

# FEELING POOR: D.W. WINNICOTT AND *DANIEL BLAKE*

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**Abstract:** This article draws on Donald Winnicott's understanding of human dependence and Ken Loach's film *I, Daniel Blake* (2015) to open up a new space between 'psychoanalysis' and 'politics'. Its starting-point is what Stuart Hall has described as the 'ferocious onslaught' on the post-war social-democratic settlement and its initial commitments to the idea of the 'full life' and 'social security for all'. Putting dependence at the heart of human experience, Winnicott's psychoanalysis is especially attuned to the individual and collective harms imposed by this new 'age of austerity'. 'Feeling Poor' explores the structures of material and psychic dispossession at work in contemporary regimes of austerity – in particular, the neoliberal denial of human dependence and vulnerability. What does the neoliberal world, its reformations of the social state, make of the primal situation of dependence – its terrors and dreads as well as its impulses towards culture and community? How might we reconceive vulnerability in solidarity rather than stigma? What might a psychoanalysis attuned to 'dependence as a living fact' contribute to the cultures of protest mobilized through the aesthetics of British social realism? Part of a wider exploration of the question of psychoanalysis and class, this article attempts to think about the symbolic functions of care embedded in the post-war welfare state and engages the potential of Winnicott's psychoanalysis as a means to social critique.

**Keywords:** psychoanalysis, dependence, relationality, neoliberalism, austerity, transitional object

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## PREAMBLE

This essay begins in one of Stuart Hall's quietly compelling comments. A few weeks after the opening in London's East End of Rivington Place – home of the Institute of International Visual Arts, of the Autograph Association of Black Photographers and of the Stuart Hall Library – Hall was in conversation with sociologist Les Back, reflecting on a special issue of *Cultural Studies: Stuart Hall and 'Race'*. Published under the title 'At Home and Not at Home' in 2009, Back's preface to the full transcript of this lengthy conversation refers to Hall's 'mode of practicing generosity' (Back is quoting David Scott who also draws attention to Hall's 'ethics of responsiveness').<sup>1</sup> The phrasing is resonant, capturing something of the collaborative quality at the heart of Hall's intellectual practice.

1. Les Back and Stuart Hall, 'At home and not at home: Stuart Hall in conversation with Les Back', *Cultural Studies* 23, 4, 2009, pp658-657, p659. (Hereafter *At Home*).

'I always write *a bit in relation to* whatever I'm doing', he tells Back, towards the beginning of their discussion, 'rather than any longer plan of work'; and, 'I write a bit in relation to them, as I always do' (*At Home*, p660).

'A bit in relation to': as a way into Hall's *oeuvre*, this phrasing draws attention to his role as a thinker who works through relating to others – their lives, their experiences, their questions. Hall's subjects may well be familiar: 'race', class, the diaspora, black British life, popular culture (all vital to the development of Cultural Studies in the university). But his idiom remains rare. That work of relating is formative, 'enabling' is Back's word; it helps others to form – their minds, their thinking, their practice – via a thought that, by bearing them in mind, demonstrates its openness to them. It's a work at once ordinary (a freighted word in Hall's writing as well as in Cultural Studies) and extraordinary, and only too easy to overlook. Hall himself expresses his surprise at the significance of his *oeuvre* to artists working in visual fields very different from his own. 'It's not an area which I feel is mine in the way in which other areas were', he tells Back. 'My work was not unrelated to it, but actually, more surprisingly, many people say now, including artists, how formative that work was in some ways for them. And I don't quite understand it' (*At Home*, p661).

Part of what is at stake here is the mysterious labour of helping others to live, think, and create: schematically, to sustain what political philosopher Hannah Arendt calls the 'life of the mind', its work in making us feel alive.<sup>2</sup> As Back writes a few years later in his *Academic Diary: Or Why Higher Education Still Matters*:

He [Hall] had a gift that enabled us to understand our life anew. .... For him thinking was always a process of transformation and changing himself, making sense out of the senselessness of exploitation, imperialism and racism.<sup>3</sup>

It's a powerful description, one that casts thinking as a form of transformative giving – to the self and to others – with the capacity to generate a renewed experience of being alive. On this description, Hall becomes something like a transformational object in the sense put forward by psychoanalyst Christopher Bollas: an 'object' that, in its way of relating to us, enables us to experience it as an environment with the potential to change, or re-fashion, the self.<sup>4</sup> Such an object can take very different forms: it can be a person, a body of work, a process, an event, an aesthetic or an ideology. But a 'good-enough' transformational object supports us in the interminable endeavour of creating, and re-creating, our worlds. 'If you followed his thought', as Back insists, 'you could not help but be transformed too' (*Academic Diary*, p41).

This, surely, is one of the reasons that Stuart Hall is treasured. To watch John Akomfrah's *The Stuart Hall Project* (2013), for example, is to witness a mind, and a body of work, being honoured and loved. It is also to take the measure of a certain panic when, towards the end of the film, we hear Hall

2. Hannah Arendt, *The life of the mind: thinking*, London, Secker & Warburg, 1978. 'The only possible metaphor one may conceive of for the life of the mind', Arendt writes, 'is the sensation of being alive' (p123). (Hereafter *Life of the mind*).

3. Les Back, *Academic diary: or why higher education still matters*, London, Goldsmiths Press, 2016, pp40-41. (Hereafter *Academic Diary*).

4. Christopher Bollas, *The shadow of the object: psychoanalysis of the unthought known*, London, Free Association Books, 1987, pp13-29. (Hereafter *Shadow of the Object*).

reflecting on the contemporary moment as one that is profoundly strange to him, and in which he does not feel at home: 'I feel the world is stranger to me than I've ever felt it before. I feel out of time for the first time in my life'. This from a man who, in an earlier scene, describes himself as 'the outsider from the time I was born' ('I was too black for my family') and whose face reflects an inscrutable pain on recalling his arrival at Oxford in the 1950s: 'Someone like me could not really be part of it'. It was, Hall clarifies, a 'very profound shock'. But it is *now* that Hall feels, for the first time, a stranger in the world, and 'out of time for the first time in my life'.

These may be the words of a man coming towards the end of his life: 'The hospital, absolutely', Hall had acknowledged to Back in 2009. 'I do a lot of my thinking there' (*At Home*, p681). But they are also the words of a public intellectual confronting what Hall describes elsewhere as 'the long march of the Neoliberal Revolution' in Britain, its experiments in austerity calculated in human lives: on the one hand, an exploitation of the crisis of global capitalism to impose an accelerated marketisation of the state, including the public services on which the majority of British citizens depend; on the other hand, a motivated distortion of collective commitments to solidarity – social attachment, social bonding, social security – as nothing more than a greedy plundering of national resources by a so-called 'culture of dependency': 'hardworking families', those 'just about managing', betrayed by socialism as well as by those 'sitting on benefits', is the mantra of British neoliberalism for politicians on both Left and Right.<sup>5</sup>

Paul Michael Garrett has described the rhetorical investment in that shift from 'social security' to 'welfare dependency' as one of the most pernicious in neoliberal discourse; pernicious and, increasingly, naturalised.<sup>6</sup> As Stuart Hall, Doreen Massey and Michael Rustin argue in *The Kilburn Manifesto* in 2013, every social settlement is founded on a 'bundle of beliefs': 'ideas beyond question, assumptions so deep that the very fact that they *are* assumptions is only rarely brought to light'.<sup>7</sup> In particular, the notorious rhetoric of 'welfare benefits as a "lifestyle choice"' (then Chancellor George Osborne's stigmatising claim in September 2010), of the 'benefit culture' (David Cameron in 2011) and of a 'damaging culture of dependency and worklessness' (Iain Duncan Smith in 2014) has helped to create an environment in which to be disabled or to become ill, to lose your job or your home, is to risk an experience of (sometimes fatal) precarity imposed on the poor and the unwell and, by extension, on all those not protected by wealth or power from the fantasias of 'the market', its ruthless reduction of what it means to live a human life.

