SELF & SOCIETY, 2017
VOL. 45, NOS. 3–4, 298–320
https://doi.org/10.1080/03060497.2017.1356102

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Martin Levy Interview with Joe Berke

Martin Levy and Joe Berke

Introduction, by Martin Levy

I first met Joe Berke six or seven years ago while researching the Congress on the Dialectics of Liberation of 1967, of which he was the main organizer. As is often the way with these things, Joe invited me to his house to talk about doing an interview and what follows is a version of that, with two or three further interventions by me and half a dozen or so corrections of fact that Joe has kindly contributed. At the time of the interview, I was deeply concerned about the ruinous state of UK higher education and, like a number of other people – including, notably, the writer and artist Jakob Jakobsen – I had a hunch that a study of the congress and of the London anti-university that followed it, would offer pointers to some future solution. Today, I am not so sanguine. Although the congress – an avowedly anti-bureaucratic undertaking – energized several hundred people and contributed something of its own free-wheeling character to the radical culture of the period, it was I believe rather too disparate in execution and effect, while the anti-university – for my taste at least – was too modish and ideological.

As for Joe, he is not just a facilitator in the largest sense, but a distinguished writer and therapist. An Englishman by affection now but initially by circumstance, he grew up in Newark, NJ, in a part of that city later made famous by Philip Roth, who attended the same high school as him and whom he succeeded a few years later as school valedictorian.

Joe came to England to work with R.D. Laing at Kingsley Hall, during the autumn of 1965. This was just a few months after the Hall had opened and at a time when the atmosphere there was notably dark, as any biography of Laing will almost certainly tell you. Residents – both 'doctors' and 'patients' – clashed repeatedly, and this coupled with the strain of working with one resident in particular – Mary Barnes, to whom he had been introduced by Laing – led him and his then girlfriend, Roberta Elzey, to eventually seek a more congenial habitation.

Following the dialectics congress and the anti-university, Joe, with Roberta and two other close friends, Morty and Vivien Shatzman, set up the Arbours Crisis Centre as a further alternative to conventional psychiatric treatment, and Arbours I suspect is one of the two achievements – the other being his work with Mary Barnes – that future generations are likely to remember him for.

Indeed, his work with Barnes led to a best-selling book,
Mary Barnes: A Journey through Madness (with Mary Barnes), and this was followed by books on cannabis (with Calvin Hernton), envy, psychoanalysis and kabbalah (with Stanley Schneider), and Freud, as well as numerous lectures and articles.

CONTACT Martin Levy m.levy@bradford.ac.uk

Presently, Joe lives in Highgate with his wife Shree, who is also a therapist, and their dog, Teva, a friendly and curious golden retriever, whom the couple describe as the 'third' therapist in residence. Our interview took place in Joe's study/workroom, a bright, comfortable, slightly ramshackle room, in which I spotted several books by Roth, the Hogarth 'standard edition' of the complete works of Freud, various books on Judaism, and signed copies of Laing's *The Politics of Experience and The Bird of Paradise* and *The Politics of the Family and Other Essays.*

Although Joe is almost 80, he has plans to write several more books, among which must surely be an autobiography.

Let's start off with medicine, Joe. Did you always want to be a doctor, or was it something you fell into?

First of all, I wanted to be a dustman. I was fascinated by the way things were gobbled up in the back of the garbage trucks. The ambition to be a doctor came after that when I was about four or five. That said, as a psychiatrist, I did become a sort of dustman because I collect people's psychic shit, recycle it and give it back to them stronger and cleaner and healthier.

Did you come from a medical background?

Not at all. My father was a schoolteacher. There were 11 children in his family and he was the oldest boy. During the Depression in America he had a good job teaching Spanish, German and commercial subjects at a high school in Newark.

I've heard that you were born after your father died. Is that a true story?

It is true. My father died in my mother's arms before I was born. Why? He was the first boy to go to college in the family and his father, my grandfather Wolf, refused to support him. In consequence, he contracted rheumatic fever from over-work – study and part-time jobs – in college. This damaged his heart. He died from a pulmonary embolus. This was in 1938. My mother had been told she could not have children because she had polycystic ovarian disease and her ovaries had been removed. When my father died, she stopped having periods. The family thought this was because she was grieving and various doctors gave her drugs to bring back her periods. But seven months later it was discovered that she was pregnant. When I was born, I was seen as 'a wonder child'.

What was she like, your mother?

She was a sensitive, creative, frustrated person. Frustrated because she wanted to be a pianist, but her father, Robert, didn't approve of women studying or going to university. After my father's death, she worked as a bookkeeper in a bank.

Do you have brothers and sisters?

None. Mother never remarried. I was the first and the last child.

You grew up on Farley Avenue, on Newark's south side. Was that a good or a bad neighbourhood?

It depends what you mean by good and bad. But it was middle class, and a very nice place to grow up in. The houses had lots of gardens and nooks and crannies for children to play in. The neighbours used to shout at us because we were going around the gardens, trampling on the plants and things like that.

We were there until I was about 12 years old. Then we moved to Osborne Terrace, which was another good neighbourhood. I went to Weequahic High School – named after an Indian tribe – and enjoyed it very much. I got top grades and graduated at the top of my class, January 1957. And then I went to Columbia College as a pre-med student in New York.

Were you and your mother on your own in Farley Avenue or did you share you share the house with other relatives?

There was me, my mother, Rose, and my grandpa, Robert and grandma, Susan.

What was your relationship like with your grandfather?

I loved him. I was deeply distressed when he died when I was about five. In those days, they didn't take children to funerals, they didn't even tell children that people were sick. So, one day he was there, and the next day he wasn't there. I was told later that he had a liver disease, which he'd picked up from a dog. I love dogs. I always wanted a dog as a child. Once I brought a dog home and it was shooed out of the house. Understandable. Ever since I became an independent soul I've had dogs. Firstly, I married Roberta, who had a Borzoi in New York called Igor. When Roberta came to London to live with me, she had to part with Igor. Not easy. When my son was four years old we got a Borzoi called Basil. And then when he passed away we got Nicolai, another Borzoi. I lived with Borzois for 22 years. They are great dogs but not as wonderful as the golden retriever named Teva – which means nature in Hebrew – which I have now.

Do you remember many of your friends from those days?

A boy called Robert Levine was a good friend of mine. And we had a group of kids around Osborne Terrace who used to play stickball. I remember all of my girlfriends and all the girls who I wanted to be friends with and those who I didn't get to be friends with. My first girlfriend was Cynthia. Then there were others. Charlotte was part of a group which in eighth grade I wanted to be part of. One day she was playing between two parked cars when one of the cars backed up and squashed her legs. That put an end to that group. Then I fell in love. I became infatuated with Deborah. She had pretty, long, black hair. Her sister was pretty too. I forget the sister's name. In high school, I used to hang out with another girl, Rona. She had beautiful ample breasts. I remember her mum would ply me with ice cream. Many years later, she wrote to me from Washington. She said, 'I remember you, do you remember me?' I replied, 'I remember you very well'. I

added: 'If I knew then what I do now I would have done more than eat ice cream with you'. Anyway, she never wrote back so maybe she was insulted. I hope not.

