

The word LASER is an anagram of the first letters of autonomous, social, experiential learning research, which goes on either consciously or unconsciously in every community of free learners and helpers.

Learning is a process that changes the learner and his world. At best, it includes pleasure and libido in *ananda*, the ultimate joy of living.

Light has always been the medium for carrying copious information at great speed. Lasers and other devices can now process vastly more information and provide vastly more feedback than was possible prior to their discovery.

LASER is therefore a useful mnemonic for the life-oriented processes that groups are all about.

The examination room

David Boll

I

I am in an examination room. Now in this examination room there are a lot of syllabuses and so forth. They are all up there on a board at the side of the room - the papers, the questions. For example, Job - How much money are you earning? What position have you reached? How are you getting on with your colleagues? and so on. And then Marriage - How successful? How often do you fuck your wife? Does she like it? Do you like it? Are you a good father? And Leisure - Friends, your relationship with them? Then, Location of Housing - Where do you live? How much did your house cost? It's pretty boring to read all this that's why I am not going into an awful lot of detail.

Then round the room there are dreadful warnings under each heading. Like, under job they have someone who's down and out, drinks methylated spirits, beard, red face. He does not look happy, it must be said. He looks bloody angry. Mark you, he does not look much angrier than most people strike me as feeling. Still, he looks angry and he is what happens if you don't do too well in your exams. And then Marriage - there is this man sitting alone in a very spruce bedsitter looking at the television. It's a terrible, sterile environment, very low and bloody awful. Friends - there's another lonely man, and his house is in a terrible mediocre suburban terrace in an indeterminate region of a characterless town in the empty middle spaces of England - pretty grim, I should think.

I have looked at those dreadful warnings, and what do I do now? Am I going to do well or badly? I am anxious. I know I have been worrying a lot about these exams.

Well, it's easy to answer the questions. I know how much I am earning, I know all that, so I can answer the questions pretty easily. So that's that. So I answer the questions

and I want to leave the room, but of course I have got the feeling there is more to it than that in some funny way. Somebody is going to mark the papers. Wait for the marks. I don't really know why it matters, quite honestly I don't. What the fuck, so I get a mark. Well, alright.

Here come the examiners with the marks. Well now, here is the job mark. The examiner is this colleague at work who really pisses me off because he is always fighting to be top and it seems sort of dreary. He really does piss me off this man, and he is sitting up there, he's very big, and he is the examiner, and he's got my mark. It's not as high as his mark - in fact there are one or two people with a higher mark in the job, and I know I have been worrying about that. If I choose to think about it, I find some people have lower marks than me and then other people have higher marks and - well really, you know, alright! Hey ho. Well, its important to him. He really thinks its bloody important. He's got the proper attitude to my mark - he has got the proper degree of respect for the people below me, and he has the proper degree of respect for the level I'm on, which is not the highest. There's also a degree of disparagement. He would even like to be a bit contemptuous about it not being higher. He can't quite manage being contemptuous. He feels there is something funny going on but he doesn't understand it. Boy, is he right! Boy, O.K., is he right! Well, that's his trip.

Now move onto marriage that's the next thing. Christ, I don't know who the examiner is here, maybe it's my wife. My wife. Oh well, I don't know, I feel some sort of sympathy with her. We fuck alright but I feel we don't fuck enough. I don't feel I get enough into it. I don't feel I get my zest into it. I feel bad about that. I would like to get more zest into my marriage, more physical zest somehow, more sort of play and fun and I feel concerned about this. I don't know how my wife feels. I don't think she is too worried. I think she feels it's getting better. She's quite a different type of examiner from the first. She feels she would like more but she doesn't know how to get it, and that's about how I feel. I feel very self critical about this. Pretty harsh. I really would like to do better, though. She is saying well, you know, things are coming on not too bad. It's like when I used to get a school report, doing well you will improve, sort of thing.

Funny that, isn't it. I thought of all these papers being the same sort of thing, but actually they are all about different things and on different levels.

The Friends paper. Well, I don't know. There they are. I don't feel I see enough of them. I don't get myself into my friendships enough. They quite like me, these people. They would like to see more of me. Quite a lot of people would like to see more of me and would be very happy to see me. It's nice. Well, I don't know, I feel rather self-critical. I seem to worry about the exam result in Marriage and Friends. I seem to be the examiner myself here!

Where I Live paper. I don't care. I can't rouse any interest just at the moment.

Sex and women paper. Well, I don't know. Yes, I want more zest and fucking. I don't know. I don't feel very interested in all that. I seem to think I should do better in some things.

