



Patron: Jim Broadbent
Registered Charity No. 1156478
Friday March 1st, 2019
Mad to be Normal (15)

dir: Robert Mullan

Starring: **David Tennant, Gabriel Byrne, Elisabeth Moss, Michael Gambon**

sponsors: **Dr Carenza Lewis & partner**

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Synopsis: London, mid-1960s. Angie Wood, a young American woman arrives to meet psychiatrist R. D. Laing. She attends lectures that he gives and visits him at Kingsley Hall, the community he has established to pioneer new treatments of mental illness. She moves in and she and Laing become lovers. At the request of parents, Laing admits John Holding, a young man who's been given ECT. He travels to New York to help publicise his book *The Divided Self*. Angie tells him she wants a child. Laing agrees reluctantly. John Holding begins to show signs of improvement. Angie gives birth but feels Laing is not interested in her or the child. They quarrel. John's former doctor lodges a professional complaint against Laing. Jim, one of the patients, attacks Angie. Laing has him sectioned. John is removed. Kingsley Hall is closed down.

"Insanity," RD Laing famously remarked, "is a perfectly rational adjustment to an insane world." Laing, sometimes known as the 'acid Marxist' for advocating the use of LSD to treat the mentally disturbed, is one of the iconic figures of the 1960s; his views inspired a good many plays and films, most famously the 1967 BBC *Wednesday Play* "In Two Minds", scripted by David Mercer and directed by Ken Loach, later turned into a film (*Family Life*, 1971) by the same team. In this, a young woman subjected to aggressive psychiatric handling at the behest of her censorious family temporarily finds gentler, less invasive treatment from a doctor influenced by Laing's methods.

Loach and Mercer wholeheartedly endorse Laing's views. Robert Mullan's film, co-scripted with Tracy Moreton, takes a less uncritical stance. As Laing, David Tennant skillfully catches the psychiatrist's characteristic gestures and verbal mannerisms: the light Glaswegian accent, the hesitations and speech hiatuses strangely at odds with the vehemence of his opinions. His behaviour is depicted as veering from the empathetic to the callous. Visiting a New York clinic, he gets through to a young mute patient, Sarah, by mirroring her stance and movement, talking to her quietly and gently stroking her face and feet until she speaks her first word in 18 months. But when his girlfriend Angie (Elisabeth Moss) asks if he loves her, he responds indifferently, his gaze turned away: "Love is a terrible burden to inflict on someone."

For all his advocacy of openness and honesty, Laing can be manipulative too. After his assistant Paul Zimmel announces that he can't take any more of Laing's community, Kingsley Hall, and wants to leave, Laing smashes one of Angie's favourite vases and tricks Paul into thinking that he, Paul, did it. Feeling guilty, Paul agrees to stay: "When he focuses his attention on you, you could just burn



up," Angie says of her lover, but Laing's attention - especially to her - is shown as intermittent and unpredictable. "If he wants to talk, we listen," is his watchword as he regards his patients; often, though, we're given the impression that he only listens to what he wants to hear.

The atmosphere of the 60s is all-pervasive: Laing's flowery shirts, LSD doled out (with dismissive references to Timothy Leary), the music of Donovan ('Season of the Witch'), The Kinks ('You Really Got Me') and Van Morrison on the soundtrack. Long-shots are rare, close-ups and mid shots predominate, enhancing the sense of intimacy bordering on claustrophobia. But though Tennant's Laing receives the camera's close scrutiny, he remains an oddly remote, unreadable figure, and the ambiguity with which he's portrayed almost seems to suggest that he, like several of his patients, is bipolar. At the end of the film one of his patients is sectioned, another taken back to undergo ECT, and a title tells us that Kingsley Hall was closed in 1970, its remaining patients forced to leave. "Laing's ideas live on," a further title states; but just how far the filmmakers feel this is a good thing isn't entirely clear

Credits

Ronald David Laing

Angie Wood

Sidney Kolok

Jim Roberts

John Meredith

Maria

John Harding

Sarah

Raymond

Dr Paul Zimmel

Director

Screenplay

Director of Photography

Editor

Music

Costume

Production Design

David Tennant

Elisabeth Moss

Michael Gambon

Gabriel Byrne

David Bamber

Olivia Poulet

Jerome Holder

Lydia Orange

Tom Richards

Adam Paul Harvey

Robert Mullan

Robert Mullan, Tracy Moreton

Ali Asad

Laurie Yule

Laurie Yule

Lance Milligan

Celina Morris

UK 2016. 105 mins

Another view

Shambolic would be the kind assessment of this loose-leaf biography of the bohemian Scottish psychiatrist RD Laing, who for five years at the end of the 1960s ran an experimental facility in London's East End which aimed to treat patients without recourse to any traditional medical means. He gloats about how his method skips over such staples as tranquillisers and electro-shock therapy in favour of old fashioned TLC. And the odd droplet of LSD.

