

## **Essential Tensions: Winnicottian Object-Relations In The Media Sociology of Roger Silverstone**

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If academia does indeed possess a habitus of its own (Gripsrud 1999), then perhaps it is one which tends to marginalise and subordinate the scholar's social, even convivial, experience of networks, peer groups, mentors, affiliations, and friendships within the sober assessments and logical arguments of published work. Though it is frequently possible to reconstruct casts of supporting characters (and this may even be one of the chief pleasures of reading acknowledgements, footnotes and the like), written work still tends to proceed – in thrall to old, enlightenment legacies – as if it were the product of a pure and disembodied rationality. Avoiding *ad hominem* argumentation, and referring to one's mates, acquaintances, lovers, colleagues and sparring partners by impersonal surname: it's a useful pretence, but pretence, nevertheless – the cultural observance and instituting of a line between the 'private' or personal and the 'public'. Following such convention, in what follows I could be expected to refer to the work of 'Silverstone'. But I knew him as Roger: he was firstly the most inspiring of my undergraduate lecturers and latterly my Ph.D. supervisor. He was always a source of support and, when it counted, a teller of helpful home truths.

So, in this essay, at this time, I will dispense with that well-worn mask of disinterest and impartiality. I doubt that Roger would have entirely approved: he once admonished me, after one oh-so-radical postgrad attempt of mine to re-introduce the 'private' into 'public' academic writing, with the terse reminder that sometimes 'private' matters just aren't very interesting to other people.

I want to take one, just one, pathway through Roger's work by focusing on the uses he made of play theory, in particular the work of British psychoanalyst Donald Woods Winnicott, author of *Playing and Reality* (1974; see also Winnicott 1992). This was, perhaps, a rather unusual appropriation for a media sociologist who had otherwise deployed high structuralism to map mediated myth (1981), De Certeau to explore the everyday, and Anthony Giddens' social theory to survey self-identity (1994). Roger's use of Winnicott, in my view, probably had much to do with his wife Jennifer's training and profession as a psychotherapist. Though he wouldn't have admitted it, wanting to observe a clear separation between public and private, I like to think of Roger's Winnicottian turn as a line of argument and a thread of indebtedness which linked him to Jennifer: a deeply personal connection and mediation which, from the outside, might seem to resemble a matter of purely logical and theoretical debate.

In turn, my own use of Winnicott in *Fan Cultures* (2002) marked another thread of connection and another debt, this time one back to Roger's own work in *Television and Everyday Life* (published in 1994 while I was an undergraduate), and *Why Study the Media?* (which appeared in 1999, around the time I was completing my D.Phil).

Why Winnicott? To follow Roger's own counsel and eschew the private or the personal for a while – what was the 'public' rationale for using the work of this particular writer to think through contemporary television, and the media more generally? How has Roger's idiosyncratic blending of play and structuration theory been taken up by other writers, especially those working in fan studies?

I'll pursue this inquiry through two stages: firstly, I want to focus on the precise conjunction or constellation of theoretical work into which Roger inserts the thinking of Winnicott. I'll suggest that what ultimately came to characterise Roger's accomplished theory-bricolage was the sensibly disillusioning belief that there can be no 'Big Single Answer' to the puzzles and problems confronting media theory. Secondly, I will address the directions and possibilities which Roger's socio-psychoanalytic work helped to open up. I will not, in this piece, offer a recap or a summary of Winnicott's work, but will instead assume some basic familiarity on the part of readers<sup>1</sup>.

### **Cross-disciplinary Theory Ensembles: Winnicott In Relation To...**

At certain points across his academic career, Roger paused and took stock of his own work. In a number of places, he therefore provided a sense of self-commentary and self-narrative – most notably in book chapters looking back at *The Message of Television* (1981; see Silverstone 1988) and re-contextualising his work on television documentary (1985; see Silverstone 1999b). Though we are obviously not bound to wholly accept these accounts, they nevertheless provide some interesting co-ordinates for thinking through Roger's own use of Winnicott and object-relations theory.

