say that Theo was constituted as a citizen in a moment of public looking: “his initiation, in front of the TV, before the dissolving towers, was intense but he adapted quickly” (32), now he scans the newspapers for “fresh developments.” Significantly, Theo’s emergence into “adult consciousness” is mediated not by literature, but by the narratives and images presented by the media.

The specificity of the context is important here. *Saturday* clearly stages the ways in which the media “fail,” but the novel articulates that failure as in complex relation with the

vicissitudes of the spectacle in the post-9/11 world (Debord 1983; Retort 2005, 16–37). The media offer “manufactured controversy” as a means of resuscitating “the fading life-chances of a disappointing news story” – the burning plane: “an aviation expert is found who’s prepared to say it was reckless to bring the burning plane in over a densely populated area” (McEwan 2005a, 70). Whilst cooking later in the day, Henry feels “the pull, like gravity, of the approaching TV news. It’s a condition of the times, this compulsion to hear how it stands with the world, and be joined to the generality, to a community of anxiety” (176). Rather than a viable locus of debate, a means of entering the public sphere, the media, the novel suggests, put on a hysterical performance which seems designed to inhibit imagination and deliberation. As the news begins and Henry witnesses the same shots of the anti-war protest he has been party to all day, followed by Colin Powell at the UN and “cheerfully censored” shots of “our lads” on the Iraq-Kuwait border, he leaves the scene on mute (177–9). Then the plane story appears and, “with a confused sense that he’s about to learn something significant about himself, he turns on the sound and stands facing the tiny set, drying his hands on a towel.” In spite of the collapse of the story, the novel suggests that Henry has discovered something important about his status as “media citizen”:

It’s part of the new order, this narrowing of mental freedom, of his right to roam. Not so long ago his thoughts ranged more unpredictably, over a longer list of subjects. He suspects he’s becoming a dupe, the willing febrile consumer of news fodder, opinion, speculation and all the crumbs the authorities let fall. He’s a docile citizen, watching Leviathan grow stronger while he creeps under its shadow for protection. He’s allowed every nervous shift of the daily news process colour his emotional state. It’s an illusion to believe himself active in this story. Does he think he’s contributing something, watching news programmes, or lying on his back on the sofa on Sunday afternoons, reading more opinions columns of ungrounded certainties...? (180)

Implicitly, the novel asks here: could it be different? Is there a different form of engagement which might allow Henry to be “active” in this story? With regard to the prospect of war, Henry and his daughter Daisy take different sides in the debate and as they range back and forth across their differing opinions (Daisy supports the protests) the novel makes clear an underlying problem: “they are fighting over armies they will never see, about which they know

almost nothing" (190). The media is positioned as a space which does not offer the resources which are essential to the faculty of judgement, itself a necessity in political life; it is compromised as a public sphere, and instead serving the interests of a Leviathan-like state power. Whilst offering a space of "protection" and solace, the media manipulate anxieties and control possible response, dictating the parameters of thought and feeling in ways which may constitute or precipitate a form of withdrawal. In this process, Silverstone argues and McEwan demonstrates:

We are complicit, we collude, we are often active without being agents, and thinkers without thought. This position of passivity is part of the deal struck with our media for the order and comfort they create for us, perhaps even in moments of high drama and disaster. We need, perhaps, to demand a modicum of discomfort, a willingness to be troubled and an expectation that the media might help us with those expectations. But we also, and crucially, need to be more critical and more alert. For our ultimate responsibility as citizens goes wider than the media's representation of the world: it reaches to the world which the media represent. (Silverstone 2007, 135)

Silverstone's intervention emblemizes a way of thinking about engagement, a way of considering the importance of setting, frame and content in determining our capacity to respond.<sup>66</sup> He insists on the need to experience, through the media, a form of *discomfort* which could be read as a need for ambiguity, for openendedness, for a diversity of opinion and position which might better facilitate our capacity to judge and act. *Saturday* does not so much *blame* the media for this situation as insist on its role in mediating and encouraging forms of indifference and "thinking small" which extend beyond our relations with technology.

Silverstone calls attention to our complicity in processes which promote political disengagement, but the need to "facilitate the imagination" through argument and testimony remains central to his argument. Such attentiveness to the form of environmental provision is, however, only one way in which the fact of the environment can be used to think about relationality and responsibility. Butler has recently argued that "to say that the self must be narrated, that only a narrated self can survive" means to say that we cannot survive with an

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<sup>66</sup> A topic taken up by Butler in her lecture on photographic frames, Butler (2007).



unconscious (2005, 65). The fear of the absence of narrative enacts the obliteration of a non-narratable beginning.

