Building Context: Transpersonal Reality in Existential Psychotherapy

Scott Bortle
To appear in a special issue of Methods

“Different participants’ utterances and conversational actions are lined up, straightened out, rectified, or laid out in an orderly way. Participants can then achieve intersubjective understandings rather than separate understandings; they can interact rather than merely act” (Nofsinger, 1991, p. 112).

Introduction
In this paper I will focus on the way in which a number of distinct contexts are invoked during the course of the interaction between Laing and Leila. An important aspect of the work that Laing does in his demonstration can be found in his willingness to take these contexts seriously and, so to speak, step into them and grant both their reality and their relevance. The result is that the “here-and-now” of the conversation is progressively enriched: Laing and Leila come to know where each other stand in terms of these contexts. Within this enriched here-and-now, Laing is able to help Leila untie some of the knots that bind her.

And I will argue that Laing is himself aware of these phenomena. When Laing returns to the podium at the end of the demonstration--accompanied, dramatically, by Leila--he is asked by a member of the audience to clarify remarks he had made earlier about “transpersonal reality--stepping into something that is a shared reality between you and the person you’re working with.” Laing picks his words carefully:

“It’s with the greatest reservations that I think one can talk about transpersonal reality. It is certainly non-verbal. And it is fundamentally, essentially impossible to express in the content of words. It is possible to convey it, however, more through words, in the music of words. In the manner of words.”

He continued:

“When one tries to explain one’s awareness of that transpersonal field to people who are not aware of it--and I know that in this company there are a lot of you who are aware of it, and many of you who are not aware of it. To those of you who are aware of it, you know how difficult it is to talk about it. And to those of you who are not aware of it, I would say this. Don’t be too impatient. Don’t, because you don’t understand it, because you’re mystified, don’t get angry.

8/24/01
Something is happening, something is happening, something is happening between us in this hall at this very moment. We can’t express it in words.”

I suggest that the “transpersonal field” Laing speaks of is the level of conversation at which context operates. Laing is saying that if one is not aware of context, one will be unable to see how therapy works. The analysis here (and in Goldman, this issue, Hwang, this issue, and Harper, this issue) corroborates this; it does indeed show that Laing “steps into” context in a manner unusual for a therapist. But there is nothing mysterious going on. Leila, in answer to a comment from the audience, says, “I think this guy would make a good therapist--he’s able to read people’s minds” --but Laing is not reading her mind: rather, he is unusually sensitive to important pragmatic devices and features of everyday conversation. In particular, Laing is able to respond effectively when there becomes apparent in Leila’s discourse a close linkage between two central contexts: that of family, and that of Christianity. In doing so he is able to foster ontological change.

Ontological change

What do we mean when we say that someone changes? It is tempting to envision a psychological self in interaction with an external world, undergoing conscious or unconscious structural changes--either through passive modification of its parts or more actively adopting new attitudes or beliefs. This cannot be our understanding, as phenomenologists, of what it means for a person to change. Martin Heidegger insists in Being and Time that the human being enjoys a particular and exceptional existence, exceptional to the point that he writes of the specifically human kind of being, calling it “Dasein,” literally “being-there,” or as Heidegger glosses it, “being-in-the-world.” If he is correct then a dualistic basis for thinking about human change will not suffice.

Heidegger’s analysis is an ontological one: it aims not so much at what we know, but at what exists for us and how it exists, and how we exist. The crucial importance of Heidegger’s analysis in Being and Time (Heidegger, 1927/1962), and the reason for its continued importance 75 years since its publication, is its insistence that being is contextual. Heidegger’s was one of the first cultural and historical analyses of both human being and the being of entities. What something, or someone, is, he insisted, depends on the historical and cultural circumstances in which it, or they, are encountered. Heidegger was not an idealist; he was not asserting that if humans ceased to exist, material objects would vanish from existence. Rather, his point was that such objects would no longer have being, for being is a human issue. “To intentionality, as
comportment toward beings, there always belongs an understanding of the being of those beings” (Heidegger, 1982, p. 175, original emphasis)

Building a common ground

Linguists who study the pragmatics of conversation recognize that in any conversation “participants are situated within multiple contexts which are capable of rapid and dynamic change as the events they are engaged in unfold” (Goodwin & Duranti, 1992, p. 5, emphasis added). This is an insight important for understanding the phenomena I describe in this paper. I will explore the ways Laing and Leila invoke multiple contexts, and the ontological change that is consequent upon this.