In 'Television Myth and Culture', Roger added a postscript of sorts to his first book, noting that "postscripts are for kite flying, or at least this one is" (1988:41). Seeking to introduce tentatively and speculatively a psychoanalytic dimension to his theorisation of television as myth and ritual, Roger wrote that he wished to explore:

Some ideas suggested in the course of my work which bear on the psychodynamics of television as an individual and a cultural experience. I still feel that we are a long way from grasping what that experience is and that the conventional ways of thinking about it... what we have come to call "effects." and "uses and gratifications" or even "readings" have so far not been able to produce a convincing account of the relationship between the medium and social life. (1988:41).

What, then, was crucially lacking in these approaches to television? Roger's starting point in his speculative postscript of 1988 was the "belief that any analysis of culture must take into account unconscious processes, both individual and collective" (1988: 41). To begin considering this, Roger indicated what he called the "parallel theorizing" of three major thinkers: Winnicott, Ernst Cassirer and Claude Levi-Strauss. At this moment, object-relations work was hence brought into a structuralist-symbolic constellation. By the mid-nineties, however, Roger had shifted the terrain of his theoretical debts. Though Winnicott remained a key point of departure for his media sociology, it was Anthony Giddens' structuration theory and Michel De Certeau's thinking on 'everyday life' which were now constellated around it, and read through it (see 1994: 163-4). Winnicottian object-relations remained, it

would appear, a pivotal or nodal point within Roger's interweaving of theoretical frames: at one moment, it was brought to bear on, and viewed in conjunction with, high structuralism and then later it was re-read via structuration theory (1994: 164). In short, although Roger's commitments to other theories may have moved with the academic times (as structuralism was increasingly discredited, and as post-structuralist/structuration theories gained currency), his interest in the possibilities offered by object-relations remained steady, albeit repositioned within differing theory networks. And though there were evidently other strands to Roger's work – such as the consumption of domestic technologies, and projects on European media and everyday life (Silverstone and Hirsch (eds) 1992; Silverstone (ed) 2005) – even these returned, as he later reflected, to the basic object-relational question of how selves can be connected outwards to the world and others through “a boundary that is, or should be, also, a bridge” (Silverstone 2005: 16).

The 'structuralist' Winnicott was, for Roger, a theorist of “the first symbol... the first metaphor, standing both for and against the other, and for and against the child. The transitional object mediates between the child and reality, and initiates the child's involvement in culture” (1988: 42). Alongside using Winnicott's concept of the 'transitional object', Roger discussed the work of Cassirer on the mythic as becoming “the focus, the transitional object, between the man, as child, and reality: it too has an elemental character” (1988: 42). And Levi-Strauss's work, in turn, was read here as a mediation on the “fundamentals of cultural experience” (1988: 43).

It is Winnicott's concept of the 'transitional object' (see Winnicott 1974; Phillips 1988) which is used metaphorically to thread together, and (con)fuse, these disparate theories, with each being interpreted as reflecting on “the elementary experiences of life, and... the level at which those shape unconscious and conscious thought and feeling” (1988:43). Rather oddly for a structuralist media sociologist, Roger used Winnicott as the prime mediator through which other theories of the symbolic and mythic are condensed, with Cassirer supposedly adding an 'adult' dimension to Winnicott's focus on child development, whilst Levi-Strauss is taken to add in a kind of 'conscious' aspect to Winnicottian concerns with cultural experience.

Of course, this constellation or ensemble of theorists may not be convincing or epistemologically compatible – and it is certainly schematic or tentative, as Roger was the first to concede – but it is nothing if not ambitious. Television is positioned, through this conjuncture of thinkers, as “a basically regressive medium; not regressive necessarily in a pejorative sense, but in the sense of putting those who work with it, both as producers and receivers, in touch with elementary thoughts and feelings” (1988: 43). And this view of television, specifically, as essentially regressive is still very much at the heart of *Television and Everyday Life* (1994), which though it continues to address questions of TV and myth/routine/ritual, also moves far more widely across socio-historical contexts as well as analyses of audience activity and media technology. This time round, Winnicottian work on the transitional object is firmly positioned alongside, and as a mirror for, the sociology of Anthony Giddens (1984):

None have quite accepted the paradox of the everyday – a paradox that Winnicott elegantly identifies in the context of the symbolic significance of the transitional object... 'Did you create that or did you find it?'...The problematic of everyday life... is the

expressions of activity and creativity within, and constitutive of, the mobile forces of structure. If this is what Giddens means by structuration then my argument follows very closely the models that he has explored. Everyday life becomes the site for, and the product of, the working out of significance (1994: 164).