On the plus side, the film is gifted with a smart and appealing central performance from David Tennant, who trades in a very nice line of ticks, stammers and hesitations as he intones Laing's crackpot theories.

The film's best moments are when it chooses to demonstrate the arduous process of psychiatric care, such as a centrepiece where the rock star doc waltzes into an American institution that's styled like a '50s horror film and enters into a hushed discourse with an apparently catatonic patient. The camera barely moves, holding onto a simple two-shot within a cramped cell and allowing the actors to do their thing.

Otherwise, Robert Mullan's film is something of a lost cause, to the point where it's hard to see how it ever got the green light in the first place. It flits arbitrarily between incidental moments. There's an almost complete absence of narrative progression, or anything that helps you to understand why this needed to be a feature film and not, say, a radio play or a magazine longread.

It's like a lengthy shopping list of notable moments that have been totted up and, at random intervals, tossed at the screen with nary a care for how they might gel with one another. To the point where the film finally fades to black at what feels like the middle of a key scene.

David Jenkins: Little White Lies

Our next screening: Friday March 15th, 7.30pm Faces Places (France 2017. Cert PG)

Our contribution to the Born a Rebel season (full programme details below) which we've jointly organised with The Venue and Mansions of the Future to mark International Women's Day, is a vivid documentary by the doyenne of New Wave directors, Agnès Varda.

Teaming up with photographer JR, she tours France meeting ordinary people in out of the way places and, thanks to JR's skills, taking photographs of them and their homes which JR then pastes onto a variety of buildings, including houses, factories and a deserted World War 2 blockhouse. The result is fascinating and, thanks to the communications skills of both Varda and JR, a lively and at times genuinely touching portrait of France. There is even a revealing encounter with Varda's New Wave comrade in arms, Jean-Luc Godard...

Part road movie, part documentary, part intriguing essay on the power of the image, Faces Places is truly a film in a genre of its own.

Born A Rebel: March 9-16th

To mark International Women's Day (March 8th) we have worked with The Venue and Mansions of the Future to curate a series of film screenings & workshops under the title Born A Rebel (inspired by a short of the same name). We aim to celebrate & highlight the diverse work & stories made by women & about women.

The programme is below: further information is available on the Society, The Venue and Mansions of the Future's websites

March 9th, 5pm: The Miseducation of Cameron Post (Cert 15)

Desiree Akhavan's follow-up to Appropriate Behaviour (shown by the Society) confirms her talent for directing as well as acting, in a story about a teenage girl attracted to a same sex relationship who is sent to a 'correctional' facility.

Showing at The Venue. Ticket information at thevenueincoln.co.uk

March 13th, 7.30pm: Can You Ever Forgive Me? (Cert 15)
Melissa McCarthy and Richard E Grant star in this Oscar and BAFTA nominated drama about the real life story of Lee Israel, a writer fallen on hard times who finds a way to make a lot of money through forgery

Showing at The Venue. Ticket information at thevenueincoln.co.uk

March 14th, 5pm: The Rape of Recy Taylor (Cert 15)

A documentary directed by Nancy Buirski telling the story of an investigation by Rosa Parks (who sparked the Civil Rights movement) into an assault on a 24 year old Alabama black mother, and the search for justice.

Showing at Mansions of the Future, 5-16 St Mary's Street, Lincoln, LN5 7EQ. Limited free tickets are available

March 15th, 7.30pm. Faces Places (Cert PG)

March 16th, 7.30pm. A Private War (15)

Rosamund Pike stars as Marie Colvin, the indomitable reporter who dared to go into the heart of the Syrian Civil War and give a voice to those innocents civilians who were unable to escape.

Showing at The Venue. Ticket information at thevenueincoln.co.uk

Throughout the season, there will be showings of the short film Born A Rebel, produced by the Yorkshire Film Archive in association with Cinema for All.

On March 16th, Mansions of the Future host a series of art and creative events for young people, inspired by the Born a Rebel idea. Details available at <https://mansionsofthefuture.org/whats-on>
All films include the option to make a charitable donation to Lincolnshire Rape Crisis.