

Laing in Austria

Theodor Itten

[Despite the great fame and notoriety he enjoyed during the sixties and seventies, the last decade of Laing's life was exceedingly turbulent. In 1980, his close friend and confidante Hugh Crawford died, and in 1981, he stepped down from his role as Chair of the Philadelphia Association. That same year, his marriage to Jutta Werner began to unravel, and his various efforts to start a new charitable foundation, St. Oran's Trust, beginning in 1982, came to naught in 1984. His last book, a memoir entitled *Wisdom, Madness & Folly: The Making of a Psychiatrist*, published in 1985, sold poorly, and after lengthy deliberations, the General Medical Council of Great Britain withdrew his license to practice medicine in March of 1987. At that point, Laing and his companion, Marguerita Romayn-Kendon, decided that a change of scene would be profitable for them both, and they left for extensive travels abroad. Their son Charles was born on January 6th of 1988 in San Francisco, and they settled in the Austrian Tyrol in June of that year.

Theodor Itten is a psychotherapist in St. Gallen, Switzerland, who studied with Laing at the Philadelphia during the 1970's, and founded the Villa Therapeutica: R. D. Laing Institute in his memory. In the following piece, Itten remembers various episodes and exchanges from the last three years of Laing's life, before his untimely death on August 23, 1989. D.B.]

This is a short account of Ronnie Laing's Austrian sojourn, based on my visit to his home in Going, Austria, on the Pentecost-Weekend, May 13-15, 1989, and of telephone conversations and excerpts from correspondence spanning the last few years of Ronnie Laing's life. Laing's last trip to Switzerland was to visit our newly built house in Rehetobel, an ancient farmer's village near St. Gallen, at the end of July 1986. He came from Scotland with Marguerita, where they were on holiday with Ronnie's kin. We spent three glorious days together, filled with longish walks and animated conversation, in which we expressed and explored our views of living together, of respectful behavior towards others, and our deepest convictions about life, culminating in a congenial discussion around the kitchen table. Ronnie talked at length about the dizzying itinerary on which Marguerita and he were about to embark: St.Gallen, Zürich, London, Rhinebeck (NY), Athens, Crete, Amsterdam, Antwerp, Brussels, New York City, Philadelphia, Paris, Rome, Bologna, Milan, and finally, Melbourne. Did I know that Jutta and he were finally heading for divorce, and selling their beautiful home on Eaton Road in Belsize Park, London? "Yes," I replied, "I heard it from Fritjof Capra, who visited us, after a lecture he gave at St.Gallen University in June."

Before he left for Zürich, Ronnie showed me his sketch for a new journal entitled *Shaman: An Internationally Networked Institute for Shamanic Research and Therapy*, asking my opinion. Ronnie was to be responsible for "Therapy," while Brian Bates would take care of "Research." Their stated purpose was: *To offer integrated courses in European shamanic tradition, its history, themes, teachings. Implications of the shaman. s vision for emerging paradigms. Approaches to research and therapy inspired by the shamanic way of being. Advanced training courses in therapy and research.* Then a "cheerio" and a Shaman's hug, as he and Marguerita entered the bus, which brought them safely to St. Gallen, where they took the train to Zürich.

Around midnight on Friday, the 9th of October, 1986, while in New York, he wrote: *"Congratulations and blessings all round on the birth of Raphael Grisha. A hug to Heidemarie."* Raphael is our third son, born a few days after Ronnie left us. His forthcoming birth was another topic of animated conversation some three months before, as Ronnie was an enthusiastic advocate of Natural Childbirth, having made a film and a speaking tour on that subject. Since his brief tenure as a general practitioner in a Scottish village, where he sometimes delivered babies, he was fascinated with embryology, an interest that persisted over the years, and resurfaced in *The Facts of Life* (1976), and *The Voice of Experience* (1982). Ronnie continued his midnight musings:

We are . . . the very first generation of human beings who have ever moved over the earth like that (listing all the places he visited recently) . . . I think Kant is supposed to have remarked . travel narrows the mind.

On Monday, March 28th, 1988, he wrote the following from Holne, near Newton Abbot, South Devon, England:

Dear Theo,

It is a pleasure to say, "Hello, old friend" to you, in writing alas, now, in the ordinary sacrament of every extraordinary present moment. Without, I hope being ungracious about present graces, I hope it will not be too long before we meet flesh to flesh, face to face, as now we do, in spirit only, as through a glass darkly . . .