In the face of that reduction, Hall stalls – it's a moment of deep hopelessness in Akomfrah's film – before finding his way back to thought:

That means hard thought, hard graft, recognising what the world is like, recognising the way the terrain is set against you, and then remembering the openness of history, and seeing whether one can intervene.

5. Stuart Hall, 'The march of the neoliberals', *Guardian*, 21 September 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2011/sep/12/march-of-the-neoliberals>, accessed 21/07/2018. David Stuckler & Sanjay Basu, *The body economic: why austerity kills*, London, Allen Lane, 2013.

6. Paul Michael Garrett, 'Words matter: deconstructing "welfare dependency" in the UK', *Critical and Radical Social Work*, 3:3, 2015, pp389-406, p389.

7. Stuart Hall, Doreen Massey and Michael Rustin, *After neoliberalism: the Kilburn Manifesto*, London, Lawrence and Wishart, 2013, p9.

This is, I think, one of the demands of Hall's legacy: a non-programmatic call to arms, distinguished by its attention to context – a reckoning with the world as it is – and by a responsiveness grounded in historical understanding of the potential for change. A form of hope, then, but one aware of its fragile provisionality as we see what, if anything, we can do to alter the world in which we find ourselves.

It is in this spirit that I turn to Donald Winnicott and Daniel Blake. At first sight, they may appear to be unlikely interlocutors: a psychoanalyst and paediatrician renowned for his attention to the earliest ties between mothers and babies, and an icon of working-class protest against the destruction of the British social state: following the release of Ken Loach's *I, Daniel Blake* in 2016, #WeAreAllDanielBlake became a rallying cry against the imposition of a basic precariousness on the major institutions of public life in Britain (housing, health, social security, education).<sup>8</sup> But to bring Winnicott and Daniel Blake together is to create a space in which to explore further the tension traversing Hall's writings: on the one hand, that commitment to the work of relating and thinking – to thinking as relating – as a means to transformative change; on the other hand, the stalling of that work in the face of the ongoing destruction of the caring function of the democratic state ('I feel the world is stranger to me than I've ever felt it before. I feel out of time for the first time in my life'). That that function is under attack is one of the starting points of this essay; that such an attack aims at the very possibility of imagining change is one of its provisional conclusions.

### *I, DANIEL BLAKE: 'IF MY MUM COULD SEE ME'*

Economics are the method: the object is to change the heart and soul.

Margaret Thatcher, 1 May 1981.<sup>9</sup>

Having seen *I, Daniel Blake* twice, I have both times been left a shivering wreck by this sequence, awash with tears, aghast with anger, overwhelmed by the sheer force of its all-but-silent scream.

Mark Kermode, 23 October 2016.<sup>10</sup>

During our screening, we were told that assessments often ignored significant health conditions. One profoundly deaf woman was informed: *In your application form for ESA you stated that following an illness when you were a child, you are now profoundly deaf. After your assessment I tried to contact you to discuss your assessment. I telephoned you several times, but you did not answer, therefore I left you a voicemail. You still did not respond. I have therefore found you fit for work.*<sup>11</sup>

The scene has become iconic. Sanctioned for arriving late to her appointment at the job centre, Katie is referred to a food bank for a supply of emergency

8. At the time of writing, the official UK Face Book page for *I, Daniel Blake* had nearly 70,000 followers.

9. Margaret Thatcher, interview for *Sunday Times*, <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/104475>, accessed 23 July 2018.

10. Mark Kermode, 'I, Daniel Blake review: a battle cry for the dispossessed', *Observer*, 23 October 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2016/oct/23/i-daniel-blake-ken-loach-review-mark-kermode>, accessed 23 July 2018.

11. Stephanie Petrie, *The Conversation*, 17 February 2017, <http://theconversation.com/we-showed-i-daniel-blake-to-people-living-with-the-benefits-system-heres-how-they-reacted-73153>, accessed 23 July 2018.

12. The sequence was filmed at Church of the Venerable Bede in West Road, Benwell, one of the busiest food banks in the country, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-tyne-40682558>, accessed 16 February 2018.

13. Jem Collins, *Human rights news, views & info*, 27 September 2017, <https://rightsinfo.org/donations-sanitary-products-sky-rocket-500-i-daniel-blake/> accessed 23 July 2018.

14. As Kayleigh Garthwaite points out in *Hunger pains: life inside foodbank Britain*, Bristol, Policy Press, 2016, p.50: “‘Cold boxes’ are handed out when people have no kettle, or no electricity to even put the kettle on’. Typically, she continues, the cold box contains ‘long-life milk, cereal, tinned fruit, tinned potatoes, tinned corned beef, tinned custard, fruit juice, crackers, biscuit and jam. I met people who were forced to return packages of rice, spaghetti and soup since, with no money, they were unable to pay for electricity to cook the food’. (Hereafter *Hunger pains*).

15. Michael Young and Peter Willmott, *Family and kinship in East London*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1986, pxxvii; Alice Ravetz, *Council housing and culture: the history of a social experiment*, London, Routledge, 2001.

16. On 18 December 2013, then Minister of State for Employment Esther

food aid. With Daniel Blake and her two children, Daisy and Dylan, she joins the long queue of people waiting outside a church hall.<sup>12</sup> Katie is pale, fatigued, apparently benumbed; she sits on a wall to endure the wait along with all those around her. It is one of the conditions of being poor: your time is worth nothing. You can wait.

Inside the food bank, there is nothing but kindness from the strangers – primarily women – who run the reception desk, shepherding children towards juice and biscuits, and helping Katie to ‘shop’ from shelves stacked with basic foods – potatoes, carrots, baked beans, pasta – and a few other essentials: toilet rolls, soap, baby wipes. But no sanitary towels. ‘People don’t donate them’, the volunteer tells Katie, whose lowered, and hurried, voice connotes her discomfort at having to ask. ‘They should’. We are in the presence of the kindness of strangers, then, but dependence on donations exposes the limits of the individual gift as a means to help those living in food – or fuel or period – poverty. Those limits may be repairable; one of the effects of this scene was a substantial increase in the number of sanitary products donated to food banks across Britain.<sup>13</sup> But the point remains. What people have to spare may not be what other people need, and the conditions in which others are living may be unknown, or unimagined. How do you cook a potato if you can’t afford to run your gas or electricity? Or if you are homeless? Or have no access to a cooker or fridge?<sup>14</sup> Kindness can be contingent, random, undependable. It may not be good enough.

