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*China has given Japan  
two pandas  
and crowds are queuing  
in Tokyo zoo*

*Japan has given China  
cherry trees  
to plant in Peking  
and workers stop to look*

*China is making gentle love  
to Japan  
Soon Japan will be bringing China  
cups of tea in bed  
- Japanese tea  
in China cups -*

Peter Barry

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## 'ENTRANCE NOT FOR EVERYONE'

### Madeleine Frances

A participant in Quaesitor's famous 9-month course was heard to remark recently 'It gets to be just a game that you learn to play better than other people'. A girl I know who braved, Boadicea-like, a first meeting of an on-going group which attacked her for her 'serenity', says now 'They try to break you down. Maybe that's good for some people, but it's not my way of finding out about myself'. Fair enough.

Critics of encounter groups tend to expect you to respond with arguments against them, and wait for you to start proselytising about growth potential, enhanced communication possibilities,

creative interaction, etc. If you want to that's fine too - but it's your trip, from beginning to end. The truth about encounter (or anything else) cannot be represented by argument, because an argument is just the inner state of the person sharpened to a fine point with which to jab at others. We argue not about the truth, but about the validity of what we experienced. In certain cases, if someone says 'Encounter is the way' or 'Encounter is a load of tripe' it can threaten the reality of my experience - I begin to doubt whether I was right. I am desperately obsessed with being right (not unlike the other 65 million individuals in

Britain, I feel) but I understand at the same time, that it doesn't matter a damn.

That's why I want to describe a group which I was in that wasn't a textbook 'good' group. Big things happened on it for me, some of which were to do with the techniques and virtues of encounter, and some of which were a million light years away from being anything to do with it. Because I never finished the group, this is a highly personal, unideal view, too. What I want to get across is that encounter is not (nor should it be) an encapsulated experience. It is shot through with life and vice versa. What happens can be magical and opening, or it can force all the concrete blocks in the psyche to cluster together for comfort and safety. What happens is you, is me. No blame.

It wasn't my first group by a long chalk. But I felt almost as stupid as usual. Having learned how to part company with my shell at times and let it get on with its idiocies while I get on with mine, we came to that agreement then. Everyone was sitting on the carpet in the little room, slouched back against the walls. It was high summer, and it seemed rather crazy to be incarcerating ourselves. Someone firmly shut the blinds to cut out the traffic noise, and we waited for the leader to arrive. I couldn't speak to anyone for all the reasons that are me, so I cast radar beams around at the other people. Out of the corner of my right eye I saw a blurred face which I liked, because it looked like mine. Across the room a delicate attractive young man was talking happily to a woman who exuded security, and a dark girl sat next to them looking miserable.

The leader arrived, and seemed to know some people in the group. She had an aura of young, swinging, feet-on-the-ground-ness. After some talk about the body holding the key to everything (at which I felt distinctly depressed) we were asked to find a partner. This is always

agony. I know immediately who I don't want to be with, so it's all a kind of cat-eat-mouse game, pretending to look vaguely round, while actually executing all manner of complicated avoidance games. I end up with the blurred face I observed out of the corner of my right eye. It is a larger-than life face, and frightens me rather. Everyone is paired off and we are told to do an exercise which consists of asking each other alternately 'Who are you?', over and over and over again. I have done this one before, and I know the weird things that tend to come out after a few minutes. The water is familiar and I'm not afraid of drowning. I hear some people having extreme difficulties asking what seems a silly question. When they run out of answers, explosive giggles of embarrassment ensue, and some end up just chatting. My partner is dark, satiric, very truthful in riddles, and amused. I can risk myself with him, because he has been through a lot, and holds his suffering not in the form of muscular agony in his face (like so many people) but in his hand, where he tosses it around like a machiavellian juggler. I admire that intensely, and I'm sorry when the group re-forms. We split into separate groups then, and start two more exercises - 'What kinds of animals do the people in the group remind you of?' and 'What kinds of furniture?'. This is fun because it is amazing to find that the substantial blonde man opposite reminds me for some reason of a kitchen stool, and I remind him of an oddly shaped chair. This game is supposed to be played as spontaneously and quickly as possible, but so often I feel I daren't say what comes to mind, or nothing comes to mind and I feel guilty. Next we go round the group saying what we like physically and don't like about the others. I steel myself for this one, because naturally I think I know what my worst feature is, and, having to some extent learned to live with it, I am terrified of having the fact flung at me

