



CELEBRATING OUR 10TH SYMPOSIA ANNIVERSARY

R.D. Laing

IN THE 21ST CENTURY

September 24-29, 2023

ESALEN INSTITUTE
Big Sur, California

**SYMPOSIUM SPONSORED
& ORGANIZED BY**
Free Association, Inc.,
San Francisco, California

FACULTY

Fritjof Capra, Ph.D. (zoom)
Nita Gage, DSPS
Michael Guy Thompson, Ph.D.

GUEST SPEAKERS

Rebecca Esho Greenslade (zoom)
Nina Gutin, Ph.D.
Will Hall
Douglas Kirsner, Ph.D. (zoom)
Heather LaFace, Ph.D.
Jon Mills, Psy.D., Ph.D., ABPP
Michael Montgomery, Ph.D.
James Norwood, Psy.D.
Astréa Issler Ribeiro
Sanford Rosenberg, Ph.D.
Rinat Tal, M.D.
Dina Tyler

FOR INFORMATION, CONTACT
Michael Guy Thompson, Ph.D.
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WHAT IS HEALING?

A FIVE-DAY SYMPOSIUM & WORKSHOP AT

Esalen

R. D. LAING wore many robes in his career including psychiatrist, psychoanalyst, philosopher, social critic, author, poet, and mystic, and at the peak of his fame in the 1970s, he was the most widely-read psychiatrist in the world. Arguably the most controversial psychoanalyst since Freud, Laing's meteoric rise in the 1960s was the result of his rare ability to make complex ideas accessible with such best-selling classics as *The Divided Self* (1960), *Sanity, Madness and Family* (1964), *The Politics of Experience* (1967), *Knots* (1970), and many others. Laing's impassioned plea for a more humane treatment of those in society who are most vulnerable catapulted him into the vanguard of intellectual and cultural debate about the nature of sanity and madness, and inspired a generation of psychology students, intellectuals, and artists to turn this disarming Scotsman into a social icon.

One of the most seminal aspects to Laing's approach to the *human condition* was his exploration into how human beings treat each other: the healing dimension to our relationships. Laing was a psychoanalyst, philosopher, and existentialist, with a no-holds barred critique of the dark side to the human condition, as well as its virtues. Our symposium this year will explore what healing entails, in all of the many contexts in which we experience it, including psychotherapy, altered states, psychedelics, education, and any experience that brings us peace of mind and a more meaningful existence.

In previous Esalen workshops we have explored the meaning of sanity, therapy, authenticity, love, happiness, spirituality, and ethics. The focus of our annual Esalen symposium and workshop this year shifts to psychotherapy and training in existential psychoanalysis, a more philosophical yet personal approach to therapy initiated by Laing at the Philadelphia Association in London. Two of our Faculty trained with Laing and founded FREE ASSOCIATION, Inc., and its **New School for Existential Psychoanalysis** to further this approach to healing. Several of our students will also present their work at this year's symposium. The workshop will be comprised of theoretical presentations, panel discussions, and experiential exercises to demonstrate practical aspects of Laing's legacy.

Among the questions we will explore:

1. What is the relation between healing and treatment?
2. What experiences have we enjoyed that we believe were healing, and why?
3. Does healing require 'treatment,' or can extra-clinical experiences be just as healing, or more so?
4. Is love an essential aspect of healing, or does it get in the way?
5. Does healing reduce suffering, or does it simply increase our capacity to suffer?

Join us for five breathtaking days at Esalen Institute on the Pacific Coast to explore how we can promote more humane and effective ways of helping those suffering from everyday life.

—MICHAEL GUY THOMPSON, NITA GAGE, FRITJOF CAPRA

FOR INSTRUCTIONS ON HOW TO REGISTER & LODGING DETAILS, PLEASE VISIT:
<https://www.esalen.org/workshops/rd-laing-in-the-twenty-first-century-what-is-healing-092423>



R.D. Laing in the 21st Century



WHAT IS HEALING?

