"Present-day troubles": Winnicott, Counter-culture and Critical Theory Today

Donald Winnicott was not a political radical; he was a liberal. Yet in recent years, as Adam Phillips notes, "Winnicott has become…something of a *counter-cultural* voice" (2007, p. xii, emphasis added), and his ideas have become influential in critical discourse. But why Winnicott now? Thinking Winnicott in relation to 'counter-culture' helps explain the recent purchase of his ideas on the critical imagination. This article takes a long view, tracing Winnicott's role in shaping the post-war administered society against which the 'counter-cultural' youth were to rebel, and outlining his contribution to a politics of care at odds with the 'common sense' of contemporary neoliberal ideology.

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In the 2007 preface to his monograph on Winnicott, first published in 1988, Adam Phillips notes that the reception of the British psychoanalyst has changed much in the intervening 20 years. "Winnicott," he writes, "has become, belatedly, something of a counter-cultural voice, no longer just a maverick psychoanalyst in the very small world of psychoanalysis, but someone set against the spirit of the age" (2007, p. xii). For Phillips, Winnicott is opposed to the cult of personality, sceptical of militant competence, uninterested in definitive theories and fast cures. "In a time of chronic professionalization... careerism... and acquisition," Phillips writes, "Winnicott has a new story to tell about what we might be doing when we pursue inadequate objects of desire" (p. xiii). Winnicott, Phillips suggests, helps us to understand what motivates the perfectionism, materialism and ruthless drive for ever-increasing efficiency that define our age. He asks us to think about what drives the narcissistic tendencies prevalent in contemporary society.

Phillips is, of course, not the first to point up Winnicott's relevance to critical analysis. Since the 1990s, Winnicott has received notable interest from theorists in the humanities and social sciences. His concepts of holding, the 'transitional object' and the 'facilitating environment' in particular have been put to work across a range of fields, featuring in the social theory of Anthony Giddens (1991), the media theory of Roger Silverstone (2007, 1994) and the philosophy of Martha Nussbaum (2004, 2001). When 'Critical Theory' is more narrowly intended to refer to the Frankfurt School and its heirs, Winnicott's thinking informs the work of

both Jessica Benjamin (1990, 1978, 1977) and Axel Honneth (1995). However, in recent years Winnicott has been gaining wider notoriety, as the recent publication of his *Collected Works* (2017) demonstrates. He has made his way into political theory, most notably in the work of Bonnie Honig (2017, 2012), though a recent essay collection on *Winnicott and Political Theory* (Bowker and Buzby, 2017) points up more widespread interest. As Maggie Nelson puts it in her 2016 memoir, *The Argonauts*: you can find Winnicott everywhere right now, "from mommy blogs to Alison Bechdel's graphic novel *Are You My Mother?* To reams of critical theory" (2016, p. 23). One possible title Nelson suggests for her book, in an alternate universe, is *Why Winnicott Now?* With the articulations of Phillips and Nelson in mind, this article sets out to think about this recent interest in Winnicott in relation to the idea of 'counter-culture,' itself an unstable and contested term, admittedly. Whilst reluctant to make any strong claims about Winnicott's counter-cultural status, the article wagers that thinking Winnicott in relation to historical and critical understandings of 'counter-culture' helps in answering the question Nelson poses: why Winnicott now?

Debates over the meaning of the word 'counter-culture' have been sustained and on-going (Bennett, 2016). Broadly speaking, the term refers to the self-conscious awareness of middle-class young people—following the Second World War and in the USA and Europe predominantly—that they constituted a group markedly different to, and at odds with, the culture and experience of their parents. This generational difference was expressed both culturally and politically, through music, literature, aesthetics, drugs, lifestyle and, or as, protest (Bennett, 2016, p. 18). This was a generation both aware of, and committed to, its own capacity to produce change, even if the changes that different elements of the counter-culture desired varied widely, from hedonism to revolution (Middleton and Muncie, 1981, p. 74). Clarke *et al*. (2006) describe

middle-class counter-culture as an "overtly ideological or political form. [Who] make articulate their opposition to dominant values and institutions – even when, as frequently occurred, this does not take the form of an overtly political response" (p. 48).Theodor Roszak's *The Making of a Counter-Culture* (1995)*,* first published in 1969, offered one of the first attempts to define the term. Roszak focused on intergenerational conflict in the USA, though he remained aware that such antagonism was of international significance. "By way of a dialectic Marx could never have imagined," he writes, "technocratic America produces a potentially revolutionary element among its own youth. The bourgeoisie, instead of discovering the class enemy in its factories, finds it across the breakfast table in the person of its own pampered children" (1995, p. 34). Emphasizing the revolutionary importance of intergenerational antagonism, Roszak insists that American youth – "technocracy's children" – were in revolt against the instrumental reason characteristic of their society, wherein the development and esteem of nuclear and military technologies betrayed an impoverished morality and pathological constitution.