again that it is awful. Whether by accident or design, only one person actually objects to that feature. I feel suspicious. When voicing my own feelings I find on the whole that it is the 'set' of a face I object to rather than any individual features, because it is the expression which reveals what I imagine the person thinks of me, and that is what puts me on edge. We all come in a big circle after that and give 'feedback' on the exercises and on each other. By this time, against my will, I am totally invested emotionally in the group. Whatever I brought with me when I came, in the way of previously conceived security or self-dislike fades - this is the most important moment of my life, and what people say to me in this state is crucial. We discuss what we feel, and hostilities and admiration between people come out into the open. I don't remember what was said. Already something is beginning to happen to me.

The last exercise that evening was walking with our eyes shut and just touching the other members of the group. This is a queer exercise, because sometimes I feel very trusting and at home with it, and sometimes not. This time I began to get paranoid about certain male members of the group. There were two men in particular who used the occasion as an opportunity to grasp in a sexual way, and it is a desperate feeling to know this is happening and yet feel you cannot object, because there is nothing definite about it. I found myself seeking out women, who touch more lightly, warmly and sensitively. All in all I was far from comfortable. Then we had to choose a partner, still keeping our eyes closed. As soon as a pair of hands touched mine I knew whose they were. It was my original partner, and I knew it without opening my eyes, because his hands were so uncertain, unmanipulative. I opened my eyes a bit to confirm it, then relaxed totally.

By the next evening of the group the people on it had crystallized a bit more.

Definite characters were recognised and reacted to. There was Brendan, highly aggressive, highly defensive, who couldn't stop talking and interrupting in the group, often saying sadistic derisive things. Two girls who had come together were like the Hans Anderson pair Rose Red and Snow White (although more sophisticated of course). A lone Australian man who emanated images of talking to sheep in the harsh outback was called Len, and came to be referred to as 'young Len' because there was an older blond man also called Len.

My dark friend was reacted to strongly by everyone, mostly favourably because of his speed and intelligence, but also with fear by some of the men. Jane, the woman I had first seen, who emanated security, started off the second group by going round asking us if we felt her to be 'out of it' as she felt herself to be. She was, I think, reassured and then began exploring feelings of tension and hostility between herself and another dark girl called Sally. Eventually they had a fight, and some beads got snapped. Some of the men in the group were obviously surprised to see women fighting. The group took very much its own course now. Rose Red, I can't remember how, became upset, and Sally began massaging her face, while the group continued.

My friend got into a scene where he described what happened to him after the end of the last group. Apparently it had affected him so much that he'd gone out and got drunk, and was then arrested. His first conviction. I felt the group leader did not understand him, and kept trying to prove too quickly that she did understand. He resented that. In the end everyone gathered round him and we were all stroking him, and perhaps we lifted him, I can't remember. What I can remember is getting an extraordinary feeling of closeness, and wordlessly finding myself with my arm linked in his when the focus of the group turned somewhere else. At the

end, co-counselling was suggested (meeting in pairs outside the group), and I felt devastated when he arranged to meet someone else.

By this time various things had happened, and it was obvious that we had a trouble-maker in the group in the form of Brendan. No-one was quite sure how to get through to him, because his defence system was so incredibly convoluted and devious that anything we said was twisted on its ear within seconds and used against us. Yet he kept saying he had come to be honest, and to learn how to relate better. The group leader, by throwing herself in as a member of the group rather than a leader, managed to make some dent in him, but triffid-like he sprang back into neurotic bloom seconds later, making a vicious remark about a member of the group who happened then to be particularly vulnerable. Obviously something had to happen.