Tell me a little bit about your schooling in Newark. Were you a happy child?

I was bullied. In particular there was one boy, Stephen Mantel, about two years older than me. He was the bane of my life when I was in the second and third grades, about seven and eight. He used to pick on me a lot after school and I would lie on the ground and pretend I had asthma [Pants heavily]. I also recall that his mother had one arm. Eventually, one summer when I was about 10, my mother sent me to a Jewish summer camp. To my absolute horror, I discovered that he was in the same bunk as me. The first opportunity I had, I knocked him to the ground and bit a chunk out of his leg, whereupon he was thrown out of the camp for picking on me. That was one of the greatest triumphs of my life. It taught me an important lesson. If someone's going to attack you, attack them first. I still take pleasure in that memory. I am, by the way, a very aggressive biter. It used to give me a great deal of satisfaction that, when I played with Mary Barnes. I used to bite her and she used to bite me. She brought out a lot of aggression in me. I also grew carnivorous plants. I still do.

In high school, I was never invited to be part of the in-crowd. This made me feel bad. But then I always got top grades, which offered a kind of compensation. I was the school valedictorian and all that. I still have my yearbook. Under my name, someone has written, 'Oh, Einstein, here is thy successor'. Far from it. First of all, I am not as accomplished as was Einstein. No way! Secondly, I think I am a much nicer person. It seems that he was pretty nasty in the way he treated people. Still, he was a great scientist.

After high school, you went to Columbia. Was it a wrench leaving Newark?

It was my first extended time away from home and I was extremely depressed. The first term I spent most of my time at night in coffee houses, playing chess, drinking coffee and eating chocolate cake. My favourite was on Broadway, at 112th Street. I never went near a bar, by the way, until my last year of college. My roommate at the time, Rick Steinhardt, now a retired professor of neurophysiology at Berkeley, took me into one. I thought this was the pits, and it was smelly and horrible. Then I grew a beard for the first time. When I came home, my grandmother, whom I deeply loved, said to me, 'What's that?' I said, 'It's a beard'. She put her hand over her heart, and said, 'Joseph, before I die, please shave it off'. I said, 'No' and afterwards I suffered a suicidal depression for many months.

Other than that, I worked very hard indeed. I was obsessed with getting good grades, and almost everything I did was to get into medical school. Two or three weeks before the exams I would stay up studying, 12, 14, 16, 18 hours a day, very much 24/7, helped by amphetamines and caffeine tablets, and then I usually did extremely well.

My high point was getting a double 'A' in zoology. Zoology was one of the most competitive courses. I think only three other people managed it, out of 168 very competitive pre-medical students.

I was talking to Morton Schatzman the other day, and he said that he stopped being Jewish at Columbia. Was that your experience too? Your mother, I believe, was fairly conservative in religious matters.

I wouldn't say I lost it, but it did tend to go underground a bit. I still went to the Jewish Theological Seminary, but it was mostly for the dinners [Laughs]. I now know that there were lots of great Jewish speakers and scholars about, and in retrospect I would love to have attended their courses. One of them was Abraham Joshua Heschel, a great teacher of mysticism and Hasidic thought at the Jewish Theological Seminary. Then there was the Lubavitcher Rebbe. He was in Brooklyn. But in those days I didn't even know that he existed. Later, I was particularly upset to discover that another one of my roommates, Joseph Rosenstein, had been to see him, and that he hadn't told me. But, in a sense that was probably providential as I wouldn't have concentrated on my primary goal, which was to get into medical school. I got in there after three years, which was very unusual, on a full scholarship from the Fishbach Foundation.

I know from elsewhere that Hermann Hesse was very important to you during your years at Columbia and afterwards. Can you explain his appeal to you?

Late one summer, as a teenager, I didn't have much to do. I think I'd worked as a councillor at a day camp. Anyway, there was a sub-library on my street, in Newark, a small building. I used to wander in there and look through the stacks of books. I worked through the alphabet, and eventually I came to H, Hesse. The first book of his I read was *Steppenwolf*, which was an absolutely amazing experience. The main character, like me, was searching for his sexual identity. And also like me, he was haunted by intense feelings of loneliness. And then I read through all of his other books, including *The Glass Bead Game* and *Siddhartha*. I wrote to Hesse and told him how much I loved his works. Later, in medical school, I got a letter back, with a story that he'd dedicated to me. He was certainly one of the most important people in my life, one of my culture heroes. I like to think that I discovered him before all of the other people of my generation.

Following Columbia, you continued your medical training at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in the Bronx, where you met John Thompson, one of the professors there. He seems to have been an extraordinary figure.

John was the great love of my life, my mentor and my saviour. He was a very unusual person, not just an existential psychoanalyst and a professor of psychiatry, but a friend of Auden and many of the most important poets of his generation. He had an extraordinary career. As a military officer, he was one of the first people to go into Belsen. I hoped that he would come to London but he died in a swimming accident in the summer of 1965. I felt quite devastated.

Anyway, John worked with very disturbed people, who were considered catatonic or schizophrenic, doing analysis with them five or six times a week for years, which must have been excruciating. One day he told me about a patient, a diagnosed catatonic schizophrenic with whom he was working. The man didn't move or do anything. He was the son of a psychoanalyst, and John would just sit with him. One day, John said something to him,

and he said 'don't give me that shit', accompanying the expression with a sweep of his hand, a gesture that had a lot of energy in it. Then John had the idea of putting a pencil or a crayon in his hand, and he started to draw furiously. That started the man's career as an artist. Later on, he became quite a successful painter and sculptor in New York in the manner of Giacometti. His name was Barry Bandler.

John, I should add, contributed to my work with Laing at Kingsley Hall in so many more ways. It's only now that I realize how many of his ideas had filtered through me, so to speak.

In your book with Mary Barnes you're very critical of some of the teaching at Albert Einstein. But Thompson aside it wasn't all bad, was it? After all, some accounts describe the early sixties at Einstein as a kind of golden age. The department was particularly rich in psychoanalysts.

There were some very good teachers there, like the head of the psychiatry department, Milt Rosenbaum, and Ed Hornick, who was a very capable psychoanalyst. But I didn't see much of them. Before I started my medical studies proper, I had a research fellowship in a kidney unit. I wound up doing endless experiments on dogs; checking their blood chemistries, all of which was horrifying. Why? Almost all the dogs died.

Later, when I passed through the psychiatric service, I was full of myself. I thought I knew a lot about the mysteries of madness. Then, one of the teachers, Jose Barchilon, aggressively challenged my reply to one of his questions in a ward round. 'You didn't mention the Oedipus Complex, Dr Berke.' I felt devastated both by the remark and his contemptuous tone of voice. Years later, I was at a conference, which Barchilon also attended. He was an old man then, who had married a young girl, and they had a child. I looked at him and thought that this is the guy I've hated all of my life, but, hey, he's nothing.

John, by the way, told me what a wonderful teacher Milt Rosenbaum was. But I never attended any of his courses. Morty [Schatzman] did, but I didn't. It just didn't work out that way.

Was there anyone else at the college who was important to you besides John Thompson?