Tony Judt (2005) notes that the surge of cultural and political protest on the part of youth extended beyond the USA, and was conditioned by changing social relations in the post-war period. As Judt puts it, "by the middle of the 1960s, the social impact of the post-war demographic explosion was being felt everywhere" (2005, p. 390). Eric Hobsbawm (1995) notes that this 'baby boom' led to the rise of a "specific, and extraordinarily powerful youth culture indicated a profound change in the relation between the generations" (p. 324). Over time, the hegemony of traditionalism waned. New technologies in which the younger generation were fluent gave them an advantage over their parents, and the balance of power shifted to reflect the increased purchasing power of educated young people. This saw the growth of a consumer culture geared towards conspicuous consumption as a vehicle of self-realization.

However the demographic changes of the post-war period did more than produce a new esteem for youth and consumption. The changed experience of this generation also led young people to see themselves as radical political and social agents who occupied a marginal position in relation to the dominant social order. Expanded access to higher education brought those previously excluded from an elite system into contact with, and critique of, archaic forms of authority. As Hobsbawm (1995) puts it, "resentment of one kind of authority, the university's, easily broadened out into resentment of any authority, and therefore (in the West) inclined students to the Left" (p. 301). Additionally, the brief period of economic stability that facilitated access to university gave students the space and time to reflect in unprecedented ways. Awareness of their own privilege, and its contingency, informed criticism of the institutions of society, beginning with the university. In the USA, the group Students for a Democratic Society, founded in 1962, produced the Port Huron Statement (Flacks and Lichtenstein, 2015), in which they noted their own social advantage and demanded change. Desire for reform in education aligned with other struggles. In the USA, this included resistance to the war in Vietnam and the support for the fight for Civil Rights. In Europe, the social and cultural changes signified by the counter-culture took shape against a background of Marxism (Judt, 2005, p. 401). The 'New Left' developed structural theories of intersectional oppression, and found new revolutionary subjects amongst the 'wretched of the earth' (Fanon, 2001; Judt, 2005, pp. 404–406). Radicals took up the language of alienation and self-expression from the early Marx, and insisted on the need to overthrow the internalized modes of oppression that persisted in the seemingly tolerant post-war administered societies. Glossing the tendency, Herbert Marcuse (1969) wrote in his famous *Essay on Liberation* that "the power of established societies" prevents the utopian, understood as a form of unsublimated creativity, from coming into being (p. 4). "The young

militants," he writes, "know or sense that what is at stake is simply their life, the life of human beings which has become a play thing in the hands of politicians and managers and generals" (p. x).

From a critical perspective, the sense of 'counter-culture' as a form of resistance to hegemonic political, social and cultural, not to mention economic, norms remains vital. Bennett acknowledges what we might call the 'psychosocial persistence' of the idea of counter-culture in the cultural imaginary:

> Through its rich historical legacy and continued representation as a mode for expression of 'otherness' from a 'mainstream' ideology, the term 'counterculture' now occupies a special place in the popular imagination… Counterculture has become part of a received, mediated memory that bespeaks a reaction to a series of pathological issues still very much at large in today's world (Bennett 2016, p. 25).

As I will show, this sense of 'counter-culture' – as a reaction to "pathological issues" and an expression of ideological preoccupations at odds with and marginal to dominant ideas of 'common sense' – is useful in thinking about Winnicott and his purchase in the contemporary critical imagination. However, Winnicott's place in the history of post-war social change is also vital in understanding this relationship. In what follows I trace Winnicott's role in shaping the post-war administered society against which the counter-cultural youth were to rebel, and his contribution to a politics of care at odds with the 'common sense' of contemporary neoliberal ideology.

If the counter-culture was a reaction to the perceived sterility, conformity and pathology of the post-war administered society, if it was concerned with "the life of human beings"

(Marcuse 1969, p. x), with what it means to be human, and how best to relate to oneself and others, then Winnicott undoubtedly shared much of its ethos. A lifelong humanist, he was a champion of the 'spontaneous gesture,' a believer in the dangers of compliance and in the importance of creativity for the experience of feeling alive. Winnicott was preoccupied with what makes life worth living, and the alienation from self and world that can come about when the conditions for 'life' are not met. In his later work, *Playing and Reality* (1991a), first published in 1971, he replaced the idea that the capacity to know constitutes a criterion of mental health with the capacity to play, to live creatively (Phillips, 2007, p. 47). There he writes:

> 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. (Winnicott, 1991a, p. 65)

This romantic concern with liveness and play, with the health and sickness of the individual and their world, chimes with the counter-culture's resistance to the ossified and restrictive character of post-war society. Winnicott shared with the radicals, and with Marcuse, the legacy of Romanticism, and its trust in authenticity, creativity, spontaneity and aliveness.

Winnicott's own politics were not radical, however. As Sally Alexander (2013) notes, "Winnicott was not a socialist but a liberal" (p. 154), and he played a significant role in shaping the administered society, and the post-war welfare state in Britain, against which the youth of the 1960s and 1970s were to revolt. Winnicott was not part of the ruling class, but he exerted a significant form of 'soft' power, influencing public opinion through his work with students of

medicine and social work, his long-running public broadcasts on the BBC, and his popular

publications in magazines and newspapers (Alexander, 2013; Farley, 2012; Riley, 1983, pp. 80–

92). He also used his administrative positions within the Institute of Psychoanalysis, and his

status as a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians, to promote psychoanalytic thinking by

serving on committees, and writing letters and reports (Kahr, 1996, p. 97).