I co-counselled that week with the elder Len, in a park near Charing Cross. Hearing the tragedy of his life to the strains of a brass band playing 'Edelweiss' and explaining to him why I didn't feel in the least feminine. He missed the point completely, and kept saying 'But you are very feminine'. I felt very moved by his life, but very afraid of it too, because I have a sneaking feeling that people attract their own tragedy, and his wish to associate further with me was rather like a large animal nudging me and saying 'Come on'. I didn't want to. During the week I rang up my friend, with a sense of impending catastrophe and asked if we could meet. It's like everything I experience in my life - the actual constellations of live realities are forming somewhere at a subliminal level, and the structure on top is superfluous. It is there to be subverted.

The next week I met him and we turned up to the group together after a drink.

Already I felt very unnerved, yet incredibly happy, because for the first time I had made what felt like a spontaneous inevitable contact on a group. And I only make real contacts once in a blue moon. We had already talked about Brendan between us, and independently decided we couldn't stand him.

In the event, when Brendan started his diatribes, my friend went and crouched before him. He yelled and clapped his hands loudly. Scared him. I knew what I wanted to do, so I did it. I was shaking with some kind of odd energy and just went up and put my hand over Brendan's mouth. He pushed me off and I put it there again. Younger Len, who was next to him eventually intervened, and forced my hands away. Then a fight ensued between him and another man in the group. I felt bad and responsible, because it was like the old story of men taking cudgels for women, and I hate that. In the end, I just sat there, holding onto Brendan's foot - a lunatic gesture which yet meant something to me. When he got up to go to the loo I let go, and just crept into the arms of my friend. We'd done things separately but we'd been through it together. Eventually the group said they felt excluded, and we joined in again.

Brendan was visibly disturbed momentarily by the whole thing, and for a short time the group actually got through to him. He couldn't stop talking about his sexual conquests, and that was the weakness which finally made him vulnerable. But I saw him months later, in another group, on top form again.

I never went back to the group, because I had to go on holiday with my husband and children the next week, and that was the last week. They were trying to arrange a weekend. By that time I was aware that I had fallen in love.

Although nothing predictable happened, my life turned upside down in the wake of that group. I can't trace back the connections along the synapses and say it was because I realised this, or understood that, or broke free of the other. The dynamics were magical, and I honestly don't know where the group was influential and where it was accidental. It doesn't matter. I wouldn't dream of recommending a group to anyone on the

strength of that or any other group. It can stand as just a peculiar, insistent, isolated instance of something real happening. And it is real things I'm looking for. If this account sounds fragmentary - you're right, it is. In the end resort, encounter groups notwithstanding, my life runs like a river, secretly. I couldn't tell you if I tried, and maybe it's the same for you.

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## GESTALT THERAPY

Vivian Milroy

An objective view of humanity today reveals that not many of us know how to live properly. Many people cannot cope efficiently with their problems and their environment. Few people enjoy to the full the actual experience of being and living.

F.M.Alexander suggested that it is because we still rely on our unconscious responses to our environment. In a simple situation of hunting, food-gathering, mating and self-protection this was very efficient. But now, with our imperfect and mistreated bodies and increasingly more complicated society, these responses are often self-defeating and damaging to the organism.

Building on Alexander's basic insight, Dr.Frederick Perls has evolved a philosophy/technique for living that he has called gestalt therapy. He first stated it in 'Ego, Hunger and Aggression' and then published a further work called 'Gestalt Therapy'. Gestalt Psychology has been concerned with emphasising the importance of perception of the whole rather than of the separate parts. One's perception of a cow for example is quite diffe-

rent if one sees it in a field, in a market or loose in a town street. And yet it is the same cow. It is the background that has changed. It is the total picture - cow/background that is meaningful and which is perceived, experienced and responded to. Gestalt Therapy applies this idea to the human organism. The sense of identity, 'I', 'ego feeling', is a total whole comprising figure and background. And this figure/background description is constantly changing. If you have toothache this sensation is the main figure and breathing, temperature, body position, are all backgrounds to it. If you have no toothache or other obtrusive body aches and you are walking by the sea, your breathing itself could be the foreground in your total gestalt against a background of sky, body movement and sea-gulls crying.

This sense of identity, 'I' feeling, is more real and vivid if one has a conscious lively contact with one's environment. If one hears music right in the foreground of one's attention and with full concentration. If one concentrates on the flavour and textures of the food in one's mouth right up to the point of complete