Esalen Institute, Big Sur, California • September 24 – 29, 2023

Symposium Workshop Co-Organizers & Faculty: Fritjof Capra, PhD • Nita Gage, DSPS • Michael Guy Thompson, PhD

CELEBRATING THE TENTH ANNIVERSARY OF R.D. LAING IN THE 21ST CENTURY SYMPOSIA!

SUNDAY – SEPTEMBER 24

7:15 – 9:30 pm

Michael Guy Thompson, PhD, Fritjof Capra, PhD, Nita Gage, DSPS

Welcome! Let's Get Acquainted!

We will spend this initial, breaking-in meeting to introduce ourselves to each other and give you an idea of what our five days together will be like. We will begin with introducing the three principal faculty and organizers of our Laing Workshop, then our guest speakers, and finally a chance for everyone attending this special week to introduce yourselves and what you are hoping to gain from this experience.

MONDAY – SEPTEMBER 25

9:30 – 10:40 am

Michael Guy Thompson, PhD

What is Called Healing?

(moderated by Nita Gage)

Michael will explore the fascinating etymology of the word "heal," which is cognate with such terms as sane, sound, sanitary, cure, and whole in order to offer a non-medicalized and diagnostically-laden notion of how existential psychoanalysis, and psychotherapy generally, may further a healthy way to live, in the broadest existential sense.

10:50 am – 12:00 pm

Fritjof Capra, PhD

Healing and the Regeneration of Life

(moderated by Michael Guy Thompson)

Drawing on his extensive life-long research into the human condition, Fritjof Capra will explore how the concept of regeneration can be understood as the very essence of life's self-organization, and how healing can be conceived as a particular kind of regeneration, which may in turn involve crisis and transformation.

12:00 pm – 1:00 pm

Heather LaFace, PhD

Ecological Healing in Group Therapy

(moderated by Nita Gage)

Heather will explore alternative ways of viewing anomalous and non-ordinary states of being from an ecological framework that challenges mainstream psychological theory and practice. She will argue that ecological approaches to embodiment further a more enduring exploration of the "I" in the context of world-environment-culture.

1:00 – 4:00 pm

Lunch Break and Play Time. *Lunch at the Dining Hall and outside on the property. Enjoy the rest of the break to relax and smell the ocean. Please return to the afternoon portion of today's program promptly at 4:00 pm.*

4:00 – 5:20 pm

Will Hall

Laing and Healing a Global Politics Gone Mad

(moderated by Nita Gage)

Laing championed the "obstinate attempt of two people to recover the wholeness of being human." Today's digital outrage theater – liberal vs. conservative, us vs. them – is closer to true extermination than Laing dared envision. Can Laing's unique non-politics ("acid Marxism") heal war and ecological collapse? Can the politics of madness overcome the madness of politics?"

5:30 – 6:30 pm

All Workshop Participants

Break-out Group Reflection

(moderated by Nita Gage & Michael Guy Thompson)

We will use these last thirty minutes of our day to reflect on issues that might have come up in today's program, including questions or concerns that some of you may not have had the opportunity to address in the discussion time that was available.

6:30 – 8:00 pm

Dinner Break – followed by a FREE EVENING! *Dinner in the Esalen Dining Hall and outdoors. Please enjoy the rest of your evening by the Fire Pit, the Terrace off the Dining Hall, or Esalen's legendary Hot Tubs.*

TUESDAY – SEPTEMBER 26

9:30 – 10:30 am

Nita Gage, Will Hall, Heather LaFace, Dina Tyler and Workshop Participants!

All-Day Breath Workshop — A Tribute to Laing's Famous Workshops from the 1970s (moderated by Nita Gage)

Part I: Breath Work

Healing and Breath Work in the Tradition of R. D. Laing (moderated by Nita Gage)

Drawing from her own extensive experience moderating such workshops, Nita Gage will facilitate an opportunity for anyone who is interested in participating in this exercise to access mild altered states via guided imagery and deep breathing. This workshop is intended to simulate the kind of workshops Laing was famous for initiating in London among his students in order to gain greater awareness of the potential for expanded modes of consciousness readily accessible to us. This one-hour introduction will presage a two-hour morning session in which participants will participate in a breath work experiential exercise.