We have already seen Katie trying to cook and clean in a house with no heating, lighting or hot water. Until Daniel gives her £20, she has no money to feed (the colloquialism is telling) the gas and electricity meters. Now we are about to witness the effects of her having restricted what she eats so that she can feed her children. Handing Katie a couple of tins of baked beans, the food bank volunteer walks off to continue picking out items for the family’s food ration. As she moves out of sight, the camera closes in on Katie who has turned away, as if huddling into the wall. She opens one of the cans, empties some of the beans and sauce into her hand, and then cups them into her mouth.

It’s a desperate and complex moment. Katie is too hungry to wait to eat, but neither can she swallow the food in her mouth. As people around her become aware of what is happening, the need to eat gives way to tears and humiliation. Katie spits the beans back into her hand, as if ridding herself both of what she has tried to take in and of the sense of shame that comes with being helpless in the face of her needs: ‘I feel like I’m going under’; ‘If my mum could see me’. This is shame in the form of an unbearable visibility, with Katie hiding her face behind her hands, as if desperate for her ‘going under’ to be un-seen: ‘I’m sorry’; ‘I’m so sorry’; ‘I just felt really hungry’.

That the very real possibility of going under is felt as her fault is one of the chronic aspects of Katie’s lived experience of the benefits system. In its current form, the welfare state has reduced her and her children to

penury: a 40 per cent cut in benefits is the sanction for arriving late for her appointment at the job centre after getting lost in the unfamiliar city of Newcastle. It has cut their ties to family and friends: after spending two years in temporary accommodation in London, Katie, Daisy and Dylan have been relocated to Newcastle by their local housing authority – a move that, in forcing a young mother to choose between decent housing (a bathroom, a kitchen, a garden) or living indefinitely in one room with two children, recalls the policies supporting the post-war slum clearances in London and other major cities across Britain.<sup>15</sup> In short, the welfare state has put the struggle to survive – the need for food, shelter, warmth – at the very centre of the family’s lives: conditionality and precariousness are built into this environmental provision, if it can be called that. But it is also undermining the very possibility of relation and contact – back in London, Katie’s mother precisely cannot ‘see’ what is going on – as if there is no room in the contemporary welfare imagination for the significance of attachments to people and places.

Katie and her children belong to a state in which people without money for food are now imagined as part of a national community in which ‘we are all trying to live within our means’, even if that means going hungry.<sup>16</sup> Part of the wager of this scene – and, by extension, of *I, Daniel Blake* – is to trace and counter what Loach describes as the ‘conscious cruelty’ of the ongoing reformation of the welfare regime.<sup>17</sup> Challenging Prime Minister Theresa May to watch the film, Jeremy Corbyn condemned that regime for its ‘institutionalised barbarity’: ‘While she’s doing so [i.e. watching the film]’, Corbyn continued, ‘perhaps she could take the Work and Pensions Secretary [then Iain Duncan Smith] with her because he described the film as “monstrously unfair” and then went on to admit he’d never seen it’.<sup>18</sup> In common with, amongst others, Robert Walker’s *The Shame of Poverty* (2014), Lisa McKenzie’s *Getting By* (2015), Ruth Patrick’s *For whose benefit?* (2016) and Darren McGarvey’s *Poverty Safari* (2017), *I, Daniel Blake* reckons with a type of hatred at work in modern welfare policy and practice, its capacity to damage, even destroy, minds and bodies. ‘It’s like, when you’re on benefits’, explains one respondent to Ruth Patrick’s research into so-called ‘welfare dependency’, ‘... [y]ou haven’t got your own mind’; ‘[On benefits] you’re just existing, not living’, is how another interviewee sums up his situation; ‘You can’t really have a lifestyle on benefits ... Me, being on benefits, I don’t really have a life’.<sup>19</sup> It’s a common theme in studies that give space to the voices of those for whom poverty has become a way of not living. ‘It’s killing me being unemployed; it’s killing me, so it is. I’m dying to get a job’; ‘I think my life’s more or less ... not finished [but] I’ve got nothing else to do, nothing else to look forward to, really’; ‘No, I don’t really think of the future. ... I just get up each day, really’; ‘It’s soul destroying, it’s just killed me’; or, finally, in the words of a sixteen-year-old girl, reflecting on her chances of finding a job: ‘I don’t expect it, I hope it’.<sup>20</sup>

McVey’s comments to Parliament on the increasing use of food banks across Britain have become rightly notorious. ‘So, in the UK, it is right that, you know, more people are visiting, which you’d expect, going to food banks because, as the time is tough ... and we’re all having to pay back this 1.5 trillion debt personally which spiralled under Labour, as we are all trying to live within our means’. The debate is available in full at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kSQgw9K6FT8>; excerpt of McVey’s comments at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4BHZN4BLV0>, accessed 23 July 2018. There appears to be no room in McVey’s mind for the idea that it might not be right for hunger to become part of the lived experience of hundreds of thousands of men, women and children across the UK (by 2015, an All Party Parliamentary Group on food poverty was reporting that hunger is ‘woven into the lives of people for whom going without food on a daily basis is now almost inevitable’, cited in Garthwaite, *Hunger Pains*, p2). Giving voice to her political judgement on destitution as a sign of the times well within her expectations as a Conservative Minister of State, McVey sidestepped the issue raised by opposition MPs: namely, that 19 per cent of referrals to food banks had been as a result of government changes to welfare

entitlements and more than a third down to incompetence in administering an increasingly complex benefits system. Instead there is recourse to the by then well-worn cliché that 'we are all in this together' so basic to the rhetorical environment forged by the Conservative and Coalition governments from 2010.

17. Diane Taylor, "'Conscious cruelty': Ken Loach's shock at benefit sanctions and food banks", *Guardian*, 23 November 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2015/nov/23/ken-loach-benefit-sanctions-jeremy-corbyn-food-banks>, accessed 23 July 2018.

18. *Independent*, 2 November 2016, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/i-daniel-blake-jeremy-corbyn-pmqs-esa-benefits-system-theresa-may-sanctions-a7393371.html>, accessed 23 July 2018.

19. Ruth Patrick, *For whose benefit? The everyday realities of welfare reform*, Bristol, Policy Press, 2017, p.126; pp157-158.

20. R. MacDonald, T. Shildrick and A. Furlong, 'In search of "intergenerational cultures of worklessness": hunting the Yeti and shooting zombies', *Critical Social Policy* 34, 2, pp199-220, p210, p211, p213.

