

## R. D. Laing's language of experience

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Despite a revival in psychiatric studies of his writings, the literary importance of the radical Scottish psychiatrist R. D. Laing has been underestimated in the years since his death in 1989. Yet Laing was immensely influential not only upon psychiatric practice, but also upon the arts. He influenced the novelists Doris Lessing and Alasdair Gray, the screenwriters David Mercer and Clancy Sigal, the playwrights David Edgar and Peter Shaffer, and poets such as Allen Ginsberg and Tom Leonard (for further details, see Showalter 220-47; Mullan *Creative Destroyer* 26-29, 89-91, 214-16, 304-6; Miller 53-85). Laing's influence upon the creative professions is not accidental: in many ways, his psychiatric writings were consciously literary productions. Indeed, his earliest ambition was to be a writer. While a high school student in 1940s Scotland, he worked his way through the local public library: "I wanted to be a writer. [...] I gave myself the age of thirty as an absolute deadline for the publication of my first book" (Laing *Wisdom, Madness, and Folly* 68-76). This literary aspiration does not mean, however, that Laing's eventual psychiatric writings were merely works of fiction. Psychiatry, as Laing saw it, needed what writing could give it: a sensitivity to obscure and recondite meanings, a revalidation of immediate experience, and a renewed "disclosure" of the world. But to value writing in this way brings potential risks: Laing's appreciation of the "world-disclosing" properties of poetic language becomes, in his worst work, an infatuation with a realm of mystical, self-validating certainties.

Previous discussion of Laing's literary status has been marred by the mythology that surrounds the man. Even as perspicacious a critic as Elaine Showalter, who has praised Laing's literary talents, makes some notable blunders. She claims that "Laing was born in 1927 in the Gorbals, the roughest, darkest, and most depressed district of Glasgow" (Showalter 224). The date is right, but the place is wrong: Laing was born in Govanhill, a middle-class district, and there he lived with his lower middle-class family (see Burston 9). The point of such mislocation is readily apparent: the imagery of roughness and darkness, of male brutality, assists Showalter in her claim that Laing's psychiatry was masculinist – "a male adventure of exploration and conquest" that "drew upon his own heroic fantasies" (Showalter 236).

A parallel rhetoric is offered by Clancy Sigal's *Zone of the Interior* (1976), a novel to which Showalter refers, and which seems to have informed her depiction of Laing as an intellectual pugilist. Sigal's

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*roman à clef* remained unpublished in the UK for almost thirty years because of fears of libel. It features Laing as “Willie Last”, an LSD-guzzling psychiatric guru sitting at the center of a network of folly and messianic rhetoric. This caricature of Laing, though often entertaining, also positions him somewhere in sub-rational masculine darkness. Last’s dialogue is rendered in a pseudo-phonetic orthography and spattered with apostrophes, while the narration of the central character (a North American) is rendered in orthographically standard, and thus rational and properly human English: “He [Willie Last] came to the front door himself. All my previous shrinks had had snooty housekeepers. ‘Och Sidney Bell, is it? Come in, mon. It’s a pleasure tae meet ye. I’ve read yir work’” (Sigal 3); later, Sidney tells how, “Dr Last hastened to assure me I was mad ‘only in th’ eggistainshul sense’” (Sigal 21).

In a curious irony, the Scots poet Tom Leonard has remarked, although not with conscious reference to Sigal’s work, that in this traditional technique of narration, “the dialect speaker tends to appear in a narrative like Laing’s patient in a hospital: there is complicity between author and reader that the speaker is ‘other’, that the user of such language cannot be the person who has written or who is reading the work” (Mullan *Creative Destroyer* 59). Showalter and Sigal therefore both rhetorically position Laing as the “other”. He slides from psychic *conquistador* to Caliban, a thing of darkness (and roughness, and depression) who struggles to imitate the speech of his masters. Naturally, it is hard to imagine an account of, say, Jacques Derrida that would carelessly and conveniently misrepresent his place of birth, or which would record his speech as if he were a comical Frenchman – a kind of Inspector Clouseau of the Sorbonne. As literary readers, we therefore have a duty to look beyond what Leonard calls the “smokescreen anecdotage about Laing” (Mullan *Creative Destroyer* 91); and this means turning to Laing’s texts, rather than to reports of his person. There is indeed some truth in the charge that Laing was at times a mere rhetorician who preferred striking assertion to careful argument. Yet there is a quite complex philosophical progression that explains Laing’s tendency to venerate “experience” as a privileged source of mystical, self-certifying insight.

