

Our work, I believe, is concerned with individual and social consciousness and action. Praxis, we could say. It's significant that this word is almost unknown in the English vocabulary. It seems there is little need to express this meaning. So, the more that significant social action is prevented in terms of the weight of the realities of power and ownership in a society, the more our work is channeled into political insignificance.

In Britain at this time, it is either channeled into a greater and more extended individualistic growth, attempting to achieve the powers of a class of Yogis. Or it is channeled into a managerial technique. I find this frustrating.

Ian Holland

Atlantis is Alive and Well and Living in Co. Donegal

My first glance of the house - 'Atlantis' painted in red and black above the door, greens, blues, yellows, astrological symbols and a yin-yang sign on the walls. This isn't a THERAPY centre. Where's the seriousness? We are here to get into our past after all, to exercise our pain. The night before I left I told a friend, 'This is going to be the most painful period of my life'. Complete nonsense. The last 6 months has been the happiest. I don't get stuck in my blackness now, I can work through my depressions. It's painful doing it, but I come up out the other side after a session instead of as before sitting staring at the wall for hours hoping the mood would pass and having no idea how to make it, or guts to try.

I was straight-jacketed in a totally conventional middle-class prison known as the Holland family. The guards were known as 'the neighbours' (suitably anonymous) and there was something called the 'Family Name' which had to be appeased at all times.

The Family Name could feel threatened in several ways. I could swear (except till I was 10 I didn't know any swear words - they were very efficient). I could fart. I could mention sex or I could omit to salute my mother's friends in the street. Most of these public prohibitions were also enforceable within the family where they came under the civil as opposed to the criminal code, and were labelled 'cheek'. Punishment was much the same however: being dragged upstairs by the chief inspector, bouncing on the stairs behind him at the end of his arm, thrown at my bed, ordered to remove my trousers and administered in official terminology 'a damn good thrashing'. This helped make a man of me, albeit one who couldn't ejaculate.

Several allies were called in to help the inspectorate mould me into a fine upstanding citizen. 'We Cow Children' advertised Burnside Primary School in neon, flashing letters as I arrived to add my tears to the buckets already wept by a little group of kids most clutching flowers for TEACHER. Teacher I'd been told was a very nice lady, only I'd to do exactly as I was told or she'd produce a big thick length of leather and give me 'a little smack' with it. Some poor guy's mother hadn't warned him and he got belted the

first day. We knew who was in control. This was someone else's scene, this was their circus. THEY had the whips and we were the clowns. Reading, writing and arithmetic interspersed with Genesis and Exodus and stone fights on the way home. Trying to maim one another. THEY were too big to even contemplate attacking so we helped destroy each other.

And on Sunday into the friendly clutches of the local holy willies. More fearful lectures about sin and no relaxed discussions about sex. I spent my teens racking my brain - was there a God???, laced with fantasies of screwing every female in the district (except I wasn't quite sure what screwing was). Anyway it didn't matter cause they'd made me terrified of women and my sister's clothes were as close as I could bear to be to a female.

By 12 they'd really got me. I gave up the fight and went underground, except when I was as big as them I didn't know how to come out again. I'd forgotten how to fight.

But deep down I always knew what they'd done. I'd swallowed lots of their reasons, rationalizations, reasonableness, but underneath I knew they'd tried to kill something in me. Very slowly I began to haul myself out of the morass.

By 20 I'd met a few other people also vaguely aware of their morrasses, but we didn't really trust one another and more important we didn't trust ourselves.

But 400 miles away there was a woman who was beginning to trust herself. Jenny James has helped start up PNP in 1970 to run encounter groups in her home to which anyone could come, changing PNP from its tea and sympathy beginnings towards helping people to grow. She was undergoing Reichian Therapy as well as giving and getting help from her friends and her personal experiences in therapy at that time are in her book 'Room to Breathe' (Coventure).

In 1974, tiring of the London fumes she bought a large house in Donegal, christened it Atlantis and moved in with her beautiful daughter Becky. Friends soon followed, as did goats, puppies, donkeys and kittens and a stream of people coming for therapy including myself.

Having read Janov I was all set for the heavies: a 3 week intensive, cut off from human contact bar my daily session with my THERAPIST round which my life was to revolve.

I hitched to Burtonport. Jenny and Babs were lying naked sunbathing in the back garden reading an astrological birth-chart. I felt both freaked and excited but adopted a cool demeanour.