I'm giving, I think, the keynote address at the European Humanistic Psychology Conference in Barcelona (You know Michela Festa, etc. Maybe you will be there . . . Maybe we can get together sometime in that merry month of May?

Love from Marguerita and Charles and me

To you Heidemarie, Dimitrij, Anatol and Raphael,

Ronnie.

P.S. Marguerita and I have settled for settling in Devon.

As we know with hindsight, of course, they did not settle in Devon, but went on the road again. At long last, in June of 1988 Ronnie phoned to invite me to spend some time with him in Kitzbühel, Austria. Sadly, I replied, "I'm about to take the train to Cologne, to attend the funeral of my sister Ruth, who tragically died of a thrombosis in the hip (at age 38), two days ago." As I sat there with eyes streaming, Ronnie consoled me tenderly, much as I tried to console him at the death of Hugh Crawford eight years ago, when our positions were reversed.

Now that he had relocated in Austria, Ronnie was living only five hour's train ride away, a gentle gift of fate. We agreed to meet as soon as possible. In the meantime, we spoke by phone frequently, exchanging family news and professional gossip whenever possible. We finally met over the Pentecost weekend in May 1989 in Going, a little village ten minutes west of Kitzbühel, where he now lived with Marguerita and Charles. I arrived at the Kitzbühel Railway station just after noon on Saturday. Ronnie was waiting on the platform. He gave me a warm, welcoming hug, and eagerly inquired about our Spring holiday in Cyprus, which is where we were when he had visited Zürich recently to lead a workshop at the University of Zürich Psychiatric Clinic, the famous "Burghölzli."

Recounting some of our adventures, I satisfied his kind curiosity. He then led me to his white Subaru. In days gone by, Ronnie seldom drove anywhere, so this was a novelty for me. Ronnie was a speedy yet competent driver. On the road he informed me about his living arrangements, showed me where they used to live in Kitzbühel, in a comfortable flat owned by a wealthy German woman friend. Presently, he said, "I am no longer drinking alcohol. I've been off the booze for over a year. Driving a car is once again a pleasure not to be despised." Having arrived safely in the driveway of the large Tirolian country house they rented, he showed me the woodshed first of all. Why? Ronnie was responsible for keeping the house warm, by feeding an old iron stove. It certainly kept him busy, and he seemed to take a certain pride in his new domestic responsibility.

We went up, where I was greeted by Marguerita and Charles. The upstairs consisted of a main living area and an open hall leading to a kitchen. On the landing stood a black baby Steinway grand with some Mozart and Gershwin scores on it. There were two bedrooms; one facing west, for sleep and rest; the other, facing north, with a spectacular view of Going's mountain, for Ronnie's writing and meditation practice. He said: "I like these steep mountains more than the ones you have in Rehetobel." As

Ronnie was doing some arbitration for a couple coming shortly, I withdrew to the guest room.

Before going to greet the new visitors, Ronnie mentioned how important this mediation work was for him. The couple were good friends of his, and beneath the overt financial wrangling, there were deeper issues of trust, clarity, honesty and friendship at stake. The man involved, as I found out later, was working with Ronnie on a project they termed the "Mind Olympics." Their idea was to bring some of the brightest (mainly western) minds together, in order to share, inspire, and enchant each other. To create a new "morphic field" and fresh "morphic resonance," as our friend Rupert Sheldrake would say (Sheldrake, 1981, 1990). Then they would put their refreshed minds to the problems that plague our planet and all human kind. Sadly, this project never left the planning stage.

To mark this visit, I had brought with me the "Festschrift," for Ronnie's 60th birthday, which he had not yet seen. I had hoped to get it published under the title: *R.D.Laing- So What ? : An anthology of thoughts, feelings and reveries on the spirit of Ronald David Laing's psychology.*¹ I solicited contributions from Martin Esslin, Susan Griffin, Morris Berman and others. Ronnie read these essays over the weekend, and on Monday morning talked to me about his impressions. He felt most of the contributions were second rate, while some authors, like Andrew Collier, (author of *R.D.Laing - The Philosophy and Politics of Psychotherapy*, 1977), were putting forward arguments without substantiating them with references to his written words. Our plan for a new book, with the working title: *The Politics of Truth*, came out of this conversation. In the beginning we simply called it "the 50/50 book," since we envisaged it as an equal collaboration.

