

may be the single most important ingredient in psychiatric care. As he points out, it is an indication of how far psychiatry has taken us from ordinary empathy and common sense that we have forgotten that suffering is usually caused by unsatisfactory relationships with others. It is also an indication of the degree to which existential therapists have departed from existential principles that we accept a biological underpinning to severe cases of human suffering.

In the final chapter Bentall highlights the dangers of coercive treatment, arguing that this coercion should only be exercised when doctors know what is in the patient's best interests. The history of psychiatry strongly suggests that this has not been the case. The purported lack of insight used to justify this coercion can also be questioned, given the questionable nature of psychiatric diagnoses and the dubious efficacy of medication. In the place of coercive psychiatry, Bentall argues for a recovery orientated, autonomy-enhancing approach, in which drugs are prescribed according to their emotional and cognitive effects, with an acknowledgement of the limitations in our understanding of this, an awareness of their side effects and a willingness to discontinue them if need be.

I have found this book an inspiring read, making me consider what existential thinking in particular has to offer psychotic patients. It would be good to continue the work of R.D. Laing and Jo Berke amongst others with intensive therapeutic impact founded on existential principles. I don't believe that therapy needs to leave cases of serious suffering to the medical profession. Arguably it is here where our input is most needed.

Marcia Gamsu

R.D.Laing – 50 years since *The Divided Self*

Theodor Itten and Courtney Young (eds). (2012). Herefordshire: PCCS Books

'If I could turn you on, if I could drive you from your wretched mind, if I could tell you, I would let you know'

(Laing, R.D., 1967: p 234)

This is a well-presented book, over 331 pages, with 4 pages of photographs, not including a useful 15 page reference list, a 3 page bibliography and a 13 page index. Laing's legacy is a charmingly mixed bequest, and this rich and varied selection could, perhaps, make your therapeutic work allied, and re-stimulated by the thought of R.D.Laing. So, the brief biography, and quotation pages, situated in the final pages of the book make vital reading. The main text of the book is divided into four sections, 'Conversations';

‘Praxis and Process’; ‘Reflections and Theories’; and finally, ‘Echoes’, which is the most rewarding part of the text.

When reading this volume, it is crucial to understand the quotation from Laing and Esterson, provided by Anthony Stadlen, (p 306), that the

‘...question is: are the experiences and behaviours that psychiatrists take as signs and symptoms of schizophrenia more socially intelligible than has come to be supposed?’

That is to say, insanity is a valid state of consciousness that could be generally incomprehensible to the sane; however, within the context of a schizophrenogenic family, we might be able to fathom the destructive psychodynamics, and origins of this fluctuating psychic heaven and hell. The healing art is there to cultivate interpersonal competence, liberation from the bondage of our own upbringing, education, social conditioning, class-consciousness and religious affiliations. Laing possessed a shamanic gift; like most shamans he often behaved very badly indeed, but his understanding of schizophrenia led him to explore the wilder regions of human experience, and return to tell us what he saw; with that most rare ingredient, the courage to speak the truth. Laing’s strident insistence that schizophrenics are in some way superior to the conventional citizen, because of their inability to come to terms with normality, was of course highly original.

So, collected in the pages of this book Laing’s life, work, frailties, brilliance and influence over the last half-century are critically appraised. There are transcripts, memoirs, newly commissioned articles and a few previously published papers. Each chapter captures something unique about Laing and his work; this book is designed to make you rethink some of your assumptions, and give you inspiration. Maybe the most appealing aspect of the rhetoric is the defence of the dignity and personal worth of the psychotic, and the repudiation of the common tendency to belittle and stigmatise him.

Interestingly, we read about the psychotherapy of one psychotic individual, David, (pp 112-116). David is in his early forties and he believes that radio waves, invented by the government are being used to drive him mad and destroy him. As an autistic schizophrenic myself, I can understand this kind of alienation. I was driven out of my home in the South-West of England, away from my family, chemically tortured, and bullied by a terrible N.I.M.B.Y. campaign. It should be noted that I am a father, and an academic with several degrees, and have undergone many years of Laingian psychotherapy. Now I am banished, I live with my family of origin, which seems highly ironic.

Moving on, a thought provoking aspect of Laing’s work was his inter-

psychic L.S.D. therapy. Laing himself entered the altered state of consciousness by taking half the dose administered, and made himself available for relating. For the schizophrenic, who has naturally an altered state of consciousness, perception and reality, reading the works of Stanislav Grof is entertaining; and might reanimate intuition, imagination and creativity. This was Laing's vision that healing and awakening can be facilitated by these powerful medicines. L.S.D. can simply help with the regression necessary to find and reconnect with your long abandoned authentic self.

A person beset with ontological insecurity may experience life as more unreal than real, more dead than alive. There are three ghosts that threaten and terrify this precarious sense of self. They are engulfment, or the fear of being taken over by others, implosion and petrification. The self longs for love and affirmation, but is terrified by the prospect of it. So, *The Divided Self* contributes to the understanding of schizophrenia, by making sense of schizophrenese; by providing a cognitive map of the splinters that make schizophrenia; and by illuminating social isolation. Of all his writings this book remains as his most popular work. It has been translated into several languages, and it has sold over 400,000 copies. The alienation we see today, is achieved only by outrageous violence perpetrated by human beings on human beings. Academics nowadays have no difficulties at all finding examples of such irrational forms of communication to justify the recent wars in Iraq. Possibly due to the decline in the use of the concept of authenticity.

For the existential practitioner, this is an engaging book that introduces charismatic authors to the reader. I think the artistry contained in the various chapters could motivate and encourage graduates to find their own voice in the world of existential psychoanalysis. The unique tone of the writers is a valuable aspect of this book that distinguishes the thought, and makes the text lively and authoritative. The direct subjective approach to Laingian consciousness is thoroughly profound, mystical and intuitive. So, I can recommend this book to both the curious psychologist and the general academic. The text varies from the less formal subjective, to the scholarly review of classic texts. I think an exceptional, recent, epic book to accompany this text, for psychotic clientele could be Andrew Scull's, (2015), *Madness in Civilization*; its aim to consider the encounter between madness and civilization over more than two millennia.

To conclude, a significant quotation for the future of existential analysis, must be the timeless, eternal truth:

In the hopelessness and the darkness of the psychotic mind Laing lit a candle. Its light will flicker on,

(Itten & Young, 2012: p.304)

References.

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