We haven't done that paper yet - the Job Change paper. Better sit here and do it.

What jobs could you do? What jobs do you want to do? What jobs have you considered? Oh boy, that's a tangle, a tangled tangled paper. Which job do you want to do? I don't know. Well, nobody gives a buggger except me. It's only me interested in examining this and I don't know the answer. I don't get any marks. But who cares except me, so why should I worry? Well, why *should* I worry? The man who examines himself has really got a problem! If he's got high standards he's really got a problem! If he can't satisfy the examiner it's the examiner's standards that are screwy. Oh God, how introverted can you get!

Oh, there's the Writing a Book exam papers. Let's do that, Writing a Book, How am I getting on? Well, I think the book is a bit pompous really. Again, I am the only examiner. Nobody else cares. Alright, so it's pompous, so maybe I'll write a better book or not as the case may be, so now thank God I've done that. It's bit dusty in classrooms. They have a feeling of exam rooms and ink wells, people scratching their initials because they are so pissed off and bored. Desks are always the wrong shape for your body.

I want to piss off out of this room, but I feel I have to admit I have got problems. I mean, I could improve. I could improve. Well, I don't know. I dare say I could, but its rather a drag just at the moment.

I don't feel too much like improving, I just feel like enjoying myself.

Well, I am fairly bored with this scene so I'd like to go out of the door now. And it's spring. In fact, I would say April, and the fields are very green and there are all these birds. Bird notes are so sharp. How are they doing in their exams? Funny isn't it really, who the fuck cares whether this bird has a happy married life? I suppose it probably does alright. It lays its eggs and things. I don't suppose it worries about it too much. It goes about its business, you know - sings and fucks and eats and all that sort of thing. I suppose some birds do it better and some birds do it worse, but if they don't know they don't give a damn. They seem equipped alright. But I've got to be serious, man, you've got to be serious. A dead bird. A bird killed by a cat, like those warning pictures in the exam room. But that's different. That's an act of nature. A bird crashes at times to fly too soon. Tragedies in bird life. Natural tragedies - different from self-examination - or imagine a melancholy hedgehog. Imagine a cheerful hedgehog - that's more of a problem! I mean some things are cheerful and some are melancholy and they're stuck with it. They're stuck with it, I guess. A hedgehog is not going to get cheerful by worrying about its melancholy, you can be sure of that. Probably it cheers up when it eats a beetle or something.

Ah, now suppose a hedgehog was worrying because it wasn't a bird! Well, it really would have something to worry about. I don't see any way out of that. It's just a hedgehog, and that's it. A hedgehog that doesn't like hedgehogs is going to be pretty miserable, and that's a fact. I mean I like hedgehogs and I like birds - I mean, you know, they are all alright in their way. I think I like them when they are themselves. I don't know that I like them so much when they're trying to examine themselves into

something different. Now, you imagine a hedgehog wanting to be a bird and not itself. One would sort of wonder why. I mean, it's got its own charm really, hasn't it? It would make a bloody awful bird. A really absolutely terrible bird. It would be a failure as a bird. Why should it be a failure as a bird when it could be a big success as a hedgehog? Or should a bird fail as a hedgehog when it's really O.K. as a bird? I can imagine a bird that felt it wanted to be hedgehog - a really screwed-up bird. Or a bird could think, I am a pretty awful bird, shall I be a hedgehog or a cow? Oh God, that's like me wondering which job to go into. Of course I mean as long as he doesn't put it to the test you can imagine some bird that's got a lot to eat and it's living in a tree and it's got fed up with its life and it's thinking, shall I be a hedgehog or a cow? I mean, it's got no idea what's involved really because it's up in the air, it hasn't got its feet on the ground. That's one thing you can say about a hedgehog, it really has got its feet on the ground! But that's one thing about a bird - it can have these fantasies because it's a bit up in the air.

Or could be a bird and a hedgehog, I could be half up the air and half down on the ground, I just want to be a human being. As a matter of fact I want a swim in this stream, so I am taking off my clothes, and I am in the stream and I am having a swim. Very nice. Gosh, this is a nice feeling. The water on my arms, my chest, my balls, my legs and all that. Feet you know - you feel the water on your feet because you are shoving against it. It's pretty muddy in this stream.

I am marching up and down on the bank and the sun is shining. There is a cow looking at me, sort of curious and I am looking at the cow. We are pretty different, the cow and me, but we are curious about one another, we are interested, we are not turned off just because we are different. He's a cow and I am a human being, but we take an interest, you know. I can kind of vaguely imagine a cow and he can vaguely imagine a person. I don't have to be a cow to tune in with a cow, or vice versa.