The opacity of the subject may be a consequence of its being conceived as a relational being, one whose early and primary relations are not always available to conscious knowledge. Moments of unknowingness about oneself tend to emerge in the context of relations to others, suggesting that these relations call upon primary forms of relationality that are not always available to explicit and reflective thematization. If we are formed in the context of relations that become partially irrecoverable to us, then that opacity seems built into our formation and follows from our status as beings who are formed in relations of dependency. (20)

Butler writes that “we might consider a certain post-Hegelian reading of the scene of recognition in which precisely my own opacity to myself occasions my capacity to confer a certain kind of recognition on others. It would be, perhaps, an ethics based on our shared, invariable, and partial blindness about ourselves” (41). For Butler, this is a way of using the fact of infantile relationality and development to forward an ethical norm which does not depend on a teleology of increasing maturity and independence. In contrast to Nussbaum, Butler does not focus on a developmental scheme predicated upon the child’s arrival at a point of ethico-moral maturity in contrast to an earlier state of immorality; rather the fact of ontological relationality – the fact we are born into an environment, we might say – provides a model and a basis for understanding and establishing an ethical mode of relating. Butler draws attention not to how the environment should be (though we should not give this up), but to the otherness of the self as a strong foundation for recognition and responsibility.

Butler insists that it is our very vulnerability to being affected by the other (and to be numbed is also to be affected) which forms the core of our ethical sociality. She writes that “a passive relation to other beings precedes the formation of the ego or the *moi* or, put slightly differently, becomes the instrument through which that formation takes place” (2005, 87). A passive relation forms the condition for our responsiveness to others, and of our responsibility for them (88). Whether passivity is coterminous with dependence, however, remains a point of contention; certainly the relationship between infant and adult world is asymmetrical, though

the child plays some active role in its negotiation. Nevertheless, such thinking makes it possible to articulate and mobilize a notion of sameness which differs from a narcissistic blotting out; and offers a form of understanding in which the environment is of central significance. Borch-Jacobsen's description of the Freudian subject is pertinent here:

Either we understand that the Other is *the same as the subject*, in which case the latter, always identical to itself, triumphantly assimilates and absorbs into itself that otherness [...] Or, on the contrary, we understand the subject to be *the same as the Other* – and at once the formula becomes more difficult to understand, at once we no longer know who or what this subject is that had just seemed so obvious, nor do we know if we are still dealing with a subject. (1986, 110)

Borch-Jacobsen foregrounds an intersubjectivity at the origin of the subject, “a kind of original *alteration* (or *affection*) by others” which proceeds and complicates any distinction between that self and those others (1993, 42). This idea recalls Winnicott's understanding of the maternal mirror, because it insists on the fundamental role of the other in the development of the self, and ultimately premises the “social tie,” the bond with others, on a primary vulnerability and dependence prior to the constitution of the ego. In short, it places it in relation to infant care. Butler draws on the concept of the environment to provide a basis for relationality, a reason for the ethical relation which might in turn prove able to facilitate social transformation.

*Saturday* suggests that such ontological-environmental ethics remain a marginalized resource in contemporary social life. As Peter Childs notes, it is difficult not to see Perowne's attitude as some sort of “metonym for the material West's indifference to world affairs” (2006, 150), whilst Martin Ryle argues that *Saturday* is “of special interest to any critic concerned with how contemporary literary fiction mirrors and addresses its audience,” and he is correct in noting how the novel takes aim at its readers (2010, 26). However, as already discussed, *Saturday* has been critiqued for acting out, at the levels of both form and content, a damaging kind of cultural myopia and withdrawal; the critique is often articulated by reading a particular passage of Henry's interior monologue. After a momentary encounter with a street sweeper to

whom he feels “for a vertiginous moment” bound, “pinned to an axis that could tip them into each other’s life,” Henry reflects on the state of British society and the purchase of “fellow feeling”:

How restful it must once have been, in another age, to be prosperous and believe that an all-knowing supernatural force had allotted people to their stations in life. And not see how the belief served your own prosperity – a form of anosognosia, a useful psychiatric term for a lack of awareness of one’s own condition. Now we think we do see, how do things stand? After the ruinous experiments of the lately deceased century, after so much vile behaviour, so many deaths, a queasy agnosticism has settled around those matters of justice and redistributed wealth. No more big ideas. The world must improve, if at all, by tiny steps. People mostly take an existential view – having to sweep the streets for a living looks like simple bad luck. It’s not a visionary age. The streets need to be clean. Let the unlucky enlist. (2005a, 74)