Any study of Laing’s language must start with his contention that the psychiatrist is, or *should* be, a skilled reader. In his first book, *The Divided Self*, published in 1960, literary hermeneutics provides Laing’s model of the therapeutic encounter: “The personalities of doctor and psychotic, no less than the personalities of expositor and author, do not stand opposed to each other [...]. Like the expositor the therapist must have the plasticity to transpose himself into another strange and even alien view of the world. In this act, he draws on his own psychotic possibilities, without forgoing his sanity” (Laing *Divided Self* 34). The therapist is an exegete, making sense of a puzzling and baffling text by drawing upon the possibilities of being that he shares with the patient. Laing’s understanding of his psychotic patients therefore displays a keen literary sense. Metaphors for unusual experiences abound in his “readings” of psychotic speech: “Fire may be the uncertain flickering of the individual’s own inner aliveness [...] Some psychotics say in the acute phase that they are on fire” (Laing *Divided Self* 45). There are allusions and inter-textual relations: a patient who has no secure sense of her existence except in the presence of others is, to Laing, “like Tinker Bell. In order to exist she needs someone else to believe in her existence” (Laing *Divided Self* 56). Puns and multiple meanings also abound. Another patient claims she is a “tolled bell” (Laing *Divided Self* 187): a bell that is tolled because she feels passive, controlled from the outside, but also a beautiful and passive girl, a “belle” of the ball, who has become what she was told to be. Laing’s literary skills are needed to understand such patients because, as he puts it, they express “‘existential’ truth [...] with the same matter-of-factness that we employ about facts that can be consensually validated in a shared world” (Laing *Divided Self* 87).

Rather than trying to “explain” psychosis, Laing offers various genres and motifs which may help to bring sense from words and actions that seem incomprehensible. Even silence and immobility may be a communicative action, rather than mere “behavior”. In his autobiography *Wisdom, Madness and Folly*, for instance, Laing confronts a hypothetical catatonic: “Is he a pillar of salt? Is he god incarnate [in] stone? Is he the still centre of the turning world?”; only when such possible understandings are exhausted, can one rightly ask the final question on the list, “Is there something the matter with his neurochemistry?” (Laing *Wisdom, Madness, and Folly* 87). Throughout Laing’s work there is an insistence on charitable exegesis wherever possible, rather than upon impersonal, non-intentional explanatory

forms. The terminology and conceptual scaffolding vary from work to work: from ontological insecurity, to the schizoid condition, to “double-binds”, to “knots”, to proscribed transcendental consciousness, and so on. But the ambition is the same throughout: to restore a fully interpersonal relationship with the other, rather than to have a relationship in which he or she is understood as possessed by some causal, or quasi-causal, mechanism.

Laing’s way of understanding is therefore very different from that employed in traditional psychoanalytic interpretation, particularly that directed at psychotic speech. Laing’s opposition to psychoanalytic interpretation is present throughout his career, but is most clearly expressed in *The Voice of Experience* (1982), where he argues that, like sophomoric literary analysis, it is an obstacle to confrontation with “otherness”. Wilfred Bion’s psychoanalytic interpretations of a psychotic patient prove particularly provoking to Laing. In the case study that Laing cites, Bion’s patient complains about a lack of interesting food and new clothes, laments the condition of his socks, and says that picking a piece of skin from his face has made him “feel quite empty” (Laing *Voice* 50). Bion interprets this as the patient’s attempt to communicate to him a feeling that he (the patient) has eaten his (Bion’s) penis. Such constructions, says Laing, are “a grinding machine which reduces any sense to total nonsense”, and forestall any genuinely revelatory interpersonal relationship: “It is difficult to imagine what the patient could say that could tell Bion anything he does not think he knows” (Laing *Voice* 52). Such reduction of the other to the same, to the already-known, merely extends the impersonal attitude: “A psychosis, like a dream, like a brain, is up for grabs, for rotation, reversal, reshuffling, slicing, apposing, juxtaposing and transposing” (Laing *Voice* 49).