21. D.W. Winnicott, 'The location of cultural experience', *Playing and Reality*,

## 'YOU MAY CURE YOUR PATIENT AND NOT KNOW WHAT IT IS THAT MAKES HIM OR HER GO ON LIVING'<sup>21</sup>

We, the UK's leading bodies representing psychologists, psychotherapists, psychoanalysts, and counsellors, call on the Government to immediately suspend the benefits sanctions system. It fails to get people back to work and damages their mental health. Findings from the National Audit Office (NAO) show limited evidence that the sanctions system actually works, or is cost effective. But, even more worrying, we see evidence from NHS Health Scotland, the Centre for Welfare Conditionality hosted by the University of York, and others, which links sanctions to destitution, disempowerment, and increased rates of mental health problems. This is also emphasised in the recent Public Accounts Committee report, which states that the unexplained variations in the use of benefits sanctions are unacceptable and must be addressed.

*Professor Peter Kinderman, President, British Psychological Society (BPS), Martin Pollecoff, Chair, UK Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP), Dr Andrew Reeves, Chair, British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP), Helen Morgan, Chair, British Psychoanalytic Council (BPC), Steve Flatt, Trustee, British Association of Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapies (BABCP).*<sup>22</sup>

No mind, no life, no future. This is the everyday misery of 'getting by', or not; the misery at the heart of *I, Daniel Blake* in its exposure of the relentless 'politicisation of dependency' (to borrow Lynn Froggett's formulation) supporting ongoing reforms of the British welfare state.<sup>23</sup> What Hall describes as the 'ferocious onslaught' on the social-democratic settlement since the late 1970s – an onslaught that cuts across established distinctions among Conservative, Liberal and Labour forms of political rationality – continues to undermine, often to devastate, the lives of millions of people across Britain.<sup>24</sup> Its material costs are calculable, at least in principle.<sup>25</sup> But as Andrew Cooper and Julian Lousada point out in their psychoanalytic study of the changing nature of the welfare project in Britain, the post-war welfare state was also a 'socially sanctioned settlement for the management of our knowledge of social suffering and conflict'; in other words, it was a settlement, at once material and symbolic, that made human need and human vulnerability a properly social concern (from 'cradle to grave' in the classic formulation: you can't birth or bury yourself).<sup>26</sup>

What happens to our knowledge of suffering, our capacity to manage the experiences of need and helplessness, when that settlement breaks down? In the context of this question, the idea of human dependence is crucial. At once denounced and imposed by our variously hostile environments, dependence can be used as a type of switch word between a neoliberal ideology on the attack against the very idea of social security, and Winnicott's psychoanalysis in its quest to grasp what, in 'The Theory of the Parent-Infant Relationship',

he calls ‘the real meaning of the word dependence’.<sup>27</sup> Belonging to the ‘third phase’ of Winnicott’s thinking, and first published in *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* in 1960, ‘The Theory of the Parent-Infant Relationship’ can be described as another non-programmatic call to arms.<sup>28</sup> In particular, it generated discussion at the Twenty-second International Psychoanalytical Association Congress in Edinburgh in July 1961, with contributions from, amongst others, Anna Freud, Daniel Lagache, Michael Balint, Masud Khan, Dorothy Burlingham and Phyllis Greenacre, as well as two further brief commentaries on the essay by Winnicott himself.<sup>29</sup>

At issue are the consequences of that ‘real meaning’ of dependence for psychoanalysis as both a theory of human being and a therapeutic practice aiming to bring about change in its patients. That the potential for change is on his mind is made explicit by Winnicott towards the beginning of the essay when he writes: ‘The interpretations that are alterative are those that can be made in terms of projection’.<sup>30</sup> Following this very condensed description of psychoanalytic practice – schematically, the work of grasping, and re-rendering, a patient’s material (words, silence, acting-out) as externalising representations of internal psychic processes – Winnicott begins to re-describe the basic facts of human infancy for their challenge to the foundations of this classic version of psychoanalysis. ‘[G]ood and bad things happen to the infant’, he argues, ‘that are quite outside the infant’s range’; that is, ‘things happen’ but they are not describable (or interpretable) in terms of what the baby wants or wants to do – a drive to instinctual satisfaction, say, or frustration at the loss of an object: precisely, the vicissitudes of internal psychic processes – because the baby is not yet ‘there’ as an individual to experience them; or, in Winnicott’s best-known aphorism: ‘There is no such thing as a baby!’ (p142, 145).<sup>31</sup>

It would be difficult to overestimate the significance of this claim to Winnicott’s provocation to psychoanalysis in the 1950s and 1960s, as well as to the ethos that made his work important to the post-war development of the welfare state.<sup>32</sup> Across its diverse traditions, psychoanalysis does uncover the conditions for Winnicott’s ‘dependence as a living fact’: a baby, born into an adult world, depends for her survival on the care she finds there.<sup>33</sup> Helplessness, or *Hilflosigkeit*, is Freud’s word; Jacques Lacan refers to the ‘specific prematurity of birth’ of the human infant; Jean Laplanche grounds his new foundations for psychoanalysis in the ‘primal situation’: ‘a new-born child, an infant in the etymological sense of the word (*in-fans*: speechless) is confronted with the adult world’.<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, we find Winnicott arguing that psychoanalysis does not go far enough when it simply acknowledges that the environment is important; more strongly, on his view, it is impossible to separate the infant from the care provided for her by the world into which she is born.

At the beginning of life, that world may well be the mother; that ‘the infant and the maternal care together form a unit’ is one of the starting-

London, Routledge, 1999, p100. (Hereafter *Playing and Reality*).

22. Letters, Independent, 26 February 2017; the full text of this letter is available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/letters/a-bad-job-is-worse-for-your-mental-health-than-unemployment-a7600411.html>, accessed 23 July 2018.

23. Lynn Froggett, *Love, hate and welfare: psychosocial approaches to policy and practice*, Bristol, The Policy Press, 2002, p21.

24. Stuart Hall, ‘The march of the neoliberals’, *Guardian*, 21 September 2011, <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2011/sep/12/march-of-the-neoliberals>, accessed 21/07/2018.

25. For example: the housing charity, Shelter, reported 128,000 children without a permanent home in England, Scotland and Wales in 2017, <https://fullfact.org/economy/128000-children-are-homeless-britain/>, accessed 23 July 2019; in February 2018, a four-year study by Ben Baumberg Geiger, in collaboration with the cross-party think-tank, Demos, revealed that more than a million benefit sanctions had been imposed on disabled people since 2010 (sanctions being one aspect of the new ‘hostile environment’ for those claiming benefits), <http://www.benbgeiger.co.uk/#millionsanctions>, accessed 23 July 2018; in December



2017, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation published research showing that 14 million people in the UK are now living in poverty (more than 1 in 5 of the population), <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/poverty-britain-joseph-rowntree-foundation-report-theresa-may-social-mobility-commission-million-a8089491.html> and <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/uk-poverty-2017>, accessed 23 July 2018.

26. Andrew Cooper & Julian Lousada, *Borderline welfare: feeling and fear of feeling in modern welfare*, London, Karnac Books, 2005, p11. (Hereafter *Borderline Welfare*).

27. D.W. Winnicott, 'The theory of the parent-infant relationship', *The Collected Works of D.W. Winnicott*, Lesley Caldwell and Helen Taylor Robinson (eds), Volume 6, 1960-1963, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2017, p143. (Hereafter, *CW* + volume and page reference).