Laing and Leila have apparently spoken to one another only briefly before they meet at the beginning of the demonstration, and so the here-and-now of their interaction is at first sparse. They don’t know what they have in common; they don’t know much about each other. It is not surprising then that we see difficulties at the start of the conversation: we find misalignment, repairs, dispreferred responses. In the first line it is not even clear who Laing speaks to, and line 2 displays Leila’s confusion. Her next utterance--“Says, he says when you when you try to torture him, he’s going to get, get a parachute and bail out” (4)--is quite bizarre. Laing attempts to align with it, with a collaborative completion (“To the nether regions”) that he must immediately repair, without apparent success.

It is not even clear that Laing and Leila are initially aligned on the purpose of their meeting, on the language-game they are playing. Laing, according to the chair of the session, is to give a demonstration of some sort. Presumably this means Laing will in some way help Leila with a problem. But at one point Leila remarks to him, “I’m just trying to help you guys um get some sense into your brains” (47) (see Harper, this issue, for more on the ambiguity of the purpose of the demonstration).

Given this lack of alignment it is not inappropriate, then, that Laing soon starts over--”Anyway...”--with a disclaimer: “I don’t know anything about (..) you at all, ah, and I don’t know what (..) to ask you about yourself” (12). This open invitation to talk is not accepted by Leila, however, who just laughs, and Laing proceeds with a series of questions increasingly narrow in scope. Leila eventually responds by offering an account of how “my brain don’t work right” (30), an account that includes mention of alternative medication (Nux Vomica), confused words and letters, and her paranoia--“And, eh, either I tend to be paranoid or errr, they really are after me I don’t know which” (36). It is unclear what context we should consider to be invoked here. In
particular, Leila displays here a lack of certainty about being paranoid—a first
display of an “ontological insecurity” on her part that I will return to shortly.

But around line 50 the context stabilizes, as Leila speaks of a “guru” she had
“for a long time” (49). Laing aligns with this topic: “What sort of guru is this
character? (55). We could call this context “Eastern religion,” or “mysticism” or “new
age”; whatever label we give it, Laing and Leila display their prior familiarity, to
each other and to us, viewers of the video tape. To pick a simple illustration of this,
Laing asks “What sort of guru...?” (55), not “what is a guru?” Leila elaborates on her
guru’s teaching about “levels of consciousness” and “the universal consciousness.”
Strikingly, Laing doesn’t display doubt about the existence of any of this, let alone its
relevance to the topic at hand. Instead he challenges her logic: “I don’t see how you can
be conscious of the universal mind, the universal mind’s conscious of you but you’re not
conscious of it” (66).

Leila struggles to formulate a reply to this challenge, after an initial uncertain
“How’s that?” (69). I won’t consider the details of her reply, beyond pointing out that
Laing again aligns with her, offering in line 77 a partial gloss of her assertion, drawing
out its implications in line 82, and characterizing his own interest in the matters under
discussion in line 87: “Well are you trying to, well, I mean, I’ve spent a lot of time trying
to work out eh, how that can, ah, be the case, if it is the case. But, I haven’t found any
answer to that (.) myself. But, eh I I still put a collar and tie on under the
circumstances. (.) Why not? Heh, heh.” We can see that Laing treats Leila here as an
equal participant in this portion of their conversation, stepping into the context she
invoked in line 49 and thus accepting it as a common ground upon which both he and she
can position themselves, and each other. If he is more forthcoming than we would
typically expect a therapist to be (cf. Goldman, this issue), this has the consequence
that both we and Leila can see where he stands in this context: who he is. The here-
and-now has been enriched, and as a result both we and they have a clearer
understanding of who both Laing and Leila are.

The reality of the conspiracy
The topic of the universal mind is dropped when Laing mentions the listening audience,
and Leila is nonplussed (“Are people listening to this?” 105) and falls silent. Laing
introduces a new topic, asking:

115   T:    And what brought you to Phoenix?
116   L:    I was trying to escape the conspiracy and it didn’t work.
Rather than casting doubt on the existence of the conspiracy of which Leila speaks, perhaps attributing it to paranoid fantasy, Laing inquires further about it. He asks, “And what conspiracy?” (120) and when Leila dodges the question he asks her to make a commitment to tell him:

124 T: Well, ah whether or not I’m a conspirator and whether
125 or not you are imagining it, are you prepared to er eh ah
126 ah give me your account of what that conspiracy is?