Laing therefore tries to find what is intelligible in terms of the “here and now” of the other’s experience, rather than to pursue one-sided interpretations built around the “there and then” of repressed psychic materials. In *The Divided Self*, at any rate, this means that Laing’s exegeses are (consciously) in the spirit of Sartre’s discussion of subjective experiences such as nausea, shame, and vertigo. “Vertigo” for Sartre has nothing to do with inner-ears or repressed psychic trauma; it’s a subjective disclosure of freedom – the vertigo that I feel by a sheer drop is a consciousness of my freedom to throw myself into it, regardless of any psychic causality which might be supposed to impede me (see Sartre 30). Laing, in discussing experiences of being on fire, or being petrified, and so forth, is trying to do for psychotic psychology what Sartre does for more everyday experience.

Indeed, Laing’s affinity with the European phenomenological movement offers one of the surest routes to an understanding of his idea of language, and how it should be used. Laing draws the logical conclusion from what he sees as a mistaken assumption that the psychotic’s speech is unintelligible. We are, he believes, experientially impoverished – cut off from the many different modalities of experience that are phenomenologically apparent. This is why we cannot easily understand the psychotic, and it is also why we are unable to understand ourselves. We are, he claims in “The Politics of the Family”, all victims of a modern “holocaust of [...] experience on the altar of conformity” (Laing “Politics of Family” 101). The implied chiasmus is of course obvious: from the holocaust of experience there arises the twentieth-century’s experience of holocaust. In his 1967 bestseller, *The Politics of Experience*, Laing declares: “Our behavior is a function of our experience”; “*If our experience is destroyed, our behavior will be destructive*” (Laing *Politics* 12).

The destruction of our experience, its reduction to ash or some other useless residue, was to Laing philosophically elucidated by phenomenology’s critique of the natural sciences. Husserl in *The Crisis of the European Sciences* (1936) pointed out the side-effects of a “scientific” or “causal” theory of perception. Such a theory treats experience of the world as primarily the effect of a cause, and so experience becomes nothing more than the effect produced by the mind as objects causally impinge upon it. What we see, feel, hear, smell, savor, and desire, may have no more resemblance to what “really” exists than the crash of a cymbal to the stick that hits it:

The phenomena are only in the subjects; they are there only as causal results of events taking place in true nature, which events exist only with mathematical properties. If the intuited world of our life is merely subjective, then all the truths of pre- and extrascientific life which

have to do with its factual being are deprived of value. They have meaning only insofar as they, while themselves false, vaguely indicate an in-itself which lies behind this world of possible experience. (Husserl 54)

Or, as Laing puts it in a 1980 Lecture, “What is the Matter with Mind?”, “Sight, sound, taste, touch and smell [...] all sensibility, all values, all quality, all feelings, all motives, all intentions, spirit, soul, consciousness, subjectivity: almost everything, in fact, which we ordinarily take to be real is de-realized, is stripped of its pretensions to reality” (Laing “Matter with Mind” 10-11). A similar expression of this idea is found by the English philosopher A. N. Whitehead (1861-1947), whose work Laing also knew (and cited in *The Voice of Experience* (see Laing *Voice* 15n)). The scientific view divides the world into an unknowable causal nature, and the apparent nature given in experience: “Causal nature is the influence on the mind which is the cause of the effluence of apparent nature from the mind” (Whitehead 31). Experience, in Whitehead’s words, is “effluence” not just as what “flows out” from the action of thing upon mind, but also as a flow that is waste, toxic, or contaminated, like the effluent from a factory or a sewage works.

Laing notes that scientists typically refuse to see what philosophers such as Husserl and Whitehead have understood: that even the basis of science, sensory experience, must be reduced by *science itself* to an “effluent”. To borrow Laing’s words, “all experience, along with the most strangely modulated and transformed [...] is consigned by science to its slop bucket” (Laing *Voice* 69). Since all experience is merely an illusion mechanically produced by a realm of beings-in-themselves, then, as Laing puts it in an interview with Douglas Kirsner, the scientific view is essentially “that experience is a psychosis of matter” (Mullan *Creative Destroyer* 45): *everything* we experience should, in a consistent scientific worldview, really be as delusive and illusory as the experience of a madman.