28. On the three phases in the development of Winnicott's psychoanalysis, see Jan Abram, 'The evolution of Winnicott's theoretical matrix: a brief outline', in Jan Abram ed. *Donald Winnicott Today*, London and New York, Routledge, 2013, pp73-112.

29. The papers are collected in *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 43, 1962, pp235-256.

points of 'The Theory of the Parent-Infant Relationship' (though, as its title suggests, Winnicott is alert to the parental and paternal dimensions of that unit).<sup>35</sup> Nonetheless the point remains to be driven home. 'We are divided into two', he warns, 'if there are some who do not allow that at the earliest stages the infant and the maternal care belong to each other and cannot be disentangled' (p143). It is difficult not to hear a note of impatience, or perhaps weariness, in Winnicott's brief history of psychoanalytic attachment to a set of ideas – in this instance, 'personal defence organisation', 'personal body scheme', separateness of self – that presupposes in the infant levels of individuation and integration in dispute throughout 'The Theory of the Parent-Infant Relationship' (p145). 'At the level of the main part of this paper', Winnicott clarifies, 'this state of affairs cannot yet be assumed. The discussion centres around the establishment of precisely this state of affairs, namely the structuring of the ego which makes anxiety from instinct tension or object loss possible' (p145). It is to this point that Winnicott returns, once again, in his 'Further Remarks' to the IPA Congress in 1961 on the conditions of infantile life *before* the possibility of object relations:

[I]f we look at an infant we see an infant in care. The processes of integration, and of separating out, of getting to live in the body and of relating to objects, these are all matters of maturation and achievement. Conversely, the state of not being separated, of not being integrated, of not being related to body functions, of not being related to objects, this state is very real; we must believe in these states that belong to immaturity. The problem is: How does the infant survive such conditions?<sup>36</sup>

How does the infant survive such conditions? The question begins to take the measure of the demand on maternal care – the child's 'one-way, non-negotiable dependency' as Lisa Baraitser characterises it – as well as providing the ground for Winnicott's conviction that no-one is spared the 'primitive agonies' of infantile life: fears of 'going to pieces' and 'falling for ever', of 'having no relation to the body', of 'having no orientation', and of 'there being no means of communication'.<sup>37</sup> As Winnicott summarises the point in 'Fear of Breakdown' in 1963: 'The ego cannot organise against environmental failure in so far as dependence is a living fact'.<sup>38</sup> In other words, how far the baby survives those very real states of non-integration, non-relation, and isolation, depends on how far the environment – in Winnicott's terms, the 'environment mother' – can protect him or her against too much exposure to the terrors of having been born. Defending against the pains of need (hunger, cold) as well as those perhaps less familiar dreads (falling apart, falling forever, falling empty), one of the functions of care on this model is to foster what Winnicott calls the baby's 'continuity of being': uninterrupted being, along with the mother but not aware of her, is the basic aim of the mother-infant 'set-up', helping the infant to bear with what happens to him or her *before*

the development of the ego that will support the capacity for individuated experiences (satisfaction, frustration, object relation, object loss).<sup>39</sup>

'This', as Adam Phillips summarises, 'was the conviction at the centre of Winnicott's developmental theory. It was the rapport between the mother and her infant that made instinctual satisfaction possible; previous psychoanalytic theory had assumed it was the other way round'.<sup>40</sup> The wager is extraordinary but, as Winnicott would insist, very ordinary too; or, as André Green suggests, Winnicott was noticing 'what had been escaping everyone's attention': if all goes well, the labour of the environment-mother remains unseen, unnoticed, taken for granted (and not only by the baby).<sup>41</sup> Nothing less than a reversal of reality takes place via this care in which the mother, identifying with her baby's states of being, creates an environment in which he or she can experience absolute helplessness as a form of illusory omnipotence: what is needed is reliably 'there' via an other who is not yet recognised as separate from the baby, an other who offers 'live, human holding' (Winnicott's phrasing) that is at once somatic and psychological (at this stage, the two cannot be distinguished).<sup>42</sup>

Feeling her way into the 'good' and 'bad' things happening to her baby, the mother uses her mind and her body to recognise, and to reflect, the baby into being. She is, as Winnicott puts it in 1967, the first mirror, forming, and transforming, the baby's earliest states, and thereby making them survivable, livable, meaningful. Again, it is easier to take the measure of that demand on (maternal) care in light of Winnicott's description of the agonies attendant on its disruption, or failure: 'Such interruptions constitute annihilation, and are evidently associated with pain of psychotic quality and intensity'.<sup>43</sup> In 'Mirror-role of Mother and Family', he elaborates that idea of interruption through the everyday play of reflection between mother and baby:

Now, at some point the baby takes a look round. ... What does the baby see when he or she looks at the mother's face? 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. I am asking that this which is naturally done well by mothers who are caring for their babies shall not be taken for granted. I can make my point by going straight over to the case of the baby whose mother reflects her own mood or, worse still, the rigidity of her own defences. In such a case what does the baby see?<sup>44</sup>

All this, Winnicott tells us, 'belongs to the beginning', when what Bollas refers to as the 'infant-mother culture' is being established through the idiom – gesture, gaze, language – of environmental care.<sup>45</sup> Read in the context of Winnicott's analysis of the mother-infant unit, the 'mirroring' taking place here is a form of generative transformation, a way of returning the baby to herself that enables her to continue with the work of 'going on being'; in other

30. Winnicott, 'The Theory of the Parent-Infant Relationship', *CW* 6, p141.

31. Winnicott, cited in Jan Abram, *The language of Winnicott: a dictionary of Winnicott's use of words*, London, Karnac Books, 1996, p155. Winnicott is not disputing the therapeutic value of that 'classic' (his word) model of psychoanalysis, or its commitments to what James Strachey describes as 'mutative interpretation' in James Strachey's influential formulation: James Strachey, 'The nature of the therapeutic action of psychoanalysis', *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 1934, 15, pp127-159 (it is worth noting that Winnicott does not use Strachey's familiar formulation here). Crucial to that model, however, is what Jean Laplanche has subsequently described as psychoanalytic auto-centrism, a falling back on the idea of the individual subject, embroiled in the activity of his or her own drives, id, unconscious. 'To project, to introject, to identify, to disavow, to foreclose etc.', Laplanche explains in 'Implantation, Intrusion', ' – all the verbs used by analytic theory to describe psychological processes share the feature of having as subject the individual in question: *I* project, *I* disavow, *I* foreclose, etc'. Jean Laplanche, *Essays on Otherness*, London, Routledge, 1999, p135.

32. As Jan Abram notes, in his focus on the stage of human

development that precedes object relations, Winnicott was almost a 'lone voice' for some thirty years. Jan Abram, 'The evolution of Winnicott's theoretical matrix: a brief outline', *Donald Winnicott Today*, p74.