'What Janov's doing is probably OK for middle-class Americans (at 6000 dollars a head) who've led a gregarious social life but the people who come here have mostly lived in isolation all their lives,' said Jenny. 'What they need is contact with people, real contact, no superficial 'getting on' with. That's what brings up feelings in them and that's what happens here.'

New people usually spend between a day and a week living in a local bed and breakfast and coming into the house for sessions. Sometimes they move straight in; it all depends on how they feel and how we communards feel about them when they arrive. Most come for THERAPY as if it were something distinct from living and soon realize it's therapy, part of their lives. We have sessions and groups when we feel like them, there's no pre-arranged schedule. They happen organically.

Our groups aren't like Janov's. He simply has a number of individual sessions going on in the same room. We don't go to groups just to relate to our selves. We live as a tribe. What's happening to others affects us so one person at a time goes into things (tho' often that sets off others) so that everyone else knows where that person is at. And we don't always take things back into the past. Our feelings aren't all just projection and it's a total cop out to automatically lie back on the mattress whenever anything comes up in you. The hardest part of therapy can be sitting looking someone straight in the eye and telling them exactly how you feel about them and letting their reaction into you. We don't avoid face to face confrontations. We relate to one another in the present the way we wish our parents had related to us in the past: as openly and honestly as we can. And most of us don't just relate to our parents by lying in the therapy room, screaming murder at or crying for them, we tell them what we're doing and why and what we want from them now. That's the scariest part: opening up communications with people you closed down on years ago.

Our groups aren't dominated by pain and seriousness either. Loads of good feelings are expressed. We get as much joy as we feel sorrow. We giggle and laugh and play about and we don't intellectualize about our feelings. One of the greatest traps is to start talking about how you're feeling instead of just expressing it.

There's no therapist/patient distinction, there's just some people who've been into therapy longer than others.

New people are asked to pay £300 (most pay less and no-one's ever just turned away) which covers you for as much therapy as you want. You can stay as long as you want only subject to how others feel about you. Sometimes someone gets totally cut off in their relating e.g. feeling such great hostility towards someone else that they find it impossible to express and so withdraw inside and don't relate to anyone. Most come back after a further dose of the outside world.

We use a variety of techniques: Primaling/Bio-Energetics/Dynamic Meditation/Massage/and Gestalt and have encounter groups, anything in fact which will help us get our energy flowing. Everyone helps everyone else as much as they feel clear and able enough to do, but no-one stands back and plays the role of 'therapist' i.e. remote, non-reactive being, utilizing a set of techniques to help a patient contact his feelings. When we're helping someone we react, positively and negatively, to what they're going into and to them as people.

The kids in the commune join in the groups if they want and relate in the same way as the adults. What we were all denied in our childhoods was the right to let out exactly how we felt about our parents to their faces; so here if a kid wants to tell his father to

fuck off he can do so without fear of being smashed for it. They aren't mollycoddled: they're treated as equals; so the adults react to them just as honestly.

They went to the local school for a while but didn't like it so they don't go now. They educate themselves.

We live fairly anarchistically. We eat communally (vegetarian) but there's no rotas, people just do what needs doing in their own time. We grow our own vegetables, we've goats and chickens, we dig our own peat and we'll sell the car soon and use a donkey and cart. We've also bought a cottage on an offshore island with 10 acres of land, where a neighbour has plans for some alternative technology projects.

I haven't solved anything like all my problems but Atlantis is the first place I've ever been able to show who I really am. I've dropped my old social roles and forms of relating: talking behind people's backs without a word to their faces, pretending not to be hurt when I wanted to burst into tears, philosophizing about problems of life in general while desperately avoiding discussing personal problems and interpersonal hassles, hiding my fears beneath parties, booze and dope.

I feel far more centred in me. I've slowly begun to break down the negative images of myself locked in my body through years of rejection, and I can see through others' shit far easier than before.

It's scary being open and admitting my needs and hurts but I can tell people and let my fear out in front of them, and my body's looser and freer and it's exciting too exploring areas of myself I've walled off for years.

Therapy isn't something separate from life. What I've learned in my sessions about how I was fucked about as a kid I apply to how I treat people in the present; so I don't mess up those I live (and love) with. I don't see Atlantis as an escape from society. It's the most real, alive part of society I've ever been in. The falseness and superficiality of most relating in the outside world sickens me, and the saddest thing is that just beneath that superficial front is a person with deep feelings who wants to be loved and to give love, and to be able to trust people enough to tell them who he really is.

DUOLOGUE

NOW

We have to decide
now
and each decision
proliferates alarmingly into so many possibilities
like cells multiplying
that we cannot see an end to it.
If you go out of the house,
now,