Laing fights fire with fire. The scientific account of truth is based upon a nonsensical metaphor in which experience accurately represents something which can never be experienced – truth is the “relation between a picture and the undepictable reality the depiction in the picture alludes to” (Laing *Voice* 29). Against such incoherent metaphor, he musters his own rhetorical armory. In his Schumacher lecture, Laing ends with a list (which I shall not quote in full) of “[a] few of the other modes of existence outside the investigative competence of natural science”: these include, “love and hate, joy and sorrow, misery and happiness, pleasure and pain, right and wrong”; “everything, in fact, that makes life worth living” (Laing “Matter with Mind” 18-19). Laing wants to open our eyes to the diversity and variety of experience, to everything beyond the “primary qualities” or “things-in-themselves” nonsensically preserved in the scientific worldview. To do this, he increasingly employs the neglected rhetorical device of *enumeratio*, the making of a list or catalogue. The variety and irreducible diversity implied by *enumeratio* is central to Laing’s depiction of experiences that may be otherwise rendered anodyne or trivial. In his autobiography, *Wisdom, Madness, and Folly*, World War Two is decomposed by Laing into the horrors of modern conflict (enabled, of course, by modern technological rationality): “When World War II started no one could imagine how it could possibly end without endless devastation, poison gas, germ warfare, torture, mutilation, rape, pillage, massacres, killing and killing and killing, shelling, bombing, sea warfare, food shortage, famine and pestilence” (Laing *Wisdom, Madness, and Folly* 35). *Enumeratio* is also the scheme with which Laing depicts the things that genuinely make him feel alive: “My life-saving consolations were moonlight and gaslight, the angel on the dome of the library, music, the coal fire, fun, indeed all things – sky, sun, stars, clouds, rain, sleep, snow, flowers, trees, birds, flies, prayer, a few people, even asphalt, fog” (Laing *Wisdom, Madness, and Folly* 52). The figure repeats throughout *Wisdom, Madness, and Folly*, from the many ways of committing suicide with “razor blades, nuts and bolts, soap, broken glass, lavatory chains, buttons, knives, forks, spoons, hair, hammers, files, combs, broken saws, coins, lavatory paper, clothing” (Laing *Wisdom, Madness, and Folly* 118) to the fascination of night-time experience – “solitude, silence, desolation, camaraderie, romance, meditation, prayer, vigil, carousing, music, the moon, the stars, the dawn” (Laing *Wisdom, Madness, and Folly* 29).

There are various other techniques by which Laing forces his readers to confront the inauthenticity with which they might attempt to downgrade vast domains of their experience to some “psychosis” of

their own neurological matter. He has a gift for novel metaphor – for the reworking of what George Lakoff would call an “Idealized Cognitive Model” of madness (see Lakoff 68-76). For example, when describing the refractory wards of Gartnavel mental hospital in Glasgow during the 1950s, Laing recalls an uncanny and oddly hopeful experience that draws upon an analogy with twentieth-century avant-garde composition. In his own words: “the ward sounded like an out-of-tune orchestra endlessly tuning up, each instrument unrelated and out of pitch”, yet there is a kind of harmony, as “when the jumble of sound in a difficult piece of music all suddenly makes sense” (Laing *Wisdom, Madness, and Folly* 123). The possibility of this hidden tunefulness inspires Laing in his early experiments with a therapeutic community based on minimal intervention. By offering his musical model, rather than a medical model, Laing hopes that the reader, seeing (or perhaps hearing) madness differently, will also perceive that drugs are not a cure for an illness, but a way of trying to “harmonize” the madman with his society: “There are drugs to calm agitation, to soften frantic feelings, to tone down awful moods, to modulate the tonal region of feelings, to regulate thoughts and the style and content of imagination and dreams” (Laing *Wisdom, Madness, and Folly* 25).

There are undoubtedly many more rhetorical strategies in Laing’s discursive writings. Some are listed, for instance, by Martin Howarth-Williams (see Howarth-Williams 64-68), including the use of archetypal imagery, syntactic parallelisms, and abrupt juxtapositions between different discourses (such as mystics and politics, or religion and science). To fully consider all Laing’s prose devices is beyond the scope of this article. To analyze fully the rhetoric of his more identifiably literary or poetic writing – that of his *Sonnets* (1977), the spiraling logic of *Knots* (1970), the mini-dramas of *Do You Love Me?* (1977), or the dialogues of *Conversations with Children* (1978) – would also require lengthy consideration.