Well, I was friendly with Leon [Redler], of course, but, yeah, there was another guy, a Puerto Rican called Jose Quinones. I first met him when I went up on the wards. He was a man in his forties, who had been variously diagnosed as manic depressive, psychopathic, and paranoid schizophrenic. I thought that he was an alcoholic who had problems with life, and that was all that was wrong with him. Anyway, I started to hang around with him and we became friends. But I got very worried because the textbooks said that one of the characteristics of schizophrenics is that they are unintelligible. But we were having easy, ordinary conversations. That's when I got to thinking that maybe I was schizophrenic, which horrified me, and made me very depressed. Finally, I decided that the textbooks were wrong. That's what really started my career in psychiatry.

Tell me a little bit about life on the Lower East Side. It wasn't all study, was it?

Not in the least. For starters, I knew the poet, Ed Sanders, because I used to live across the street from the Peace Eye bookshop. In fact, I knew all of the Fugs, but especially Tuli

Kupferberg, who was one of the first beatniks I met, selling copies of his poems. He used to read poetry on a street corner in the West Village, and one day I went up to him and introduced myself. His girlfriend was Sylvia Topp. They were great figures. Later I met Allen Ginsberg. I went with him to the Dakotas once for a party. At one point I thought that he was going to grope me! [Laughs].

The Fugs dedicated a song to me, *'Coca-Cola Douche'*. There were several bars we used to go to on St Mark's Place. One was called the Dome, near Second Avenue. St Mark's was on the dividing line between the Lower East Side and the West Side, the east Greenwich Village and the west Greenwich Village. This was a very exciting place to be at the time. There were poetry readings, lectures, discussions and meetings with all kinds of people. Then it died out when the [amphetamine] heads moved in.

I read my poetry at Le Metro cafe, on Second Avenue. But folks knew I was also a doctor, so they gave me a room at the back and people would come to me and I would give them advice or treat them with penicillin. I often got paid with 'a nickel bag of grass'.

I've heard that you treated Andy Warhol. Any truth in that?

No. I treated a close friend of Warhol's, a writer named Ronnie Tavel. He also became a patient of mine, and I helped him with psychotherapy. Through him I visited Warhol's 'Factory'. But I couldn't stand Warhol!

What were your political opinions at this period?

I was very left wing, a Trotskyite and a Marxist, which horrified my family. I organized a general strike for peace at my medical school. About six of us took part. We marched from Einstein to the Lincoln Center, with Julian Beck and Judith Malina of the Living Theater and a few dozen people. On another occasion, I fasted for peace with Morty and Leon at the White House during a blizzard. I was horrified and disgusted to discover that my friends had gone out and bought drinks and pizzas. Now that I think about it, I think that we were the only people from the Albert Einstein to take part. Most of the medical students at that time were still pretty apolitical.

This must have been about the time you met Carolee Schneemann.

I met Carolee after going to a great happening she did called 'Meat Joy' at Judson Church in the West Village. It blew me away. So I went along, introduced myself to her and we became very good friends. I thought that she was a great artist as well as the personification of eroticism.

You would have made a good couple.

We would have killed each other. I would have hated having my penis as an object in her paintings [Laughs]. Her great friend was the composer Jim Tenney. His penis is in her paintings *and* her films. For years she was relatively undiscovered in America. She's won many awards, but all her life she's suffered from lack of money. She's never had the financial success she deserves. Carolee was my erotic mother. In fact, I fell deeply in love with her.

You spoke earlier of your search for a secure sexual identity. Did you have a girlfriend during this period?

I had several girlfriends, though all of them were casual. I specialized in Irish nurses, lapsed Catholics. One girl Morty, Leon and I shared together was an artist named Diane. Then, before I went to London, my girlfriend was Roberta. When I got there, I didn't think that I'd see her again. But I felt very lonely and missed her. So I asked her to come over.

As for Morty, his main girlfriend at Einstein was a radiologist called Grace Connor. We were all part of a group together. Grace was a lovely person. She used to have seders for 'goyim' at Passover time. I used to visit her apartment above Oscar's fish restaurant on the Upper East Side, and hold forth on politics and other matters. I fell in love with her as well, though it was her sister Beth with whom I eventually slept. That was my first time. She was also a nurse. I corresponded with Grace for a while when I came to London but then we lost touch. I don't know what happened to Beth. Maybe she married a doctor.

Am I right in thinking that you vacationed in San Francisco a couple of times during this period?

On one occasion I went across country in a car with Leon and his girlfriend of the period. I remember going through South Dakota and the North Dakota Badlands and I remember the triangular tensions, the sexual tensions, that sprang up between us. In fact, I made several trips to California around this time, once with Leon and afterwards with Roberta, whom, by then, I had married in London. On a number of occasions, I went to the Esalen Institute in Big Sur. That was when it was still in its early days and they had just started to build the swimming pool.

What was the attraction?

Well, it wasn't just Esalen – the whole hippie thing of that era was very attractive to me: the acid, the other drugs, Lawrence Ferlinghetti and the City Lights bookshop. At one point, I thought about doing my internship at San Francisco's Southern Pacific Hospital, which was located opposite the Golden Gate Park 'panhandle'. It would have meant that I would only have had to work once every six nights or so, whereas at Long Island College Hospital in Brooklyn Heights, where I ended up, it was once every three or four nights. Finally, I chose Long Island College because it was closer to Ronnie Laing. I had read his book *The Divided Self* and decided I wanted to work with him. That's a story and a half. Sometimes I think that I had a lucky escape. Had I gone to Southern Pacific, I might have got strung out on drugs and all sorts of shit.

Tell me a little bit about FUNY (the Free University of New York) which you helped to set up before you came to England.

Oh, FUNY, I thought you said 'funny'! That's a good way of putting it. It was a big, hippy, socialist, left-wing, Trotskyite place that I was involved with just after leaving medical school. Allen Krebs came up with the idea. I knew Allen and I knew his wife Sharon. We brought together a lot of poets, writers, politicos, those sorts of people. We rented a

loft on 14th Street, I think. Essentially, we set up the Free University as an alternative to the conventional university system. We wanted our courses to be more relevant to real life, as we saw it. After the Dialectics of Liberation Congress at the Roundhouse in 1967, the idea morphed into the anti-university of London, and the rest as they say is history.

Was Paul Goodman involved with FUNY? You were friends with him through Julian Beck and Judith Malina.

I don't remember that Paul was ever directly involved with FUNY, though it's true that we were friendly, and his ideas were certainly current. I liked Paul. He was a rough, wise man, though he could be extremely sarcastic. He was of an older generation than most of us, an anarchist and a syndicalist, who was writing on the problems of youth and education.

It's clear from some of your letters of the early sixties that you had quite a bit to do with Alexander Trocchi as well. Deep friendship or passing interest?

Trocchi was a buddy of Laing's, though I don't know how much of a buddy. He was an irrepressible Glaswegian writer who wrote *Cain's Book*, the Sigma paper on the 'Invisible Insurrection' and some other things. Laing introduced me to Trocchi. I went up to Glasgow and spent time with him and his wife, Lyn, who worked as a hooker to finance their drug habits. I liked her very much. She was a lovely woman. So Trocchi and I hung out for a while. Then he got too druggy for me. He was into heroin and cocaine. He burnt out eventually.