Both Ryle and Naomi Booth argue that this scene illustrates Henry’s own anosognosia. Coming just moments after the encounter with the street sweeper, McEwan, Booth claims, “hints at the potential for self-delusion here” (Forthcoming, 16). “Rather than returning to the question of anosognosia,” Ryle writes, to the question “of how these beliefs may ‘serve his own prosperity,’ Perowne lets his critical self-scrutiny falter and lapse” (2010, 32). McEwan clearly stages Perowne’s self-delusion here, a mental attitude of which Henry is not unaware. In fact, he takes his distance from the position he articulates, claiming it as failed vision. We “*think* we do see,” the street sweeper’s job “*looks like* simple bad luck,” comments which foreground an absence of vision, and suggest more is involved in determining the street sweeper’s prospects than luck. Perowne is well-aware of how a pervasive belief in the impossibility of large-scale change serves to perpetuate the status quo. But to move beyond Henry, here *Saturday* stages the ubiquity of the “performance principle,” the defining purchase of “the seeming consistency between individual effort and success” discussed by the Frankfurt School and which Benjamin summarizes thus:

Precisely because of the “nature” of social relations, a competitive framework appears in which the individual seems to be master of her/his own destiny, or seems to be to blame for her/his own fate. For example, class does not appear as a structural relationship (between groups) but as an attribute between individuals who merit their position. It takes the form of a comparison between individuals in their relation to fortune, rather than a mutually conditioning relation in which one group has power over another. (1978, 45)

Henry's encounter with the street sweeper, and his meditation on anosognosia, tell just this familiar story of a society where rational self-interest is *the* organizing principle through which hegemonic authority operates. The scenes foreground an association between what we might now consider neo-liberal modes of thought and the "late failure" of the "radical hopes" which a more structural vision might allow.

The failure of collective feeling within contemporary capitalist society figures keenly when Henry visits a fishmonger to pick up the ingredients for a fish stew he will cook that evening. Regarding the fish, Henry ponders the obligation which a shared biology suggests:

Scores of polymodal nociceptor sites just like ours in the head and neck of rainbow trout. It was once convenient to think biblically, to believe we are surrounded for our benefit by edible automata on land and sea. Now it turns out that even fish feel pain. This is the growing complication of the modern condition, the expanding circle of moral sympathy. Not only distant people are our brothers and sisters, but foxes too, and laboratory mice, and now the fish. (2005a, 127)

There is an echo of Elizabeth Costello here, giving her lectures at Appleton College, in which she argues that being rather than thinking should form the grounds of recognition and responsibility (Coetzee [1999] 2001). To accept that even fish feel pain conjures a limitless obligation to all forms of animal life, however Henry quickly judges this situation unworkable: "the trick, as always, the key to human success and domination, is to be selective in your mercies. For all the discerning talk, it's the close at hand, the visible that exerts the overpowering force. And what you don't see [...] that's why in gentle Marylebone the world seems so entirely at peace" (127). Biological knowledge reveals our filial links with animals, rather than our distance from them, which produces a demand for sympathy, a call for responsibility based on ontological similarity, however that sympathy is deemed unworkable and Henry demands "selection," itself a Darwinian (read self-interested) term. In spite of this evolutionary coding, Henry expresses something like an aporia of responsibility here, what Derrida describes as the double-bind of ethics, wherein to respond to an other is always to fail to respond to all of the other others to whom I am responsible. He writes that: "there are also

others, an infinite number of them, the innumerable generality of others to whom I should be bound by the same responsibility, a general and universal responsibility (what Kierkegaard calls the ethical order). I cannot respond to the call, the request, the obligation, or even the love of another without sacrificing the other other" (1995, 68). Derrida details life as a series of daily betrayals or sacrifices in which we choose either professional obligation (for example) at the expense family, or we abandon all of the other others for the close at hand: "all the cats in the world to the cat you feed at home in the morning" (71). As the scene at the fishmongers suggests, faced with all of the others of the world, it is most often the "close at hand" who exercise the greatest claim to responsibility, "for all the discerning talk."

