

Carol Marks

psychotherapy must remain an obstinate attempt of two people to recover the wholeness of being human through the relationship between them.

Any technique concerned with the other without the self, with behaviour to the exclusion of experience, with the relationship to the neglect of the persons in relation, with the individuals to the exclusion of their relationship, and most of all, with an object-to-be-changed rather than a person-to-be-accepted, simply perpetuates the disease it purports to cure.'

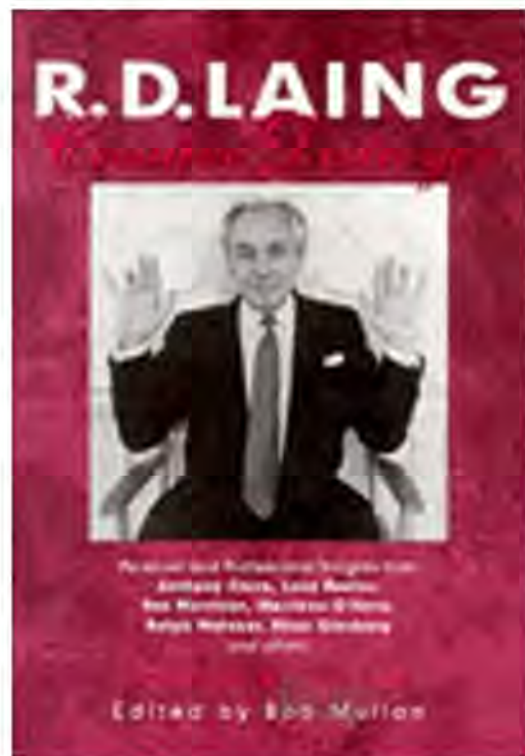
The Politics of Experience, R. D. Laing

In the late 1960s I lived in London in an apartment that used to be occupied by the Rolling Stones. I lived there with my husband, who was homosexual, although he had promised when we got married to give it up for me. I was 21, I was a model, I was thin, I drank and smoked and was very sophisticated and very happy. I adored my mother and stepfather and the only neurotic in my family was my poodle Caesar, who could not be left alone all day and be relied upon to keep clean. This enraged me and I beat him then wept bitter tears of repentance.

Fortunately, around this time my friend Mina read *The Divided Self* and decided that she had to be in therapy with R. D. Laing, the psychiatrist who had written it. However, even though she left several messages with his secretary, as well as on his answering machine, he did not respond. Finally, she called up and said something like, 'You rude bastard, why don't you answer your fucking messages?' Dr Laing was prompt in returning this call. And after an initial consultation he agreed to take her on as a client. And soon Mina could talk of nothing else but him.

Now Mina was Russian and she'd had a terrible childhood, she had reason to be depressed and she definitely needed help. When she wasn't depressed Mina was exotic, vivacious and fun. She was also very intelligent and our little group of South Africans living in London tended to defer to her in matters of the mind. If she thought this R. D. Laing was such a godsend then perhaps I should read his book, too, even though there was nothing wrong with me.

So I picked up *The Divided Self* and after reading a couple of chapters – BOOM – I realized this book was all about me. I'd always felt different, estranged from what was going on around me, as if somehow I'd missed the cues evident to everyone else, which was why I always fouled up. Feelings of engulfment, petrification and persecution were nothing new to me. But until I read *The Divided Self* I'd accepted that if I was going to exist in this world, and be who I was supposed to, I had to overcome



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these feelings and build up a different persona, one which worked better. And I had succeeded in this to the extent that I was functioning as a normal, newly married, happy, successful woman. When I crashed I kept it to myself and as soon as I began recovering I forgot about the feelings of worthlessness, self-consciousness, being a nobody, not a real person a sham, and denied they had ever existed. But here on these pages was a man not only describing these feelings but discussing them as if they were fine to have and saying that in fact many people had them, and for good reason. Suddenly I was validated and I was no longer alone, or as lonely. *The Divided Self* and *The Politics of Experience* and *The Bird of Paradise*, which I read next, were perhaps not wholly responsible for all the changes that occurred in my life, but in short order I was divorced my modelling career was over, and I had dropped out.