Did you try heroin and cocaine yourself?

I did. I liked it so much that I resolved to stop taking it!

Let's turn to Laing now. Can you tell me how you first found out about him?

It was through *The Divided Self*, which I read as a second-year medical student. Laing didn't talk from a detached perspective; he talked with a subjective, interior attitude. In fact, the book seemed to be about me – so much of it touched me deeply. So, I wrote to him and said, 'I'd like to meet you'. He never wrote back. Then, when I was a third-year medical student, I had a chance to do a six-month elective anywhere in the world. I decided to do a three-month stint at the Dingleton Hospital in Scotland under the famous social psychiatrist, Maxwell Jones. He was working to liberalize a staid old traditional place. During this time, I called Laing. He said, 'Come and see me if you must'. So I went down to London, and we hit if off together. As with Hesse, I like to think that I discovered Laing, that no one in the States had heard of him before me.

What was your relationship with him like then?

I was the student, the young acolyte, and he was an amazingly brilliant therapist, writer, teacher and lecturer, so I was very pleased to know him. Lots of people were attracted

to him, lots of very creative, innovative people. There was a lot of competition, so I was very fortunate he took to me instantly.

I haven't often mentioned this, but he got me a flat in Assia Wevill's house, without telling me that Sylvia Plath had recently killed herself there or anything at all about the intrigue with Ted Hughes, who was having an affair with Assia Wevill.

Was Laing part of that story in some way?

He was part of the whole thing. It's possible that one or some of them came to see him for a consultation. He was always having consultations with famous people. Anyway, very soon he let me work on the families and schizophrenia project in Hallam Street, with Aaron Esterson and all the other people around him.

He also introduced me to his wife, Anne, and I remember going to Church Row, where they had a flat, and seeing these big colour pictures of women's bodies being cut open with knives, their vaginas eviscerated, their breasts hacked off. I felt quite shocked and frightened! Then he included me in many of his social activities. We went out to movies together. I remember going to the Swiss Cottage Odeon with his kids to see a James Bond movie.

Do you remember much about any of the other Hallam Street people besides Laing, say Aaron Esterson or Joan Cunnold?

The first time I took acid was with Aaron Esterson. He was my guide. He just sat with me, and I enjoyed the experience immensely. I felt my body came alive, and had orgasms in all my limbs when I moved them. Afterwards, I remember we went out to a restaurant and, for the first time in my life, I ordered rabbit. I hated it. First, because I didn't like the taste of it, and secondly, it was unkosher. Later, my wife, Shree (whom I married after Roberta and I separated) kept rabbits as pets. Wonderful warm, furry creatures. The idea of eating them is repulsive.

I also remember a great naval character called Jesse Watkins. I enjoyed his company immensely. He was an artist, who also had been a patient of Laing's. I have a sculpture by him in my office. He used to hang around Hallam Street and take part in the various events. Later on, he turned up at Kingsley Hall with Aaron and most of the other Hallam Street crowd.

What about Sid Briskin? Any recollections of him from this period?

Not a lot, except that he was a senior social worker whom Laing was analysing. You see, Laing was so seductive, so wonderful, so engaging, so charming that everybody wanted to be with him, which is probably why Sid went into analysis with him in the first place. But the more people wanted to be with him, the more Laing felt that he was being gobbled up. So he would often back away. And that's what happened with Sid. Laing finished the analysis and made Sid a member of the Philadelphia Association instead. So Sid became a key figure in the setting up of Kingsley Hall. Later I learned that Sid was gay, although he had been married to a woman. I forget her name.

And then Laing came over to America?

In 1964, I invited him to New York to meet Ginsberg, all of the poets, and Morty and Leon and my teacher Dr John Thompson. You know what Laing said after meeting Thompson? He said that he was the only person he had ever met who knew more about schizophrenia than he did. From someone like Laing, that was quite a compliment!

You settled at Kingsley Hall in September 1965. But I think I'm right in saying that you came to London again, before that.

I came over to London again during the spring of 1965 for two weeks. I was thinking of coming back and I just wanted to check that things were still okay for me. At the time Laing hadn't started Kingsley Hall yet, but he was just about to.

It was also when I met Mary Barnes. Laing asked me if I wanted to sit in on his consultation with her, and I said, 'sure', not thinking very much about it. Then this woman came in and fell on the floor. She was clearly psychotic. Laing started to talk to her, and half an hour later she was talking as regularly as you and me. I thought, 'fuck me. This is amazing'.

Where did you stay?

This time, Laing found me a shed in the garden of a big house on the corner of Regents Park Road and Berkeley Road, owned by a very flamboyant woman called Flora Papstravrou. She was a 'madam', who had taken a young woman as a lover. I forget her name. Anyway, Flora had a salon and all sorts of artists and writers would come along. Ronnie was extremely close to Flora. When he came around I was invited to the salons, and I thought, 'this is hot shit'. So much was happening in London – on the artistic side, the political side, the acid side, the smoking drugs side. For me, two weeks of paradise!

And then you returned to America to finish your internship, at Long Island College Hospital in June. FUNY aside, what else was going on in your life at that point?

About that time, I also got involved with Tim Leary and his crowd up in Millbrook. I used to go up there and take acid. To me, a middle-class Jewish boy from Newark, always worrying about money, always worrying about food, to go up to Millbrook and find a kitchen with about 20 fridges in it, packed with food. Well, to be honest, I enjoyed the food more than the acid. The food was worth more than any acid trip!

Then I worked as a doctor for a while for Health Insurance Plan (HIP). I was a hippy doctor! I made more money then than I had ever made in my life. It was unbelievable. Before then I'd worked as an intern, a house doctor, for $50 a week, and then I was making $300 to $400 a weekend for HIP, which to me was a fortune.

I met my future wife, Roberta, at the Coda Gallery next to the Judson Church, where I was helping with an exhibition on LSD art.

Then I gathered all my money together and came to London in September with a group of poets I knew including Calvin Hernton and John Keys. We came on a ship called *The Happy Castle*, *The Castel Felicia*. You can read about that voyage in Calvin's novel *Scarecrow*.

Yes, you're the 'Dr Yas' character. What was that about?

I was the Dr Yas character who would give LSD to anyone who asked for it.

You were fond of Hernton?

I admired Calvin tremendously, especially for his sexual prowess with women. He had one beautiful woman after another. And I loved him for his use of words, his beautiful poetry. There's a wonderful poem he wrote about Laing called 'In Gandhi's Room'. It's in *Fire* magazine, a literary journal, my baby, and various anthologies. Calvin did a lot of work for *Peace News*. Then he went to Nigeria for a while. Later on, he married Mary Garvey, who had lived at Kingsley Hall, and who had previously been married to Aaron Esterson. He was a sociologist – we wrote a book together, *The Cannabis Experience* – and a great American novelist. His most famous book was *Sex and Racism*.

I've read that not everyone was pleased with your arrival at Kingsley Hall. Sid Briskin for one was very upset by it.

