

# R.D. Laing

## IN THE 21ST CENTURY

July 16-21, 2017

ASILOMAR  
CONFERENCE  
GROUNDS

Pacific Grove, California

SYMPOSIUM SPONSORED  
& ORGANIZED BY

Free Association, Inc.,  
San Francisco, California

### SPEAKERS & FACILITATORS

Fritjof Capra, Ph.D.

Michael Cornwall, Ph.D.

Frank Echenhofer, PhD

Nita Gage

Jack Gipple

Rebecca Greenslade

Will Hall

Michelle Anne Hobart

Douglas Kirsner, Ph.D.

Heather LaFace, Ph.D.

Ralph Metzner, PhD

James Norwood

James Penner, Ph.D.

Michael Guy Thompson, Ph.D.

Connor Tindall

Andrew Turkington, RN, LMFT

Dina Tyler

### FOR INFORMATION OR INQUIRIES

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## What Are Altered Realities? A FIVE-DAY SYMPOSIUM & WORKSHOP



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.

Now, in the third edition of this newly inaugurated annual event, Laing's former students and colleagues from around the world, including Fritjof Capra, Michael Guy Thompson, Douglas Kirsner, Ralph Metzner, Nita Gage and others, will meet for five days at **Asilomar in Pacific Grove, California**, to continue our critique of Laing's contemporary legacy. Last year we explored one of Laing's most fervent questions: *What Is Therapeutic?*, from a variety of perspectives; the year before that we explored the nature of sanity and madness. This year we will continue our ongoing and multifaceted conversation by asking, *What Are Altered Realities?*, in all their clinical, philosophical, and political permutations. Joining us again will be some of the leading lights in the burgeoning Alternative to Psychiatry Movement, including Will Hall, Michael Cornwall, Dina Tyler, Jack Gipple and others, to share alternatives to the contemporary, often abusive psychiatric treatment for those in extreme mental and emotional distress.

#### Among the questions we will explore:

1. What does the term, *altered realities*, or states, connote?
2. What is the nature of the variety of altered realities we are capable of experiencing, including mindfulness, yoga, meditation, breath work, or imbibing a drug, whether psychedelic or psychotropic?
3. What are the variety of ways that our realities are altered spontaneously, such as falling in love, losing one's temper, achieving equanimity, going mad, or succumbing to extreme fear, and how can such states help us?
4. How might we employ ways of altering our reality deliberately, in such a way that our capacity to live well and more lovingly is enhanced?
5. What are the spiritual dimensions to altered states, and how might traditional spiritual practices inform our ability to achieve higher planes of consciousness?

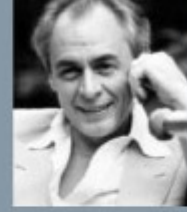
Join us for five days at breathtaking Asilomar Conference Grounds on the Pacific Coast to celebrate the **50th Anniversary of the Summer of Love** and promote more humane and effective ways of helping those suffering from extreme states.

—MICHAEL GUY THOMPSON, NITA GAGE, FRITJOF CAPRA, STEVE SORKIN

# CELEBRATING THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ICONIC SUMMER OF LOVE!



# R.D. Laing in the 21st Century



## What are Altered Realities?

Asilomar Conference Grounds, Pacific Grove, California • July 16 – 21, 2017

Symposium Workshop Co-organizers: Nita Gage | Steven Sorkin, PhD | Michael Guy Thompson, PhD

### SUNDAY – JULY 16

6:30 – 9:30 pm

**Michael Guy Thompson, PhD, Fritjof Capra, PhD, Nita Gage, and Heather LaFace, PhD**

*Catered dinner by the sea and Welcome Session: Let's Get Acquainted!*

We will spend this initial, breaking-in meeting to share a catered dinner by the sea at the Surf and Sand Meeting Room and introduce ourselves to each other. This meeting will give you an idea of what our five days together will be like and explain what went into our decision to arrange for this very special program for you. We will begin with introducing the four principal organizers of our Workshop to you, then the presenters, and finally a chance for everyone attending this special week to introduce yourselves and what you hope to gain from this experience.

### MONDAY – JULY 17

9:30 – 10:50 am

**Michael Guy Thompson, PhD**

(moderated by Douglas Kirsner)

*On Falling in Love*

Michael Thompson, author of *The Death of Desire*, will explore how the phenomenon of falling in love alters our reality, for better or ill. Among the questions he will explore are: What are the preconditions for falling in love? What is the erotic nature of falling in love, and why do we fall out of love? Is this phenomenon real, or imagined? Is erotic love sufficient to endure, or are there other, higher forms of love necessary? What is the relation between falling in love and madness?

