

# The Cure for Psychoanalysis

A Day with Adam Phillips at  
The Institute for Contemporary  
Psychotherapy



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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

At the end of the 'Day with Adam Phillips', a friend of both Adam's and mine said something to me like, 'Ah, so that's what it is like to experience Adam Phillips' attention'. Those in attendance that day felt both lucky and grateful for our experience of Adam's humility, good nature, compassion, stamina and depth.

Thanks to Leslie Hendelman and John Bliss. The idea for inviting Adam to ICP began in a conversation among the three of us and Leslie did a great deal of the initial work to make this conference possible

Ron Taffel, whose expansive vision and management of ICP continuously amaze me, has supported this project with his usual diplomacy and clarity.

Holly Levenkron, the enthusiastic and creative director of ICP's Analytic Training Program, and I invited a few candidates, supervisors and faculty to read Adam's essay 'The Magic of Winnicott' in advance of The Day. Questions were prepared and following The Day several wrote commentaries of their experience. To Tom, Melissa, Betty, Karen, Kathleen, John and Leslie and Patricia, you have our appreciation and admiration.

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Ed Corrigan

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Adam Phillips



## INTRODUCTION

*by Ed Corrigan*

Adam Phillips often suggests that what psychoanalysis needs is more good sentences. In the following pages there are many memorable ones, sometimes beautiful, often unexpected. In the two essays in this monograph and in conversation with the audience, recorded and transcribed here, one good sentence leads to another, and the reader or the listener gathers confidence that they are being led somewhere promising.

This book begins with ‘The Magic of Winnicott: Playing and Reality, and Reality’, an essay many years in the making (Phillips read *Playing and Reality* as an adolescent). It starts off with a description of a wonderful and unanticipated encounter with the extraordinary Marion Milner. Their conversations years ago play into and influence this entire essay. Milner, in some measure, was conflicted by Winnicott’s ‘magic’. Phillips takes up her doubts and works them through or, better, works on them as he both re-examines and reimagines *Playing and Reality*. One experiences Phillips the clinician at work throughout this essay and throughout this monograph. Unself-consciously and seemingly without intent, Adam Phillips offers up a more open, non-essentialist, more inclusive psychoanalysis. It’s exhilarating. And challenging.

And the flow in these pages is more than one good idea or sentence leading to another ... there is a momentum, driven in part by the exchange between members of the audience and Phillips. The range of questions and comments from the day and throughout the interview section is leading somewhere – for many – perhaps opening up new pathways (or questions) in their clinical work or approach to psychoanalysis. (See, for example, the delightful, diverse and original commentaries from several members of the Institute for Contemporary Psychotherapy (ICP) community.) But there was also a force building up in Adam Phillips. The array of questions and comments confronting Phillips during the day allowed him, encouraged him, so to speak, to examine and draw together his preoccupations, convictions, curiosities, affections, the pleasures and rewards of an analyst with his patients – 40 years of clinical work and thinking and writing about psychoanalysis – all in the space of one day.

And the energy of the day carried Phillips – inspired him, I believe – to write his next essay, the title essay of this book, and its concluding piece, ‘The Cure for Psychoanalysis’. Phillips suggests that ‘the analytic patient and her analyst need to be adventurous. People don’t tend to come for psychoanalysis wanting an adventure, but perhaps they should. Or perhaps they do’.

In between these pages is an adventure for the adventurous.

**Welcome to  
A Day with Adam Phillips  
at the Institute for Contemporary  
Psychotherapy**

***by Ron Taffel, PhD***

Every major teaching event expresses an organisation's history and values; so it was with 'The Magic of Winnicott' featuring Adam Phillips on 3 March 2018. Hosted by the Institute for Contemporary Psychotherapy (ICP), the presentation drew close to 400 attendees. They came to hear Phillips, scholar and master teacher, relentless advocate for and thorn in the side of much that psychoanalysis holds dear. This joining of ICP and Phillips, the creation of the day, as well as this volume (neither of which would have happened without the uniquely effective skills of psychoanalyst and author, ICP supervisor and instructor Edward Corrigan, PhD), was indeed an expression of shared values. After all, ICP has been a force for change during its nearly five decades, a somewhat idiosyncratic presence in the field that resonates with Phillips and his writings.