Well, the energy we brought blew the place apart. Not everyone was ready for that.

Sid and I were great rivals for Laing's affection. And Sid was in love with Laing, which also didn't help matters. And then you have to remember that there was a lot of subliminal homosexual intrigues going on, especially around Clancy Sigal. Clancy was part of that Laingian group, and he objected vehemently to this input of other Americans. He hated it. I don't know whether it was because of him or because of us, but Clancy was suffering from suicidal depression. Anyway, Laing, Esterson, Briskin and myself cornered Clancy just outside his flat one night. We were frightened that he was going to kill himself. Eventually Laing injected him with Thorazine and brought him back to Kingsley Hall. For Clancy, this was like a gang rape. He slept it off and never returned to Kingsley Hall. He was furious with Laing, with what had happened, with how his idol had fallen.

You were quite in awe of Laing at that point.

Laing was fantastically seductive. He'd often take off all his clothes down to his underpants and puff his chest up like an adder or a viper. He could do yoga very well. And he was very handsome personally, whereas I was just a shy lad from Newark, New Jersey.

Tell me about the dinners at Kingsley Hall. They seem to have been quite a feature of life there.

The dinners we had were terrific. Laing would sit at the head of the table and dominate the conversation. Eventually people would drop off, exhausted. Laing would always be the last one. I could never keep up with him. He would go to bed at about three or four o'clock in the morning. Then he'd wake up at six to go to his office at 21 Wimpole Street.

Many readers of our interview will connect you with Mary Barnes, of course. Why did you become so close to her and not, say, to one of the other residents?

I got involved with Mary because I wanted to get close to Laing. It was the royal road to a closer relationship. You see, Laing was a genius at making contact with extremely regressed, psychotic individuals, but I think he found their intense wish for closeness with him oppressive. So, he would hive them off to other people. Eventually he hived off Mary to Aaron Esterson, and Aaron hived her off to me. Our relationship started with my feeding her with a baby bottle.

Can you tell me something about the John Latham 'box' at Kingsley Hall which Mary slept in? Did it have anything to do with Reich? I'm thinking now of his orgone accumulator.

No, the box had nothing to do with Reich. A Reichian orgone box is more like the Tardis, an old phone box. That said, I think we had one at Kingsley Hall for a short period. Latham's box was a larger structure, more like a hippie temple: a huge wooden box with different coloured lights. Mary moved into the box when Kingsley Hall opened up and sort of took it over. Not long afterwards, Laing got there and she moved upstairs. The rooms upstairs in the roof were called the cells. At another time Mary had a cell up there too. I had a small room on the first floor. Laing had a large room upstairs. Then he lived in a separate flat for a while with his wife-to-be, Jutta.

Apparently Laing sent you to see the psychoanalyst Marion Milner. Most people who know of Milner will think of her book On Not Being Able to Paint, *which is about the kind of difficulties that people face in expressing themselves creatively. Did that book inspire you in any way?*

Not at all. I talk about this in the *Mary Barnes* book. As I said before, it was my memory of what John Thompson had done with Barry Bandler that inspired me to try the same thing with Mary. Mary was painting with her shit. People wanted to throw her out because they couldn't stand the stench. She was taking over the whole space with her smell. So, I thought of John, and said, 'Mary, paint with this black crayon or pastel'. And that's how she started.

You have to remember that Mary was a very controversial figure at Kingsley Hall. The shit was only a part of it. There was a pro-Mary and an anti-Mary faction. Aaron Esterson was part of the anti-Mary faction, I was part of the pro-Mary faction. The anti-Mary faction wanted to get rid of her.

Another feature of Kingsley Hall was that it was mostly a series of middle-aged psychiatrists and social workers, who were sloughing off their first wives and taking on new and younger ones. I didn't realize that at the time, but that was what was happening. So, you had Aaron Esterson – he left Naomi, his first wife, and embarked on an affair with Mary Garvey, and eventually married her. And all these sexual undertones and overtones were going on there, which contributed to the craziness of the situation. There were intense jealousies.

There were lots of 'ill' people there, though neither Laing nor I ever used that expression. We would say that they were suffering, or we would talk about how they were disturbed or disturbing. There were lots of people like that, though no one quite as powerfully as Mary.

Mary was the queen bee. She was the central character. She had tremendous input and energy from me. No one else had the support that she had. Most of the people who came

to Kingsley Hall were hoping for a change of state in their lives, but they didn't achieve it. Some people wanted to kill themselves. They arrived and then they left, sunk into the same state of regression and paranoia that they had come with. There was a guy there called David, I think that was his name, an engineer with whom Leon worked. One day he tore Mary's paintings off the wall. Mary had put these black breasts everywhere. He couldn't stand them so he tore them off the wall. Mary reacted with rage.

In conventional terms, many of the people there were quite mad. Some got better, some changed, but nobody changed like Mary. Mary was a fine example of what Laing is talking about in *The Politics of Experience*, of going down and coming up again. I think that's why Ronnie was pissed off with me when I published the book – *Two Accounts of a Journey through Madness* – with Mary: I had stolen his thunder, so to speak.

Laing in his book of interviews with Bob Mullan says that things got so bad between you and some of the other Kingsley Hall people that they planned to get rid of you. Any truth in that?

Mullan's account is wrong. What happened was this: I asked Laing if I could go into analysis with him. He said, 'no'. So naturally I was very disappointed. Then he said, go and see this man at Kingsley Hall instead – it was an aging, depressed, well-known anthropologist, John Layard. His father was an even more famous anthropologist, who I think was one of the husbands of Margaret Mead. So I went to see this old man in his little room at the top of Kingsley Hall. I sit next to him, he sits next to me. He gives me his finger, and he points to his head, and he says, 'touch me'. So, I touched him. There was a hole there. Then he says, 'this is where I tried to blow my brains out'. There was a hole in his skull where a bullet had passed through. I said, 'that's weird' and touched it. Then he started to fondle my leg. I got up and left. I felt very uncomfortable. I screamed at Ronnie, 'How dare you refer me to this aged creep!' And he said 'All right'. And then he referred me to Marion Milner, and she referred me to Norman Cohen. That's how my psychoanalysis began. Later on, I found out that Layard had been part of that homosexual subculture of Berlin in the 1920s, a friend of Christopher Isherwood and Auden, who, of course, as I've mentioned already, was connected to John Thompson. Of course, Layard probably did want to get rid of me.

Were people taking LSD at Kingsley Hall during this period?

LSD was a large part of the scene at Kingsley Hall. This was the time before it became illegal. Laing would get boxes, a hundred, two hundred phials from Sandoz and distribute it freely. But he also used it very deliberately and very successfully in working with very disturbed people. Eventually they all came through it. No one committed suicide. And many people saw it as the most significant experience in their lives. I was like an assistant to him at the time, sitting with people. I would sit with these people in a white room at Kingsley Hall, with flowers and some music.

Were you tripping as well?

No, I was usually dead tired, dead bored. My job was to make sure they didn't go outside and jump off a roof. And then I was there to help them with anything they wanted.

Nowadays it is supposedly contraindicated to give it to someone who is suicidally depressed or psychotic. But that's bullshit. It's actually the drug of choice. I didn't give it to patients, though. I worked with Laing under supervision.