As the family meal approaches later in the day, Henry prepares his fish stew whilst watching the television news. Descriptions of what he sees are intercut with the procedures of cooking, the national and international juxtaposed with the homely and familial. There are reports of the protests: "On the big Hyde Park stage, sound-bite extracts of speeches by a venerable politician of the left, a pop star, a playwright, a trade unionist. Into the stock pot he eases the skeletons of three skates." A moment later, as a senior police officer is answering questions about the march, Henry places some mussels into the pan, "if they're alive and in pain, he isn't to know" (2005a, 177). Questions of responsibility raised by the protest march come into contact with Henry's act of watching, whilst Henry's response to the possible suffering of the mussels reiterates a certain refusal. This act of not wanting to know is further complicated by his support for the war, which is based largely on his encounter with an Iraqi professor who has detailed to him the horrors of Saddam's regime. For Henry, the protest itself enacts a form of refusal: he sees it as just "singing and dancing in the park," "the iPod generation doesn't want to know" about the genocide and mass torture taking place in Iraq (191). Henry's opinion, however, is based on a personal encounter, a sense of responsibility to those if not loved then at least near. At the end of his day, as he once again reflects at his

window, Henry hears his daughter Daisy – who is against the war – chastise him: “you’ve let one man’s story turn your head” (277).

In an interview with Zadie Smith, McEwan suggests that Westerners who criticize his novel are hypocritical, because we partake in the same advantages as Henry: “that’s why I have him gazing at the locks on his door, thinking about the bad people, the drug dealers who want to get in—there’s an embattlement. They’re on the other side. You block these people out of your world picture” (Z. Smith 2005, 56–7). Smith pursues the point, suggesting McEwan is “saying that happiness is based on unreality or a bubble of unreality.” McEwan’s response is difficult: “it’s a kind of framing, yes. But great things are achieved within that frame.” As Milner reminds us with reference to painting, the frame marks off one kind of reality from another ([1955] 1993, 17). “Frames,” Butler argues, “work to give face and efface” (2007, 955). McEwan suggests that not wanting to know constitutes not only a means of survival, but the key to something like “flourishing”; through processes of exclusion, he appears to be suggesting, we are able to negotiate the world, and our thriving is a direct consequence of such practices. Yet such modes of framing – whilst expedient – work counter to an ethics of ontological recognition and responsibility.

Ultimately, we must recall that Henry’s regression to “the close at hand,” the retreat to his well-appointed Bloomsbury home and “the hermetic Elysium of the cultured” (Ross 2008, 77), comes at a price. The Perowne home is invaded by those people McEwan claims “we” block out of “our” worldview, those, it would seem, we choose not to imagine. The narrative suggests that the consequences of “thinking small,” of not wanting to know about suffering, may be an experience of violence. McEwan has famously gone so far as to claim that “a failure of imagination” figured amongst the crimes of the 9/11 hijackers – a point he reiterated in an interview in 2002:

Now, I’m an atheist. I really don’t believe for a moment that our moral sense comes from a God [...] It’s human, universal, [it’s] being able to think our way into the minds of

others. As I said at the time, what those holy fools clearly lacked, or clearly were able to deny themselves, was the ability to enter into the minds of the people they were being so cruel to. Among their crimes, is, was, a failure of the imagination, of the moral imagination. (McEwan and Whitney 2002)

McEwan is here symptomatic of a political discourse that concentrates on the spectacular manifestations of violence and leaves their causes at the margins. His response is in direct opposition to that of Gayatri Spivak, who used the event of terror as a prompt to reflection on – and imagining of – the lives of those who perpetrated the attacks (2004). McEwan seems unable to consider the suffering that the hijackers *might* have known about; his thinking overrides Spivak's call for a mode of imagination, an ethical (rather than epistemological) mode of knowing, to be extended to those who killed. Eric Santner offers a related, sympathetic, response to the question of how the symptom of violence might be understood:

Symptoms register not only the past failed revolutionary attempts but, more modestly, past failures to respond to calls for action or even empathy on behalf of those whose suffering in some sense belongs to the form of life of which one is part. They hold the place of something which is there, that insists in our lives, though it has never achieved full ontological consistency. Symptoms are thus in some sense the virtual archives of voids—or, perhaps, better, defences against voids—that persist in historical experience. (cited in Žižek 2002, 23)