Leila still equivocates—“well, I think a conspiracy (.) doesn’t exist…” (129)—but Laing persists:

138 T: Is it a benign conspiracy or a malign conspiracy is it?

Leila actually then proceeds to suggest that the conspiracy is a fantasy—“you see the mind creates a whole lot of things…. So it it stands to reason if I believe in a conspiracy, people are going to act like conspirators”—and it is Laing who counters by insisting that it is real!

180 T: Well, I mean, this whole sit up set up is an enormous
181 conspiracy and you’re right in eh, right in the heart of
182 the conspiracy just now.
183 L: Ump.
184 T: So eh if you haven’t [laughs, coughs] if you, if you if
185 you came to Phoenix to get away from the conspiracy,
186 you haven’t done very well. [laughs]

Leila asks, rather meekly, “You mean the conference is a conspiracy?” ‘Yah. Course,” Laing declares broadly. “What kind of conspiracy?” she asks (191), and “What do you know about it?” (205).

To understand what is going on here it is helpful to jump ahead to the discussion with the audience that follows the demonstrate. There, back at the podium, talking about transpersonal reality, Laing will declare, “There is a conspiracy. There is a divine conspiracy which has brought us together. There is a divine conspiracy as well as a conspiracy of the devil.” And he speaks with sympathy of:

“those people who find it very difficult to live in the world of the interpersonal and the intra-personal and can see how stupid it all is, how ugly it all is, how inexpressibly confused it all is. And yet are just regarded as crazy and mad for realizing that, and either locked up or run away.”

To Leila, Laing at first jokingly implies that the conspiracy is malign because it will harm him if he describes it: “Well, I’ve got a I’ve got a plane booked, eh, to get to

Boston Sunday, so I’m not going to say what sorta conspiracy is because I want to go on
that plane in a, in good order as far as I’m concerned” (193-195). But then, in a more serious manner, he says “No, I think it is quite a benign conspiracy” (196). And he makes a connection back to the prior topic: “I think the universal mind is eh has been asleep abit... it’s sort itching a bit. And it’s sorta waking up abit and sorta doin’ something about it now(.) through us” (206-210).

Why is this important? We noted earlier that Leila displayed a lack of certainty about being paranoid. We will find Leila displaying this kind of uncertainty at other moments, about other entities and even herself: does the conspiracy exist? Is she a Christian? Is she a good daughter? I want to suggest that Leila is displaying what Laing has called “ontological insecurity.” A person who is ontologically secure will “have a sense of his presence in the world as a real, alive, whole, and, in a temporal sense, a continuous person. As such he can live out into the world and meet others: a world and others experienced as equally real, alive, whole, and continuous” (Laing, 1960/1990, p. 39). An individual lacking this ontological security “cannot take the realness, aliveness, autonomy, and identity of himself and others for granted” and as a result “has to become absorbed in contriving ways of trying to be real, of keeping himself or others alive, of preserving his identity, in efforts, as he will often put it, to prevent himself losing his self” (pp. 42-43).

Laing has located the conspiracy in the context of the conference, the here-and-now. He grants the reality of the conspiracy, about whose ontological status Leila has displayed skepticism and uncertainty. And the here-and-now context becomes further enriched.

**Invoking the context of Christianity**

This enriching of the here-and-now, and the consequent ontological clarification of the participants in the demonstration, advances further as a new context--that of Christianity--is invoked. This time it is Laing who makes the reference that invokes the context, and Leila who pursues it. This first reference to an element of Christianity occurs almost in passing in the transcript at line 213, when Laing responds to a fatalistic comment from Leila about the “universal mind” --“If it’s capable of doing anything” (212)--by saying:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>213</th>
<th>T:</th>
<th>Auh auh Well, Jesus Christ has got no other hands but ours.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>215</td>
<td>L:</td>
<td>Oh.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>216</td>
<td>T:</td>
<td>It’s only capable of doing what we do. I mean, as far as (. ) we’re concerned.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Leila seeks clarification, and Laing responds once more by offering what is, for a therapist, unusual self-disclosure:

218  L:  Are you a Christian?
219  T:  Well, that depends who I’m talking to [laughs]=
220  L:  Well, just tell me that=
221  T:  If I’m talking to you? Well, ah I’m not sure what I
222    should say about that eh, it ja ah  ah I’m a Christian in
223    the sense that Jesus Christ wasn’t eh crucified isn’t
224    wasn’t  crucified between two candlesticks in a
225    cathedral, he was crucified in the town  garbage heap
226    between two thieves, in that sense I’m a Christian.
...
230  But, I mean in another in
231    another sense I mean I I wouldn’t admit to being eh a
232    Christian in most Christian company. Why, are you a
233    Christian?
234  L:  Hell no!
235  T:  Eah eah?
236  L:  I don’t think so ah I think, I think God doesn’t know
237    what he’s doing, so um,  [sighs] who knows maybe
238    Jesus maybe Jesus had a mental problem. You know.

The context of Christianity again gives Laing and Leila common ground upon which to stand and talk. Within this context they both position themselves as radical Christians, opposed to the hypocrisy and pretensions of the tradition. At lines 221-226 Laing offers a narrative of the crucifixion that portrays Christianity as rooted in and amongst the cast-offs of society, in the garbage heap, with the thieves. Likewise, Leila’s “Hell no!” (234) and then “maybe Jesus had a mental problem” (236-8) also reject a traditional Christianity, as she adopts a position aligned with Laing’s.

Invoking the context of family:

The final context that plays an important part in this conversation is invoked in a rather more conventional manner, as Laing asks Leila about her parents. Line 285 includes a marked shift in the topic of conversation:

284  T:  [Laughter in background] They are laughing. That got
285    a laugh [laughing and coughing] (5). What ‘bout your
286    em mom and dad an that sort if thing, what sort of (.)
are they alive, eh?
The audience has laughed at a comment Leila just made, seemingly at Laing’s expense and he, in 284, remarks on their laughter. Leila falls silent, not replying, apparently self-conscious. Laing self-selects and changes the topic by inquiring after her parents. In doing this he invokes the context of family for the first time, and we shall see that this context serves as an operative background for the remainder of the conversation.

This topic shift is not unexpected, given the importance therapy generally attaches to a client’s family relationships, and given the particular role Laing has described the family playing in the genesis of psychopathology, especially schizophrenia (e.g., Laing & Esterson, 1964). But the use to which this context is put is somewhat unusual.

Laing begins with a question that is broad in scope, repairing it half way through to insert a presequence (“are they alive?”) to which Leila, after seeking clarification (“Who my parents?”) responds in the affirmative. Laing then asks her to characterize her father:

291 T: What sort of chap was your father, is your father?
292 L: Oh, well ah eh he’s a Christian preacher. Yes.
293 T: Oh, I ought to have known. [laughs]
294 L: Yeah, my parents are very religious. At least, they say they are.
295 T: Well, you’re very religious.
296 L: You know my, yeah, I guess I am.

The way Leila chooses to describe the “sort of chap” her father is re-invokes the Christian context: “Oh, well as eh he’s a Christian preacher” (291). We glimpse for the first time that Leila’s biography, her personal history, is one in which the context of family and that of Christianity must have been closely linked. When one is born the daughter of a Christian preacher, it must be difficult to distinguish family from Christianity, to separate being a good daughter from being a good Christian. And indeed, Laing responds with a newsmark: “Oh, I should have known!” that implies that a connection has become visible. He gives no explicit indication of what it is he should have known,” but it will be parsimonious if we presume that what surprises him is the same thing that we see for the first time here. This interlinking of Christianity and family would surely strike any clinician as worthy of note, and on this interpretation the force of Laing’s utterance is that features of their prior talk gibe with this new information. What we, and he, learn now about Leila’s father requires a retrospective reevaluation of the earlier exchange about Christianity, and suggests a
linkage between these two contexts--Christianity and family--that any therapist would find pregnant with possibilities. But how to act on these possibilities?

Some misalignment and pragmatic repair work follow, as Leila aligns one way with Laing’s newsmark--“Yes, they’re very religious”--while Laing offers an alternative characterization of what is new: “Well, you’re very religious.” Leila has apparently understood a different basis--her family’s religiosity--for the newsworthiness pointed to in Laing’s “I should have known.” Leila pauses as though to consider his last remark, and then gives a qualified agreement. Laing rapidly adds, interrupting her, “No, it’s not meant as an insult,” presumably designed as a repair of the pragmatic force of his 296. What has struck Laing as noteworthy is evidently not immediately apparent to Leila--not surprisingly, since it is a coincidence, a connection, that she has been living as natural necessity her entire life.