10:30 am – 1:00 pm

Breath Work (continued)

Experiential Exercise (moderated by Nita Gage)

Part II: Breath Work Experiential Session

Nita will facilitate the chance to experience states of expanded consciousness elicited via deep breathing and other Shamanic exercises, followed by the opportunity to process these experiences in a warm and safe environment. We will repeat this exercise in the afternoon portion of this all-day experiential exercise.

1:00 – 4:00 pm

Lunch Break and Play Time. *Lunch at the Dining Hall and outside on the property. Enjoy the rest of the break to relax and smell the ocean. Please return to the rest of today's program promptly at 4:00 pm.*

4:00 – 5:30 pm

Breath Work (continued)

Experiential Exercise (moderated by Nita Gage)

Part III: Breath Work Experiential Session (continued)

In this 90-minute session Nita will continue to facilitate the chance to experience states of expanded consciousness elicited via deep breathing exercises, followed by opportunities to process these experiences in a warm and safe environment.

5:30 – 6:30 pm

Breath Work (continued)

Breath Work Group Process Session (moderated by Nita Gage)

Part IV: Break up into small groups for processing today's experience

6:30 – 8:00 pm

Dinner Break – followed by a FREE EVENING! *Dinner in the Esalen Dining Hall and outdoors. Please enjoy the rest of your evening by the Fire Pit, the Terrace off the Dining Hall, or Esalen's legendary Hot Tubs.*

WEDNESDAY – SEPTEMBER 27

9:30 – 10:40 am

Rinat Tal, MD

The Healing Potential of Medicines and Psychedelics (moderated by Nita Gage)

Rinat will explore and contrast the proper use of psychiatric medications in psychotherapy with the emerging use of psychedelic drugs such as ketamine, psilocybin, and MDMA.

10:50 am – 12:00 pm

Sanford Rosenberg, PhD

Dreams and Healing (moderated by Michael Guy Thompson)
"A dream uninterpreted is like a letter left unopened" (*Talmud*). Sandy Rosenberg will explore the relationship between dreams and healing, arguing that dreams do not operate according to rational ways of thinking but instead speak in an unfettered language, one that itself may further the healing process.

12:00 – 1:00 pm

Astréa Issler Ribeiro

Forgetting as a Way of Healing

(moderated by Nita Gage)

Freud states that psychotherapy patients suffer from 'reminiscences.' Is 'remembering' a source of suffering? Which memories hurt the most? Nietzsche adds that forgetting is a way to sanity. So, which events should we remember and which should we forget in order to be healed?

1:00 – 4:00 pm

Lunch Break and Play Time. *Lunch at the Dining Hall and outside on the property. Enjoy the rest of the break to relax and smell the ocean. Please return to the rest of today's program promptly at 4:00 pm.*

4:00 – 5:00 pm

Rebecca Esho Greenslade (via Zoom)

Healing as Revolution, Revolution as Healing

(moderated by Nita Gage)

Taking up the question James Hillman posed when he asked if psychotherapy could have new fantasies of itself, so that the consulting room is a cell in which revolution is prepared, this presentation will draw on radical therapy herstories, feminism and liberation psychology to consider the role of social justice work as a pathway to personal and collective healing.

5:00 – 6:00 pm

Douglas Kirsner, PhD (via Zoom)

Laing on the Human Condition

(moderated by Michael Guy Thompson)

Drawing from his seminal 1980 interview with Laing on a visit to London, Douglas Kirsner, who also lived in one of the Laingian houses in London as a way of learning more about Laing's work, will share some of Laing's personal as well as thoughtful assessments of the human condition, and the paradoxical nature of human behavior.