Winnicott's intellectual contribution to the ethos of the welfare state was forged through

his interwar work with mothers and children. "Mothers and children were emblematic figures

throughout British culture and politics in the first half of the twentieth century," Alexander

writes, but "no one gave the mother as much psychic power as Winnicott (2013, p. 166). In the

interwar years, Winnicott ran open clinics for mothers and children in Paddington Green and

Hackney from 1923. Here, working with working class women and their children, who exhibited

diverse symptoms but had "nothing really wrong with them" (cited in Alexander 2013, p. 163),

Winnicott developed an interest in the lives and inner worlds of his patients. Alexander links this

to "a wider curiosity about the recently literate and enfranchized people in the aftermath of total

war" (p. 152). What Phillips terms 'history-taking' (2007, pp. 39-61) was central to his approach

in the clinics, and to his subsequent ideas. "The doctor gets from the parents as clear a picture as

he can of the child's past life, and of his present state, and he tries to relate the symptoms for

which the child is brought to the child's personality, and to his external and internal experiences"

(cited in Phillips 2007, p. 51). These stories often told of separation and loss, of maternal

pregnancy and sibling birth that precipitated symptoms through which depression and anxiety

manifested. By the time of his retirement in the mid-1960s he had accumulated over 60,000 of

these case histories, written from interviews with the child's parent, or whoever brought the child

to see him, and his own notes made during the treatment (Alexander 2013, p. 151).

It was his sense of the importance of the child's relation with their mother that led him to write in December 1939, with colleagues Emanuel Miller and John Bowlby, to the *British Medical Journal*, concerned about the proposed evacuation of children from London following the outbreak of the Second World War. Drawing on Bowlby's work, the authors stress "one important external factor in the causation of persistent delinquency is the small child's separation from his mother" (Winnicott, 2012, p. 13), arguing that sustained separation of young children from their mothers was thus likely to lead to serious psychological disorders. During the war, Winnicott then worked with state-sponsored schemes for evacuated children in group homes in Oxfordshire, an experience that led him to further emphasize the importance of a stable and consistent environment in the development of psychic health (Phillips, 2007, p. 63). The hostels established for the most disturbed evacuee children were, he wrote, "an opportunity for experiment in the provision of substitute homes" (cited in Phillips, 2007, p. 63). Additionally, from 1943 Winnicott came to disseminate his ideas about the importance of care to a wider audience, via a series of broadcast on the BBC, which were published in the educational magazine *The New Era* the following year (Karpf, 2013; Riley, 1983, p. 90). The aim of these broadcasts, Winnicott said, was to reassure mothers that they knew what they were doing. He aimed "to support ordinary people and to give them the real and right reasons for their good instinctual feelings" (cited in Riley, 1983, p. 89). Winnicott would continue these broadcasts until 1962.

As Alexander (2013) notes, Winnicott's willingness to be interested in his patients' stories, in their "dream worlds and nightmares and the social conditions of their lives" reveals a "seem of mid-twentieth-century liberal thinking to set beside the demographic and economic anxieties of the period" (p. 153). Winnicott's attention to the experiences and relationships of his

patients parallels the perspective of liberals, social democrats and other reformers in the second quarter of the twentieth century, who believed sociality to be the core human motivation, and saw recognition of this as central to justifying the emerging welfare state (Gerson, 2017, pp. 311–12). Eli Zaretsky (2005) finds a parallel between object relations theory and a Popular Front culture that "stressed interpersonal connection and social solidarity" (p. 251) in the latter half of the 1930s. Winnicott certainly shared these preoccupations. At a Scientific Meeting of the British Psycho-Analytical Society in 1942, he 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!" (1958, p. 99). His pre-war work with mothers and children led Winnicott to this famous conclusion, which foregrounds relationship as the condition of possibility for health.

Winnicott was committed to the question of what makes a healthy individual (Caldwell, 2013, p. xvi), and his answer was maternal care. Nevertheless, he sees the mother's capacity to care as at least in part dependent on a stability facilitated by the wider society. Gal Gerson (2005) writes that for Winnicott "a stable home that is relatively free from anxieties is where individuality forms…government should draw away from primary relationships, as such relationships are the condition for human flourishing" (p. 115). The development of an integrated personality depends on intimate care from ideally one person who can maintain proximity to the infant. This kind of relationship is essential to the development of the capacity to think and to deliberate. Indeed, "the main activity for promotion of [the] democratic tendency is a negative one: avoidance of interference with the ordinary good home," Winnicott wrote in 1957 in his article on the meaning of democracy (1986, p. 259).