While Ronnie was seeing the couple, trying to sort out their differences, Marguerita and I sat in the comfortable living room, with Charles, toddling about and playing, till he was tired and fell asleep. Marguerita spoke of their travel experiences and of recent visits from Natasha and Max, two of Ronnie's children with Jutta. Marguerita said: "I am keeping a diary, noting down Charles's developments as he grows." Ronnie planned to draw on this stock of knowledge, for a book to be called *Childhood, Youth and Adolescence*. Meanwhile, Marguerita was helping Ronnie finish his new book, *The Lies of Love*, which she was assiduously typing and retyping, parts of which were revised up to ten times, as the writing was so complex. She did this work in a large sunlit room, downstairs.

While driving to the house, Ronnie promised to show me his new manuscript. I reminded him of this after his tea break just before he returned to the couple downstairs. He went to his room and promptly came back, giving me a large pile of folders, some thicker than others, loosely arranged so that he could shuffle them

round. He said: "The finished book is hopefully going to be on your desk within a year's time. All that remains to be done is to polish up the rhetoric." To aid this process he and Marguerita were reading to each other from Shakespeare's *Sonnets*. Ronnie mentioned his plan to give the final manuscript to Ted Hughes, then Poet Laureate of England, for the latter's comments because, in Ronnie's own words, "I want to be second to none." He considered this book to be his most original work after *The Divided Self* and *Knots*.

In this new text, which he began to write in 1982, Ronnie included passages from his unpublished book: *Schizophrenia: Sickness or Strategy* (1967), where he sought to articulate a "Grammar of Relationships." In the early 1970's, he had decided not to publish this book. Why? Because he was convinced that most of his prospective critics would not grasp his evolving theoretical perspective, and did not wish to be ridiculed by his inferiors.

Admittedly, some of his thoughts on this score were presented in *Interpersonal Perception: A Method of Theory and Research* (1966), which he co-authored with Phillipson and Lee at the Tavistock Institute, and the chapters entitled "Mapping" and "Rules and Metarules" in the first, Canadian edition of *The Politics of the Family*, edited by Phyllis Webb (CBC publications, 1969). In *The Lies of Love*, however, he wished to go beyond the dyadic perspectives featured in *Interpersonal Perception* to map the lineaments of the triple-bond or triangle of mother, father and child, articulating the overlapping and convergent impact of our concurrent relationships with significant others, both in and after childhood. Laing's argument is impossible to summarize here, but I found a useful example of his "grammar of relationships" to give to the reader some intimation of where he was going. He says:

*If we are as, a, b or c, studying the situation/triangle (t) we are in together, there is no possible way to form a picture of it, that we can be certain is "true." From outside t, another picture can be formed, but this diminution essentially remains. I leave the question open as to whether it is possible to be in it and outside it at the same time. My picture of t from within it, is itself part of t, and my (a's) picture of b's picture of a's picture of c's picture of t is part of t and so is a's or b's picture of b's or a's or c's picture of a or b's picture (etc.) . . . part of t.*³

Since this stuff is too algebraic for most people to follow, much less translate into the language of lived experience, Ronnie regularly resorted to real-life vignettes, selections from the fictional works of de Beauvoir and Sartre, the plays of Aristophanes, classical mythology and the occasional case history to illustrate what goes on between people. I was spellbound.

Unfortunately, at the time, there was no way to make a photocopy of the manuscript. But ten years later, in the summer of 1999, I consulted the Laing-Archive at Glasgow University Special Collections Department, Hillhead Street, just a few hundred meters away from Ruskin Place,

where Ronnie and his first wife, Ann, lived with their five Children from 1955-56. There I found Version 8, 1988, titled: *Lies of Love and Love of Lies*.(4) Ronnie's opening inscription was the famous lyric from the song "It's A Sin to Tell a Lie" by the immortal Hoagy Carmichael:

Be sure it's true, when you say "I love you." It's a sin to tell a lie. Millions of hearts have been broken, just because these words were spoken.