Or as this argument is rhetorically condensed: "everyday culture is... within this paradox, transitional" (1994: 164).

Now, it could be argued that Roger's work variously puts object-relations theory, and Winnicott, to work in the service of structuralist and post-structuralist or structuration-ist agendas. But I think this mistakes the dialectical force of Roger's arguments: Winnicott is, after all, not simply being added to Levi-Strauss or Giddens by way of supplementation. Rather, I would say that object-relations theory – and especially Winnicott's tolerance for logical paradox and contradiction between subject/object or agency/structure – is deployed in resistance to, and in transgression of, the disciplinary narratives/trajectories which Roger's work otherwise appears to trace out. Object-relations psychoanalysis of a Winnicottian bent, at least in my reading, offers an approach to the subject and cultural experience which cannot be readily reduced to 'structuralist' or 'post-structuralist' dogmas, and which therefore productively unsettles the logical fore-closures of each school of thought.

Roger was also aware – or became aware – that his use of Winnicott to theorise television as a 'regressive' medium characterised by 'essential tensions' between audience creativities and industry/cultural 'structures' (1994) could be viewed as overly generalising. In a further piece of open, modest self-reflection and self-commentary, he noted:

In *Television and Everyday Life* I argued for an ontological security/transitional object model for television as a whole. This general and perhaps overly reductive approach requires some modification, confronted as it now is with the complexity and specificity of the textual address... The discursive spaces offered by television in and to which we as audiences contribute are clearly more complex than a singular model will allow. (1999b: 82)

Positioning television as essentially mythic (conscious/unconscious elementary thoughts and feelings) or essentially structuralist (mediating between agencies and structures) thus gave way in Roger's thinking to a multi-dimensional set of aspects or components of the televisual. By the time of *Why Study the Media?* (1999a), Winnicott is still very much on Roger's agenda, but play is now self-consciously theorised as one "dimension of experience" operating in relation to differing "textual claims". TV texts are analysed as affecting audiences through rhetorics, poetics and erotics, and play is said to act as just one dimension of media experience – albeit a "central" one (1999a: 63) – along with performance and consumption.

But though the sense of a grand-theoretical conjuncture or 'Big Single Answer' providing a general media theory of television has receded by this point, Roger's work still holds tenaciously to the importance of theorising audiences' unconscious processes (1999a:56). He is quick to criticise other

media-sociological and empirical audience studies for dismissing “out of hand... any sense of conflict, the irresolvable, the irrational or the inexpressible” evidenced in audience self-expressions and discourses, whereby “these people [the studied audiences – MH] do not appear to have an unconscious” (1999c:28, commenting on Barker and Brooks 1998). Nor is his sense of the unconscious entirely weakened or attenuated, as some have argued is true of Giddens’s sociological appropriations of psychoanalytic theory (see Craib 1992: 176-7), where ‘ontological security’ is reduced to a one-dimensional feeling of safety or security granted by routine.

As Winnicott’s place in Roger’s media theory shifted somewhat, this version of object-relations became less a guarantor or co-ordinator of ‘the answer’ to questions posed by television as a medium, and increasingly a marker of paradox and irresolvability. Of course, this could make such a theory, for some academic readers, a token of evasion or irresponsibility: acknowledging Winnicottian paradoxes of transition – did you make that or did you find it? – could be viewed as never having to make your mind up between ‘bad’ structure or ‘good’ agency. Or never having to settle for an either/or of sociological/psychoanalytic accounts of cultural experience. Or never having to narrate and evaluate media culture as properly or improperly rational/irrational.