I'm lying down now and sunbathing. I often feel tense lying down. That's because when I lie down I start trying to improve myself. I lie down and have this little exam room with people round me and they say, now you're lying down so you have time to think, are you improving in your marriage? And your job? How are you doing? Down in the little room there. Oh shit. That's what I do, a little exam room round my head. Oh God, I just feel I must be really out of touch to be in there because it means I'm out of touch with everything else. I must be really lacking other interests before I can sit in this exam room, sort of build it round me. I must be really screwy and miserable, really really miserable and lonely and like I was at school when I could not do anything but pass exams. That's what it's like. It's like my fucking father who never did anything but take an interest in exams and work away the old shit. Work, work, work. A real shit. I feel bloody sorry for him actually. God, he set me a fucking awful example though. And here I am. Oh boy, do I lack other things. I remember sitting at home - everybody else was out on a cricket field or something. A miserable little kid. I thought I was the greatest genius. Maybe I was, but Christ what a sacrifice.

I remember going out and collecting chestnuts at dawn one year. It's one of the happiest things I have ever done. Crisp air, lovely fields, new feeling of conkers when

they are fresh out of the shell. Chucking stones up in the chestnut trees, and plonk, the green shell comes down and I split it open, and it used to be silky white inside, sort of cossetting this thing inside, this lovely new-born conker. It was really glossy and bright. Wonderful things, when they are new. The birth of the conker. It had that quality of all new life, you know - fresh and quite tough and well taken care of, well thought out, alive, and beautiful. Even going all fusty and stale. In my boyhood, spending life amongst desks, initialled desks, printed books, reading about games of football, printed books, funny. I don't know, here I am by a river bank and then I start thinking about all this, my past. It's better than the exam room though. I mean, it's my past, it's me, my past which lead to this. I feel more tranquil about it. I don't mind my past the way I mind the exam room because the exam room shuts me in but the past is an opening out in a way, it's a dimension. It's got the sense of dimension that this countryside has, my past time. I feel real in that and it gives me also a sense that I want to make up for lost time and sort of lie around here in the sun and not think about improving myself.

Oh, I could do with a fuck. I could do with a nice big naked sweaty girl with big tits and a body. I don't see her head when I think of this girl. She's got one, I don't doubt, but I think mostly of anything that would make her body real. I think of her big hairy cunt or goose pimples or having a period or spots. A real girl with a body who I can fuck. You would imagine that everybody had a body but having not had one myself for many a long day I can assure you this is a great big illusion. Would I fuck my wife if she was there? Well, I don't know. She's not the worlds greatest fuck but she's not too bad. She's got maybe half a body. Maybe if I fucked her more she would get more of one. How to grow a body together. That could be a strange thing couldn't it? I wonder what would happen if she walked up now. She's a bit ethereal somehow. I love her. She's sort of wispy, and I'm sort of wispy and we're two swisps. I want somebody whose got something I haven't got. I want somebody who'se really got a body. Maybe then I will feel I've got one.

II

It's the next day now and of course I have been back in to the office room on my own. Back in that room, a very small room, very empty, very dull, nothing to relate to in it, nothing to do, I'm too anxious. I can't do anything in case somebody comes in and sees me doing it! A room where there is nobody there and yet you can't do anything on your own! Is it a wonder really that I get preoccupied with things like examiners? Who wouldn't be in such a place? I think of my life and all those isolated rooms I have been in. It's terrible, this feeling of blank non-existence, non-relating. The exams could be a relief. Well, they were at school. The exams were a relief, they were something to do, they were something to work for. Those rooms I used to work in to pass the exams. At least there were examiners in my life. My father paid me to succeed in exams. He put in a bit of an appearance when there was an exam in the offing. Isn't that weird? What a way to spend a life! I'm a long way from that river bank.

If I come out of this little room where there has been nothing but me and I have not been able to do anything on my own, I am really frightened of anybody. They are so big and I am hardly there. I am just a wisp. Outside just seems unreal. This man at work who pisses me off gets huge. There is nothing else, you see. When I am actually with him and I can look at him and see him he does shrink, he becomes human. I suppose I get more normal, but when I am alone in that little room and he is not actually there and he's outside, he is a giant, he is very frightening. Actually it isn't him that got big, it's me that got little. I am just a wisp. I am just a little wisp, I am really terrified of anybody.

I come out and I revisit this river bank and see just how it feels.