Leila freely offers more detail on her parents in the next several utterances--we learn they run a shelter in Saginaw, Michigan--but Laing gives minimal responses to this until he is able to ask, in line 307, “How do they feel about you?”

Lines 307 to 329 can be read as the progressive development of an answer to this question, first in the form of a collaborative articulation of an account of Leila’s relationship with her parents and finally, to jump ahead, with the declaration “’Cause maybe they hate me after all I, after being, an unfaithful daughter” (329).

But at first Leila ducks Laing’s question, disclaiming her ability to reply--she insists she does not know the answer. Then, in 308 to 312, she offers a narrative which, strikingly, invokes again both the context of family and that of Christianity--Christmas being an event both of religious significance and of family celebration.

307  T:  How do they feel about you?
308  L:  [Laughs] [T: heh] I don’t know. [laughs] I don’t know
309  um, I wrote them, I don’t know, I wrote’m a letter and
310  asked ‘em. And, I haven’t picked them up in the mail yet. I
311  asked ‘em ah if it was okay for me to send a
312  Christmas present. [laughs] That’s, I don’t know.
313  T:  No reply?
314  L:  I haven’t been to the Post Office yet to pick it up. To, if
315  they did reply, I mean I ah, they probably did.

Yet still the point of her story appears to be that, since she’s not yet retrieved her parents’ reply to her letter, she can’t say how they feel about her. She has offered an answer to Laing’s question, but it is still the answer that she can’t answer.
That Laing accepts her narrative as relevant to the topic, as an offered answer to his question, is shown by his asking, in line 316, “Do you expect them to send you a Christmas present?” And Leila’s response—“Oh God [whispered] I don’t know” (317)—is sufficiently laden with affect—strained, a hint of exasperation—for us to interpret it as about more than simply the sending of a gift.

After some repair work Laing pauses, then challenges the force of her account:

T: Uh huh. (4) I would never have thought of, uh sending, writing my parents and asking them if it was okay for me to send them a present for Christmas. Eh ah and why wouldn’t it be ok?

Laing’s assertion—with all its pointed emphasis—that he wouldn’t have thought of asking permission of his parents, and his subsequent question, call for Leila to clarify what in the circumstances of her situation has made her do such a thing—what the nature of her relationship with her parents is that she has to explicitly ask permission to do something which would normally be a matter of course. Her story, he says in effect, sits oddly in the context of family. It presupposes family conflict that runs counter to the norm, so that it is not a canonical story. He is pointing out that what her narrative presupposes is already more of an answer to his original question than the narrative itself. Her narrative makes the point that she doesn’t know how her parents feel, but surely she would ask for permission only because her parents have negative feelings.

And in response to this challenge Leila finally offers a direct reply to Laing’s original question.:

L: Well, ’cause maybe they hate me after all I, after being, an unfaithful daughter.

Her words do not come easily. She makes a self-initiated self-repair and hesitates before calling herself “an unfaithful daughter.” Her response here serves to answer both the immediate question (328) and the question posed back in 307. With all this work Leila has now positioned herself and her parents within the family context. She positions herself as an “unfaithful daughter,” uncertain whether her parents understand her need for independence (“I have my own life to live”). She and her parents are estranged, far apart not just geographically, she in Arizona, they in upstate Michigan, but also alienated from each other, their relationship one of indifference or even enmity.

Leila’s qualification here—“maybe”—is I think an important one. Note that its scope is somewhat unclear. Is she saying that she has been unfaithful, and her parents
perhaps hate her because of this? Or is she saying that her parents may view her as unfaithful, and consequently may hate her? If the latter, then we can say that she suffers from the same ontological uncertainty or insecurity in the family context as she has displayed in the other contexts invoked earlier. She is not clear whether she’s “an unfaithful daughter” or not.