Santner positions violence as a reaction to a form of environmental failure, the failure of the environment to respond to suffering. For Winnicott, the antisocial act is a symptom, as Jan Abram puts it in her foreword to *Deprivation and Delinquency*, it “conveys an important message to society,” it is a response to distress (2012, iix). If we pursue McEwan's idea of terrorism as a failure of the moral imagination – and I am not claiming that I agree with this, but using it heuristically – it might be possible, following Santner, to see that failure as a consequence of an encounter with a global environment that is not sufficiently empathic, or interested in imagining the other. The failure of the moral imagination might be assigned to those in positions of power – baldly, “the West” – for it is potentially our “failure to respond” which is ultimately at issue here. Reading *Saturday* as allegory in these terms, it would beggar belief to suggest that “Dover Beach” might, as Hadley so succinctly puts it, “save the day” (2005, 92). Faced with the task of responding to violence, it would be almost comical to believe

that such a situation might be rectified by constructing a reading list for the terrorists – or the Baxters, or the Henrys for that matter – which features the “right” kind of texts.

This is not to negate the importance of environment, but rather to insist on the purchase of the concept in thinking politics and power beyond the narrow definition of the “cultural.” The staging of Baxter’s apparent transformation through an encounter with the poem raises, of course, the question of the civilizing mission of literature, but the text does not simply endorse this possibility, it poses it as a question. McEwan does not leave things clear cut. Baxter suffers from that rare neurodegenerative disease, Huntington’s Chorea, which leaves him prone to sudden changes in mood. As Henry is well aware, “it is the essence of a degenerating mind, periodically to lose all sense of a continuous self” (McEwan 2005a, 224). The reason for Baxter’s transformation is thus complicated, disarticulated from a straightforward causal scheme in which lyricism and image coalesce with such subtle brilliance as to create a sense of a better world, a better life. The text insists on this provocation: “could it happen, is it within the bounds of the real, that a mere poem [...] could precipitate a mood swing?” (221). Baxter *might* have been transformed by the poem, or this metamorphosis might just be a symptom of his illness, and there is something very *unpoetic* about that.

The fact of Baxter’s illness draws attention to a mode of genetic thinking which serves as a kind of placeholder for the elision of environmental concerns across *Saturday* and far beyond it. Perowne, does not, overall, endorse the environmental view:

It’s a commonplace of parenting and modern genetics that parents have little or no influence on the characters of their children. You never know what you are going to get. Opportunities, health, prospects, accent, table manners – these might lie within your power to shape. But what really determines the sort of person who’s coming to live with you is which sperm finds which egg, how the cards in two packs are chosen, then how they are shuffled, halved and spliced at the moment of recombination. Cheerful or neurotic, kind or greedy, curious or dull, expansive or shy and anywhere in between; it can be quite an affront to parental self-regard, just how much of this work has already been done. On the other hand, it can let you off the hook. (25)



For Perowne, the question of temperament is answered before the child is even born, and whilst this is a theoretical proposition which can force parents to relinquish a degree of narcissistic belief in their own abilities, as the quote goes on to suggest, it is also one which permits an abdication of responsibility for the form of self-experience one's offspring ultimately get.

The quote also evokes a central theme of McEwan's 1987 novel, *The Child in Time*, in which the trope of a government-commissioned child care manual enables reflection on the relationship between forms of governance, understandings of childhood and social responsibility (1987). In *The Child in Time*, which takes place under the pervasive social injustices of the Thatcher administration, "the nation is going to be regenerated by reformed childcare practice[s]" which configure children as "at heart selfish, and reasonably so" (1987, 178, 170). McEwan's earlier novel uses the child as a means to criticism, a way of responding to the erosion of social care and the displacement of vulnerability as an acknowledged co-ordinate within public life. In contrast, the description of parenting offered by Henry reveals a wish to downplay the significance of both the social and parental environments by inscribing genetics as the central determining factor in character development and hence the locus of responsibility for the kinds of qualities individuals possess, and their sense of self. For Perowne, "there is much in human affairs that can be accounted for at the level of the complex molecule" (2005a, 91), as Sage puts it, for him "subjectivity is an expression of genetic material" (2012, 137).