6:00 – 6:30 pm

All Workshop Participants

Break-out Group Reflection

(moderated by Nita Gage & Michael Guy Thompson)

We will use these last thirty minutes of our day to reflect on issues that might have come up in today's program, including questions or concerns that some of you may not have had the opportunity to address in the discussion time that was available.

6:30 – 8:00 pm

Dinner Break followed by FREE EVENING! *Dinner in the Esalen Dining Hall and outdoors. Please enjoy the rest of your evening by the Fire Pit, the Terrace off the Dining Hall, or Esalen's legendary Hot Tubs.*

WHAT IS HEALING?

SPECIAL THANKS TO ESELEN INSTITUTE & FREE ASSOCIATION, INC.

For more information and inquiries, contact Michael Guy Thompson, PhD: michaelguythompson@mac.com

THURSDAY – SEPTEMBER 28

9:30 – 11:00 am

Jon Mills, PsyD, PhD, ABPP

On Transcendence and the Sublime

(moderated by Michael Guy Thompson)

In this exploration of the true nature of spirituality and its relation to healing, Jon Mills will propose that in piety as well as disbelief, the quality of lived experience is the cornerstone in defining the phenomenology of transcendence and the sublime.

11:15 am – 1:00 pm

Michael Montgomery, PhD

Tales of Treatment

(moderated by Nita Gage)

Such a simple idea, that the humane treatment of others can be healing. Michael Montgomery will use this hour to share his experience of practicing psychotherapy in four countries and the impact that Laing had on his journey. Michael is also one of our inaugural candidates in the New School for Existential Psychoanalysis.

1:00 – 4:00 pm

Lunch Break and Play Time. *Lunch at the Dining Hall and outside on the property. Enjoy the rest of the break to relax and smell the ocean. Please return to the rest of today's program promptly at 4:00 pm.*

4:00 – 5:00 pm

Nina J. Gutin, PhD

Suicide????!

(moderated by Nita Gage)

In her presentation, Nina will present a wide variety of perspectives about the nature of suicide: how it is understood, experienced, judged and treated. She will show how these perspectives and assumptions shape how we view and relate to those with suicidal experiences, and also have implications for those impacted by suicide loss. Nina is also one of our inaugural candidates in the New School for Existential Psychoanalysis.

5:00 – 6:00 pm

James Norwood, PsyD

Hunting Power: How Therapy Can Inspire a Life of Wonder and Passion

(moderated by Michael Guy Thompson)

Drawing from the work of Carlos Castaneda, Nietzsche, and R. D. Laing, James will explore the healing element of psychotherapy by emphasizing its power to enhance the courage and authenticity of the therapist, by focusing on the essential role of passion and wonder.

6:00 – 6:30 pm

All Workshop Participants

Break-out Group Reflection

(moderated by Nita Gage & Michael Guy Thompson)

We will use these last thirty minutes of our day to reflect on issues that might have come up in today's program, including questions or concerns that some of you may not have had the opportunity to address in the discussion time that was available.

6:30 – 8:00 pm

Dinner Break followed by our end of the Workshop Party!

Dinner in the Esalen Dining Hall. Please join us on the lawn after dinner for our Circle of Joy to celebrate our Esalen workshop with song and good cheer!

FRIDAY – SEPTEMBER 29

9:30 am – 12:00 noon

Michael Guy Thompson & Nita Gage, DSPS

Closing Comments and Audience Discussion!

We want to spend this last block of time together to review our five days at Esalen and what it has meant to you, and to look ahead to next year, when we will host another five-day experience of *R. D. Laing in the Twenty-First Century*.

Good-bye!

DON'T FORGET! CHECK-OUT IS 10:00 AM BEFORE our Friday morning wrap-up. Make sure you are ready if you have booked a return shuttle to the airport.