Meantime you worked at the Langham Clinic, helping patients one-to-one …

That's right. Laing helped me get a job there. I made four guineas per session.

Do you still have strong feelings about Laing?

Look, I loved Laing. I still love Laing – there's nothing like an ex-lover. But I hated him also. I felt so rejected by him. If people continued to hang on to him, he could be quite brutal by humiliating them. He was a father figure, an older brother figure, an alter ego figure to me, all of those things. And he was very exciting.

The kindest thing that Laing did for me, and he did many kind things, was to turn me down for therapy. Why? Because we would have destroyed each other. We were both big guys. My transference with him was so intense. I eventually realized that he was the God that failed – as at the Dialectics Congress – he was outrageous there. I hated him for messing things up. After he rejected me, or I felt rejected – and I certainly rejected many of the things he did – I would contemplate tying him to a chair and lobotomizing him.

Just before we move on to the congress, Joe, I wonder if you can say something about David Cooper, Laing's South African collaborator. Am I right in thinking that he didn't have a lot to do with Kingsley Hall during your period?

There was a whole ferment of people at that time, a whole left-wing crowd, which included David Cooper and the *New Left Review* people. The *NLR* used to hold their meetings at Kingsley Hall and sometimes David would come around for those. Otherwise, although I went to Villa 21 once or twice, I can't say that I had a great deal to do with him. David had been a communist in South Africa. When I met him properly, through Laing, in 1965, he was high bourgeois.

He was living near Shenley Hospital, right?

That's right. Radlett or St. Albans. Anyway, he had a couple of children and a huge St. Bernard dog. Yeah, he really liked animals. I remember that very well. At that time, I was still ra ra ra from the Lower East Side and thought that anyone looking like David was a reactionary. Later on, he became an alcoholic and split from his Vietnamese wife. Then during the congress he became radicalized. He was very intellectual, I remember. He wrote *Reason and Violence* with Laing, about Sartre. I admired him for his intellectual knowledge and capacities. But I couldn't read that stuff! He was a big man who as the years went by got bigger and bigger. By the time he died his beard was much bigger than mine [Laughs].

By the way, there was a lot of competition between David and Laing and Esterson. Laing and Esterson in particular were very left wing during the mid-sixties. Laing would

walk around Kingsley Hall with a copy of Lenin's collected works under his arm, and Esterson would walk around Kingsley Hall with a copy of Stalin's works. I was interested in Trotsky at the time. Laing was much freer than Esterson, who was always insisting on boundaries and structure. I felt closer to Laing. I was never close to David.

It was Cooper who coined the term anti-psychiatry.

That's right. Afterwards Laing disavowed the term. He said he had nothing to do with it. But that is wrong.

Would you say that Cooper was more disturbed than Laing?

Yes, undoubtedly.

Let's talk about the congress now. I wonder if the Destruction in Art Symposium (DIAS) of 1966 provided some sort of prototype?

It may have been for some of the others. But I can't say that I was aware of it. In any case, DIAS was important to me for another reason. Gustav Metzger asked me to write a lecture for it. It was the first work of that type that I'd ever written, and I was extremely proud of it. How did the lecture begin? 'Man is a work of art … Man is a work of art in the act of destroying himself.' That's it. I showed it to Laing, because I wanted him to praise it, to say, 'It's a nice piece', that sort of thing. But he looked it over and rewrote it. That was not what I asked him to do. It infuriated me because many of the things he wrote were better than the things that I had written.

You came up with the idea for the congress, right?

Yes, the Dialectics of Liberation Congress was my idea. It came out of the wonderful influx of ideas and activities at Kingsley Hall and out of my interest in FUNY and other things. I talked about it first with Laing. He thought that it was a good idea. Then we got David and Leon involved.

You were the founder then?

That's right. But then as it got going a lot of other people got involved. Not just Ronnie, David and Leon, of course. But a whole bunch of people.

You called the organizing body for the congress the Institute for Phenomenological Studies. Why was that?

We needed a fancy name, so that people would take us seriously! [Laughs]. We had Laing's reputation and we had David's reputation. But we still needed something to bring in participants. The members of the IPS were me, David, Ronnie and Leon. We set it up to sponsor the dialectics congress. No one gave us any money. We had to pay for everything either ourselves or out of the ticket sales. It was crazy. We did it on a shoestring. You couldn't do it like this nowadays.

And the IPS was based at Kingsley Hall?

Partly there. We also organized it from the front room of 65a Belsize Park Gardens, the basement flat to which Laing moved with Jutta Werner, and from a house at the bottom of Primrose Hill, where I lived. I moved there from Kingsley Hall with my wife-to-be, Roberta Elzey. Roberta couldn't stand Kingsley Hall. She was an artist and a writer at the time and training as a social worker. I'd first met her, as I've said, at the Coda Gallery in 1965 and, somehow, she followed me to England. She came with a huge salami at least two feet long – in those days you could bring meat through airports. And a nice big cheesecake. These were a present to me [Chuckles]. And she moved into Kingsley Hall right away. Mary got very jealous of us – she used to pee on our bed. Anyway, we eventually got a small apartment at 4 St. George's Terrace, on the corner of Primrose Hill. We lived on the ground floor, Leon and Liz were in the flat above. It cost us £8 per week, plus £2 for rates. We had two-bar heaters and no central heating. Then we also used to meet up with Cooper and some of the *New Left Review* people at The Queens pub on the corner.

Ah, didn't Engels live near that pub?

He did. The fact that I was living close to where one of the founders of Marxism had lived used to amuse me greatly.

How did you go about deciding on the speakers for the congress?

Well, we chatted about it. At the time, I was very left wing. Laing mentioned Marshall McLuhan. But I vetoed him. Now I cringe when I think of that name because he was obviously a very important person. But I kept him out because I thought he wasn't left wing enough. He would have been brilliant.

You certainly invited Sartre.

Laing wanted him particularly. But he refused to come, which, in retrospect, was extremely fortunate. In his old age, he became an angry demagogue. Read my *Tyranny of Malice*, the chapter on anarchism. Sartre wrote a lot of crap about destroying bourgeois culture, burning down rich people's houses, stuff like that. And then he made incomprehensibility a sign of greatness. It was his work that was incomprehensible.

But Cooper didn't find him incomprehensible, and neither did Laing. Both were hugely influenced by him.

At the time, Sartre was a big figure.

So they were duped?

Well, there's Sartre and Sartre. Laing and Cooper were interested in phenomenology, and

Sartre was part of that. Later on, as Sartre aged, he became more and more radical, and I think crazed and crazy. That's the part of Sartre I'm talking about.

I know that some of Mary Barnes' paintings were exhibited at the congress. But did she come along herself? I take it for granted that there was a big Kingsley Hall contingent.

There was a big contingent. But I don't think that Mary came, though she was certainly well aware of what we were doing. A lot of people came from the congress to visit her at Kingsley Hall. Visiting Mary was a very big event at that time.

What about Harry Trevor, another one of the residents at Kingsley Hall? Did he come to the congress?