Baxter provides, for Henry, an instance of "biological determinism in its purest form," and the fact of his disease points up what is at stake in the materialism Henry seems to endorse (2005a, 92). Baxter suffers from Huntington's Chorea, a genetic defect – the "excessive repetition of a single sequence – CAG" in a single gene on chromosome four (92). Unexpectedly, in the context of his own response to 9/11, Žižek summarises the consequences

well: “(if there are forty repetitions, you will get the first symptoms at fifty-nine; if forty-one, at fifty four...if fifty, at twenty-seven). A good lifestyle, physical fitness, the best medicine, healthy food, family love and support can do nothing about it – pure fatalism, undiluted by environmental variability. There is as yet no cure; we can do nothing about it” (2002, 61–2). Fatalism, the impossibility of action; Huntington’s is a disease capable of emblematising *Saturday*’s defining concerns. Nothing can be done, we cannot change it; the co-ordinates of the illness and impossibility of its cure metaphorize cultural pessimism and resignation. “There’s nothing anyone can do about a damaged saccadic system. And generally there’s nothing on offer at all for this condition, beyond managing the descent” (McEwan 2005a, 96).

My intention here is not to pour scorn on the genetic basis of Huntington’s, which would be absurd. Rather I want to suggest that genetic determinism functions in *Saturday* as a metaphor of social disengagement. Speaking nearly twenty years ago, Steven Rose, himself a neurobiologist, articulated the critique of neurogenetic reductionism in clear terms: “all this research is the result of the catastrophic loss that has affected the Western world in the last few years. Loss of hope in finding social solutions to social problems” (cited in Roudinesco 2003, 31). This is the fundamental claim; Rose rejects a genetic determinism which abnegates the role of the environment and thus pre-empts the possibility of social change. Lamenting the worrying notion of research into “gay genes,” Rose cites his own attempt to draw attention to the limits of genetic explanation: “recently, as a joke, I wrote in the journal *Nature* that with this type of research someone would soon be claiming that the war in Bosnia was the result of a serotonin problem in Dr. Karadzic’s brain and that it could be stopped by a massive prescription of Prozac.” In spite of the uneasy laughter such thinking might provoke, Dominic Head entertains this kind of idea, suggesting that an allegorical reading of *Saturday* might invite a comparison between Baxter and Saddam Hussein: “we may wonder if there is an invitation to speculate on the possibility of a common psychological disorder” (2007, 181). However, to attempt to understand violence and character solely in terms of biology and

faulty genes risks abnegating questions of responsibility on various levels. Firstly, the question of agency is reduced to the luck of the chemico-genetic dice. Secondly, neurogenetic reductionism is complicit in the elision of questions of social responsibility and environmental provision. The model is symptomatic of a society which doesn't want to face up to the significance of environmental factors in determining the form taken by individual and collective life. Despite its appeal to "sameness," this is not the sameness that Butler and Borch-Jacobsen describe; rather it is a form of irresponsible determinism which precludes – instead of facilitating – social change.

Genetic determinism and "Dover Beach" come together at the end of *Saturday* as a dual means of obfuscating questions of social injustice which Henry cannot help but see, however much he may not want to. When Henry pushes Baxter down the stairs after he has been pacified, ostensibly, by the poem, there is a moment:

Which seems to unfold and luxuriously expand, when all goes silent and still, when Baxter is entirely airborne, suspended in time, looking directly at Henry with an expression, not so much of terror, as dismay. And Henry thinks he sees in the wide brown eyes a sorrowful accusation of betrayal. He, Henry Perowne, possesses so much – the work, money, status, the home, above all, the family [...] and he has done nothing, given nothing to Baxter who has so little that is not wrecked by his defective gene, and who is soon to have even less. (2005a, 227–8)

Admittedly, Henry – professional reductionist – reads their difference through genetics, and will ultimately make reparation of sorts by performing the surgery which will save Baxter's life, but his reference to his own material wealth and success evokes their disparity in social terms which no surgery, or poetry, will correct.

Earlier I mentioned Foley's comment that the "medical images of comforting, healing and repairing which recur throughout the novel resonate powerfully in a world marred by destructive violence" (2010, 154). This is a judgement which sits in tension with Ross's reading of the novel's message: "in the postradical twenty-first century, the best hope for promoting the health of the community is not social activism but clinical expertise" (2008, 89). Ross is

right to suggest that the surgeon's skill cannot solve social problems; however care might offers itself as a kind of solution. Put simply, the novel raises the question of the role of care, and environment, in social life, and it is pertinent to such thinking in several ways. Not only does it interrogate a liberal ideology of literary value, it also insists that the necessary sites of reading and imagining extend beyond the arts. In addition, it lends itself to thinking environment and care beyond the provision of "good-enough" forms of both literary and media culture, and in relation to a non-narratable sameness which might provide the basis for the social tie, a reason – if one is needed – to care about, and for, others.