Fritjof Capra, PhD, physicist and systems theorist, is a founding director of the Center for Ecoliteracy in Berkeley, CA. He serves on the faculty of the Amana-Key executive education program in Sao Paulo, Brazil, is a Fellow of Schumacher College (U.K.), and serves on the Council of Earth Charter International. Dr. Capra is the author of several international bestsellers, including *The Tao of Physics* (1975), *The Web of Life* (1996), and *The Science of Leonardo* (2007). He is coauthor, with Pier Luigi Luisi, of the multidisciplinary textbook, *The Systems View of Life* (Cambridge University Press, 2014). His new online course (www.capracourse.net) is based on his textbook. He lives in Berkeley, CA.

Nita Gage, DSPS, trained with R.D. Laing and his associates at the Philadelphia Association from 1974–1980. She left London and returned to America in 1980 and pursued post-graduate education in psychology and psycho spiritual studies. She trained and studied with shamanic teachers and specializes in integrative psycho spiritual healing. Nita is co-founder of the NeuroImaginal™ Institute, www.neuroimaginalinstitute.com; Director of Healer Within Retreats, www.healerwithinretreats.com, teaching medical and addiction professionals NeuroImaginal Practices for health and well being. She is the author (with Linda Star Wolf) of *Soul Whispering: The Art of Awakening Shamanic Consciousness*, and lives in Maui, Hawaii.

Rebecca Esho Greenslade is an existential-feminist psychotherapist, supervisor and writer. In 2018 she founded Gaia Therapy Project, which now operates as a community therapy collective on an urban farm in East London. Rebecca supervises therapists in training at The Minster Centre, London and is undertaking PhD research in feminist psychotherapy and post-capitalist desire with the Department of Psychosocial Studies at Birkbeck University, London. She is the founder of the Feminist Therapy Network. Rebecca is a Zen student and practitioner in the White Plum Lineage and Buddhist chaplain in training. She divides her time between the UK and the US.

Nina J. Gutin, Ph.D. is a Clinical Psychologist in private practice in Pasadena, California. She conducts trainings in Suicide Assessment, Intervention and Postvention, facilitates “Survivors After Suicide” groups for the Didi Hirsch Suicide Prevention Center, and is a member of the Los Angeles Suicide Prevention Network. She is co-chair of the Coalition of Clinician-Survivors (which supports clinicians after personal and professional suicide losses) and has published articles about suicide loss and postvention. She is involved with several organizations which aim to challenge the ways in which suicidal experiences are conventionally understood and treated. She lives in Pasadena, California and is also a candidate at the New School for Existential Psychoanalysis.

Will Hall MA, DipIPW, is a schizophrenia diagnosis survivor, therapist, psychiatric survivor movement advocate, and international trainer on altered states of consciousness labeled psychosis. A PhD candidate at Maastricht University School for Mental Health and Neuroscience, he authored the “Harm Reduction Guide to Coming Off Psychiatric Drugs” and “Outside Mental Health”; hosts Madness Radio; and is part of the Bay Area Mandala Project. He has written for the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* and *Journal of Best Practices in Mental Health*, and appeared in *Newsweek*, *New York Times*, *Forbes*, and the films *Crazywise* and *Healing Voices*.

Douglas Kirsner, PhD, holds a Chair in Philosophy and Psychoanalytic Studies at Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia. He is the author of *The Schizoid World of Jean-Paul Sartre and R. D. Laing* (2003), and *Unfree Associations: Inside Psychoanalytic Institutes* (2009). He lived in one of the post-Kingsley Hall, Philadelphia Association households during the 1970s and has retained a special research interest in Laing’s work. His 1980 interview with Laing has recently been published in *The Psychoanalytic Review* (April, 2013). Douglas is also on the faculty of the New School for Existential Psychoanalysis. He lives in Melbourne, Australia.

Heather LaFace, PhD, lives in Los Angeles where she sees patients in private and group practice settings. Over the past 9 years she has been developing a method for an embodied group process within ecological and self-organizing frameworks. Her current writing and research interests explore paradigm-shifting connections between affective neuroscience, philosophy, and social theory, with a special interest in facilitating our unique social engagement pathways to the experiences we find truly healing. She has served as adjunct

faculty at Antioch University Santa Barbara as well as at Pacifica Graduate Institute, where she received her PhD in Clinical Psychology. She is a supervisor and on the faculty with the New School for Existential Psychoanalysis.