The welfare state shared much of the ethos of Winnicott's thinking. Barry Richards (1984) suggests that object relations theorists offered "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 humanize capitalism according to psychoanalytic principles" (p. 13). From his inter-war and wartime practice in paediatrics and psychoanalysis, Winnicott came to theorize the importance of trust and dependence as the necessary context for psychic development, and stressed the anxiety the experience of insecurity can cause. This way of thinking was also central to the ethos of the Beveridge Report (1942) into *Social Insurance and Allied Services*, which paid considerable attention to mothers and children, and offered the revolutionary vision of "a society so organized that it could fight…the five giants": want, disease, ignorance, squalor and idleness (Fraser, 2017, p. 238). Mass Observation recorded public reactions to the report, which brought "the sudden realization of how insecure one's own life really is" (Fraser, 2017, p. 243). From theories of infantile attachment (Bowlby) and maternal holding (Winnicott), and an awareness of the "unthinkable anxiety" (Winnicott, 1990, p. 97) that insecurity might bring about, could be inferred the need for institutions that might hold the citizen and facilitate their "going on being" (Winnicott, 1990, pp. 46–7). Sally Alexander (2013) describes Winnicott as one of the "intellectual architects of the welfare state" (p. 154), and gives a clear account of the implications of his thinking for social policy:

> Winnicott's vision is social—the maternal environment, the two-body relation inaugurates subjectivity; the space between them both instils what he calls the "maturational process," and forms the basis of creative life and culture. But 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 professionals were the necessary context of mental landscapes" (p. 151).

The institutions of society took on, in both his thinking and in early visions of a welfare state, an analogous role to the maternal holding environment. Gerson (2005) argues that Winnicott's "vision favours a social settlement that manifests stability and so fosters a sense of security, yet keeps out of particular spaces where the confidence it generates may be acted upon… [it] seems to reflect a regime that leaves the marketplace and the household alone, but surrounds them with regulations, taxes and professional supervision: a liberal welfare state" (p. 120). The need for stability in the caregiver-child dyad would make reliable social institutions necessary, institutions capable of sheltering the family unit from extremes of poverty and insecurity, through social insurance and children's allowances. If the caregiver, most often the mother, is to provide the child with a good-enough holding environment, then the home itself must have a similar holding environment, provided by the welfare state.

Winnicott insistence on the need for reliable and tolerant social institutions helped create the social conditions necessary for the counter-cultural flourishing of the 1960s, in Britain at least. As Carolyn Steedman (2017) records, the period of relative stability after the Second World War produced a generation born in the '40s and '50s who enjoyed social freedom and educational access unavailable to their parents. The post-war consensus on social justice and the welfare state represents a period when the production of human beings was taken seriously. As Steedman (1986) writes:

The 1950s was a time when state intervention in children's lives was highly visible, and experienced, by me at least, as entirely beneficent. The calculated, dictated fairness of the ration book went on into the new decade, and we spent a lot of time…picking up medicine bottles of orange juice and jars of Virol…I think I would be a very different person now if orange juice and milk and dinners at school hadn't told me, in a covert way, that I had a

right to exist, was worth something. My inheritance from those years is the belief

(maintained always with some difficulty) that I do have a right to the earth. (pp. 121-2)

This sense of a right to the earth, the right to have a say in how things are, and to imagine how they might be, was available to the counter-cultural generation in a way it had not been to their parents, who had played their own part – through more liberal parenting techniques – in bringing it into being. Beneficiaries of a period of growth and stability previously unknown, the post-war generation "had no way of understanding what their elders had experienced or felt" (Hobsbawm 1995, p. 328), or of comprehending their parents' gratitude, after the depression and the war, for the stability and relative affluence of the post-war welfare states.

Winnicott (1991a) commented on this in a talk delivered at the British Student Health Association in July 1968, just months after the events of May. In this talk, he gives credit for the adolescent revolt of the 1960s to "the positive elements in modern upbringing and in modern attitudes to the rights of the individual" (p. 143). Unlike the more traditional approaches to childrearing that held favour in the pre-war period, experts like Winnicott urged mothers to forego strict rules and restraint, advocating instead a kind of intuitive and permissive mothering that appealed to a socially progressive generation (Wilson, 1980, p. 189). These more liberal attitudes had created the conditions for freedom of thought, he argues. "If you do all you can to promote personal growth in your offspring, you will need to be able to deal with startling results," he writes (p. 143). Winnicott avers that what he coyly terms "the present-day troubles," are a sign of social success (p. 143). The experience of relative stability and freedom in the post-war period has allowed the younger generation's 'true selves' to flourish, producing subjects capable of critiquing, and resisting, the norms of their society. It has produced individuals capable of experiencing hate for their parents. This is no bad thing: for Winnicott, compliance is

the very thing to be warded off. Yet Winnicott's views on the counter-culture display a level of ambivalence. Writing on women's reproductive autonomy in 1969, in a talk written for the Progressive League, titled 'The Pill and the Moon,' he informs his audience that the pill involves "the killing of babies" (1986, p. 203). Seemingly more apprehensive about social change than he was in July 1968, he notes that the pill is "going to alter the adolescent scene, it's going to alter the scene for all parents. Well, it has done, and you can hardly remember when it didn't alter the scene" (p. 196). Hobsbawn (1995) describes these alterations as a "cultural revolution" evident in "family and household" that changed "the structure of relations between the sexes and generations" (p. 320).