He may have done. The obvious names would include Paul Zeal, Noel Cobb, Bill Mason, Ben Churchill, Paul Gillette, Sid Briskin, Morty and his wife, Vivien. Harry Trevor was a very distinguished South African artist, who had been referred to me for therapy. He told me that a psychiatrist had told him that he must never paint again. Why? 'Because I'll go mad', he said. Which, I said, was bullshit. 'If you'll have a breakdown. So what? Life continues.' So he started painting again, producing the most extraordinary work including an etching for the first volume of *Fire* magazine. In my office, I have a beautiful oil painting that he did of me. It's one of the few portraits he did. Later, he jumped off the roof at Kingsley Hall and broke a few bones. He was pursued by demons. Then the bugger died of a heart attack in the late sixties. He was a very extraordinary, a very brilliant artist.

I've got a copy of the first volume of Fire *magazine. It's beautifully printed. Why the name 'Fire'?*

Ecstasy, heat, passion!

How many issues were there?

There were three issues. Then I brought out the *Counter Culture* book.

By the way, I was the first person in England to publish the diaries of Che Guevara. I saw them in the English version of the Cuban newspaper, *Granma*, and simply reprinted them in *Fire*. I never went to Cuba.

Because you didn't have time or because you didn't want to?

Oh, I wanted to.

Another interesting thing about *Fire* magazine: eventually I got a query from the fire department here, asking to renew their subscription [Laughs].

Tell me about the Counter Culture *volume, which like the Penguin anthology reproduces some of the congress material. I think that I'm right in saying that it was designed by Paul Lawson of IT and the porn magazine* Zeta *fame?*

I don't know about the pornography [Laughs]. But, yes, Paul Lawson designed it. Peter Owen published it. It was outrageous the amount of time he took to get it out. The pages were skewed, a lot was cocked up. I wanted to publish it on newspaper-type paper in colour, and then sell it for a quid. Instead, Owen published it the way he did at £4.50. I said, 'who will pay £4.50? It's a huge price'. Now copies of the book sell for hundreds of pounds at Abe Books.

Returning to the congress again, do you remember which of you wrote the manifesto, the one that begins, 'All men are in chains. There is the bondage of poverty and starvation'?

All four of us wrote that. We bounced ideas off of each other – even the name 'dialectics of liberation'.

And the secretarial work was done by whom?

Jane Haynes did a lot of it. She was married to John Haynes, the photographer. And Antonia Davey, who was Laing's secretary. And Jutta helped as well, with typing and other things.

You originally planned to hold part of the congress at Rotherfield Hall, a stately home in the Sussex countryside. That seems to have shades of the Trocchi/Laing Braziers Park event, the one that Jeff Nuttall describes in Bomb Culture *as a disaster.*

It's interesting you say that. But that event took place just before my time, so I wasn't part of it.

Laing was always trying to get a rich patron to dig us out of our financial hole. Well, the hall was owned by a very rich man. He might even have had a title. He certainly had a really well-known chef to cook for him – from the Tiki Tonga Restaurant in Tunbridge Wells, I think. Well, all of us went down there. For a while he was the great white hope. His place was going to be the New Kingsley Hall. But Laing screwed it up by not giving him the right respect and by saying things that irritated him. He did the same thing with Elly Jansen, of the Richmond Fellowship. One time, they were getting close, they were courting each other. Elly wanted Laing to be involved in the Richmond Fellowship and Laing wanted to get some houses from her. But then he irritated her. I don't know exactly what happened. But they had a falling out. Laing could be very rude. He had a tendency to bite the hand that fed him.

Of course, he was very rude to Stokely Carmichael before the congress. Would you give me your version of the incident? You were, I believe, one of the witnesses.

Okay, but for starters it wasn't an incident. There were incidents, plural. We rented a house in Elsham Road, Kensington, where the principal speakers at the congress were to stay, the idea being that they would all hang around and have a creative dialogue. The congress began on the Monday. On the Sunday, people were checking in. I was going round the rooms to see that everything was right, and I was horrified to see a whole lot of cat shit on Stokely Carmichael's bed. So I quickly called Leon and we cleaned it up. I don't

know if someone put it there, or a cat came in; it was a mystery. But I do know – and this is one of the reasons I went off Laing as a person at that time – that when Stokely Carmichael introduced himself to Laing, Laing said, 'Ah, Carmichael! A Scottish name. It must mean that one of my ancestors owned one of your ancestors'. Carmichael was totally put off by that, and rightly so. He was after all a very famous person. He stayed one night, and then left, and hung out with Michael de Frietas, alias Michael Abdul Malik, Michael X, who was eventually hanged in Trinidad for killing a white woman. I felt the whole point of the congress, which was to have people interact with each other, was lost because of Laing's comment!

But Laing in the Bob Mullan book of interviews says that nobody really wanted to talk. They just wanted to come along and do their presentations.

That isn't strictly true. Gregory Bateson spent a lot of his time talking to the other major participants, ditto Paul Goodman. Bateson came with his 15-year-old son. I can remember Bateson's phenomenal drinking. He was probably the only person who could hold his own with Laing; they would get through a couple of bottles of Scotch in the evening. I didn't know this till later, but Goodman kept on running after Bateson's son. That was one of the sub-plots.

As for the organization, we split the people up into alphas, betas and gammas. The alphas were the principal participants, the betas were people like Allen Krebs, Jeremy Holmes and Juliet Mitchell and others who held groups, seminars, to discuss matters, and then the gammas were everybody else who paid to get in.

During the congress and afterwards there were references to spies and Special Branch and related agencies. Were you aware of anything of that nature?

Well, if I did, they didn't impinge on me. But I'm told that Special Branch were deeply interested in Stokely Carmichael. They thought that he was extremely subversive.

There was also some trouble concerning a film. Not the one by Peter Davis, but the one by Roy Battersby. 'Hit Suddenly Hit', I think he called it.

Roy's film, which was made for the BBC, was put under lock and key, apparently because it was too incendiary. Then they had it destroyed or someone deliberately 'lost' it, which was certainly very unfriendly of them. I was outraged about that film for years. Then I thought, hold on, maybe they were right to destroy it. After all, Roy was a member of the Socialist Worker's Party with Vanessa Redgrave. It might have morphed into Socialist Worker's propaganda!

In your Centres of Power *book, you've spoken of how devastated you felt watching your home town Newark go up in flames during the days leading up to the congress. I wonder, how did that experience affect your opinions about Stokely Carmichael and black power?*

I was horrified seeing my whole neighbourhood put to the torch. Psychologically, I wasn't prepared for it. Part of me was always fantasizing about going back there. So it wasn't just

the houses going up in smoke – the riots were shown on the TV as the congress opened; it was as if they were burning the bits of me that I was still reluctant to let go of. Of course, it's now said that a lot of the people there burned their houses down deliberately to get the insurance money. In other words, it was more than just another 'black power riot'.

Anyway, later on, I had a remarkable dream in which I revisited my old neighbourhood. It had been renewed and was beautiful. After that I stopped wanting to go back. Why? Because my new 'old' neighbourhood was in my mind, and I had no desire to contrast that with other realities.