The manuscript consists of ten chapters. After introducing his theme, in the first chapter, Ronnie poses the question: What is going on? What is happening? The second chapter concerns "Putting the Devil into his Hell." Then a longer, third chapter, which dwells on the proposition that God is a jealous God, and themes like the crisis of credibility, the credibility of crisis, and the Nietzschean notion of "the human species as a secret to itself." Next, in chapter four, he examines the *The Witches' Hammer* or *Malleus Maleficarum*, written by two Dominican monks, Jakob Sprenger and Heinrich Insitoris, published in 1487 at the request of Pope Innocent VIII as a handbook for the Inquisition. After pondering the deep, but often unconscious dread men cherish toward women, the root of medieval misogyny, he abruptly shifts focus in chapter five to address "The Transpersonal - Extrasensory Intention."

Chapter six deals with power issues. Then chapter seven, "pour d' amour," consists of love poems by Ronnie. The next two Chapters are titled: "Living the Lie," and, "Why Pretend?", followed by the final "Eros, Love, Truth, Deception, Mystification, Sexual Communion." The manuscript is 192 pages long.

After a delicious supper served by Marguerita, the four of us sat quietly by candle light, sipping green tea. Ronnie had offered me wine, but I declined. So Ronnie lit his pipe, and leaning back comfortably in his chair, told me how he had been approached by the Dean of the Department of Medicine at Princeton University. Would Ronnie accept a Professorship in Psychiatry, should they formally invite him to take a Distinguished Chair? He would not need to teach undergraduates. Ronnie asked: what sort of psychiatry did they expect him to teach? In the light of their answer, he had now decided that, if asked, he would undoubtedly decline. That was that. Ronnie then gave us his overview of the psychiatric profession in the USA. By his account, clinicians, health insurance companies, and the author/distributors of the DSM are routinely trying to deceive and double-cross each other. Insincerity is built into the system. When doctors can not fit the pattern of patients complaints or experiences into a pre-existing theoretical framework, they give them "dual diagnoses," sometimes claiming to cure "incurable" disorders and/or pathologizing reasonably intact people in order to be reimbursed for their services. As far as he was concerned, these duplicitous dealings are profoundly immoral. And to complicate matters, though they deceive one another, to be sure, on another level, there is a certain complicity between them all, evidenced in the enormous disparity between the story that the mental health industry puts to the public, and what really goes on behind the scenes. "Remember," Ronnie said, in an apparent reference to his current professional isolation, "Galileo and his rift with the Church and the Science establishment."

After a welcome pause, he talked at length again about *The Lies of Love*. As it was getting late, Marguerita gave in to her fatigue and went to bed. Ronnie and I sat quietly together. Our silences became longer, interspersed with reflections on the ineluctable intertwining of *The Self and*

Others, using each other's perspectives to reflect on our own "positions of seeing." Within the open field of visioning "the third," Ronnie and I finally decided to call it a night.

Early Sunday morning, I heard Ronnie up at seven o' clock, carrying wood to the house, lighting the fire and washing-up in the kitchen. After a bath, I went upstairs, where an astonishing spectacle greeted me. Ronnie had actually made breakfast for us. "Are you ready for eggs? How would you like your toast?" he asked. He was being a generous host, something I had not experienced before, at least not in this way. Laing was always a remarkably good listener, provided he thought you were sincere. But previously, in his study at Eton Road, Ronnie would welcome guests with the offer of drinks, and nothing more. During his last visit to my home he tried to make some coffee. But he never washed dishes or laid the table or gone in for any kind of housekeeping. This was a rare Pentecost Sunday indeed.

"Drinking or not drinking alcohol makes no difference to me now. I'm fine without it, and am going to stay that way, till the end of my life," he said. A year or so previously, Marguerita had given Ronnie an ultimatum: either he stopped drinking or she would return (with Charles) for New Zealand. Now that all that was settled, he hoped that royalties from *The Lies of Love* would be substantial enough to buy his new family a house in Scotland, where he wished to return, eventually. There he would open a practice, see people, and of course write.