11:00 am – 12:30 pm

**Fritjof Capra, PhD**

(moderated and followed with a discussion by Heather LaFace, PhD)

*What Is Reality?*

Fritjof Capra, the renowned physicist and author of the groundbreaking classic, *The Tao of Physics*, will reflect on how his views about the nature of "reality" have been changed by quantum physics, cognitive science, and by the counterculture of the 1960s. **Fritjof's presentation will be moderated and followed by a discussion with Los Angeles psychologist, Heather LaFace, PhD.**

12:30 – 3:30 pm

**Lunch Break and Play Time**

*Lunch at the Dining Hall, enjoy the rest of the break to relax and smell the ocean. Please return to the afternoon portion of today's program promptly at 3:30 pm.*

3:30 – 4:50 pm

**Douglas Kirsner, PhD**

(moderated by Michael Guy Thompson)

*Laing on Altered States*

Douglas Kirsner, the Australian philosopher, psychoanalytic scholar and author of *The Schizoid World of Jean-Paul Sartre* and R. D. Laing, will draw from Laing's little-known sources, unpublished lecture materials and personal asides with colleagues, to explore his relationship with altered states. Topics will include Laing's use of drugs, including LSD at Kingsley Hall, his experimental therapy center in London, as well as other practices he employed to alter one's reality.

5:00 – 6:30 pm

**Michael Guy Thompson, PhD, Nita Gage, James Norwood, Connor Tindall**

(moderated by Michael Guy Thompson, Nita Gage)

*Gnosis Retreat Center: Bringing Kingsley Hall to the Bay Area*

The four speakers are currently planning to establish a residential community modeled on Kingsley Hall and Portland Road in London, to be located in San Francisco or surrounding area. Like Portland Road, this house is intended to be a refuge for those in crisis, or for those in chronic need, as well as for those adventurers simply seeking a more sane way to live, without medicating drugs. This household, or "re-treat" center, will be operated under the aegis of Free Association, Inc., the same not-for-profit association that organized the 2013 Laing Symposium at Wagner College in New York, as well as the Laing Symposium & Workshop hosted at Esalen last year and now. Michael, Nita, James and Connor will share their vision of this project and how you might help to make it a reality.

6:30 – 8:00 pm

**Dinner Break – followed by a Free Evening!**

*Please enjoy the rest of the evening relaxing with a walk on the beach and sand dunes, hang out at our designated hospitality space in Afterglow, or dip into nearby Pacific Grove, Monterey or Carmel for an after-dinner cordial or cocktail.*

## TUESDAY – JULY 18

10:00 am – 12:00 noon

**Ralph Metzner, PhD**

(moderated by Michael Guy Thompson and Douglas Kirsner)

*Altered States I: Laing, Leary and LSD*

**Followed by discussion with James Penner, PhD, Douglas Kirsner, PhD, and Michael Guy Thompson, PhD**

Ralph Metzner, the renowned Harvard psychologist, author, and researcher and early collaborator with Timothy Leary and Richard Alpert into altered states, will describe how Laing and Leary first met and what happened when they took LSD together.

Metzner is particularly interested in the impact that the recent legalization of marijuana in California will have and the potential for expanded research into other psychedelics, including psilocybin and MDMA. Metzner is also a co-founder and President of the **Green Earth Foundation**.

12:00 – 4:00 pm

**Lunch Break and Play Time**

*Lunch at the Dining Hall, enjoy the rest of the break to relax and smell the ocean, or take advantage of this extended break to arrange for an afternoon massage with Heather James. Please return to the afternoon portion of today's program promptly at 4:00 pm.*

4:00 – 6:00 pm

**Frank Echenhofer, PhD**

(moderated by James Penner)

*Altered States II: Altered States and Ayahuasca*

**Followed by discussion with James Penner and Ralph Metzner, PhD**

Frank Echenhofer has conducted research into the use of psychedelics for many years, with a special interest in the spiritual and medicinal use of Ayahuasca. In this special two-hour presentation and panel discussion, Frank will share the fruits of his research into the uses of Ayahuasca with us, including the therapeutic uses of other psychedelic substances. The second hour of this presentation will feature a round-table discussion on the use of psychedelics and their medicinal properties.

6:00 – 8:00 pm

**Dinner Break – followed by our FEATURED FILM EVENT!**

*Dinner in the Asilomar Dining Hall. Please enjoy a yummy meal in the Dining Hall. Then return promptly to Nautilus at 8:00 for our Evening Film Event!*

8:00 – 10:00 pm

**Orange Sunshine** (2016)

**A documentary film about the Brotherhood of Eternal Love!**

(moderated by Michael Guy Thompson, PhD, Fritjof Capra, PhD and Douglas Kirsner, PhD)

*Orange Sunshine* is the never-before-told story of the Brotherhood of Eternal Love – a spiritual group of surfers and hippies in California. They became the world's largest suppliers of LSD spanning the 60s and 70s. This feature-length documentary follows their rise to star-status in the psychedelic movement as they distributed millions of hits of acid throughout the Americas and Europe, sometimes suppliers to Timothy Leary, even hoping to procure R. D. Laing as their would-be British distributor. Virtually everyone who consumed acid during this era sampled Orange Sunshine, whether they knew it or not. Riveting and informative.