In fact, the generation born in the 1940s and 1950s, and shaped by the early welfare state and the ostensible 'sexual revolution,' would turn a critical eye on Winnicott himself. In the early 1970s, the insistence on maternal responsibility associated with object relations theory became the subject of feminist critique. Winnicott's vision depends on a traditional sexual division of labour in which the father functions as "the protecting agent who frees the mother to devote herself to her baby" (1986, p. 248). Father is the breadwinner, and the representative of an external world and law the mother implants in the baby (Riley, 1983, p. 88). Such families require state institutions like schools, health care and benefits to support their functioning and guarantee stability. Thus, Winnicott's contribution to the post-war social settlement foregrounded security, whilst also providing intellectual support to the 'naturalness' of women's restriction to the home (Mitchell, 1974; Riley, 1983). Writing in 1974, Juliet Mitchell (1974) stressed the social conservatism of the post-war period, which led to the closure of nurseries and communal restaurants, and the restriction of women: "instead of national workers, they were to be private wives" (p. 228). Commenting on the relationship between this trend and object

relations theory, Mitchell argued that "it does not amount to an estimation of the intrinsic merits or otherwise of the work if one points out that the development of child psychoanalysis contributed very neatly to the demands of the epoch" (p. 229). Though "very sensitive," Winnicott's early work featured "paeans to the family" that "obscured its more interesting content" (p. 229).

Interpretations differed, however. Writing at the end of the decade, Denise Riley (1983) and Elizabeth Wilson (1980) argued that, whilst "a widespread pronatalist appeal" sat comfortably with Winnicott and Bowlby's ideas (Riley 1983, p. 91), it was wrong to suggest "there was any kind of concerted effort at the level of government policy to get women back into the home" (Wilson, 1980, p. 188). Certainly, women's domestic role was "reinforced by the progressive currents of thought of the period" (Wilson 1980, p. 190), but the basis of their popular appeal lay in "the flowering of love for children in a war-torn world," and a celebration of working class maternal spontaneity and warmth in opposition to austere forms of upper-class child-rearing (p. 190). Riley employed the idea of "popularisation" to capture the somewhat ephemeral and dialectical relationship between the production of theory and the social sensibility of the time (1983, p. 91).

Never the less, Winnicott's relentless association of women with motherhood and his preoccupation with women's apparently 'intuitive' mothering when in a state of 'health' (never *guaranteed*, however) certainly did little to challenge traditional gender roles. The post-war welfare state depended on women keeping up this unpaid care work, and Winnicott's idea of the "ordinary good home," protected by, yet separate from, the outside world, only naturalized this arrangement. The welfare state depended on "the drudgery of women" (Wilson, 1980, p. 42): their unpaid work within the home. The economic dependency of wife and mother was cemented

by National Insurance, a contributions-based system that excluded those not in work, most often women and the disabled. This policy tied social stability to women's economic dependence, and undervalued the work of care. The 'family wage' – which was supposed to provide sufficiently for a whole family, rather than an individual –bolstered this dependence and entrenched the sexual division of labour, leaving women in the home without pay for their work and at the mercy of the sole 'breadwinner.' Whilst there were debates about the remuneration for reproductive work in the 1940s and 1950s (Wilson, 1980, pp. 30–2), things came to a head in the 1970s. Feminists underscored the androcentrism of the welfare state model, and called for its radical reformulation, in order that the work of care be taken seriously. The demands of the Women's Liberation Movement for equal pay, equal education and job opportunities, as well as financial and legal independence, constituted an attack on welfare state paternalism (Alexander, 2013, p. 169).

However, inspired by the New Left and counter-cultural radicalism, from the late '60s feminists also turned to psychoanalysis in search of resources for emancipation. Consciousness-raising groups, as Juliet Mitchell (1971) notes, worked in terms of a Freudian understanding of the relationship between self-narration and agency (p. 59). Mitchell's own work with psychoanalysis, set out in *Woman's Estate* (1971) but coming to fruition in her crucial intervention of 1974, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, sought to use a somewhat Lacanian Freud as a supplement to Marxist theory in order to explain how the sexual division of labour was (re)produced. Mitchell fails ultimately to offer an adequate synthesis of Marx and Freud, insisting towards the end of the text on the seemingly timeless and inexorable fact of sexual difference beyond the frame of capitalist modernity (1974, p. 412). A few years after *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, however, Mitchell (1978) wrote that "from its inception until

today, many feminists have argued not…for the end of the family but for, in whatever kin or communal form it occurs, an equality of reproduction with production; producing people should be as important as producing things." Mitchell is certainly right in her assertion, though as Wilson (1980) notes, it is unclear how it might sit with a Freudian theory of sexual difference that seems to reify the existing sexual division of labour in capitalist societies (p. 199).