Now I was into freedom, north west London, dope, the Velvet Underground, vegetarianism and R. D. Laing. It was also clear that things had not been as rosy at home as I had supposed and that I could do with some assistance in sorting out why I felt the way I did. Not from Dr Laing though, for he only took on interesting people like Mina, not people like me who really had nothing to complain about. I knew I would not be crazy enough for him.

So I fell in love with my own personal paranoid abuser and moved to Chalk Farm, close to where R. D. Laing lived. Don owned a vegetarian restaurant in the area, which was the first of its kind, and every night there was a line of people around the block waiting to get behind the Victorian etched glass into the gas-lit room where patrons sat together at long tables made from railway sleepers and ordered from a blackboard on the wall. George Harrison and Jane Asher came, Julian Bream came Penelope Tree and Justine de Villeneuve came, Donovan came, Terence Stamp came, David Cooper, the anti-psychiatry psychiatrist came, and Mina and her husband brought along R. D. Laing and his beautiful partner, Jutta. Dr Laing it appeared had no objection to having social relationships with his clients. And not surprisingly he liked Mina and Arthur and had drawn them into his circle and now they all were at one of the tables having dinner together. I sneaked covert glances at him and discovered that he was slight and attractive with a high forehead and an expressive rather delicate face. His table manners were terrible though and he shovelled the food in, kept his mouth open while he chewed and used his hands if he felt like it, all of which affronted my middle-class notions of etiquette. But Arthur and Mina and those closer to Ronnie told me how free he was in everything. (And when he vomited, he vomited. Don was once at his house and he said that Ronnie excused himself and went to the lavatory, left the door ajar, and from an upright position vomited directly into the bowl.)

But even that first night I was aware of Ronnie's charisma. Whatever he was doing: talking, eating or keeping silent, he dominated the space and everyone at the table was focused on him. As I spent more time in his company I could see why. I had never before come across anyone who interpreted the world the way he did, his approach was highly original, but at the same time everything he said made perfect sense to me

Something I particularly responded to was the way in which he was able to present things without judging them. For instance, he might describe a family situation which corresponded to a similar occurrence in my own family, but because of his lack of judgement I would feel less threatened and better able to see that my responses had perhaps not been as off the wall as I had imagined. Which was an incredible relief. Letting people be who they were was a key concept of Ronnie's and it seemed to me he was saying that without an acceptance of how someone was, there could be no real understanding of human nature (within obvious limits, of course, for Ronnie was neither stupid nor irresponsible, and he was always quite clear about the unacceptability of acted-on-violent impulses which might harm someone). And as Ronnie refused to judge others he refused to judge us. No wonder we all fell in love with him.

For a long time I hovered on the periphery of the group, eating up every word of Ronnie's and delighting in his sense of humour, which could find something funny in even the direst of psychological states. Yet for the most part I was still too timid to address him directly. But every now and then, after great thought, I'd open my mouth and something entirely different would come out. I'd be very embarrassed but this kind of spontaneity always caught Ronnie's interest and we would actually have a conversation. Afterwards, high on my accomplishment, I would resolve to be as brave the next time I saw him, but face to face with him again, I would be just as intimidated, and say nothing. As long as you came out with what was really on your mind, Ronnie would be totally generous. But if you didn't and tried to show him how clever you were, he would spot it instantly and then he would be ruthless.

Being around him also gave us a sense of our own possibilities. Which led to Mel, Lolly and myself, opening, with hardly any money and less experience, our own vegetarian restaurant in St John's Wood, in north west London. The restaurant, as well as providing gainful employment, also gave us the chance to see more of Ronnie for we agreed unanimously that he and his family should be our guests whenever they came to eat, and as an added enticement have the pick of our organic vegetables to take home with them. Adam, Ronnie and Jutta's son, turned our cash register, ice cream freezer and everything else within his grasp, upside down, but what the hell - chaos was a small price to pay for occasionally having Ronnie come to dinner.

