

Spontaneous Remarks on Adam Phillips' "WINNICOTT'S MAGIC: 'PLAYING AND REALITY' AND REALITY"

Shutters On the Beach, October 28, 2017

By  
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After the intense and inspiring events of this week with NCP's first Master Clinician in Residence, I am experiencing a combination of exhaustion and elation. I can only imagine how our speaker is feeling after the marathon of this week while still jet lagged, climaxing in this all day conference on Winnicott and the British Independent School. Adam has been consistently eloquent, elegant, and fluent in expression, conveying his point of view with cogency and wisdom.

In trying to summarize some of the main themes of this week and of today's conference, a number of ideas come to mind. From Adam, I learned the word "redescription." "Elaborate" is another. He makes the word "interesting" interesting. He urges us to have a wide angle vision, in attempting not to narrow the mind (inspired by Marian Milner, whose relationship with Winnicott and ambivalence about him was the subject of his paper. Adam met with Milner on Saturday afternoons, drinking whiskey and talking about Winnicott).

Adam practices a form of mindfulness that emphasizes thinking and feeling, along with play and spontaneity, over an excessive concentration of the mind. He often refers to dreamwork and to reverie. This permits his audience to relax, to be elastic, catalyzing associations and images, affections and hatreds. He disarms with humor and the capacity to be playful. While not using the word love and eschewing

sentimentality, Adam values a life of affection and appears fully capable of living an affectionate life.

After this exposure to Winnicott, Milner, and Adam Phillips, we can revalue a life of work, love, and play, of play informing all aspects of work and love. Because Adam is not affiliated with an analytic institute or a national or international organization, he writes as a free floating intellectual. As a result, he appears not to be suffering from a severe psychoanalytic super-ego, and seems fully capable of an exceptional independence of mind. Too many of us who are affiliated with analytic organizations or institutes suffer from the analytic police in our heads, often imposed from external authority. Adam is committed to restoring the subversive edge to contemporary versions of psychoanalysis, opening up new emancipatory possibilities.

Regarding today's conference, I want to thank our four panelists and the lively engagement of the audience. To me, we reached a rather high level of discourse, raising incisive questions, maintaining civility, respect, collegiality, and kindness. This is a major achievement, given that all four psychoanalytic institutes were present and a spirit of solidarity prevailed over partisanship or parochialism. It was a welcome antidote to a climate of divisiveness and hatred in American culture today. Those in attendance were aware of this. The conference was jokingly referred to as a "wedding," and in some ways it felt like a happy marriage of the four institutes, thanks to Adam. Whatever one thinks about this conference, it was NOT boring.

One key sub-text of the week was the attempt to fashion an ethics of psychoanalysis. We could easily have one, two, maybe ten conferences on this topic. Adam appeals to those of us who are anti-essentialists and opposed to narrow-minded dogmatism and facile deterministic thinking. I experienced a transference to Adam in terms of revitalizing my desire to read more carefully, not necessarily to read more, but to be more alert to the latencies and unconscious echoes in written works. Being around Adam made me want to write again. And we need more members of our community who are willing to write, to contribute to the literature, and to participate in creative aspects of the wider culture.

Throughout the week, Adam posed two fundamental questions: what kind of person do you want to be? And what makes life worth living? Obviously, there are no simple answers to these elusive questions in a secular culture, mostly subjective and idiosyncratic ones. The questions humble. Since we analysts may not have an answer, we ought not to presume we know them for either our patients, our children, or for the individuals we teach and supervise.

Lastly, for me this week reaffirmed my love of psychoanalytic theory and practice, and my love for the psychoanalytic vocation. I also found Adam's presence to be a form of therapy for the psychoanalytic profession.

In today's paper the conjunction "and" is the key concept in Adam's paper. It is twice repeated in the title of his paper. It is additive *and* improvisational *and* linking *and* relational. I want to conclude by expressing my genuine gratitude to Adam by asking: *And* when are you returning to Los Angeles and to NCP?

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