33. Winnicott, 'Fear of Breakdown', 1963, *CW* 6, p525.

34. Freud, 'Project for a scientific psychology' (1895), *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud*, London, The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1995, pp283-392; Jacques Lacan, 'The mirror stage as formative of the *I* function as revealed in psychoanalytic experience', *Ecrits*, New York and London, W.W. Norton & Company, 2006, p. 78; Jean Laplanche, *New Foundations for Psychoanalysis*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1989, pp89-90.

35. Winnicott, 'The Theory of the Parent-Infant Relationship', *CW* 6, p143.

36. Winnicott, 'The Theory of the Parent-Infant Relationship: Further Remarks', *CW* 6, p361.

37. Lisa Baraitser, *Maternal encounters: the ethics of interruption*, London and New York, Routledge, 2009, p21; Winnicott, cited in Jan Abram, *The language of Winnicott*, pp161-163.

38. Winnicott, 'Fear of breakdown', *CW* 6, p525.

words, the mother's face – its movement, its animation, its reflectiveness – is part of the holding so vital to early environmental provision.<sup>46</sup> If the mother's face is *not* a mirror, if she cannot lend herself to her baby when the baby 'looks' for her, then the possibility of a transformative exchange between the two of them – a 'two-way process' in Winnicott's terms – is interrupted, or lost.<sup>47</sup> Falling apart, falling alone, falling forever: what the baby loses is the mother's mind, her (adult) capacity to imagine and elaborate what is being lived through.

On occasion, this is an inevitable, even necessary, experience (the mother, Winnicott will say, *must* fail). More strongly, it is structural to Winnicott's account of the mother as mirror: 'the mother is looking at the baby and *what she looks like is related to what she sees there*' (p112). That nuance is crucial. What the mother looks like is *related to*, but not identical with, what she sees when she looks at her baby. This is relation, not reproduction; it is relation forged in identification and reflection between two. Not everything is, or can be, caught up in the mother's face, or the gift of her looking back. On the contrary. The not-seen, the not-reflected, shadows Winnicott's understanding of the relation between mother and infant: be it the face of a 'good enough' mother (alive, reflecting but not all) or, at the other end of the spectrum, a face full of the mother's mood, unreflecting, 'dead'. On this reading, not finding herself in the other – not being found, not being seen – is a fundamental aspect of the experience of coming into being (or, as Juliet Mitchell notes in a different context, 'a primal nonrecognition ... would be everybody's human lot to some degree').<sup>48</sup>

On my understanding of Winnicott, it is the balance between being seen and not-seen, found and not found, that makes the difference between living and not-living. 'We have yet to tackle the question of *what life itself is about*', he writes in 'The Location of Cultural Experience' in 1967. 'Our psychotic patients force us to give attention to this sort of basic problem'.<sup>49</sup> Returning to the vicissitudes of early infantile life – 'Trauma', he explains, 'implies that the baby has experienced a break in life's continuity' – Winnicott runs a line between the 'living fact' of dependence and the possibility of creative living (p97). The question of what life is about may well be a privileged example of what Arendt once described as the genre of the 'unanswerable questions of meaning'.<sup>50</sup> But supporting the idea of the human being as a producer of meanings, it runs like a red thread through Winnicott's later writings. What makes life worth living? What makes life feel real? What makes life *life*? The questions belong to all of us, but it is the form of suffering that Winnicott identifies as psychotic – 'hovering between living and not living', as he puts it – that keeps the problem in view (that psychosis is an 'environmental deficiency disease', the effect of a failure to make the dependence of early infancy bearable, is one of the implications of his claims).<sup>51</sup> The capacity to experience life, to make it real and find it worth living, Winnicott concludes, can happen 'only *in relation to a feeling of confidence* on the part of the baby,

that is, a confidence related to the dependability of the mother-figure or environmental elements, confidence being the evidence of dependability that is becoming introjected'.<sup>52</sup> Or, as Winnicott insists elsewhere: 'No-one can hold a baby unless able to identify with the baby' – a statement that puts empathy and imagination at the core of his thinking about the 'real meaning of the word dependence'.<sup>53</sup>

In other words, Winnicott's excavation of dependence bring us up against the fact that the potential of being, or becoming, human depends on a psychosomatic and psycho-social experience of care. The baby *needs* to be met by another human mind, and by a world in which the mother has a mind to meet her baby. The consequences of that insight have secured Winnicott's unique place in post-war British social history; as Sally Alexander has pointed out, his ideas were 'part of the ethical and practical thinking that informed the British welfare state's provision of need through its clinics, hospitals, welfare centres, schools, and homes from the 1930s to the 1950s'.<sup>54</sup> On this reading, the idea of 'holding', or the holding environment, becomes a key term for extending the reach of Winnicott's thinking beyond the mother's arms and out into the world of family and society.<sup>55</sup> Certainly, in retrospect, the caring function of the mother and the caring function of the state appear to converge: in the form of direct support for mothers and babies, certainly, but more broadly in terms of a post-war structure of feeling that at once facilitates, and is facilitated by, Winnicott's psychoanalysis of the mutual imbrication of dependence and mind, care and human creativity.

#### 'I, DANIEL BLAKE, DEMAND MY APPEAL DATE BEFORE I STARVE'

'Wouldn't it be awful if the child looked into the mirror and saw nothing?'<sup>56</sup>

When those who have power to name and to socially construct reality choose not to see you or hear you, whether you are dark-skinned, old, disabled, female, or speak with a different accent or dialect than theirs, when someone with the authority of a teacher, say, describes the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked into a mirror and saw nothing.<sup>57</sup>

'I think I would be a very different person now', writes Carolyn Steedman in *Landscape for a Good Woman* in 1986, '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'.<sup>58</sup> Growing up in south London in the 1950s, Steedman belongs to one of the first generations of children whose lives were shaped by the post-war vision of the British social state. 'What my mother lacked, I was given' is her succinct summary of the difference introduced by that vision – however flawed, or under-

39. Winnicott, 'The theory of the parent-infant relationship', *CW* 6, pp155-156.

40. Adam Phillips, *Winnicott*, London, Fontana Press, 1988, p. 100; Christopher Bollas underlines the point in *The shadow of the object: psychoanalysis of the unthought known*, London, Free Association Books, 1987, p50: 'Since there is little psychological sense of differentiation between the baby and his external objects, there is also little differentiation between the infant's internal instinctual processes and he parents' environmental handling of the baby's internal needs'.

41. André Green, *On private madness*, London, Rebus Press, 1996, p287.

42. Winnicott cited in Jan Abram, *The language of Winnicott*, pp184-186.

43. Winnicott, 'The theory of the parent-infant relationship', *CW* 6, p154.

44. Winnicott, 'Mirror-role of mother and family in child development', in *Playing and Reality*, p112.

45. Winnicott, 'Mirror-role of Mother and Family in Child Development', p112; Bollas, *The Shadow of the Object*, p13.

46. That Winnicott is identifying a maternal dimension to the visual field is part of the interest of this paper in the context of the encounter between

psychoanalysis and visual culture; for further discussion, see Vicky Lebeau, 'Mirror images: D.W. Winnicott in the visual field', in Agnieszka Piotrowska (ed), *Embodied encounters: new approaches to psychoanalysis and cinema*, Hove and New York, Routledge, 2015, pp171-182.