I am so tiny. Mist over the grass. The grass is very big and I see one of these girls coming like I was imagining, you know, a big meaty girl, very real. I am frightened of her, I am so unreal. If she waved her hand at me she would go right through. If the wind blows I will vanish. The grass is very beautiful, very bright green. I can hang onto that because it's round me, very big and translucent, full of light, the sort of fleshy light that vegetation has when the sun is shining through it. I can sort of cotton on to that - it's about the right scale for me. I can remember back there, of course. The room, this terrible grey scene and dead dust and stale air. It's a terrible feeling. I felt sheltered there. I think of it as sheltered but actually it's very destructive in there.

I hang to this grass, like some little wraith of cobweb or one of those little bags of silk that insects are born from, feeling pretty tremulous.

I am travelling round a bit now. The world is very misty and unreal and tenuous and I don't feel it quite exists, but there it is. I can see misty trees and unreal illusive water in the stream and grey mountains as though they were made of mist and sky, and closed houses where you can't see what's going on, and paths into woods that peter out and don't end up except in a tangle of briars.

Now I feel I am emerging out of this terrible misty formlessness slowly. I think the thing is it takes time. I am just kind of waiting. I think that's the thing - the world will come in to being. After all, the thing is, it is there - it's me who is not there. If I just wait peacefully it will slowly flow back. It's pretty frightening though, that the world went like that. It grows back very slowly. It's not a matter of me travelling, it's a matter of me receiving. Sensing a trembling in my knees, a shaking feeling in my shins, curious wandering vibrations in my chest. My legs are a bit cold. Oh my pained lost forgotten body. The bottom of my back feels very good, very vibrant. It's not a matter of improving myself, it's just a matter of existence. It's not a better/worse parameter, it's being-in-existence/not being-in-existence. You just can't take it for granted you exist to some extent, but I come and go incredibly. Sometimes I am a distraught speck in an empty room, a piece of worried dust on stale drafts, a frightened speck in the corner of a box in a room in a dead house that's locked and whose windows are boarded up. Sometimes I am the universe. Or I have been fire. Or I have just been my body, a wonderful thing, very beautiful. But sometimes I am just a dream that a draft of old wind puffs round a dusty room, a screech of air, the pain of looked windows, a scratchy noise in the air conditioning, that is all that's left of something that can be

the whole radiance of harmony of the universe constellated in an instant. Such is man, such is man. A live and dead speck, a speck that is terrifyingly nothing, a speck that is vibrantly everything.

Funny - I thought I went into an empty room in order to exist, and actually I don't exist because I am in the empty room.

Ah well, it's not always so. Sometimes I exist a great deal in an empty room, but those rooms where I can't move either out or in, where I am neither with people nor with the world, and I can't be with myself - those rooms are really death. But an empty room can be beautiful. The glint of the light in a window or the greyness of a television screen can be very beautiful, if those dustwinds of the mind are still enough for my sight to perceive it. Even an empty room comes back into existence if I am still, and I come back into existence with it. Ultimately it doesn't matter whether its a room, the world or what it is as long as it exists. But there can be a terrible vicious circle here because I am in the room and the solitude gets me so scared of anything outside I can't get outside so I stay inside and it gets worse, it gets worse and worse, and so the little room that seems nothing becomes a whirlpool, it sucks everything into itself and it all disappears down a sort of internal hole. The room that seems still and boring and not very important is the suction void down which everything vanishes into greyness - trees, fields, streams, clouds, fashions, life, women - every bloody thing just pours into emptyness and disappears. That's the real death, the death of existence. But I will say another thing, and that is that in a way it's an illusion. I mean I am still here, potentially. The world is still here. It appears all to vanish, but if you give it a chance, if you just give it a chance, once give it a chance, give it a chance, in stillness, and it does, it does, gradually, flow back.

Natural Therapeutic Research Trust

The trust was formed to enable a school to be set up in the country to train people in acupuncture, naturopathy, osteopathy, herbalism and homeopathy.

The students (qualified doctors) will be in residential training for at least one year. The learning of the technical aspects will go hand-in-hand with the development of the intuitive side of the above therapies. The aim is to train doctors to diagnose through a process of intuition as well as with the intellect. A White Cross Society has also been formed, which will train lay people for one month.

A property has been purchased in the country as a site for the school. The house, which accommodates some twenty people, needs a great deal of work done to it including such major items as connection to main sewerage, heating, plumbing and installation of gas and electricity. People are contributing labour and professional advice but funds are needed for materials and equipment. Offers of help should be sent to Natural Therapeutic Research Trust Ltd., 222 Ballards Lane, Finchley, N.3.