After breakfast, sitting comfortably with cups of coffee, Ronnie told me that Bob Mullan, a sociologist, was writing an authorized biography, using the taped interviews Mullan and he had recently made. Moreover, he told me, Brian Bates of Sussex University was compiling an *R. D. Laing Reader*. Mullan might also edit a selection of Ronnie's journals, which were in Mullan's safe-keeping at that time. During the day, Ronnie wandered round the house, sat at the piano and played, or rested in bed, all in a quiet, composed sort of way. After one such rest, he asked: "Would you like to go for a ride, to see our countryside and perhaps visit Kitzbühel?" I replied, "Yes, that would be charming." So off we went.

We parked in Kitzbühel, bought cigarettes in a small sidestreet restaurant, and proceeded to wander about somewhat aimlessly. "No no," we laughed, "we are not dependent on nicotine, but we like it anyhow," looking into each other's eyes, nodding knowingly from the knowledge of temptation and sobriety. "There are at least two points of view for any issue or situation," said Ronnie reflectively, then added: "I don't feel very well, not very embodied." He was still suffering from dental surgery he had undergone several days before. His teeth were a disaster. And come to think of it, he did look a bit pale in his tweed trousers, elegant Italian shoes, white cardigan and dark blue shirt. Nevertheless, we danced on the pavement while talking, exchanging amused glances, and mimicking the movements of different passersby.

Back at the house, around 5 PM, Ronnie, now in a solemn mood, lay down for a rest, returning shortly to give us a spirited Mozart recital on the piano. Afterwards, we devoured Marguerita's homemade apple strudel, and Ronnie played with Charles, eventually taking him to bed. Marguerita and I cleared the table for tea. Ronnie reappeared. Charles was asleep. I took that opportunity to relate my recent dream about his death.⁵

The dream went as follows:

Ronnie Laing and Francis Huxley come to me one beautiful afternoon. Apparently, it is time for Ronnie to die. We assemble in my house. It is a peaceful time. Ronnie lies down on a specially prepared bed, which I inherited from my paternal grandparents, which is situated in the middle of the room. Francis lies down beside Ronnie, both of them preparing to die. Their heads point West. Francis lies on the northern side, Ronnie on the southern of the bed. Their dying is a slow process that takes all afternoon. There are no visible signs of a struggle or of suffering. In fact, to my surprise, it is an entirely peaceful happening.

Both my friends have passed away and now lie dead in front of me. I take a piece of vinegar soaked veil, put it on Francis' forehead, put some sage leaves on his face, and cover both of the departed with a quilt. I know that Francis has only escorted Ronnie and doesn't himself want to die. Evening comes. Night arrives. Dawn makes her appearance, and with her comes the noble goddess Artemis to help bring Francis back to life. She tenderly removes the sage leaves, and when she lifts up the vinegar-veil, Francis moves for the first time. As he has been with the Dead, we have to do everything very slowly. Gradually, his soul is awakening by the bright morning light. He sits up on the bed's edge, letting his long legs dangle. Supported by Artemis, he learns to walk again, step by step. He is on his way to a fresh identity. Artemis sings and chants, mixing soft, familiar melodies with a strict, and to me, unknown liturgy. Both she and I read, alternatingly, some carefully chosen passages from Francis' own books. We want to remind him of his former self, voicing episodes of his insight and creativity, in order to create parallels to the here and now. Then we suddenly find ourselves in Huxley's flat in London which happens to be next door to my house. Artemis and Francis go out for a meal, while I return home to find Ronnie's dead body still there, now in a coffin. My helpmate is cleaning the room and tidying up our home.

After listening to my dream quietly, and without comment, Ronnie replied with stories of two near-death experiences that occurred since 1986. Oh, by the way, did I know that David Cooper died in 1986? (Who else had died since then, we wondered?) First Ronnie, then Marguerita, told the story of the second near-death experience, when Ronnie almost crossed the threshold of this life. As he recalled, he felt as if he were on teetering on the edge, pondering whether to surrender to death, or to come back into this life again. At the time, both options seemed equally valid. There was gripping music, reminiscent of Bach, emanating from the side of death. On life's side, on the other hand, there was loud screaming: in fact, Marguerita, who was howling for his return. With every ounce of energy she possessed, she begged him to opt for life. Eventually, as she recalled, she reached him, and felt the tide turning, bringing Ronnie back. Yet, she observed wryly, "I've never seen Ronnie angrier than the first two weeks after he came back." Ronnie laughed, as did we all. What a huge release of tension! Now other vivid stories and ideas were exchanged, interweaving with one another. Did I know Moody's work on near death phenomena? Ronnie was booked at a conference entitled "Apocalyptic Courage" on August 3-8, 1989, in Denver, Colorado, where Raymond Moody, author of *Life After Life* was giving a paper (Moody, 1988). Ronnie's talk was entitled: "The Eye of the Needle is Here and Now," but he was not certain if he was up to it. Despite the hectic itinerary of the preceding year, he said he did not relish the prospect of long distance travel anymore. Yet, he did promise Diethart Jaehning, Chairman of the Conference, that he would come.