We probably had some kind of social life that didn't include Ronnie, but if he wasn't there the sparkle was missing. Fortunately however, even though Ronnie guarded his privacy carefully, there were a number of opportunities for us to be with him. At one time there was an informal seminar he gave every second Friday night, at Paul Zeal's house. Paul was a therapist, but more importantly he had a very long living room which could accommodate quite a crowd. The event was not advertised, it wasn't really a public thing, and was more for people Ronnie knew. This was a wide-ranging bunch, from people living in the various houses which had been set up along Kingsley Hall lines, to colleagues, to visitors passing through town, to clients and to us, the core groupies.

I can't remember if there was a charge for these seminars, but if there

was it was nominal, something like a quid, and not another person could have squeezed into Paul's long front room. The seminar started at seven or seven-thirty and went on until Ronnie had had enough (and he could always outlast everyone else, he was literally indefatigable). There was no set topic, Ronnie would talk for an hour or so about something that interested him and then there would be a general discussion. Once he spoke about Gregory Bateson, prefacing his talk by saying it was extremely difficult to explain what Bateson was up to, and that sometimes he, Ronnie, really got it, and that sometimes he didn't. Well, that night he did and it turned out to be one of those rare times when difficult concepts are explained in such a way that a lay person can easily comprehend what is being said. Afterwards, I would have been hard put to explain Bateson's theories on an ecology of mind, but while Ronnie was talking I followed perfectly. And this state of understanding, or grace, was something we all experienced with Ronnie over and over again. The seminars were by no means always about complicated thought patterns, simple things were just as common, like an electrician coming to Ronnie's house and Ronnie observing the man at work and leading from that into a discussion on concentration and a job well done. What I remember most about the seminars were their magical quality. For as corny as it sounds, when Ronnie 'got it', something akin to a transmission would occur and everyone would get it. There was a lot of hero worship and bullshit involved in being around Ronnie, but one of the things that kept us there was simply that his mind went far beyond anything any of us had ever known. Part of his brilliance was the way in which he continuously revealed the barriers we imposed on our minds, but equally as impressive was his confidence in our capacity to go beyond those limits. It was like being around fire, you were terrified it would consume you, but you were also so tempted that occasionally you just threw yourself in. And depending on your degree of fearlessness you either let go of your preconceptions, or you really got burnt.

However, despite being around Ronnie and understanding so much more about life, I was miserable again. My relationship with Don was shaky, to say the least, I felt depressed a lot of the time and had become so terrified in social situations that I almost lost my voice. I was far too busy thinking about what I would say and whether it would sound okay to actually say anything. Besides, everyone else's stories were much more interesting than mine. Nothing had happened to me, my family life was quite normal, all I was doing was blowing it out of proportion. Nevertheless, if I felt so terrible, perhaps I should see someone. I was still too scared to ask Ronnie in case he said no and instead I chose John Heaton, a colleague of Ronnie's, whom I knew Ronnie had recommended to a couple of people who didn't have interesting enough lives for him to take on. So for two and a half years I lay on John's couch and punished him for not being Ronnie by not opening up to him.

And for a year of that time Ronnie wasn't even around for he had decided to take a sabbatical and he, Jutta, their two children and Brenda the babysitter had gone first to Sri Lanka, where Ronnie would do a *Satipatthana*, and then to India. A *Satipatthana*, yet another new dimension

introduced by Ronnie. I had taken acid because I knew Ronnie gave it to his patients, I had started doing yoga because Mina and Arthur had gone on holiday to Italy with Ronnie and Jutta, and when Arthur said he hated his body Ronnie had told him he could change it by doing a series of exercises designed for warriors. Ronnie taught him how to do yoga and as Ronnie never did anything moderately, seven-hour yoga sessions were not infrequent and Arthur was hooked and he passed it on to us. And his body changed. And now it was some kind of Far Eastern mysticism. Don had been reading Christmas Humphries and Krishnamurti for years, but it was only after Ronnie became interested in Buddhism, that I did.

Night did not fall permanently on England when Ronnie left, but all the same there was great excitement when he returned. We had already heard that Ronnie had been the best meditator the monastery had ever had (word was that he had set some kind of meditating record). But before I could personally hear about his achievements Ronnie went off to lecture in America. The first time I would see him was after his return when he gave a public talk at the Friends Meeting House about his year in Sri Lanka and India.