But one strategy in particular stands out as a clue to Laing’s philosophical legitimation of his rhetoric. If there is indeed a modern “holocaust of experience”, then it may be that the traces of an earlier meaning can gesture towards what has been repressed, sidelined, or simply exterminated in our lived reality. In his second book, *Self and Others*, published in 1961, Laing close reads Jean Genet’s play *The Balcony* by drawing attention to the etymology of the word prostitute: “Most of the play takes place in a brothel. The girls in the brothel are shown to be, in a literal sense, pro-stitutes. They stand for (pro-stare) whatever the client requires them to be, so that he can become for a while that figure which he wishes to be” (Laing *Self and Others* 103). The existential meaning in prostitution is its furnishing of a “collusive identity” (Laing *Self and Others* 104). To collude is to play together at self-deception: “The term collusion has the same root as de-lusion, il-lusion, and e-lusion. The root ‘lusion’ ultimately comes from the past participle of the Latin verb, *ludere*. [...] It can mean to play, to play at, or to make a sport of, to mock, to deceive” (Laing *Self and Others* 98). Such rediscovery of language is a frequent trope within Laing’s work. Elsewhere, he draws attention to the etymology of words such as *companion* (literally, a bread-sharer), *orientation* (to find the East), *diagnosis* (to see through), and the *obvious* (that which stands in one’s way, and so both evident, and an obstacle). As Martin Howarth-Williams rightly concludes, “This technique involves looking afresh at a common word [...] to discover new, or often, very *old*, meanings, which are literal, thereby sweeping away, or at least, relativizing, the conventional meaning” (Howarth-Williams 65).

This concern with uncovering an older, forgotten meaning, came to Laing from Heidegger. Glasgow in the 1950s, as well as apparently being (according to Showalter) a dark and depressed domain, was also an important centre for the translation of German-language philosophy into English. As well as Ronald Gregor Smith’s translations of Martin Buber, Glasgow also produced what was for many years the only English translation of Heidegger’s *Sein und Zeit*, the version produced by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (see Heidegger *Being and Time*). Laing, indeed, was known to both Macquarrie and Robinson: “John Macquarrie was working on the translation [of *Sein und Zeit*] which I thought was a total disaster and at times I tried to persuade him that the whole point of Heidegger was totally lost by translating *sein*, which is the German infinitive of the verb to be, *sein*, by ‘being’” (Mullan *Mad to Be Normal* 367). The influence of Heidegger is quite apparent throughout Laing’s work. In his second book, *Self and Others*, for example, Laing meditates on the English idioms that revolve around how

“a person ‘puts himself into’ his acts”, how he “may seem to be ‘full of himself’ or ‘beside himself’, or ‘to have come to himself’ again after ‘not being himself’” (Laing *Self and Others* 117). This everyday existential vocabulary directs us, he says, to a different notion of truth, one different from the representational account presupposed in causal theories of perception (see above). Citing Heidegger, Laing contends that “in natural science truth consists in a correspondence, an *adaequatio*, between what goes on *in intellectu* and what goes on *in re*” (Laing *Self and Others* 120). Yet, “there is another concept of truth which is to be found in the Greek word ἀλήθεια. In this concept, truth is literally that which is without secrecy, what discloses itself without being veiled” (Laing *Self and Others* 120). The concept of truth as *aletheia*, or disclosure, is central to the literariness of Laing’s writing. This conceptual refocusing of truth brings together Laing’s existential exegesis of schizophrenic speech, his opposition to reductive psychoanalytic interpretation, his revalidation of “anomalous” experience, and his poetic reworking of psychiatry’s rhetoric. Laing claims in *The Politics of Experience* that “[w]ords in a poem, sounds in movement, rhythm in space, attempt to recapture personal meaning in personal time and space from out of the sights and sounds of a depersonalized, dehumanized world. They are bridgeheads into alien territory [...] Their source is from the Silence at the center of each of us” (Laing *Politics* 24).