If the environment provides a basis for thinking about our responsibility for others, it also offers a model of the kind of care we should proffer. Fred Alford turns to Winnicott to theorise an ethical mode of relationality defined by fusion at a distance, a mode of relating involving both separation and attachment modelled on Winnicott's vision of maternal "holding" which also resonates with a mode of imagination which eschews excessive proximity and distance (Alford 2000). It is here that we might return to Ferguson's subtle reading of professionalism in *Saturday*, which "may have its privileges" but also "appears as a way of converting an impersonal relationship into something with the feel of love" (2007, 51). After he has performed the surgery on Baxter, Perowne pays a visit to his bedside. He "slips his hand around Baxter's wrist and feels for his pulse" (2005a, 262–3). He does it "because he wants to," it's a "simple matter of primal contact, reassuring to the patient – so long as it's done with unfaltering authority" (263).

We have returned to the point at which the thesis began, to a scene of care. More importantly, to a scene of "care" as "cure" – Winnicott, we might remember, says that the "applied science in medical and surgical practice can be taken for granted" ([1970] 1990a, 113). Care-cure is an "extension of the concept of holding," it is a feature of "the facilitating environment enabling personal growth" (119). *Saturday's* scene of reading brings the

environment to the fore, but the novel ultimately insists on the fundamental purchase of the concept beyond the Elysium of the “cultured.” Personal transformation may represent a retreat from a politics of social engagement, but the concept of the environment foregrounds questions of politics and power, it forces us to think about imagination and responsibility, and what might bring about social transformation. Henry’s actions at Baxter’s bedside may embody something like “the dream of the healing touch,” but it is a dream of which – and from which – we should not be too eager to awake (2005a, 255).

## Conclusion

### To forget the world?

If I were to create an origin myth for this thesis, it might refer to my watching *In Treatment* in 2009. The show captured my attention, and led me to articulate a set of concerns: I wondered how the series might be thought in relation to the psychoanalytic cultural theory – which mainly drew on Freud and Lacan – with which I was familiar. I also wondered what the series might say about the place of psychoanalysis in cultural life, and what it might contribute to understanding the therapeutic, or transformative, potential of cultural forms. It was the starting point of a journey which is far from over, but which culminates, for the time being, here.

This thesis has contributed to thinking psychoanalysis in relation to the cultural field through Winnicott's concept of the environment, which emphasizes "facilitation," and notions of nurturance, growth and cultivation. I have sought to bring such thinking into dialogue with other strands of psychoanalytic theorizing more generally associated with "classical" or "negative" positions because I believe that we need both the "classical" and the "romantic," the "negative" and the "positive," if we are to have in psychoanalysis a truly useful object with which to think about cultural life.

There is a hint, I perceive, of "application" in my last comment – as if psychoanalysis were something separate which might be brought to bear on that cultural field outside the clinic – this, however, is a mode of thinking I have worked hard to destabilize. As I hope I have made plain, psychoanalysis is intimately imbricated with culture in many ways. Not only is the discourse part of intellectual history, public life and popular culture, it also offers an approach to cultural (aesthetic) experience which makes the line inside/ outside difficult to draw. "What

counts as psychoanalysis?" is a question that persists across this thesis, and which is fundamentally complicated by the idea that "culture" might function as a mode of "cure."

The relationship between psychoanalysis, culture and cure has been explored through a persistent analogy, one between the work of the mother, that of the analyst and the cultural form or object. Such analogical thinking is open to obvious criticism – there are many ways, for instance, in which a cultural object is not like a mother or an analyst, the absence of immediate dialogic interaction is only the most apparent. There is also the risk that, in making this analogy, I fall victim to the "notion of the normative life-story," rendering psychoanalysis a tool in "mainstream social engineering" (Phillips 1994, 110–1). Whilst I accept this criticism of developmental thinking, I hope that I have managed to sustain a certain ambivalence by pointing up theoretical normativity, using its insights, and supplementing its oversights where necessary. As Butler's recent work demonstrates, it is possible to use the fact of relationality and dependence to theorize responsibility without insisting on a narrative of developmental progress. Nevertheless, analogies allow things to be seen; I hope that my analogy has functioned heuristically, rather than restrictively, and, by viewing the world in this one particular way, has allowed something to come to light.