It was well into the morning hours when Ronnie and Marguerita crept to bed, while I resumed reading *The Lies of Love*, finishing it, finally, with burning eyes and a deep, irrepressible yawn, at about 3 AM. Content, and full of thoughts, I went to sleep.

But not for long. Ronnie roused me early, at the pre-arranged time, as we wanted to talk about our book project before I took the train home. After a fine breakfast (prepared by Ronnie) and a brief time out for some photographs, we settled down on the sofa. We began the first draft of an outline for our joint effort, promising to send each other our subsequent revisions in the weeks ahead. Ronnie then drove me to the train station. On the platform, he gave me the customary "shaman's hug," and we said a loud "cheers" to "50/50," as we called our project. We promised to stay in touch, and to visit each other soon. I waved from, and he to, the slowly rolling train. The last I saw Ronnie in the flesh he was walking toward the car, waving at me with both arms, disappearing abruptly as the train gathered speed. I received the following letter from Marguerita on June 14, 1989:

Dear Theo,

Thank you for sending the photos - they are very nice - and for your lovely letters. I am writing to let you know we are to be here longer than originally thought - until December at least and your company was so delightful that I would like to invite you whenever you feel like dropping in for a weekend or whatever. When I told Ronnie that I was writing to you he mentioned to remind you about the idea of editing a book 50/50 . . . and also to send you his very best wishes. All the very best for now to you and to your family, with love, Marguerita.

At the end of June, I sent Ronnie my first revision of our proposal, and he replied with a longish letter on August 1st:

Dear Theo,

I woke up with rather a start today, that a month has passed since your letter and notes. They are very welcome and take us far along the road we want to go . . .

As for the book:

1. The Politics of Truth has a good ring to it. I think we can live with that until/if something else occurs to us that supersedes it along the way . . .

4. in general, I like your thoughts for the book. I would want contributors to commit themselves to an actual examination of the work of R.D.L. -specifically, not vague programmatic manifestos.

e.g. (a) The shift of perspective - all through from the Kraepelin interview in The Divided Self to the carefully worded relevant part of Intro. to Sanity, Madness & the Family to the point by point contrasting vignettes in The Facts of Life to the complete de-anchoring from "clinical" co-ordinates in the vignettes in The Voice of Experience.

(b) The focus on person-person conjunction-disjunction as the unacknowledged cleavage/ Spaltung in the I-Thou non-actualized ontologically possible human connection; again present from beginning of my oeuvre, to now . . .

(c) The actual data in the work. The presentation of actual metanoiac transformations and modulations of experience which - sometimes, not always as indicated in The Politics of Experience, seems to have a healing value. This metaphor of a "journey" has been persistently treated with scorn and contempt.

(d) The theoretical and practical study of social context . Reason and Violence via Sartre, Oxford Companion of Mind article, Phoenix Arizona articles.

(e) The "look," the way of seeing, as constitutions of what is seen etc., who sees whom how.

(f) Interpersonal Perception.

(g) Phenomenology anchored, manifested in actual situations.

(h) Praxis and process. I went into this in detail in my Burghölzli talk this year - they all seemed completely bemused, but, this time, very respectful etc.

That is, I think we should get participants. very explicit, and in no way reluctant agreement to address specific issues (theoretical and practical) thematized in the oeuvre of R.D.Laing.

We should go over these themata together, name them, and make sure they "cover" most of the territory. Both Bob Mullan (biographer) and Brian Bates could be useful here. We might contrive to get us all in the same place at the same time . . .

Publication 1992 . . .

So - don. t take so long to answer as I have!