The hall was filled to capacity, we sat in the front two rows, and when he walked out onto the platform he came over to us and addressed me directly, 'I saw a friend of yours in America and he sends you his love', he said. I was so overawed he was talking to me in front of everyone that for a moment I couldn't think who he meant. (He was referring to Don who had bought a couple of old Rolls Royces and Bentleys and taken them to America to sell to gullible Americans.)

That night Ronnie was really on and he amused and entertained us as he related his journey, from when he had taken his last tab of acid as he boarded the plane, to the intense meditation on mindfulness in the monastery, to the story of the English-speaking baba who had been living alone in the hills for many years and who came down to the town of Almora the day Ronnie and Jutta arrived. He talked about how well he had liked mediation, adding though, that he lacked the single-minded determination to give himself completely over to anything. And I immediately thought that I, too, never wanted to put blinkers on my life.

Ronnie gave a great presentation that night but most striking was his gentleness. Up until then I had gone along with the general consensus that Ronnie could drink copious quantities of alcohol and imbibe equal quantities of drugs, with their only effect being to make him more penetratingly aware. But now that he was not taking any drugs, there clearly was a difference and markedly there were none of the customary jabs which he used with great effect to pierce what he considered unauthentic.

Don called from New York. Americans had not been as impressed with old cars as expected and he was out of pocket and feeling low. So I flew to New York and then as part of the healing process we drove from the city to Los Angeles in a Volkswagen Beetle. After that we really needed a vacation and we ended up in Ylappa in Mexico, which could only be reached by boat. And there in a hut on the edge of the sea, with a nearby waterfall plummeting a hundred feet into an icy cold pool of water,

stoned on tequila and grass, I realized I could not continue seeing John and that I absolutely had to see Ronnie.

Following my return to London I made an appointment for an initial consultation costing £18 and no guarantees. I knew the chances were slim that Ronnie would see me – I told myself I'd left it so late that even if he wanted to he probably couldn't squeeze me in. Ronnie's garden-level room was large, booklined and elegant. There were velvet drapes, a piano and rugs from the East, but I couldn't see any of it, all I could see was him standing in the middle of the room politely giving me a choice of where to sit, on the floor, on a chair, on a couch, wherever. We sat on cushions on the floor and I took a deep breath and keeping my eyes trained on him I started to talk, telling him about the therapy I had had, but mainly telling him how much I wanted to see him, that I wanted it more than anything else I had ever wanted. I was fulsome and laboured that point over and over again until Ronnie stopped me and said with a smile, 'You don't have to convince me, I have no objection at all to seeing you.' I couldn't believe it, he was taking me on, me. It was so precious and I thanked him as enthusiastically as I had pleaded my case. And then I was standing outside the house as happy as I had ever been knowing that for ten pounds a week I was going to be in therapy with R. D. Laing.

So I started spending an hour a week all by myself with Ronnie. And right from the start it was unlike anything I had ever encountered. For Ronnie was an incredible mental acrobat and wherever I went, and in whatever contortion, there he was right alongside me. I had previously observed him work with people commonly considered as daft, people whom it was virtually impossible to understand. But Ronnie would listen carefully and soon he would have a conversation going which to outsiders might be incomprehensible, but which very visibly transformed the person he was talking with.

His ability to plumb thought processes, whether complicated or banal, was infinite, but he was also a dab hand at helping to dissolve rigidity. I once told him about a time when I was eight or nine and my mother and stepfather were entertaining family, and I had some wine and got carried away with the attention I was getting and wanted to continue being amusing and gay, and feeling very daring I started dancing and stripping. I hadn't got very far, my jewellery, shoes and socks, jersey, belt and perhaps the first buttons of my shirt when I noticed the expression on my mother's face and I immediately felt humiliated and blushing furiously I trailed off and stopped. Not a huge deal, nothing terrible had happened and the incident had remained hidden until then. But sitting with Ronnie I was covered with the self-same shame and worried about what he would think of me and what this incident would reveal about me. However, well before I finished Ronnie began smiling and when I came to a halt he burst out laughing, and it was so spontaneous and refreshing that suddenly all the painful repressed feelings did somersaults and I could see the humour of the situation and everything fell into place. I laughed too and pieced it together in a much more confident manner, with Ronnie egging me along every inch of the way. For there was nothing he liked more than when me or anyone 'got it' and was able to make the shift

from conventional mind to what the reality of the situation had been. Or was.