Indeed, on the whole, Roger deftly sidestepped such brands of critique: “I still want to preserve play, the play, the game. And even if I postpone judgement for the moment on its value, I still want to insist on its place in society and culture” (1999a:66). But is this deferral, this self-aware postponement, really an irresponsible derogation of the critic’s role as cultural-political arbiter? Roger was certainly not afraid to arbitrate – as his final book shows (Silverstone 2006) – but in the late nineties he evidently wanted to do something subtly but meaningfully different.

In place of what I would dub a ‘fantasy of critical omnipotence’ – where scholars assume they can produce ‘the answer’ through a singular concept or theory (see Hemmings 2005 on Massumi 2002 and Sedgwick 2003) – Roger’s work negotiated and navigated the temptations of grand theory before arriving at a dis-illusioned position. By this, I do not mean pessimistic ‘disillusionment’ or common-sensical disappointment, but rather a kind of transitional, object-relations ‘dis-illusionment’, where the subject’s regressive fantasy of omnipotence is tempered by the realisation of the existence of external others who may not accord with its desires or wishes (see Winnicott 1974: 12-15). By not rushing to judgement, media and cultural theory can perhaps preserve a more sensitive, moral space for engaging with the actions and self-evaluations of the Other, rather than overwriting or subsuming these into some grand narrative or cultural-political scorecard. And by so refraining, it can undoubtedly make use of Winnicott’s “lack of systematic theorizing and pleasing sense of paradox” (Craib 2001: 126).

Roger’s gathering of Winnicott into an explicit ensemble of theoretical debts may not have exhausted his indebtedness to object-relations theory. It may well be that the *basic stance* of a theoretical engagement with culture – does it aim to tolerate imagined or empirical Others, attack/criticise them as lacking, identify with them, celebrate their creativity? – can be more-or-less ‘Winnicottian’ in its own relational character, as well as via the proclaimed debts and references that are explicitly ‘Winnicottian’. The differing ‘general theories’ or blanket-generalisations into which Roger drew Winnicott’s work – and he has been far from alone in this (see, for example, Burgin 2004; Elliott 1996; Randolph 1991) – may

themselves have operated in a kind of 'essential tension' with a more open-ended and Winnicottian attitude towards cultural experience. By suggesting this, I am not arguing that a new criterion of 'fidelity' to Winnicott should or could be adopted; merely that there is at least a reading of Winnicott which alerts theorists to the dangers of premature and foreclosing 'interpretations' which can work to secure one's own intellectual certainty/superiority in the face of the Other/analysand (see Phillips 1988:146). Dumping Winnicott wholesale onto a cultural object or phenomenon – using this theory, for instance, to shape a generalisation that TV is always like a 'transitional object' – may thus be curiously anti-Winnicottian in its enacted relation to the object of study.

By ultimately seeking to dis-illusion the reader, Roger's later work, which recognised the danger and weakness of "a singular model" (1999b: 82) of television, was just as significantly indebted to the work of Winnicott in the form of its argument, as *Television and Everyday Life* (1994) was in its substantive content. No doubt the cognitive and emotional lures of 'A Big Single Answer' have not been – and probably never will be – dismissed from media theory. But at the very least, Roger's willingness to bring Winnicottian psychoanalysis into detailed dialogue with structuralist and structuration-theory sociology (before then retreating optimistically and positively from 'grand theory') offers one reflexive self-narrative of the 'doing' of media theory. And perhaps it can be taken to represent not just a theory of the psychodynamic in relation to television, but also a "psychodynamic of theory" (see Craib 1998:138–56).