Laing asks a question that is easy to miss, and indeed Leila does not seem to grasp its force:

331  T:  Wa unfaithful to?
332  L:  Yes.
333  T:  Eh...

There is a misalignment here: Leila’s second pair-part (“Yes”) doesn’t match Laing’s first pair-part: his question doesn’t permit a yes/no answer. And Laing’s next utterance, a terse “Eh...” calls for something further, displaying his dissatisfaction with her reply. It is possible that Leila took Laing’s utterance as a continuer; that she took him to be repeating “unfaithful” to confirm that he had understood and encourage her to continue. His Glasgow accent makes his words here hard to comprehended. But the misunderstanding goes unrepaired--and apparently unnoticed--by Leila as she continues, further developing her account of her conduct towards her parents.

334  L:  I haven’t visited in, in years [laughs]=
335  T:  Ump
336  L:  And, in fact, and I don’t communicate well well with
337           them either. But, you see, I have my own life to live.
338  L:  Ea, you know, I hope they understand that, but maybe
339           they don’t.

It will not be until line 340 that Laing develops further what he starts to say in 331.

Citing the Bible

The duality of the words “faithful” and “unfaithful”--the fact that they too function in both the contexts that we have seen are operative here--highlights again how for Leila the two contexts are interwoven, so that an entity in one exists at the same time in the other. If one is the daughter of a Christian preacher, how one lives as a daughter is not separate from how one lives as a Christian. Leila is a daughter--some kind of daughter; at the same time she is a Christian--some kind of Christian. But what kind--“faithful” or “unfaithful”?--and how to live the duality?

A consequence of this interweaving is that talk about referents in the context of Christianity can be simultaneously talk about referents in the family context. We see
this immediately, in the subsequent discussion (lines 340-371), where Laing and Leila speak of a biblical passage (Luke 14:26) concerning the Christian attitude towards ones parents.

Goldman (this issue) considers this portion of the conversation in considerable detail. I want only to make some general points about its use of context, and the ontological work that is accomplished.

340  T: Uhuh. Well, if you’re faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ,
341     how can you be unfaithful to your father?
342  L: Yeah? [smiling]
343  T: But, eh, I mean he said that didn’t he eh eh unless you
344     hate your father and your mother and follow me, you can’t be
345     eh my disciple.
346  L: Yeahah

Leila’s smiling “yeah?” in 342, a continuer, displays recognition of the passage which Laing is glossing and encourages him to continue. When he paraphrases the passage in 343-4, she thoughtfully confirms what he says. What Laing has done is recognize the fact that the two contexts, those of family and Christianity, are woven together, and propose a way to grasp the relationship of the two contexts.

As Leila and Laing debate the appropriate translation of this passage, and the term “hate” is softened to “prefer,” then “deny,” and finally to “happily indifferent,” one might think, on a first quick reading of this section of the transcript, that the family context is no longer operative; that this discussion presupposes only the context of Christianity. That this is not the case becomes evident when Leila suddenly glosses the relevance of all this to family relations:

368  L: Because if you are not happily indifferent to your
369     parents, they’re going to be on your case all your life.
370     [laughs]
371  T: That’s right [laughs]…

Ostensibly they have been talking about religion, but Leila’s utterance makes it clear they have been speaking of the family too.

Leila laughs with a new lightness and clarity. Laing gives an enthusiastic assessment of her gloss. And immediately after this Laing announces that he must return to the conference podium. The conversation can be ended; its work is done. Startlingly, Leila asks Laing if she can accompany him, “see what you say,” and she does indeed take a seat on stage with him, and confidently answers questions from the audience.
Conclusions

Leila has been confused because she was born into, and continues to understand herself in terms of, two contexts simultaneously. One presumes that the “weave of references” of these two contexts have bound and tugged on her in confusing and contradictory ways. Laing not only displays recognition of these laminated contexts, he suggests a way of reconciling their demands. Throughout, Laing allows Leila to invoke contexts in which he is willing to take a stand. He grants reality to the entities she is insecure about--universal mind, conspiracy, herself. One result seems to be a reduced ontological insecurity on her part. Being happily indifferent to her parents would offer her the possibility of remaining separate from them without being understood as unfaithful. Her tension and ambiguity are resolved. Whereas before Leila was trapped in a situation where she could neither be faithful to her parents nor to Jesus (because her separation from her parents was understood as an affront to both), the re-interpretation Laing offers of her position in the two key contexts frees her, opening the possibility of being separate and yet faithful. She should remain separate from her parents in order to be faithful to Christ. And all this work goes on at the level of pragmatics, in the conversational acts of this therapeutic demonstration. This is the level of the “transpersonal reality” of which Laing speaks.
References