In one of my first sessions I had been going on about how everyone else really had reason to be crazy and instead of giving me what I wanted, which was his assurance that what had happened to me was big time bad, he said, 'You know some people only need a little push and I'm hoping you're one of those.' Then he looked at me quizzically as if he knew I wasn't sure whether to be affronted or pleased.

Almost every session with Ronnie produced insight and I would walk out of his room floating – with the help of the best grass or hash for I had quickly discovered that Ronnie was not averse, if one brought round some good grade stuff, to having a smoke during the session. (His post-India phase of renunciation had come to an end within a couple of months of his return.)

And besides my sessions, everything else was also wonderful, for Ronnie got us started on a new quest – the pursuit of pleasure. After the years of introspection and work on the self we needed some fun. It was play-time. And as usual, when Ronnie decided on something, it was carried through with a vengeance and suddenly we were all rushing off to learn how to dance and sing and play a musical instrument. Ronnie himself was an accomplished musician and when he sat down at the piano, knowing many old-time songs and being able to play by ear, he would entertain us till the wee hours.

Now fun was the name of the game and we eagerly gave ourselves over to it. There were wonderful parties with dancing and singing, picnics on the Heath with cut glass and silver utensils, beautiful clothes from India and Mexico by Thea Porter. Thea was a clothes designer for those with a taste for the rich hippie look. Jutta loved her. There were also *cordons bleu* candlelit dinner parties, trips to Greece, Spain and Italy, and hordes of little children who seemed always to be running round naked. During those years the sun constantly shone and it never rained. At last I belonged, had found my place and my place was with Ronnie, as long as Ronnie was around to point out the way everything would be okay.

Nevertheless, there were times when the whole thing backfired. One of these for me was a 'Come as your most Beautiful Fantasy', a joint birthday for Jutta and Paula. I borrowed a wealthy friend's finery and wearing a fine spring dress and dripping diamonds and emeralds, and with my long hair straight and gleaming, off I went to the party. Phillip Saville, a television producer, had lent his large romantic space, the catering team had done wonders, and everyone looked superb. Including me, and as soon as I walked through the door I was surrounded by men, my fantasy come true. But as they converged I lost my nerve and my tongue and eventually they all went off and left me alone. In desperation I went to sit next to Ronnie who was dressed in a long white Indian shirt and pants. He asked me what my fantasy was and I said it was a beautiful rich person and he chuckled and obviously wanted to go on with the conversation. I had sat down with him because I was feeling stiff and anxious and hoped he would help me out. But this was a party

and Ronnie was not into being a nursemaid, and then I felt worried about wanting him to – we were always very careful about invading his space – and I tried to talk to him like a regular party girl. But I couldn't so I did the polite thing and got up and five minutes later I gave up completely and left to commit suicide.

I couldn't wait to see Ronnie in therapy to discuss this terrible fiasco. But when I brought it up he looked completely bored, so bored that it cut me to the quick and there was an instant where I clearly saw that I could either hold on to my hurt or I could drop the whole thing. I decided to let it go and as I did the difference between how I looked and how I felt suddenly struck me as hilarious. And then Ronnie was right there with me.

There were also times, however, when he didn't give a damn and then he wouldn't harm you, but he wouldn't help either. I was once talking about how I felt he wasn't interested in what I was saying (and I must say here that we as a group were so much up each other's bums that though it feels as if he said this to me, I can't remember any more whether he actually did, or whether it was to someone else who then related it to me). But here's the gist of it: 'Mostly I'm up for cleaning away your shit and powdering your bottom and putting a fresh nappy on you, but sometimes I'm just not.' And that was that.

