

BOOK REVIEWS

In this issue we review a film as well as a wide range of books. The film is Luke Fowler's film about RD Laing, *All Divided Selves*, which was also a 2012 entry for the UK's most prestigious Art prize, The Turner Prize. We start the books with three books about Heideggerian ideas, the third of which is an important book by Robert Stolorow that relates Heideggerian thought to trauma and therapeutic practice. Narrative theory and practice is reviewed next and is followed with a book that looks at the value of fiction. Two books focussing on practice follow, one on the wider issue of Pluralism and one on working with Military personnel. We finish up this issue with a book about the Transpersonal dimension in psychotherapy.

All Divided Selves. Nomination for the 2012 Turner Prize.

Luke Fowler. (2011). London: Tate Britain.

Anyone who has ever attempted to find footage of legendary pioneers of existential psychotherapy at work or in interview, will know it can be a thankless task. Therefore I welcomed news – from my art-loving mother – of Luke Fowler's Turner Prize entry 'All Divided Selves', but was surprised to then find how few of my friends and colleagues in the SEA knew of its existence. In the end I went along to Tate Britain for a viewing of the 90-minute film accompanied by the same friend with whom I had walked out of a memorial conference on R.D Laing earlier in the year due to its entire absence of novel content on Laing. We had gone for a drink instead, and laughed because we thought it had helped us to feel closer to Laing in spirit, so to speak.

Fowler's exceptional documentary of Laing during what were probably his most productive years, from round the late 1960s and early 1970s, repeats precisely nothing from the more widely known documentary 'Didn't You Used to be R.D Laing?' And it includes as much footage of those he worked with (and against) at this time as of Laing himself, which is a huge achievement. Gone are the embarrassing drunken public ramblings, witticisms, clever interpretations and faux charisma of the former. Instead the viewer is treated to a sensitive, serious and eloquent Laing, speaking passionately about his contributions, mainly to the theory and practice of psychotherapy. This, I thought, may go some way to reduce common mis-interpretations of Laing's ideas, as well as challenge the sole image present in most people's minds of R.D Laing as nothing but an avant-garde counter-culture guru whose popularity rests on the socio-political scene of the time, and little more.

What Fowler does so well is to capture the mood and atmosphere of the time in which Laing worked. There are scenes, shot in colour, from within the communities he set up in east London. There is also black and white

footage of a traditional, formal psychiatric interview, complete with white coats (over a suit and tie, of course) and students diligently observing, set in stark contrast to footage from the Dialectics of Liberation conference, which included not just the speakers speaking but also mingling socially with each other and the audience, sat on low-slung sofas, smoking cigarettes.

With the death of Thomas Szasz a few days prior, Szasz's dislike and distrust of R.D Laing was in our minds as we watched. We were touched to see two sets of footage of Szasz himself, speaking as a very young man indeed, probably as early as the 1950s and we wondered afterwards what Szasz might have made of such a dignified public portrayal of Laing. But during the film itself we had no time for this sort of a discussion, with exchanges limited to 'Who's that?', 'Did David Cooper have a beard?', 'Everyone seems to look like Buber!', and 'Far out!' as we were transported to this pivotal era for our profession.

One highlight for me was a lengthy section showing Aaron Esterson working with a family, taken from the near impossible to find BBC documentary 'The Space Between Words: Family'. I had never before had a chance to see Esterson at work. Everything about this section of the film appears peculiarly ancient except the content of what is said, which is entirely current. My favourite interview, was of Laing, dipping in and out of – from what I could tell – topics addressed in his two papers 'Operations' and 'Rules and Meta-Rules' from *The Politics of the Family*. Here he makes intelligible key psychoanalytic concepts usually considered entirely 'un-existential' and off limits to existential therapists, such as repression, projection and transference. I enjoyed hearing this as much as I did when reading these papers for the first time.

One of the central concerns in Laing's writing is the ways in which behaviour – whether in families, groups or in psychotherapy – can become alienated from an individual's responsibility to such an extent that it is then incomprehensible in terms of the actions of any specific agent (see for example Laing, 1969). Fowler's film reminded me of the kind of enquiry that Laing himself advocated – the retracing of steps from 'what is going on' to 'who is doing what' – in this case applied to the history and development of the field of existential psychotherapy. Through careful and thorough research, Fowler allows the viewer to see clearly and for the first time for many no doubt, who the key 'actors' and 'agents' are, or rather were. But as these figures come clearly into view, how many of us can in fact recognise them? Is existential therapy entirely in denial of its indebtedness to practitioners and theoreticians such as R.D Laing, whom this documentary successfully resurrects?

I am unsure if *All Divided Selves* is art or should be at the Tate or not, but my gut feeling is it isn't and it shouldn't be. I hope it will occupy a central space on training courses in existential analysis alongside Laing's writing. That said, I hoped it would win. I loved it.

References

- Laing, R.D (1969). Intervention in Social Situations. In *The Politics of The Family and Other Essays*. London: Vintage.
- Tougas, K. and Shandel, T. (1989). *Did You Used To Be R.D. Laing?* Vancouver: Third Mind Productions.

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Time and Death: Heidegger's Analysis of Finitude

Carol J White. (2005). Aldershot, Hants: Ashgate.

Carol White's book probably stands as the most scholarly publication on Heidegger's analysis of death that is currently available. Including an indispensable foreword to the book, the noted Heidegger scholar, Hubert Dreyfus, identifies no less than eight positions on death and dying that various philosophers read into the relevant sections of *Being and Time*, concisely illuminating the arguments and counter-arguments for each stance. This provides us with a context for this publication, but it is also used as a testament to the towering contribution made by White, since Dreyfus argues that her position is the most compelling interpretation of Heidegger's account on death, based not just on the philosopher's earlier work, but consistent with writings produced throughout his life. I agree with this assessment. Given the thoroughness of her research, I was also left wondering how much more White could have contributed to this area had she herself lived longer. After all, this study was still a working project right up to the time of her sudden death. Thankfully, there is more available to us than the book itself; whilst we are provided here with five published chapters (excluding the Introduction), we have another two chapters that have been omitted from print and that are available on the internet, if one is so inclined to pursue this.

The book is also a remarkable piece of work given the author's own life circumstances. As the preface informs us, Carol White had lost the use of her hands and legs at the age of 13, after being paralysed by a tumour. Each letter and sentence was subsequently typed with the use of a wooden spoon. This became painful after a time, prompting White to organise support from students and colleagues, both for the execution of words into electronic text and for gathering relevant research material that she required in the course of her work.

White's book, I think, illuminates two main things. One is the fact that Heidegger's existential-ontological idea of death in *Being and Time* is prone to be rather unclear to us once we probe further into the actual text itself. Commentators have attributed various reasons for this: that Heidegger rushed it, or that he himself had an unclear sense of what he was trying to