47. Winnicott, 'Mirror-role of Mother and Family in Child Development', p113.

48. Juliet Mitchell, 'Trauma, Recognition, and the Place of Language', *Diacritics* 28:4, 1998, p124.

49. Winnicott, 'The Location of Cultural Experience' (1967), in *Playing and Reality*, p98.

50. Arendt, (*Life of the mind*), p62.

51. Winnicott, 'The Location of Cultural Experience', p100; Abram, *The Language of Winnicott*, p158.

52. Winnicott, 'The Location of Cultural Experience', p100.

53. Winnicott, 'From Dependence Towards Independence in the Development of the Individual', 1965, *CW* 6, p472; as Angela Joyce explains in her recent introduction to 'The Theory of the Parent-Infant Relationship' (*CW* 6, p5): 'In her holding function, the mother not only attends physically to her baby's needs but in her mind imaginatively elaborates her baby's experiences'.

54. Sally Alexander,

achieved, it may have been in the decades between 1945 and the election of Margaret Thatcher's Conservative Government in 1979 (p122). As a feminist and a historian, Steedman is well aware of both the limits imposed by the entanglement of the social state in traditions of liberal philanthropy – that ingrained notion of post-war reconstruction, as Gareth Stedman-Jones puts it, as 'for the welfare of, rather than by the agency, power and intelligence of, the working class' – and its vulnerability to fading, or reversals, in political commitment from both Right and Left (p146). But her concerns also lie elsewhere: 'If it had been only philanthropy', she wonders, 'would it have felt like it did?' (p122).

Orange juice, milk, school dinners: this is a child's eye view of food security, one that supports Steedman's analysis of what she describes as a 'structure of care and affection' embedded in the state's provision for her child self (p123). Crudely, dinners and juice tell Steedman that she matters and is wanted in the world. Propped on that provision is a young girl's fragile sense of having a life worth nourishing – feeding, housing, educating – against the odds of personal beginnings riven by the effects of material and symbolic dispossession. Countering those beginnings, the welfare state intervenes to help Steedman believe in her right to exist, even to flourish; its provision of (material) care creates a potential space in which a life worth living can emerge and take shape. In this sense, what Steedman offers in *Landscape for a Good Woman* is a remarkable insight into the psycho-social formations of human need; more strongly, in her attention to the lived experience of welfare relations, she appears to have documented an encounter with what Cooper and Lousada describe as a 'social state of mind' discoverable in a society's ways of dealing with – managing, transforming, ameliorating, provoking, ignoring, exacerbating, exploiting – our collective and individual needs (*Borderline Welfare*, pp10-11). In other words, the vicissitudes of the social state help to identify what Steedman describes as the relation between psychic structures and state interventions, the capacity of the state to tell its citizens that they have a right to exist – lives worth living and minds worth nourishing (*Landscape for a Good Woman*, p122). Or not.

From its opening sequence *I, Daniel Blake* cues its audience into what it means to encounter a social state that has abandoned its commitments to care. Faced with a black screen, what we hear is a tragic-comic rendition of a work capability assessment as Blake is forced to undergo the now notorious 'fit for work' test administered on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions. We listen to a woman reading from a list of questions that, as Blake points out, he has already answered on the form he has already returned. What Blake needs is recognition of the fact that he is recovering from a heart attack, and money to live on until he is well enough to return to work. What the assessor is there to do is to take him through a scripted interview to produce a score that will determine Blake's fate – a fate weighted on the side of a supposed reduction of state spending on welfare benefits.<sup>59</sup>

In this context, Blake is not a patient but a claimant, exposed to a discourse that neither reflects, nor responds to, his experience of illness and the subsequent struggle to survive. That Blake does not immediately recognise that lack of fit, that he maintains his spontaneity in the face of an encounter drained of individual meaningfulness, is vital to the scene's dark comedy. 'I'm a health care professional'; 'If we can just keep to these questions?': the assessor's appeals to status and script announce the redundancy of her professional responsibility. 'If you ask questions you get answers – and hardly anything else': reflecting on the uses of psychoanalysis to family doctors in 1957, Michael Balint evoked a world of general practice now difficult to imagine in its commitments to continuity of care – the *family* doctor in a position to know his patients as people – and the crucial importance of listening to what patients say.<sup>60</sup> Writing less than a decade after the founding of the National Health Service in 1948, his words appeal to a world away from the 'monumental farce' (Blake's phrase) now playing out on the cusp between the DWP and the NHS (or rather, in the space that emerges when the DWP displaces the NHS from decisions once grounded in clinical judgement).<sup>61</sup> The 'health care professional' is not a doctor and the forms of knowledge available to understand what it means to recover from a heart attack appear to have no place in the assessment process. On the contrary. The role of the interviewer is not to listen, but to ensure that the claimant – who is not her patient – cannot speak freely; in the world of welfare documented by *I, Daniel Blake*, no-one wants that form of free speech, or a medical professional listening with empathy and concern.

Farce can also be a form of terror. In this sequence, that terror may be held at bay by Daniel Blake's play with words, and his exposure of the 'brick wall' of the bureaucratic function. That artful black screen, and the absence of a human face from the field of vision, capture something of the 'blinking' of human vulnerability by the modern welfare imagination – a blinking by no means confined to the formal mechanisms of welfare bureaucracy. Take, for example, Toby Young's invective against the film, giving voice to the entire 'climate of opinion' (to borrow W.H. Auden's phrase) in which *I, Daniel Blake* takes up its place. 'I'm no expert on the welfare system', Young wrote in the *Daily Mail* in October 2016:

but several aspects of *I, Daniel Blake* don't ring true. The two protagonists are a far cry from the scroungers on Channel 4's *Benefits Street*, who I accept aren't representative of all welfare recipients. But Loach has erred in the opposite direction. For a filmmaker who styles himself a "social realist", he has an absurdly romantic view of benefit claimants.<sup>62</sup>

This is the new neoliberal common sense, and it is no wonder that imagination can fail in the face of its refusal to budge from what it wants to know of the world. Young is not interested in the evidence amassed by *I, Daniel Blake*

'Primary maternal preoccupation: D. W. Winnicott and social democracy in mid-twentieth century Britain', in Alexander and Barbara Taylor eds. *History and psyche: culture, psychoanalysis and the past*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, p149. Winnicott's contribution to that history is now being uncovered; as Alexander puts it (p154): 'few historians of the welfare state recognise the contribution to humanitarian feeling made by D.W. Winnicott before and after World War II'.