So therapy was great, even though my relationship with my boyfriend hadn't improved. However, he had remained in America searching for a guru leaving me free to experiment with my love life. Talking to Ronnie had enabled me to drop pretending but I still couldn't say I was getting the hang of the thing. I just had to rely on the premise that through the therapy I eventually would. Sex had definitely become the testing ground, when it worked I would know everything had worked. But it never did.

Then Jakov entered the picture. I knew that for many years Ronnie had been very friendly with two men, Francis Huxley, the anthropologist, and Jakov Lind, the writer. The story was that for 12 years the three of them used to meet every Tuesday night with their respective partners and brainstorm. I had got to know Francis, who was indeed a remarkable man, but I had never met Jakov. I had heard about him though, and what I'd heard was that he was a writer of esoteric stories and a seducer of women. He adored women and they adored him. All rumour, of course, but I did wonder what kind of a man he could be. Then one night he came to the restaurant with Francis and Ronnie. And for once I wasn't aware of Ronnie's every move because I knew Jakov was looking at me. I was flattered but also quite taken aback. He didn't look like Errol Flynn, he had a tummy after all, how could he be a seducer of women?

But when he called the next day and invited me to tea I accepted and then became extremely nervous. What if I wasn't seducible? What if it didn't happen for me? Then I would know for sure that real feeling was never to be mine. Luckily however, the day of the tea was also the day I went to therapy. As it was I was so nervous and excited about the tea that I immediately started talking about it. We were smoking some excellent Thai grass, and perhaps it was that, but it seemed to me that when I stopped the atmosphere in the room had changed. Ronnie was very

responsive to what I was saying, and from my perspective, subsequently more responsive to me. I told him how anxious I was that I wouldn't measure up and he laughed and said he didn't think I had anything to worry about and that no matter what happened I was sure to have an interesting time. He was really chuffed by the whole thing and we had a very lighthearted session and when it was over he hugged me and said again that he knew I was going to have a lovely time and that he was very pleased I was going. He accompanied me to the front door and on the way we saw Jutta who had just come in and Ronnie told her I was going to have tea with Jakov. But Jutta was in a bad mood and she couldn't care less who I was having tea with. (Jutta was often terse and irritated with Ronnie at that time but I was so self-absorbed and I never imagined they might be having problems with their relationship and in fact admired the way she was with him. We knew one of the reasons Ronnie loved Jutta was that she was quite willing to call him on his stuff and wasn't overawed by him. Something else in Jutta's favour was that she had never been to therapy. Of course, Ronnie, as perfect as he was, would be with a woman who had no need for therapy.)

So I nervously drove to Jakov's apartment. And had the most exquisite time I'd had to date. This was what I had been waiting for and everything fell into place, what had gone before had merely been the rehearsal. I was not so totally gone I didn't realize that all the work I had done with Ronnie had been tremendously beneficial. But what really mattered was what was happening here. And in the most blissful way I could never have imagined, the roof of my head lifted off, sparks flew and the *bindu* went right through my crown. I was blessed, I was saved. And by the end of that fabulous night I knew I could no longer continue with therapy. Not only because I now understood everything but because Jakov and Ronnie knew each other too well. And telling Ronnie about Jakov would be like having him at the keyhole when I was with Jakov. And as there was nothing left to unravel or improve, why do it?

When next I saw Ronnie, not having any more problems expressing my feelings, I told him breezily that I felt that what I had had with him was a dazzling mind-fuck, which I had needed more than anything else, but that because of the nature of our relationship that was as far as it could go. Now, however, I had met someone with whom I could go all the way. Which was what I had been waiting for. As I said this I was amazed at how right it felt but at the same time I was also slightly uncomfortable because I loved Ronnie and was so grateful for his help and his presence in my life and was so unused to choosing, and wished I didn't have to. And Ronnie was graceful and said he was pleased I'd had such a good time and that it had worked out for me but that despite this he thought there was still some work I had to do and that I should continue to see him for a while. This deflated me somewhat but I was habituated to the all-or-nothing approach so I stuck to my guns and said I didn't want to come any more. And Ronnie conceded and that was the end of my therapy. (An aside to this is that after telling this story to friends, one of whom was also in therapy with Ronnie, she got very stoned and told Ronnie that she had had some realizations and that if he

didn't fuck her the therapy was over. Apparently Ronnie then got up, bowed, said it had been a pleasure and wished her luck.)