This relates to a critical refusal embedded in Roger's work: a refusal to be restricted by disciplinary norms, and a rebuttal of the limits of fashionable paradigms. Roger focused instead, first and foremost, on the complexities of the object of study, and on television's many places within social and cultural life. However, I don't want to romanticise this: Roger was hardly an academic 'free spirit' who always magically escaped the dominant theories and approaches carrying academic-subcultural value at the times when he published. Yet he consistently worried away at myth and structuralism, and De Certeau's version of post-structuralism, and Giddensian structuration theory which failed to adequately examine the media (1994: 23). In each engagement with a form of dominant theory, Roger played with what he 'found' objectively, and at the same time created something of his own out of it. As both found and created, Roger's media theory therefore simultaneously belonged to disciplinary norms/fashionable paradigms (respecting these cultural 'illusions'), and destabilised or challenged them (enacting a kind of theory-weaning or 'dis-illusionment'):

Finally there is the issue of illusion... For Winnicott the transitional object is both the focus and the mediator of the constant shifting between illusion and disillusion that marks the beginnings of reality testing and the emergence of the individual as a viable social actor. The mother's job, in his terms, is to provide the basis for the illusion in the child that she is part of the child and then (in weaning) to provide the basis for disillusion. The transitional object, the location of the first not-me experience, is the locus of both; it offers a secure site for the exploration and test of the complex relations between reality and fantasy (Silverstone 1994: 17).

Or as it could alternatively be said: the transitional object and its intersubjective cultural successors facilitate both a connection to the Other and a recognition of their separateness – just as

Roger's theorizing plays out its debts to key paradigms, and yet maintains a creative or idiomatic separateness from them. This is absolutely not to collapse all theory-production into a transitional realm, of course. Nor does it imply that all media theory is structured like a transitional object! However, the concept may yet have further value for thinking about theory-production, as well as more conventionally 'aesthetic' acts of creativity and the use of symbolic resources such as media texts (Zittoun 2006).

Thus far, I have considered how Roger explicitly appropriated Winnicottian object-relations, as well as how he may also have implicitly enacted the relational character of Winnicott's work via his own media theory, perhaps even 'creating' and 'finding' theory in a kind of Winnicottian psychodynamic mode. In the next section, I will shift my focus to examine the possibilities that Roger's deployment of Winnicott helped to open up elsewhere in media theory, zooming in specifically on fan studies.

### **Appropriations in Fan Studies: Playing and Disciplinarity**

Despite Roger's innovative, but probably overly generalising, application of Winnicott to television (1994), work on the psychodynamics of the medium and its place in social and cultural experience has hardly continued apace. John Ellis makes use of the psychoanalytic term 'working-through' in his (2000) study of TV's forms, *Seeing Things*, and Robin Nelson (forthcoming) suggests that generically transgressive and 'high-end' TV drama may appeal to audiences by provoking temporary or fleeting ontological insecurity. But on the whole, some of the directions for future study of television *per se* opened up by Roger's work have yet to be substantively built on or even empirically tested.

There are exceptions to this account, however. In an illustration of how ideas can be taken up in perhaps unexpected or unanticipated ways, Roger's work on play theory has been critiqued, applied and extended in books produced by a number of his PhD students placed in fan studies (Hills 2002; Sandvoss 2005) and game studies (Darley 2000; see also Dovey and Kennedy 2006). Evidently the case for thinking about play (or ludology) is strong in relation to game (and other new media) cultures. And yet, even among those who could be described as displaying relations of 'discipleship' to Roger's work, such as Andrew Darley (2000), there is sometimes a tendency to retreat from Roger's own hybridization of sociology and psychoanalysis into a more secure and 'purely' sociological theorisation or academic identity (Sandvoss 2005 also shows aspects of this, I would argue). The awkwardness of Roger's created and found theory – his alignment of Winnicott with a host of more-or-less (in)compatible fellow travellers – is sometimes downplayed in this later work that fits more easily within available disciplinary identities.

It has potentially been fan studies where Winnicottian theories of play have found the most ready home. Here, Roger's use of Winnicott was paralleled by other work produced at around the time of *Television and Everyday Life*, such as C. Lee Harrington and Denise Bielby's *Soap Fans* (1995). Unlike Roger's general theory of TV as somehow Winnicottian, or as a transitional object *tout court*, this related Winnicott to specific fan audiences appearing to display an intense immersion in, and engagement with, media texts. The guiding metaphor and analogy of the 'transitional object' drawn from Winnicott (1971) appeared more persuasive when applied to these particular audiences. In studies such as *Soap Fans*, a Winnicottian approach was also developed empirically rather than (or as well as) speculatively. And like

Roger's work from at least the late 1980s onward, *Soap Fans* sought to combine Winnicottian understandings of culture with media sociology, rather than viewing the two as inevitable antagonists.