Subsequently, feminists working between socialism and psychoanalysis drew on Winnicott to enrich and develop this perspective. Winnicott's unique preoccupation with the maternal role made visible the work of 'reproduction' missing from traditional Marxist accounts of political economy. Nancy Chodorow (1978) employed Winnicott's ideas of holding (p. 23) and projective identification (p. 29) to question the biological basis of the tendency for women to care for children. Chodorow also focused on how unconsciously gendered forms of maternal care contribute to the reproduction of the existing sexual division of labour and social relations. Jessica Benjamin's (1978, 1977) early work confronted the gendered assumptions of the Frankfurt School, and the limitations a Freudian framework imposed on their thinking, most importantly Freud's failure to adequately theorize the maternal relation. Subsequently, Benjamin used Winnicott to develop a theory of the psychosocial processes that underwrite the patriarchal refusal to recognize the value of care (1990). These important interventions depend on Winnicott's foregrounding of the maternal role, whilst valorizing care not in the service of a regressive paternalism, but with the aim of social transformation. Benjamin insists on the radicalness of the demand society overcome the devaluation of those tasks and attributes deemed feminine and associated with women, care in particular. "Though maternal care is still regarded as vital for small children," she writes, "its values are nearly irrelevant for life outside the nursery" (1990, p. 208).

The timing of Benjamin's intervention is notable. Writing in the late 1980s, she points towards the socio-economic changes that followed on the heels of the counter-cultural decades. As economic difficulties intensified in the 1970s and 1980s, neoliberal thinking began to exert pressure on the welfare state. By valorizing individualism and championing the efficiencies of privatization, government policy in the Thatcher era worked to undermine the post-war ethos of solidarity, which had provided the rationale for what was inherently a "socially sanctioned system of concern" (Cooper and Lousada, 2011, p. 21). Thatcherism stressed the rationality of self-interest, and mobilized divisive arguments that pitched "tax-payers" against a workless "underclass" with the aim of eroding social solidarity. Placing the very idea of society in question, Thatcher's governments of the 1980s set about dismantling the collective institutions of the welfare state, and returning responsibility to individuals under the guise of increasing individual agency and autonomy. However, Hobsbawm writes that the policy of closing mental hospitals and replacing them with care in the community faltered because "there was no longer a community to care for them" (1995, p. 337).

Some critics assert the role of the counter-culture in bringing these new realities into being. Hobsbawn (1995) certainly thinks that the "triumph of the individual" characteristic of the 1960s 'cultural revolution' supplied the intellectual apparatus necessary for the dismantling of social institutions. The cultural changes of the 1960s, he writes, created a society where "human beings lived side by side but not as social beings" (p. 341). Writing in 1999 on the situation in France, Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello (2007) claimed that the new spirit of capitalism evident in the 1980s and 1990s took inspiration from the critiques of state-organized capitalism that flourished after the events of May '68. According to Boltanski and Chiapello, management theorists seeking a fresh face for corporate culture took on the counter-cultural spirit of

individual creativity, its anti-hierarchical and anti-statist ethos and its celebration of flexible, networked, horizontal relationships, and a new era of creative capitalism was born.

More recently, Nancy Fraser (2013) has brought the frame of gender to bear on Boltanski and Chiapello's analysis (p. 210). Fraser uses their argument to structure her own controversial claim that "the diffusion of cultural attitudes born out of the second wave has been part and parcel of another social transformation, unanticipated and unintended by feminist activists—a transformation in the social organization of postwar capitalism" (p. 211). On Fraser's analysis, second-wave feminism (broadly conceived as she admits) took issue with welfare state capitalism, and attacked it. This attack, however, unwittingly provided discursive tools that governments could mobilize in order to weaken and erode the welfare state (pp. 212-214). As already discussed, second wave feminists critiqued the androcentrism and paternalism of the welfare state, arguing that it worked to maintain existing relations of inequality between men and women by valorizing work, from which many women were excluded. In supplementing one breadwinner's wage with 'family allowances,' the welfare state made women financially dependent on their husbands, and kept them in the home doing the unpaid work of 'drudgery' necessary to reproduce the worker. Whilst the idea that both before and after the War women did not work is a myth, the critique of the family wage centered on women's desire to be given equal rights to work as men. Women demanded not only access to jobs, but the possibility of flexible and part-time work, which could be organized around caring responsibilities. Fraser argues that the critique of the family wage "now supplies a good part of the romance that invests flexible capitalism with a higher meaning and moral point" (p. 220), through its claim to be meeting demands for freedom and gender equality. "The dream of women's emancipation" writes Fraser, "is harnessed to the engine of capitalist accumulation" (p. 221).

Sociologists note that the entry of women into the labour market has brought about changes in the character of working practices (Philipson, 1993). As women have entered work at all levels, wages have fallen, and job security has been eroded. Additionally, 'prestigious' professions, formerly populated by men, have come to be seen as 'women's work,' and suffered a concurrent fall in esteem. Jobs for life, if they ever existed, have been replaced by part-time, insecure positions. Irene Philipson (1993) describes this as a process of "feminization." For Fraser (2013), women's entry into work has also served "to intensify capitalism's valorization of waged labour" (2013, p. 221). Today, everyone is expected to work, whether they have caring responsibilities or not, leading to the double burden of work and care. At the same time as responsibilities have increased, welfare support has been reduced. For Fraser, second-wave feminism's demand for economic autonomy has been co-opted to justify this destruction. "It seemed a short step" she writes, "from second-wave feminism's critique of welfare-state paternalism to Margaret Thatcher's critique of the nanny state" (p. 221).