As for myself, I was so high and so in love and so full of insight that I didn't spend much time analysing my relationship with Ronnie. Which had changed. On the one hand he welcomed my input at the seminars, where I was no longer scared to speak, and he was clearly amused by my bias which had now become sexual fulfilment as the road to enlightenment. But in our more personal dealings, at parties and dinners, there was a distance, a lack of interest, which had not been there previously.

Much more dismaying, however, was my eventual realization that even though I was now a sexual being I was not going to be happy for ever. And nor was anyone else and Ronnie and Jutta were having problems, as were various other couples in the group. I on the other hand had no ties so I fell in love with a Frenchman and went to live in France. Then I was no longer part of the inner circle and news of Ronnie and Jutta came to me via the telephone.

But France wasn't so far after all from England and I visited fairly frequently and occasionally saw Ronnie. During this time Ronnie and Jutta and some of the couples in the group split up, and while Ronnie and Jutta got together again, the other couples did not. However, everyone remained friendly and no one missed a Ronnie event because of a divorce. One of my last visits while I was still living in France was on the occasion of Ronnie's birthday. Ronnie and Jutta had moved to Eton Road in Belsize Park, to a large house decorated with Jutta's customary taste and elegance. For entertainment Jutta had arranged a concert in which she and her singing teacher would sing a German *lieder* and Mina would follow with old Russian songs. We were waiting for Mina to sing when the doorbell went. Jutta answered it; then from the doorway she said, 'Robert's here.' Ronnie was visibly impressed and he immediately got up and left. A couple walked past the open door with Jutta following them then Ronnie put his head in the door and said to Mina something like, 'Sorry for the interruption but if you wait a moment you might be lucky enough to have Robert Bolt and Sarah Miles listen to you sing.' Then he was gone. Mina looked slightly disconcerted but after five minutes or so had elapsed she shrugged her shoulders and started to sing. Ronnie, Jutta and Sarah Miles and Robert Bolt never did return to the room while the concert was in progress, but it was a great party all the same and ended with us all drunk and dancing like dervishes.

That was the last time I saw Ronnie and Jutta together and back in France the stories I received became more fragmented. Arthur was losing his mind, doing a lot of drugs and demanding financial support from Ronnie. Ronnie said no and Arthur became threatening. Ronnie couldn't care less. Ronnie and Jutta had separated again, this time it was definite and Ronnie was living with Francis, drinking enormously and making up for lost sexual opportunities. He also apparently was turning on colleagues and the more well known they were, the more vicious he was.

Then I went to South Africa to visit my parents and fell in love with Paul, an artist. But despite this I had to leave and on my way back to France I stopped off in London. Francis was one of the first people I vis-

ited, he and Ronnie were still living together, though when I arrived in the early evening Ronnie was out. However, close to midnight he returned with his son Adam and David, an antique dealer. He was very friendly and charming but he wasn't really listening and talked over everyone and wanted, it appeared to me, to make it clear he was available. The next day when I mentioned this to a woman in the group her lip curled and she said that though he might imagine himself single he was pretty hopeless on the domesticity front and still dropped his laundry off at the house for Jutta to do.

While I was in London, Michel Odent, the French obstetrician, gave a talk which I attended. My plan was to hear him and then go back with him and Mel, my former restaurant partner, who in the interim had married Francis Huxley, to Francis's place. Mel said that Michel was keen to meet Ronnie and that Ronnie had agreed, though rather reluctantly. During the ten years I had known Ronnie people with impressive reputations had always been passing through town and wanting to meet him. In those days when he did meet with someone it took place under optimum circumstances, in a house impeccably maintained by Jutta, where the whirrings of the household never disturbed Ronnie's room. However, at Francis's house Ronnie's needs were not being catered to with the same amount of thoroughness and I understood from Mel that there was a certain amount of tension between Ronnie and Francis. To further complicate matters Mel and Francis were going through their own troubles. So all told, a pleasant evening is not what we should have been anticipating.