Actually, I think that the congress itself was a reparative event, intellectually and emotionally. We were trying to understand the roots of violence, with the underlying hope that we could find a way of making things better. I don't think that we succeeded. But that was one of our underlying motives.

Did the riots affect my view of Stokely Carmichael and black power? Possibly.

What happened to Laing and Cooper after the congress? You've already mentioned that Cooper was radicalized by the experience.

After the dialectics, there was a big split between the two of them. Laing, who had been very political, became completely apolitical. He went deeply into eastern mysticism. Cooper, who by then was developing a following, became a Maoist and established himself as the resident guru at the Manna Restaurant on Primrose Hill.

I'll tell you another interesting titbit about David. Following the congress, he was invited to Cuba and South America. In Argentina, he stayed with a friend of mine, a psychiatrist, Hernan Kesselman, and gave lectures on anti-psychiatry. He then set fire to the flat. Why did he set fire to the flat? Because he said that Kesselman was not sufficiently revolutionary, that he was too bourgeois. Whereupon Hernan had him committed to mental hospital. So, David became a patient in one mental hospital while he was giving lectures on anti-psychiatry in another mental hospital. Hilarious!

After the congress, Joe, you set up the anti-university at Rivington St. in Shoreditch. That also involved Allen Krebs, I believe. What else do you remember of him?

Allen, as I've said, was a friend of mine in New York. We founded the Free University of New York together. He was very much a left-wing ideologue, very much against the system. His wife, Sharon Krebs, became notorious for going to the Chicago convention in 1968, naked, with the head of a pig on a platter, which was a tremendously ballsy thing to do. I don't know what happened to Sharon. Allen eventually came to London and got involved with the anti-university and a number of other things. He was trying to find himself. At times, he got very depressed. He couldn't find a job and he stayed at Kingsley Hall for a while. His girlfriend there was one of the characters in the third act of David Edgar's *Mary Barnes* play. There's a saying: 'If you're not very left wing in your twenties then there's something wrong with you. If you're still very left wing in your fifties then there's something wrong with you'. Allen never changed. He was also potentially a very violent person, a very paranoid person. The bastards are out to get me, that sort of thing! I don't remember what happened to him. I think he died in an auto accident.

You once said to me that you weren't really interested in the anti-university once you'd set it up. You lost your enthusiasm for radical education very quickly!

I became wiser. In order to really have an anti-university, there has to be consistency. It has to be developed. It has to have money behind it. It needs to have a consistent place and time when people can meet. I didn't have the time or, in fact, the inclination to work on it. I worked on the Arbours Centre. That's been relatively successful. It's lasted over 40 years. I think that the anti-university lasted two years.

Regarding Arbours, were there philosophical differences between you and Leon Redler? After Kingsley Hall, he, of course, went ahead with the Archway Community. What was going on between you?

It was all quite simple. He stayed with Laing's group, and Morty and I didn't. Though I never asked to be, I had wanted to be a member of the Philadelphia Association. But as I said, Laing went off me. I was too hot a potato, too wild. I spoke my mind and a lot of Laing's crowd didn't like that. Instead, Morty, Vivien, Roberta and myself founded the Arbours Association, to provide places to stay and psychotherapy for people in severe distress.

Leon on the other hand continued to have a very close relationship with Ronnie over many years. He was part of the Philadelphia Association. For many years I had nothing to do with Leon for that reason. Morty and I were contemptuous of Leon for sucking up to Laing for so long. Then, later on, Leon became disillusioned also.

Then Laing died and the Philadelphia Association split into different factions. One faction was led by Haya Oakley, and then there was a Leon faction. I've become more friendly with Leon recently. Towards the end of the eighties, I even tried to get together with Laing again. I was hoping to resolve a lot of my difficulties with him. I sent him a copy of my book, *The Tyranny of Malice*. He wrote me, 'It's a great book, a great title'. He thought that maybe his next book would be called *The Tyranny of Love*. So I was sad when he died. It reminded me that the Arbours Centre came out of the work we did together.

Getting back to Counter Culture *again, let me quote you the opening lines from your 'The Creation of an Alternative Society' chapter. 'America is the end product of two thousand years of EUROPEAN-CHRISTIAN culture, now synonymous with what is called THE WEST. For our very survival AMERICA must be destroyed.' That's pretty strong stuff. Surely you didn't really believe that?*

I did. Now, thankfully, I've become more balanced. At the time of writing that, I was very angry about Vietnam and I was also very envious of rich people. During my analysis with Norman Cohen, I went through some really profound depressions. Not that I am an especially envious person, but I have a component of envy in myself that is very powerful and also a component of greed in myself. I'm not a greedy person, I'm not a jealous person. But all these things contribute. I'm also a very loving person. But at that time, I was focusing on what I saw as America's violence, at home and in Southeast Asia. Of course, later on, I thought about the subject more deeply. Well, it's true, America has behaved deplorably,

but it's also given lots of people the opportunity to develop their lives, to get wealthy, to own homes, things like that.

Finally, a question about the Mary Barnes book. Did you and Mary work separately or did you work on it together?

Mary's journey had been so extraordinary that I thought that something should be written about what had happened. While at Kingsley Hall, I was very impressed by the work of Marguerite Sechehaye, a Swiss psychoanalyst, who had published two books. One was called *Symbolic Realization*, the other was an account of a schizophrenic girl going down through a breakdown. *Diary of a Schizophrenic*. That book described the girl's experiences, and that's where I got the idea from. Two people giving separate accounts of a single event.

I encouraged Mary to write. You'll notice if you reread the Mary Barnes book that in the first part of the book she writes in very simple sentences and then that they gradually become more complex. We worked on it together. I never showed it to Laing before it was published for various reasons. One, because he was away in India meditating and I didn't know where he was. Secondly, I was concerned that he would make a lot of comments, negative and positive, and expect me to rewrite it again. That being said, I am sorry that I never had the opportunity to discuss the book with him, nor did I have the chance to hear his reactions to the Mary Barnes play which David Edgar wrote. I have been told that he saw the play in New York and liked it.

Notes on contributors

Joseph Berke is a psychoanalytic psychotherapist for individuals and families and a prolific writer on psychological, social, political and religious themes. A graduate of Columbia College of Columbia University and of the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York, he moved to London in 1965 to work with R.D. Laing, becoming resident at Kingsley Hall, where he helped Mary Barnes, a nurse who had been diagnosed with schizophrenia, to emerge from chaos. Their book, *Mary Barnes: Two Accounts of a Journey through Madness*, has been adapted as a stage play by David Edgar and has also been optioned for a film. In 1970, he co-founded the Arbours Association; afterwards, he founded the Arbours Crisis Centre, of which he was the director. Joseph is married to the psychotherapist Shree Berke (aka Lisa Pickar) and has two children from his previous marriage to the writer and teacher Roberta Berke. See also: www.jhberke.co.uk.

Martin Levy currently researches a number of subjects, including early twentieth-century counterculture and Jewish identities. He is the author of a small number of publications including books on eighteenth-century social history and articles on universities and anti-psychiatry. He holds a Master's degree in librarianship and information management from the University of Northumbria, and works at the University of Bradford as special collections assistant.