Whilst feminism and neoliberalism may both have harboured reservations about the welfare state, Fraser can be criticized for downplaying political arguments and emphasizing the cunning of capital as the driving force behind these changes. The rolling back of the welfare state was facilitated by ideas of individuality and personal responsibility that won out over the commitment to social solidarity. These were widespread cultural attitudes, not the product of feminism. However, Fraser's views on the necessary direction of contemporary activism and strategy have much in common with Benjamin's (1990) position, outlined above. Fraser urges feminists today to return to the key tenets of second wave feminism: a concern with the sexual division of labour and with the gendered nature of value judgements that distinguish estimable from unimportant work. "Feminists might militate," she writes, "for a form of life that decenters

waged work and valorizes uncommodified activities, including, but not only, carework" (2013, p. 226). They must militate, then, for the unrealized demand of second wave feminism that care be taken seriously.

Clearly Fraser is not the only thinker to champion care in the critique of dominant forms of thinking. Care is central to contemporary philosophical and feminist discourses that seek to contest masculinist ethical, political and ontological assumptions (Cavarero, 2016; Gilligan, 1990; Tronto, 1993). However, the principle of care is not a panacea, and the idea that care is an uncommodified activity must be questioned. The critiques of black feminists (Crenshaw, 1991; hooks, 1981) have long complicated our understanding of the sexual division of labour, and the freedom granted to some women to enter the job market since the 1970s has produced a "care deficit" that requires the low-paid work of less affluent female 'others,' reinscribing longstanding structures of inequality (Hochschild, 2003, p. 214). Notions of self-realization and autonomy, adapted to serve capital, encourage the rejection of caring roles, and underpin the commodification of caring in "new spaces of marketized domesticity" (Green and Lawson, 2011, p. 646). Privatized forms of care, such as care homes and nannies, increasingly replace state provision, and the work of care is globalized: performed by women and low paid migrant workers who take on the management of needs for those able to pay.

Yet the marketization and commodification of care is only possible because of *the need for care*: the fact of human dependence on others, most often women, which was Winnicott's abiding concern. As he puts it, "if there is no true recognition of the mother's part, then there may remain a vague fear of dependence" (1991b, p. 10). Though Winnicott celebrated the ordinary good-enough mother, he never held that the work of care be performed by the biological mother, or by a woman, only that it usually was, and it largely still is. Winnicott's ideas may

have bolstered a specific ideology of femininity in the wake of the Second World War, but his work more broadly foregrounds what is necessary – though not sufficient – for the development of psychic health: namely the provision of a stable setting, a holding environment, in which 'life,' understood as a form of creative spontaneity, might occur. Winnicott (1991a) writes that "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" (p. 71). Winnicott here outlines a politics of care premised on environmental experience.

This attention to the existential experience of 'aliveness' places Winnicott at a distance from the post-structural perspectives that have dominated critical thought since '68. Mari Ruti (2011) notes that Winnicott's emphasis on the authenticity and spontaneity of the 'true self' is difficult for poststructuralists to accept because it evokes an essentialism antithetical to a discursive understanding of subjectivity (p. 360). For Ruti, however, this is a misreading, because the true self does not describe a fixed content but rather a way of relating to the world, a flexibility that enables the fending off of psychic rigidity (p. 361). She also notes how a Lacanian emphasis on the critique of the ego and its 'era' makes it difficult to address instances when the ego is deeply wounded by oppression and its narcissistic abilities are destroyed. In contrast, the concept of the facilitating environment makes it possible to think about oppressive conditions which necessitate a focus on survival, at the expense of other, more flexible or creative, forms of life (p. 370–1). Ruti asks "Who Can Afford Creative Living?" (p. 368). Today, the answer increasingly seems to be those who can afford care in its myriad forms.

At a time when the infrastructures that support life are under constant attack and a self-reliant vision of the subject dominates political discourse, Winnicott's attention to the positive

role played by institutions finds increasing purchase. Some have been saying this for a very long time, not least Margaret and Michael Rustin, who, in 1984, turned to Winnicott to understand "the preconditions for the formation of altruistic capacities so important in socialist ideas of humanity" (1984, p. 210). How might institutions, they asked, instill in individuals the kinds of altruistic capacities that would make them tend towards socialist politics? For the Rustins, the primary caregiver must have "security and emotional space," provision must be made for "caregivers themselves to be cared for" (p. 213) if infants are to "grow beyond a self-centred and narcissistic attitude to their human environment" (p. 210). The Rustins are not making an argument for the functions of the biological mother, but for taking care seriously. The preconditions of socialism may depend on the widespread acceptance of the socialist feminist perspective that care is vital and demands support, and this will require not the destruction of the welfare state, but its reformulation and expansion. As Fraser (2013) notes, "unlike some of their countercultural comrades, most feminists did not reject state institutions *simpliciter*" (p. 216). Instead, they sought "to infuse the latter with feminist values, they envisioned a participatory democratic state that empowered its citizens" (p. 216). Yet this agenda represents more than mere liberal reformism. As Johanna Brenner (2014) has argued convincing, taking care and affective labour seriously would involve a confrontation with capitalism itself:

> Social responsibility for care depends on the expansion of public goods, which in turn depends on taxing wealth or profits. Compensating workers for time spent in caregiving (e.g., paid parenting leave) expands paid compensation at the expense of profits. In addition, requiring (either by regulation or by contract) that workplaces accommodate and subsidize employees' caregiving outside of work interferes with employers' control over

the workplace and tends to be resisted in the private sector, where jobs continue to be

organized as if workers have very little responsibility for care. (2014)

Psychoanalytic theory that foregrounds the vital importance of care offers resources for thinking

this kind of transformation. Faced with the sustained onslaught of neoliberal decentralization,

Rustin (2015, 2014) and others have reiterated that key Winnicottian notion: dependence. In the

2013 Kilburn Manifesto, Rustin (2015) reminds us that the welfare state itself involved

"recognition of the realities of unavoidable and universal human dependency" (p. 3), a fact at

odds with the ideology of personal responsibility and economic self-interest that dominates

contemporary policy making (engaged in the pursuit of inadequate objects of desire).

Barbara Taylor (2014) offers another example of this critique in her 2012 memoir, *The

Last Asylum,* an account of her experience of mental illness and the changing face of mental

health care in the UK since the 1980s. Concluding her account, Taylor (2014) writes that "the

mental health system I entered in the 1980s was deeply flawed, but at least it recognized needs –

for ongoing care, for asylum, for someone to rely upon when self-reliance is no option – that the

present system pretends do not exist, offering in their stead individualist pieties and self-help

prescriptions that are a mockery of people's sufferings" (p. 264). Winnicott's belief in the

importance of dependence brings the question of real suffering into focus, foregrounding the

psychic consequences of profound failures in holding and handling that can destroy the ego's

narcissistic capacities. Such critiques highlight the contradictions between the truth of the human

need for care and the contemporary individualized accounts of subjectivity that underpin

government policy. Unless dependence is acknowledged, or some attention paid to the non-

narcissistic capacities of the ego itself – both key facets of Winnicottian thinking – critical theory

lacks the psychoanalytic resources necessary to defend public institutions from the onslaught of neoliberal privatization.

The recent work of American political theorist, Bonnie Honig (2017), offers another example of Winnicott's increasing purchase on the critical imagination in the face of the relentless neoliberal impulse to "privatize everything" (p. 3). In 2017's *Public Things: Democracy in Disrepair*, Honig argues that public things—which include hospitals, roads and public telephones as well as more difficult institutions like prisons—are transitional objects, and part of the holding environment of democratic citizenship itself. "They do not take care of our *needs* only," she writes, "they also constitute us, complement us, limit us, thwart us, and interpellate us into democratic citizenship" (p. 5). They are also and always reminders of "community obligation, fragility, and interdependence" (p. 6). Honig claims public things provide the focus for political action, and that political action is, in essence, the contesting of these public things. Certainly both Winnicott and second-wave feminists were involved in such contestation, and their interventions have played a part in laying the ground on which contemporary struggles takes place. Faced with the dismantling and destruction of public things in recent decades, we find ourselves today engaged in collective actions to defend public things, such as hospitals, schools, universities and mental health care.

Honig (2017) is conscious that public things have received little attention from political theorists, but she does not provide an account of this dismissal. It is here that we might wish to supplement her 'object-orientated' approach with the language of social reproduction. Public things, or better the institutions and practices necessary to reproduce life and labour, have received scant theoretical attention because, quite bluntly, they are associated with dependence, which is in turn associated with women. We live in societies that continue to fail to acknowledge

dependency, and that valorize self-reliance, autonomy, separation and competition. Whilst the needs of small children for care are broadly acknowledged, the values of care "are nearly irrelevant for life outside the nursery" (Benjamin, 1990, p. 208). However, spaces of care point up human dependence and need. They turn attention from the subject towards the conditions of possibility for subjectivity and resistance themselves. To reiterate Mitchell's (1978) intervention: "many feminists have argued [for]…an equality of reproduction with production; producing people should be as important as producing things." This is why public things demand our attention and our energy: because they provide forms of holding and handling, like the infant care they supplement and extend, and contesting the form of that holding and handling is the work of democratic citizenship and political struggle.

This article has offered a long view of the relationship between Winnicott's ideas and the counter-cultural politics of the 1960s and 1970s. Winnicott's ideas, born in the interwar climate of social solidarity, informed the architecture of the post-war welfare state, which was itself a condition of possibility for the counter-culture to develop. Whilst Winnicott's attention to mothering did little to challenge the sexual division of labour in the post-war period, and was far from marginal in its influence, he foregrounded the importance of social reproduction and the fact of dependence. Under the hegemony of the neoliberal ethos, these facets of life have been devalued, cast in the role of marginal ideological 'others.' This is a state of affairs that necessitates the constant reiteration and rearticulation of a 'counter-cultural' politics of vulnerability, dependence and care. With this in mind, the need to remember Winnicott seems more urgent than ever. Not only because capitalism may well be buried under its own contradictions if the desire for wealth destroys the means of social reproduction, but also because attending to need and care has the capacity to bring about more radical social transformation.

This has been only a brief snapshot of Winnicott's contemporary relevance, but hopefully it has begun to identify what makes Winnicott today a "counter-cultural voice" with something to say about "the present-day troubles," and gone some way to answering Maggie Nelson's question: Why Winnicott now?

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