Winnicottian object-relations theory has therefore started to guide versions of 'psychoanalytic ethnography' that deal with media and fan audiences, and follow on from Roger's work (see Hills 2005; Lacey 1999; Molino and Shumar 2002; Zittoun 2006). Within this progression, some of Roger's "disciples" have differed strongly on the question of whether fandom is, like his own earlier view of television, inherently regressive (albeit non-pejoratively). My argument (2002) has distinguished between media texts used as 'proper' transitional objects (closely akin to Winnicott's own definition), and those used by fan audiences as 'secondary' transitional objects, which though intensely cathected, remain more culturally intersubjective and are also acquired – I would argue – non-regressively in adulthood rather than childhood. In contrast, Cornel Sandvoss in his book *Fans* has suggested:

We must not too quickly dismiss the possibility that a continuation of transitional objects in later life constitutes a regressive, though not pathological, experience (Silverstone 1994), which can be intensely pleasurable precisely because of its return to pre-separation wholeness in childhood, fostering a most radical sense of belonging (2005: 93).

It is Sandvoss who, in a sense, is most faithful to Roger's earlier arguments. But it is not mere fidelity that is at stake here. Rather, it is the extent to which theoretical narratives of media fandom might themselves play into negative stereotypes of fans as childish/pathological – stereotypes which retain a cultural efficacy even in these times where fandom has started to become a little more mainstreamed. I will leave aside the question of whether the transitional object implies a "return to pre-separation wholeness in childhood" (it is, after all, the first 'not-me' object, and so can hardly be easily read just as a matter of fusion with the environment). But by arguing that media fans are non-pejoratively "regressive", we run the risk of seeming to agree with far more powerful forms of cultural common-sense which are, precisely, pejorative. I would argue that we also traduce the fan experience, which I am still not convinced is quite experientially (or discursively) regressive in the manner implied by Sandvoss (2005).

Playing with and appropriating Winnicottian theory in relation to media fandom has therefore partly been about the differing commitments scholars have had to critical theory, in Sandvoss's case, or the anti-stereotyping agendas and narratives of fan studies coming out of Henry Jenkins's (1992) *Textual Poachers*, in my case. Winnicottian work within fan studies may well have split the transitional object into almost 'good' or 'bad' renderings; healthy or regressive, overly agentive or excessively structuring. By contrast, Roger's (1994) media theory take on Winnicott is one where 'good' creativity and 'bad' pathology can almost co-exist:

For Winnicott [specific cases were] useful ...in exploring pathology in relation to transitional phenomena... How does this... help in the understanding of the media? ...Winnicott asks whether an investigator making a study of drug addiction would pay proper attention to the psychopathology evident in the area of transitional phenomena. My argument, in relation to television, both pathological and non-pathological, creative and addictive, is explicitly the same. But there is more to it than matters of pathology,

though such matters loom large in any discussion of the medium, these days and always (1994: 13-14).

Pathology remains very much on the agenda here: Roger ultimately observes that "the same object can be used both positively and negatively, and that addiction and creation are very closely related to each other" (1994: 14). This, I think, holds onto the multidimensionality and paradox of the transitional object; *Television and Everyday Life* tolerates this paradox whereby the transitional object treads the finest of lines between toppling into pure creativity ('inner' agency) or sheer obsession (the impositions of the 'outer' world, or structure). But I would argue that later players with this theory in fan studies have rather decomposed its paradoxes (see, e.g., Hills 2002 and Sandvoss 2005).