The Institute for Contemporary Psychotherapy was founded in 1971 by eight iconoclastic visionaries who broke off from mainstream psychoanalytic institutes to form their own training and treatment centre. I'm not sure they would

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have characterised themselves as iconoclasts or as visionaries, but history tells a different story. ICP's irreverent prescience was apparent from its earliest days. Just as important, though, was an almost taken-for-granted set of values – that ICP would do its best to be inclusive, diverse, egalitarian and progressively alive. The founders believed, much as Phillips emphasised throughout the day in his comments on D.W. Winnicott, Marion Milner and many other psychoanalysts, that personal growth in treatment (and one would assume training) should not be about indoctrination, coercion or compliance. Rather, it is deeply personal, each of us taking what we can or choose to take from the unscripted, non-linear journey that is psychoanalysis. These values attracted me to ICP in 1975 as I was doing my doctoral research at the institute; they still do. And I believe the same spirit of 'dissent' led to the institute's astonishing development over the years. Starting with a couple of patients and trainees, ICP grew almost entirely through word of mouth, from an exclusively psychoanalytic training institute to one that now has eight divisions, including its certificate psychoanalytic program, as well as, certificate programs specializing in trauma, gender and sexuality, eating disorders, families and couples, teens and children, and a two-year program in psychodynamic psychotherapy. All ICP endeavors are anchored by the basic principle that psychoanalytic training is about protecting choices in the kind of clinicians we are now and who we *think* we'd like to become in the future.

ICP's inclusive edginess attracted candidates who loved its creative (and sometimes disorderly) ethos. Many stayed on long after they graduated to provide psychoanalysis and psychotherapy, addressing newly emerging needs of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, as they continued with further training. It shouldn't be, but it is still a bit surprising that since ICP's inception we have provided over 1 million hours of sliding-scale treatment. At the same time the institute has trained many thousands of clinicians in its educational offerings and programs.

With its psychoanalytic core, the key value at ICP (following in the tradition of our psychoanalytic grandparents) has been to serve populations in need – the often invisible 'other.' For example, in the early '70s we established a low-cost treatment service for financially distressed college students – many of whom were recent immigrants – just around the time that free access to a college education was ending in New York City. In the late '70s we began the first outpatient eating disorders program in the city, at a time when this crippling condition had not yet entered public awareness. In the early '80s we initiated an affordable family and couples treatment service that worked with many young interracial and interethnic couples, addressing a heretofore 'invisible' population. At about the same time we received one of the city's first grants to offer psychotherapy to struggling artists, who, like canaries in a coal mine, were just beginning to deal with the pervasive commercialization and gentrification

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that were emerging full force in the '80s. In 1982 we began an HIV support group, again before the public and many mental health professionals had recognized the severity of the epidemic that was beginning its course of utter devastation. In the mid to late '90s, ICP was awarded a major grant to launch a gay and lesbian affirmative psychotherapy program, a trailblazing initiative that became a model in the mental health field. Fast-forward, two days after September 11th, we spontaneously organized one of the city's largest trauma counseling interventions for those who lost family and friends in the attack. And about ten years ago we initiated perhaps the first clinical conference worldwide for those who work with the transgender community.

From its beginnings, then, ICP's humanistic values inspired an adventurous community, especially for therapists and candidates who in different ways felt themselves to be 'the other.' A home and family were developing, an organism that in its DNA was not afraid to expand definitions of the treatment frame, stretch notions of 'suitability' for analysis and do so in an environment that attempted to promote (though not always successfully), kindness over competition, clinical rigor with as little pretentiousness as possible, and service without too much defensiveness about wanting to help others.

ICP's attempts to balance the demands of quality psychoanalytic training, all the while creating revolutionary treatment initiatives, became highly visible. Directors of institutes around the country would call, questioning how

to start such programs, usually asking what ‘strategies’ ICP had used. I was always a bit taken aback and my response must have left them bewildered: ‘I don’t know what you mean by strategies; expanding the work is not an add-on, this is who we are.’ We were driven by a commitment, at first exclusively fueled by our psychoanalytic graduates, faculty and candidates, to make psychoanalysis and psychotherapy more accessible to the world at large – at the time, an almost *subversive* ethos.

Here is where Adam Phillips and his writing about Winnicott come in – and why we were drawn to hosting this event. Treatment and its frame could not possibly remain static in a twenty-first-century environment, nor, as Phillips writes, did Winnicott or Milner believe in a static container anyway. With seismic changes in child development and child-rearing practices, startling fluidity in self and identity and the unimaginable impact of technology on the human condition, how could the container remain stuck in time? Or as an intellectual, philosophical pursuit, should it ever be allowed to remain still? Using his multigenerational view of psychoanalytic theory as a base and D.W. Winnicott and Marion Milner as his teachers, Phillips almost casually re-translates both of these icons, and in the process rattles psychoanalytic infrastructure. I believe (though he may not agree with this) he wants to change something about the soul of psychoanalysis.