55. 'One can discern a series', Winnicott writes in 'The antisocial tendency' in 1956, '– the mother's body, the mother's arms, the parental relationship, the home, the family including cousins and near relations, the school, the locality with its police-stations, the country with its laws', Clare Winnicott, Ray Shepherd and Madeleine Davis (eds), *Deprivation and delinquency*, London, Tavistock Publications, 1984, p125. His focus on the 'antisocial' child in this essay helps to explain the characteristics of this series, but the more general point stands: the idea of the 'holding environment', a staple in psychodynamically-oriented social work, finds its purchase beyond the time of early infancy and the domain of the family; institutions, cultures, societies, political systems, can be understood as forms of holding. For

further discussion of the role of 'public things' in the creation of what she calls a 'democratic holding environment', see Bonnie Honig, *Public Things: Democracy in Disrepair*, New York, Fordham University Press, 2017.

56. Winnicott, 'Mirror-role of Mother and Family in Child Development', p116.

57. Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born*, London, Virago Press, 1984, p199.

58. Carolyn Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman*, London, Virago, 1986, p122. (Hereafter *Landscape for a Good Woman*).

59. That the administration of Work Capability Assessment cost more than they save has been consistently reported, undermining claims that such 'austerity' measures are an economic necessity. See, for example, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/dwp-fit-to-work-assessments-cost-more-than-they-save-report-reveals-a6801636.html>, accessed 23 July 2018.

60. Michael Balint, *The Doctor, his Patient & the Illness*, Kent, Pitman Medical Publishing, 1977, p133.

61. The role of the medical profession, particularly the leadership of the BMA, has been sharply criticized by blacktriangle campaign: <http://blacktriangle>

(or, by extension, the many organisations and campaigns challenging the rhetorical environment in which benefit claimants are regularly denounced as 'scroungers' and 'shirkers', and government ministers can cast the continuing rise in the use of food banks as a phenomenon to be expected in austere times). 'We heard far worse stories than the ones in the film', Loach tells Alissa Wilkinson in interview following the success of *I, Daniel Blake* at Cannes in 2016. 'But we didn't want to take the most extreme stories. We wanted to show that this could happen to anybody'.<sup>63</sup> At stake is the transformation of what Loach calls 'raw emotion' into a cinematic object to be used – shown, shared, interpreted – by its diverse audiences. In this context, *I, Daniel Blake* – the title announces its potential as an occasion for testimony – has opened up a space for men, women and children living with, and sometimes dying from, the effects of an accelerating austerity experiment to speak into the public domain. 'I, Daniel Blake, Demand My Appeal Date Before I Starve ...': to a welfare system peopled by 'Decision Makers' and 'Health Care Professionals', issuing 'Sanctions' and 'Formal Directives', and 'Digital by Default', Blake writes back. Literally. On the wall of the job centre, that new circle of hell for so many. 'My new art installation', Blake announces to the crowd gathering to applaud his graffiti, his last resort in the face of state mindlessness – and,



Figure 1: Blake's graffiti – image and text – has taken on a life of its own beyond the film.<sup>64</sup>

now, a means to frame the testimony of claimants in their own acts of 'writing back' (Figure 1).

It is a measure of the distance we have travelled from the initial commitments of the post-war social state – the idea of the 'full life' and 'social security for all' (the one leaning on the other) – that *I, Daniel Blake* can be dismissed so easily as a form of socialist romanticism. On the other hand, the question of what, if anything, cinema can do to counter that dismissal haunts its critical reception. Loach's *oeuvre* is renowned for its commitment to the stories of 'ordinary people', living on the margins of structures of power and investiture; in fact, the idea of the ordinary is one of his points of contact with Winnicott (and, indeed, with Stuart Hall). However, writing several years before the release of *I, Daniel Blake*, John Hill points to widespread concern that Loach's cinema was becoming almost completely devoid of any hope for social and political change. As Loach himself has observed, '[a]udiences are much less optimistic, much less prepared to engage in the possibility of change' and 'you have to work harder to get that [change] in their minds'.<sup>65</sup>

It is as if imagination – oppositional, counter-intuitive forms of imagination – are failing in the face of the difficulty of changing anything. Hopelessness, very real and very felt, is one prevalent response.

Reading between Winnicott and Loach, it may be that the question of whether or not films like *I, Daniel Blake* can 'change anything' is beside the point.<sup>66</sup> Or, rather, our understanding of what 'change' is, and how it can happen, may need to be re-thought. Elaborating on forms of lived experience marginalised, denied, and vilified in contemporary British culture and politics, *I, Daniel Blake* – and, by extension, Loach's documentary aesthetic – can be understood as a form of reflecting, and giving back, what is there to be seen but is all too often ignored (and ignored in a motivated way). That form of reflection cannot be taken for granted, and part of the work of *I, Daniel Blake* has been to expose the effects of its absence. As such, the film provides a form of holding against the violence of non-recognition, its capacity to shape – or, rather, reduce – the forms of life available in twenty-first century Britain. Again, that holding cannot be taken for granted.

Can a film 'hold' you? The question captures the challenge of the encounter between Winnicott's psychoanalysis and the objects and practices of cultural interpretation. It is not only that Winnicott's writings are especially attuned to the individual and collective harms imposed by a neoliberalism apparently wedded to the denial of human need and vulnerability. More broadly, his analysis of dependence – mind, care, creativity – opens on to a series of questions about the role of cultural objects in creating 'holding environments', both on and off screen. *I, Daniel Blake* brings such questions in to particular focus. Offering itself as an object to think with, and against, the neoliberal attack on the social state, it holds out the possibility of relating differently to the facts of human dependence and vulnerability; in this sense, Loach's film takes on the labour of knowing and symbolising the reality of

campaign.  
[org/2014/03/27/the-leadership-of-the-british-medical-association-is-complicit-in-the-suicides-of-britains-disabled-people/](http://org/2014/03/27/the-leadership-of-the-british-medical-association-is-complicit-in-the-suicides-of-britains-disabled-people/), accessed 23 July 2018.

62. Toby Young, 'Why only Lefties could go misty eyed at a movie that romanticises Benefits Britain', 25 October 2016, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-3869182/Why-Lefties-misty-eyed-movie-romanticises-Benefits-Britain-says-TOBYOUNG.html>, accessed 23 July 2018.

63. Alissa Wilkinson, 'Dare them to censor you', *Vox.com*, 4 January 2017, <https://www.vox.com/culture/2017/1/4/13980456/ken-loach-interview-i-daniel-blake-bureaucracy-palme-dor>, accessed 23 July 2018.

64. <https://www.facebook.com/IDanielBlake/photos/a.1054974551.242676.1073741828.939783992761733/1377939495612845/?type=3&theater>

65. John Hill, *Ken Loach: The Politics of Film and Television*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, p199. Citing Mark Fisher: capitalist realism: 'the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to imagine a coherent alternative to it'.

66. Oscar Rickett draws attention to the question often



posed to Loach's cinema in 'Can culture change policy?' [https://www.vice.com/en\\_uk/article/yvejx/i-daniel-blake-actually-change-anything](https://www.vice.com/en_uk/article/yvejx/i-daniel-blake-actually-change-anything), accessed 23 July 2018.

human need identified by Cooper and Lousada as one of the functions of the post-war social state (*Borderline Welfare*, p11). It is at once a force for social criticism (the more familiar idea of engaged cinema), and a form of transformational object there to be used by its audiences, if they can find ways of relating to it.

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