## WEDNESDAY – JULY 19

9:30 – 10:30 am

**Nita Gage, Will Hall, Michael Guy Thompson, PhD, Michelle Anne Hobart, and All Workshop Participants!**

(moderated by Nita Gage)

**Part I: Breath Work as a Means to Elicit Altered States**

*Introduction to Breath Work and Altered Reality*

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 – 12:30 pm

**Breath Work** (continued)

**Part II: Nita Gage**

*Breath Work as a Means to Elicit Altered States*

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.

12:30 – 3:30 pm

**Lunch Break and Play Time**

*Lunch at the Dining Hall, enjoy the rest of the break to relax and smell the ocean. Please return to the afternoon portion of today's program promptly at 3:30 pm.*

3:30 – 5:30 pm

**Breath Work** (continued)

**Part III: Nita Gage**

*Breath Work as a Means to Elicit Altered States continued*

In this two-hour 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

**Nita Gage, Will Hall, Michael Guy Thompson, PhD, Michelle Anne Hobart, and All Workshop Participants!**

**Part IV: Nita Gage**

*Breath Work as a Means to Elicit Altered States continued*

We will devote this final one-hour afternoon session to processing how today's experiential exercise went for all the participants, including those who served as witnesses to today's events. Followed by a free evening to gather yourselves and relax.

6:30 – 8:00 pm

**Dinner Break – followed by a Free Evening!**

*Dinner in the Asilomar Dining Hall. Please enjoy the rest of the evening relaxing with a walk on the beach and sand dunes, hang out at our designated hospitality space in Afterglow, or dip into nearby Pacific Grove, Monterey, or Carmel for an after-dinner cordial or cocktail.*

# What are Altered Realities?

SPECIAL THANKS TO ASILOMAR CONFERENCE GROUNDS & FREE ASSOCIATION, INC.

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

Please see the *Dreams & Schemes* insert for additional elective presentations available each day.

## THURSDAY – JULY 20

9:30 – 10:20 am

### Rebecca Greenslade

*In Praise of the Unaltered State*

(moderated by Andy Turkington)

Drawing from her experience as a Zen student and practitioner, Rebecca will explore the contrasting perspectives on altered states held within the Rinzai and Soto traditions of Zen Buddhism and the differing emphases these schools place upon immanent and transcendent experience. She will consider the ethical implications and responsibilities of kensho (enlightenment) and suggest that the pursuit of altered states might be something to let go of, rather than attain.

10:30 – 11:20 am

### Dina Tyler

*Meaning and Transformation in Altered States*

(moderated by Nita Gage)

Dina will talk about her efforts to create supportive environments for altered states of consciousness that allow for the full potential of humans as meaning-making agents and experiencing transformational aspects of the world beyond the mundane.

11:30 am – 12:30 pm

### Will Hall

*R. D. Laing and the Therapeutic Uses of Altered States*

(moderated by Michael Cornwall)

How can a non-dual understanding of the psyche access and integrate the healing potential in spiritual visions, mind-altering drugs, and psychotic states of consciousness?

12:30 – 3:30 pm

### Lunch Break and Play Time

*Lunch at the Dining Hall, enjoy the rest of the break to relax and smell the ocean. Please return to the afternoon portion of today's program promptly at 3:30.*

3:30 – 4:50 pm

### Michael Cornwall

*Enhancing the Subjective Loving Receptivity of Madness Caregivers*

(moderated by Michael Guy Thompson, PhD)

Michael has specialized in doing med-free therapy with people in madness since 1980 from a Laingian/Jungian orientation. He has been an Esalen workshop leader for several years. Michael experienced un-medicated madness himself and today will

share with us how madness caregivers themselves can alter and enhance their own inner physical, cognitive and emotional states to more lovingly be present and receive the archetypal, psychic, spiritual and emotional intensities of those they serve.

5:00 – 6:30 pm

### Jack Gipple

*Windhorse Teams: Joining with Madness to Find Paths Out, Together*

(moderated by Andy Turkington)

Jack Gipple has worked with the Windhorse Project since 1999. He will talk about his experiences with Windhorse teams, how they form around people trapped in states of madness, join with them, and establish systems of relationship and environment to find paths out, together.

6:30 – 8:00 pm

### Dinner Break – followed by a Free Evening!

*Catered dinner in our Hospitality Space at Afterglow. Please join us for this special good-bye catered dinner in our Afterglow Living Room space, followed by a Fire Pit by the sea and celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the Summer of Love!*

## FRIDAY – JULY 21

10:00 -12:00 noon

### Michael Guy Thompson, PhD, Fritjof Capra, PhD, Nita Gage, Heather LaFace, PhD

*Closing Comments and Audience Discussion*

We want to spend this last block of time together to review our five days at Asilomar and what it has meant to you.

How can we stay in touch and help make the connections we made with one another this week endure?

We also want to look ahead to next year, when we will host another five-day experience of *R. D. Laing in the Twenty-First Century*. Next year the theme for our annual Symposium and Workshop will be: *What Is Love?*

We hope you will be able to join us again next year for another exciting time together, when we will be back at Esalen!

**Don't forget: check-out is 12:00 noon. Make sure you are ready if you have booked a return shuttle to the airport.**

**Good-Bye!**