Jon Mills, PsyD, PhD, ABPP is Honorary Professor, Department of Psychosocial & Psychoanalytic Studies, University of Essex, UK; on the Faculty at the Postgraduate Program in Psychoanalysis & Psychotherapy, Gordon F. Derner School of Psychology, Adelphi University, and a Supervising Analyst and Faculty Member at the New School for Existential Psychoanalysis, based in San Francisco. He is the recipient of numerous awards for his scholarship, and the author and/or editor of over 30 books in philosophy, psychoanalysis, psychology, and cultural studies including most recently *Archetypal Ontology* (2023), published by Routledge.

Michael R. Montgomery, PhD, is an existential psychotherapist and clinical social worker. He has practiced and researched psychotherapy in four countries, in private and public settings. He specializes in complex trauma and extreme emotional states drawing from existential–psychoanalytic and dialogical approaches to support healing. He is a regular contributor to the Society of Existential Analysis and is an ordained Buddhist. Michael lives in Boston, MA and is also a candidate at the New School for Existential Psychoanalysis.

James Norwood, PhD, a graduate of the California Institute for Integral Studies (San Francisco), PsyD program in Clinical Psychology, has been studying existential psychoanalysis with Michael Guy Thompson for the past six years and practices psychotherapy in San Francisco. He has been one of the primary people involved in Gnosis Retreat Center, a residential project to provide respite for people experiencing extreme states, and the founding of the New School for Existential Psychoanalysis, of which he is Associate Director. He lives in San Francisco.

Astréa Issler Ribeiro is a psychoanalyst in Sao Paulo, Brazil and in addition to a private practice she conducts outdoor sessions with people on the streets. She also has been working at the public psychiatric day hospital and coordinates therapeutic groups. She is also an artist and philosopher. Astrea is also on the faculty and a supervisor at the New School for Existential Psychoanalysis.

Sanford Rosenberg, PhD, is President of Media Research Associates, and has thirty-five years of experience in Media Psychology. He is a clinician, executive coach, educator, and consultant on media projects including movies, games, and the web, applying the methods of dream psychology and personal mythology to media. Sandy specializes in qualitative knowledge-based research and clinical applications, examining the relationship between language, story, structure, symbol, image, emotion, and experience. Sandy is also a faculty member and supervisor at the New School for Existential Psychoanalysis. He lives in Oakland, California.

Rinat Tal, MD, is a psychiatrist and psychotherapist in private practice in Los Angeles. Her work focuses on minimizing medication management with clients with various conditions, including extreme states, incorporating a variety of influences that focus on the transformative aspects of the client-practitioner relationship. She has an abiding interest in alternatives to conventional psychiatry. Rinat is also on the faculty and a supervisor at the New School for Existential Psychoanalysis.

Michael Guy Thompson, PhD, received his psychoanalytic training from R. D. Laing and associates at the Philadelphia Association in London, and served as the organization’s administrator from 1973–1980. He is Personal and Supervising Analyst and Faculty Member, Psychoanalytic Institute of Northern California, San Francisco, and Founder and Director, New School for Existential Psychoanalysis, a virtual two-year training program modeled on his own training with R.D. Laing, in San Francisco. He is the author of over 100 journal articles, book chapters, and reviews, as well as numerous books, *The Truth About Freud’s Technique* (1994), *The Ethic of Honesty* (2004), *The Legacy of R. D. Laing: An Appraisal of His Contemporary Relevance* (2015), and most recently, *The Death of Desire: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness* (2017 2nd ed.), an extensively revised and expanded edition of the original, published by Routledge. His current book project, *Essays in Existential Psychoanalysis: On the Primacy of Authenticity*, will be published by Routledge this year. He is lives in Berkeley, California.