Laing argues for the function of language as a poetic disclosure of so-called “inner” being, our “personal idiom of experiencing our bodies, other people, the animate and inanimate world” (Laing *Politics* 6). This claim that poetic art discloses being (or Being) is much the same as that made by Heidegger in his later work, where he asserts that “language alone brings beings as beings into the open for the first time”, and concludes that “*All art*, as the letting happen of the advent of the truth of beings, is as such, *in essence, poetry*” (Heidegger “Work of Art” 197). This indebtedness to Heidegger helps to explain what many have seen as the failings of Laing’s later work – an unwillingness to argue, an indifference to evidence, and a tendency to mystical assertions. Although there is a temptation to attribute these failings to the merely psychological causes at work upon Laing (e.g. drug and alcohol abuse), there is also undoubtedly a logically intelligible path to such a mode of discourse. Habermas has argued that Heidegger’s project, by insisting upon disclosure as the primary meaning of “truth”, eventually produces a series of incommensurable “truths” that are “in each case provincial and yet total; they are more like the commanding expressions of some sacral force fitted out with the aura of truth” (Habermas 154). Thus, as Laing starts to echo Heidegger more faithfully (*The Politics of Experience* is particularly filled with such repetitions, e.g. the paraphrasing of Heidegger’s “What is Metaphysics?” (Laing *Politics* 22-23)), he begins to follow the same path. Reason quickly becomes downgraded to a mere instrumental mastery over the world as Laing echoes, for example, Heidegger on the technological disclosure of nature as a “standing-reserve” (Heidegger “Technology” 322) – to describe a goose as “raw-material-for-*pâté*”, says Laing, is “a brutalization of, a debasement of, a desecration of [...] the true nature of human beings and of animals” (Laing *Politics* 38). What Laing correspondingly elevates is not rational discourse, but a supposed realm of self-validating certainties. In *The Voice of Experience*, for instance, Laing voices his fascination with re-incarnation: “Belief in a cycle of reincarnation is worldwide. Whole civilizations have been dominated by it”; such experience “is in no way accounted for by being dismissed as the delusions and hallucinations of the mind unable to reach to the haven of scientific disenchantment” (Laing *Voice* 99). Similarly, in *The Politics of Experience*, religious faith is also above rational critique: “Faith was never a matter of believing He existed, but of trusting in the presence that was experienced and known to exist as a self-validating datum” (Laing *Politics* 100).

What therefore marks, and mars, Laing’s later work is something like the same mystical certainty that Habermas notes in Heidegger:

The event of Being can only be meditatively experienced and presented narratively, but not argumentatively retrieved and explained [...] Dasein [“being-there”, i.e. human being – GM] is no longer considered the author of world-projects in light of which entities are at once manifested and withdrawn; instead, the *productivity* of the creation of meaning that is disclosive of the world passes over to *Being* itself. Dasein bows to the authority of an unmanipulable meaning of Being and rids itself of any will to self-affirmation (Habermas 152-53).

No doubt this sounds very abstract. Consider then an illustration from Laing's writings: he claims that "[f]ew are made to believe their experience. Paul of Tarsus was picked up by the scruff of the neck, thrown to the ground and blinded for three days. This direct experience was self-validating" (Laing *Politics* 100-01). By imbibing Heidegger with his LSD, Laing came to the position outlined in *The Politics of Experience*: "True sanity entails in one way or another the dissolution of the normal ego [...] and the eventual re-establishment of a new kind of ego-functioning, the ego now being the servant of the divine" (Laing *Voice* 101). The schizophrenic journey is therefore something more than the masculine voyage of exploration described by Showalter; it is equally a Heideggerian transition in which "[t]he being of phenomena shifts and the phenomenon of being may no longer present itself to us as before" (Laing *Politics* 92).

Laing never fully retreated from this position (which is frequently glossed as the "romanticization of schizophrenia" – an accurate, yet partial understanding of his thesis, which is as much philosophical as psychiatric). It haunts his work, particularly in his repeated hints at the reality of re-incarnation – as in *Conversation with Children*, for instance, when his young son insists that he was a soldier who killed a lot of people, "last time I was alive" (Laing *Conversations* 1). Sigal's mockery of this thread in Laing's thought is thus scarcely an exaggeration: "When a patient is so sure she came fr' another planet", announces Willie Last, "th' integrity of her statement slices my rationality off at th' knees" (Sigal 206). Yet the movement of Laing's philosophy of language is far from eccentric: the progress from hermeneutics, existentialism, and phenomenology, to something approaching a deconstructive free-for-all (in which aliens and re-incarnation are all equal "truths") could be seen as a compressed history of an important strand in literary and critical theory. Laing's vices were, and are, shared by the intellectuals of his generation: like many, he followed the critique of "instrumental reason", but could find no alternative model of rationality. His language of experience directs us toward what is "heterogeneous" to the scientific destruction of phenomenal reality, and it does so with the skill of an accomplished novelist, playwright, or poet. But, without some alternative rational criterion with which to separate wisdom from madness and folly, Laing's language becomes at times a "mere" rhetoric which promotes a mystical submission to the anonymous power of "experience".

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