Whilst Roger's characteristic theory-ensemble is occasionally broken down in later fan studies work into sociology versus psychoanalysis, so too is the paradox of the transitional object – did you make that or did you find it? – neglected or overwritten in favour of returning 'found' structure to priority, or alleging that others (myself among them) may have paid too much attention to fans' 'creative' agency. Although one of the stakes in this debate concerns who is 'critical' and who is 'celebratory' of media fans, I wonder if this binaristic playing with Winnicott loses the thread, or the connecting string, of both Roger's and Winnicott's arguments – that the transitional object is *both-and*. It is structuring and agentive, created and found, with-standing destructive hate and holding connective love, inner and outer, almost as if it is an edge-object or frame (Kuhn 2003). It plays along the fault-line between obsession and creation, looking remarkably akin to both things, clearly much to the position-taking chagrin of media theory which, even now, prefers to be able to clearly and cleanly adjudicate between morally 'good' and 'bad' versions of objects, texts and audiences.

So, I would argue that one profound irony characterising some of the audience/fan studies work which has followed Roger's use of Winnicott is that it has enacted various splittings, whether these have been about reinstating a 'purer' media sociology versus object-relations psychoanalysis, or positing/opposing fans' alleged 'regressiveness'. It begins to look to me as though supposed 'pathology' – an inability to hold together the paradoxical but bridging capacities of the transitional object – belongs far more within and between academics' split-off worldviews and disciplines than it does within their objects of study, whether these are audiences, gamers, or fans. And although I'm not going so far as to accuse myself or other academic writers of this 'pathology', I do nevertheless want to draw attention to the manner in which paradoxes and "essential tensions" theorised so elegantly by Roger (1994:x) have tended to collapse back into disciplinary and logical binaries, if not ossified bones of contention, for other writers (Harrington and Bielby 1995; Darley 2000; Hills 2002; Sandvoss 2005; Dovey and Kennedy 2006).

### **Conclusion: Returning to Essential Tensions?**

As Roger noted in the preface to *Television and Everyday Life*:

Running through the discussions that... follow, and almost with a life of its own, is the phrase 'essential tensions'. This phrase has emerged almost involuntarily while I have tried to work out what I wanted to say. It refers, of course, to a dialectic at the heart of

social reality... It is an acknowledgement – for which I have no apology – that social life is, in all its manifestations, *essentially*, in constant and productive tension (1994: x).

Perhaps this can give one final, concluding insight into the place of D.W. Winnicott in Roger's thinking; for Roger, Winnicottian theory was a part and parcel of capturing, mediating, and reflecting on, these very 'essential tensions.' And if there is an unapologetic 'essentialism' here (a dirty word in sociology, of course) then it is the strangest of essentialisms: one which means *creatively refuting the limits and boundaries of disciplinary, sociological sense-making in pursuit of better apprehending social reality*.

There's a romanticism at the heart of this interpretation, no doubt, but it's a cautious romanticism of the type identified in Roger's (1999c: 28) *Sight and Sound* review of audience ethnography work: "In [Isaiah] Berlin's eyes, Romanticism rejects the claimed certainties of secure knowledge." Such romanticism works not to undermine knowledge, however, but rather to improve on theory's creative abilities to tolerate paradox and inter-relatedness. I think there's still a lesson here which those of us honouring Roger – in this collection of tributes and in our ongoing work – might profitably return to, and take forward afresh.

### Biography

Matt Hills is the author of *Fan Cultures* (2002), *The Pleasures of Horror* (2005) and *How To Do Things With Cultural Theory* (2005) as well as many book chapters and articles. A Senior Lecturer in the School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies, at Cardiff University, UK, he is fortunate enough to be researching and writing books about two of his own mediated transitional objects: *Doctor Who* and cultural studies.

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<sup>i</sup> Anyone requiring a primer on Winnicott would benefit from reading Adam Phillips's entry in the 'Fontana Modern Masters' series (1988) or Ian Craib's *Psychoanalysis: A Critical Introduction* (2001: 125-32; see also Minsky 1998: 50-60). Useful summaries regarding Winnicott's work in relation to media/cultural studies are given in Harrington and Bielby (1995: 133-36), and Silverstone (1994: 8-15 and 1999a: 63-4), amongst other places.