

Ord International Summer School:

Arundel, 1974

There's no problem for me about ORDISS: I enjoyed it. I wondered if I ought to write here a serious appraisal of my experience, criticisms of how things were run and so on, but that now seems pointless. My experience was mine alone and my criticisms were made then and there where they belonged. I paid £30-odd a week for a very creative holiday in a very facilitative environment; that's how I see it, not as a serious experiment in communal living - though there were many valuable things to learn there about community.

The population changed weekly, veering between 60 and 140 of whom about half were English. People were all alive and good to know, and we had time and space to experience ourselves, our variety, our skills and creativity and warmth and fun; and loneliness. One startled newcomer to the scene was overheard declaring on the 'phone' 'It's like a cross between a kibbutz and *Hair*'. I suppose it could be described as a large-scale growth-and-creativity-workshop-cum-self-structuring-encounter-group, verbal (French and English) and non-verbal and open to all ages. For part of my stay I was accompanied by two of my children. Alone and with them I appreciated the chance to be free yet responsible, the atmosphere of acceptance, the value placed on feeling and growth and relationships. Back home now we have many good memories, and we brought away a great deal we'd discovered inside us and between us.

I wrote this poem the day before leaving. It reads quite differently now from the way I felt it at the time. How indeed can we ever appraise an experience?

In a green-carpeted room
Sound-deadening
The outside light came through square windows
The ivy crept in through the ventilator,
Chairs, armchairs sat empty by the walls
And on the floor a group of people
Close, touching, exposed in mutual intensity
Watched me, as clumsily I pulled out the furniture of my mind.
They stared at the cushioned impact of my violence
Sat attentive as I howled out long-deadened sounds
into the corners of the room.
They granted me release.
And the circle of people closed and opened
Opened and closed.

Then, in another place I threw
Great streaks of oily colour on a page
Vibrant with defiant light
Bold rhythms to hold attention
Eruptions of me
Splashes settling into space.

And wove my way, dancing, round others
Moving in my body
Moving through space
Touching and withdrawing
Closing together, coming away
Dancing up, against, around
Down, through
Beyond

Here children play.
Their voices call across the grass
They scream through their undergrowth
Handle clods of earth with contemplation
Run
Plunge in deep water
Run

. . . and out into the open.

There in the bushes green leaves, tough, smooth, lie in layers
Or burst out.
Succulent heather stands up from the ground, gold-green and prickly
And dry dull nettles, forbidding and untouched.

I rest on the grass.
Above, the sun is shining on massive trees
Whose voice brushes over the leafy spaces
In sweeps of movement
A timeless green display
Where black branches curve and hold their grand burden
Before the cloud-wisped sky.
Rhododendrons shelter below
Still and poised
Delicate in smell
Distant and brilliant
Lightly stirred by the wind.

And the grass shifts unceasingly
A haze, an undulation
Moist roughness under my hand
Clipped spikes.
Minute insects clamber through green forests.

Everything is movement.

Alix Pirani