Which was evident from the moment we arrived. Another couple had come with Michel so there were five of us waiting and waiting for the door to be opened. Ronnie was struggling with the lock and had to be helped by Francis, and then Mel was explaining why there were more people than just Michel, and Francis had obviously had a gut full and he disappeared in the direction of the kitchen with Mel behind him. Ronnie had clearly had a lot to drink and while we opened the wine we had brought he went to the piano and put his full glass on top of it and started to play and sing. Then Francis appeared and said irritably that last time Ronnie had done that the wine had spilled and the keys had been gummed up with liquor and he did not want that to happen again. Ronnie just went on playing, and exasperated, Francis and Mel disappeared back into the kitchen.

I didn't feel like sitting and listening to Ronnie and taking my cue from him, and apparently none of the others did either and we began talking amongst ourselves. Then Ronnie stopped playing and came and sat with us. He was still handsome but looked rather dissolute.

'How old are you?' he asked Michel Odent and when Michel said, 'Fifty four and a half', he burst out laughing and repeated fifty four and a half in a mocking ironic tone. I felt slightly uneasy but to his credit Michel was unfazed and smiled and asked Ronnie how old he was. '57', said Ronnie and then he started laughing again. I wasn't sure what might happen next. It felt as if Ronnie could blow - which I had heard he frequently did those days - so I got up and went into the kitchen where I

found Mel sitting cross-legged on top of the kitchen table and Francis looking anguished. It was obviously no place for me and I went back into the sitting room. By now we had all had quite a bit to drink and goodness knows how much Ronnie had had before we came and suddenly he was at my side mumbling something about was I going to be with Francis tonight. No, I wasn't, I said firmly, not quite catching his drift and then he said plainly, well if I wasn't going to be with Francis how about him? I was startled but there was no question in my mind about my reply and I said something flip like, he would have to do a lot better than that if he wanted to get me into bed. But he didn't want to be denied and my reply infuriated him and he went for me. I can't remember the exact sequence but it was something like how all I had to rely on were my youthful charms and as they were fast fading I needed to be a lot more appreciative. However, the miraculous occurred and I didn't feel in the least insulted and thought what an asshole he was being and I burst out laughing and said, 'Oh Ronnie, that's not true and you know it.' He was taken aback but too drunk to let it lay so he became more insulting and I just went on telling him he hadn't got it right. Then abruptly he said he'd had enough of us being there and we had to go and he was hustling us through the door. And that was that. Except for the fact that I was exhilarated. It was as if what I had learnt from the master I had finally been given the opportunity to use against the master himself. I was free.

I never saw Ronnie again but I continued to hear stories of his drunkenness and his increasing attacks on people, both physical and mental. I heard he was with Marguerite, who had been his personal assistant. They were living in a squat, she was having a baby and then they went to live in America. After that there was a long silence during which time I married Paul, the artist from South Africa, and also went to live in America. A couple of years later Lolly called me from London with the news that Ronnie had had a heart attack while playing tennis in St Tropez and was dead. After the initial shock had passed I imagined Ronnie not having played tennis for years but running faster than anyone else, going after every ball, even the most impossible, giving the game every ounce of everything he had and his heart finally not being able to stand the strain, being all used up.

Though Ronnie has been dead for seven years his mind has remained accessible to me. His craziness, his drunkenness, his viciousness, his awfulness, remain as well, but as his stuff, part of his neurosis, having to do with how he set *himself* up, nothing to do with me. What is to do with me is his essence, the pure distillation of what he knew. And what I retain most vividly are his thoughts on how to relate to people without trying to kill them; on how to respect one's own mind; on how to be frightened and still go on; on how to never give up until one reaches the heart of the matter; and perhaps most importantly, on how to find the courage to trust oneself.

'The experience of being the actual medium for a continual process of creation takes one past all depression or persecution or vain glory,

past, even, chaos or emptiness, into the very mystery of that continual flip of nonbeing into being, and can be the occasion of that great liberation when one makes the transition from being afraid of nothing to the realization that there is nothing to fear.'

The Politics of Experience, R. D. Laing