Love, from Marguerita, Charles, and me, to you, and Heidemarie, Dimitrij, Anatol, and Raphael.

Ronnie⁶

I answered this detailed outline, with a proposed date to meet for face discussions. But late at night, on the 23rd of August 1989, I came home from choir practice, having just rehearsed "The Song of the Sun," by St. Francis of Assisi. There were candles lit all around our house. Heidemarie placed them there, after Francis Huxley had called in my absence, saying: "Terrible news, Ronnie is dead." After conversations with Francis Huxley, Jutta Laing and Adrian Laing, we retired with streaming eyes and aching hearts.

The following day, the *St. Galler Tagblatt* asked me for an obituary, which I provided in the form of a telephone interview with the news editor, Eleonore Baumberger. She created the following headline on page two: "It Does Not Disturb Me, To Be a Human Being."⁷ There, I noted that, contrary to popular belief, Ronnie Laing was no utopian, and did not have a ready made formula for a better society. The principal thing for him was love, and to live together, acknowledging and accepting our inner demons, and those of others. What disturbed him was that we live in a society which makes living in this mode of love and acceptance very difficult. Laing knew how psychiatrists frequently fear a stark, authentic encounter with the confusion and inner turmoil of their patients. A genuine therapy always touches one's own soul.

Ronnie Laing once dreamt of a football match where, as he put it, "*I am both sides.*" *It only ends when "the game turns into a dance."*⁸

Endnotes

1. *Festschrift for R.D.Laing's 60th Birthday*, 7.10. 1987

R.D.Laing: So What ?

1. Poet - Psychiatrist, Psychiatrist - Poet Martin Esslin
2. I am remembering an earlier self . . . Susan Griffin
3. Experiencing R.D.Laing Fritjof Capra
4. Variation on my Theme R. D. Laing
5. I had a dream of Therapy Theodor Itten
6. Across an Abyss Douglas Kirsner
7. Appearance and Liberation Andrew Collier
8. Journeys Ross V. Speck
9. Nature is not a Paradigm Morris Berman
10. On the production of Subjectivity Felix Guattari
11. Daseinsanalytic Dream Interpretation Gion Condrau
12. In Search of True Psychiatry David Goldblatt
13. Conversation with Ronald Laing Heidemarie Krolak

Marguerita Romain-Kendon, Theodor Itten

2 Francis Huxley, Where the Map is the Territory, in: *Theoria to Theory*, 1974, Vol.8, pp.289-301.

3 SCDGU-R.D.Laing Collection, Call No. K 35 - Patmos Meditations 1968, Book 2, No.1

4 Special Collections Department - Glasgow University Library (SCDGU), R.D.Laing Collection, Call No. A 326 - Lies of Love and Love of Lies, Version 8/1988

5 Theodor Itten - Traumtod : Todesträume; in : Neues vom Tod, Hrsg. Adolf Holl, Ueberreuter-Sachbuch, Wien 1990, pp.127-148.

6 Letters - R.D.Laing to Theodor Itten, in: *R. D. Laing: Creative Destroyer*, Ed. Bob Mullan, Cassell - London, 1997, pp.172-177.

7 "Es stört mich nicht ein Mensch zu sein" - Zum Tode von R.D.Laing. Interview mit einem Freund & Berufskollegen, Theodor Itten, von R.D.Laing. St.Galler Tagblatt, 25.8. 1989, p. 2

Interview with Eleanore Baumberger. - Reprint in:PMS-Aktuell 3/1989, p.41. CH-Weinfelden.

8 SCDGU-R.D.Laing Collection, Call No.K23, Dreams - Sept. '63-July '65.

I wish to thank Noel Cobb for his gentle and clear editorial help, as always remembering: *Beatitudo ultima finis vitae humanae est.* T.I.

[*Editor's Note:* A year after Laing's death, Theodor Itten learned of my forthcoming book, which was eventually titled *The Wing of Madness: The Life and Work of R.D. Laing*. He tried to get my help in engaging a publisher to place Laing's *Festschrift*, and despite my enthusiasm, I was unable to do so. Fortunately, much of the material in the *Festschrift* appeared later in *R.D. Laing: Creative Destroyer*, edited by Bob Mullan. Theodor Itten and Noel Cobb are currently trying to resurrect *The Politics of Truth*. D.B.]

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