This thesis demonstrates a preoccupation with the aesthetic, and merger, mimesis, reflection and recognition have become key terms. There are several things to say about this focus. Firstly, the thesis has attempted to question what we might term the line between the imaginary and the symbolic. It is not possible to draw this line, or to insist that the primary maternal relation is cut off from the social and from processes of social subjectivization. Whilst this strategy gives the environment considerable influence, it also insists on its complex implication in and with structures of power. For this reason I have found it necessary to draw on both classical and romantic attitudes. In this context, it is useful to recall Freud's famous phrase, "where id was, there ego shall be," because – as I mentioned in chapter one – it

captures something of the duality of both identity and the task of psychoanalysis. The phrase describes both the nurturance of the ego and the fact of subjection. As Deborah Luepnitz puts it, there is a need to imagine the human in terms of “both a substantive *self* and a structural *subject*” (2009, 975). Winnicott’s attention to the role of the other in the development of subjectivity, the constructed nature of individuality we might say, lends itself to comparison with “post-structural” theory, for instance with the work of Laplanche, Borch-Jacobsen and Lacan as I have suggested. However, dependence on the other is both a threat and a resource, both enabling and repressive; we are always subject to the social, but we also have the capacity for spontaneity, and we must remain vigilant of how social norms and power differences can influence forms of subjective life. In one sense, Freud’s refusal to distinguish between culture and civilization is correct because the cultivation of the self and the process of subjectivization cannot be disentangled.

Ambivalently, however, I remain committed to an evaluative understanding of culture, to an ideal of care as cure. Whilst I have repeatedly called for a broad understanding of what constitutes culture, the idea of the environment offers a way to conceptualize familiar narratives of aesthetic value; in fact, developmental theory in many ways repeats pervasive notions of the need for difficulty, tension and struggle which translate into notions of aesthetic hierarchy. However, the need for difficulty and “uncompleted narratives” need not instil a mode of elitism. In relation to the media, for instance, such ideas seem necessary; as Silverstone argues, there is a need for breadth and depth of opinion if we are to be able to think, judge and imagine, for it is not technology – or even machinery – which is “bad,” but rather the uses to which it can be put.

At the end of this thesis I am more committed than ever to a range of “therapeutic functions” which encompass both classical and romantic aims. If we might characterize the former by a strategy of revelation which serves to lay bare forms of alienation and antagonism,



the latter sets out to heal the split, as it were. A classical mode of analysis is essential in approaching issues of power, ideology and the inherent complexities of life; it is central to the process of undermining and questioning forms of mastery. However, such thinking benefits from the supplement of positive aims, which gesture towards routes for change, offering to give “imaginative possibility to potential life forms” (Michael Rustin 1991, 194). Butler’s work is exemplary of how we might productively combine these perspectives without resorting to a developmental teleology. However, it is necessary to retain some idea of what we might want a life and subjectivity to look like so that we might know what kinds of actions to engage in on the basis of our relational responsibility. In the current political climate, for instance, positive aims, based on an estimation of need and the right to care and “life,” make it possible to argue against oppressive and punitive governmental policies. The current welfare system, for instance, increasingly fails as an environment which might safeguard being and facilitate a “creative” relation to the world.

Carey and Richards remind us that the idea that culture should perform a healing function for the individual or society may be a “therapeutic fallacy” (Carey 2006, 96–134; B. Richards 1994, 145). There is no need to subscribe to a narrow definition of culture to perceive certain pressing questions: is it right to ask culture to be useful? Is it right to ask psychoanalysis to be useful, for that matter? Focusing on “use” runs the risk of adding weight to modes of instrumental thinking all too prevalent in our contemporary society. We must be mindful of bolstering modes of thought which insist that aspects of cultural life with no clear financial value “pay their way.” Assigning culture a therapeutic function – I am thinking of recent government emphasis on the role of the arts in promoting “well-being” – risks endorsing and perpetuating such thinking. However, it concurrently seems vital to retain a sense that culture has the capacity to facilitate transformation. If we let go of the idea that it could make things better, do we risk accepting the world as it is?

This brings me to my final point: preoccupied with “use” and function, I am left wondering about the university, about the arts and humanities, those bastions of “culture” in all its forms. Is it right to ask university departments to be useful, and how shall we define this use? Usefulness does not need to be determined by instrumental reason. The arts and humanities play a fundamental role in the quest for social transformation and justice, they are – or should be – a particular kind of environment, one which offers the space, and the possibility, for imagining different conditions. In the current economic and political climate we should be protective over this space. It is one of the sites – an important one – where the “work of culture” might flourish.

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