During the day together and beyond, Phillips raised post, post-modern issues by asking engagingly subversive

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questions. Phillips wonders, almost as an afterthought, is negative transference inevitable and necessary to a 'cure'? In fact, in his accompanying paper, 'The Cure for Psychoanalysis,' he asks what a 'cure' for the analysand and for psychoanalysis itself would actually look like; is it even feasible when cure becomes the goal of the work? Doesn't the increasingly goal-oriented structure of treatment these days (much like the commodity-oriented 'premeditated' parenting I describe in *The Rise of The Two-Dimensional Parent*) create an artificially constricted, lifeless connection? Phillips focuses on a mind-bending paradox increasingly relevant as we move far from analytic neutrality: to hope for an authentic, relational journey, while we unwittingly structure goals that increase the chance for impersonal relationships, diminishing autonomy and the ability to take from analysis whatever it is one chooses to take. In his subtle way, Phillips manages to address misconceptions about the container so distasteful to many twenty-first-century patients and to analysts themselves – clinicians who secretly break the rules in order to breathe life into an ossified misconception.

Another, in my view, much-needed challenge from Phillips: What if the dense language we use to communicate and build our clinical infrastructure separates us from the ineffable vagaries and paradoxes of the human condition, cutting us off from ourselves and the meandering magic of curiosity, play and imagination in the treatment room? There is so much we can bring into the space simply by asking a question



or posing a thought or reflection in a non-authoritative way, Phillips muses, and paradoxically does so with such an easy, off-handed authority.

Phillips asks (I think being his most subversive here) what the role of kindness is in psychoanalysis. In fact, this is a question almost every patient I've consulted with, who has been in previous analyses or psychotherapies, has much to say about, a Winnicottian characteristic that is projected in both the content of his writing and the tone of his radio broadcasts. At what price do we ignore kindness in our theories, and especially in our analytic training and supervision?

And, most pointedly during this political moment, with clouds of fascism gathering here and around the world, Phillips in 'The Cure for Psychoanalysis' looks back to Milner's words: 'Psychoanalytic treatment is an antidote to indoctrination; it is an enquiry into how people influence each other, into the individual's history of living in other people's regimes.' Nothing could better describe his disarmingly provocative rattling of our discipline's cage and at the same time embody the history of ICP. This non-compliant restlessness, an ever-expanding re-definition of psychoanalysis, resonates with increasing numbers of contemporary analysts, of course, just as it does with the unpredictable arc of ICP.

By asking casually unsettling, often humorously paradoxical questions about 'the givens,' the basic conditions of psychoanalysis, Phillips invited us to join with him in 'The Magic of Winnicott.' Building on Phillip's presentation, you

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will find in these pages the clinically descriptive and personal dialogue he had with Ed Corrigan in the afternoon of that day and substantive interactions with the audience's questions throughout. And, to continue the conversation, a metabolizing of the many questions raised, this is followed by contributions from ICP's analytic candidates, faculty and supervisors, written after the event. They are a mosaic of brief responses, beautiful bursts of light that contain varied reflections sparked during that day we all spent together.

The Institute for Contemporary Psychotherapy and its Psychoanalytic Program welcome you into the world of psychoanalysis through Phillips' lens, a remarkable curiosity that resonates with so much of our deeply felt work in the consulting room. We are fellow travelers, Phillips might say, struggling to accept the journey's uncertainty, hopefully walking down divergent and unpredictable paths.

Ron Taffel, PhD  
Chair, ICP Board of Directors

**Winnicott's Magic: *Playing and Reality*  
and Reality**

**by Adam Phillips**

This paper is dedicated to Ed Corrigan whom I have loved talking to as a friend and colleague for the last 30 years.

*Nothing has happened until it has been described.*

Virginia Woolf

*... too great enthusiasm for the clarity of verbal interpretation can also, at times, disastrously distort what the patient is experiencing*

Marion Milner

**I.**

When I got to know Marion Milner towards the end of her life, she was clearly vexed by her relationship with Winnicott, who had been her analyst, her supervisor, her colleague and, as she put it, her 'friend'. She had read my book on Winnicott and asked me if I would come and talk with her and so, every so often, I would go over to her house on a Saturday afternoon, we would drink whiskey and we would talk. She was consistently admiring, grateful and affectionate when