

# Bernard Burgoyne

## Intact Island

The virtues of the Sun are often praised. And when life in modern cities has become "modern life", and has achieved a notoriety in transforming virtue into strain, then the opposite of virtues are achieved in social life. Pressure - what they used to call vice - runs through the nervous system of every individual. The pace of human activity and the nervous strain of attending to a human and a mechanical environment at the same time are both high. There remains only the fantasy of old ideals of health and action.

I had been living for almost two years without a break from the systems of formality, and forms of automatic response which bureaucracies often impose (being unable to think of themselves as functioning in any other way), when - last year - I visited the Skyros Centre, run by Dina Glouberman, on an old island in the Aegean.

Of the twenty or thirty people in the community there, some had been in Skyros from the beginning of the program, and some had just arrived. What was common to them all was a sense of participating in an activity, a sense of blending seriousness with enjoyment, and a sense of living in an environment safe for the investigation of personal pains, and hopes, and distress. The relations built in groupwork - the response of people to the concerns of others, the sense of fairness and respect, the exploration of intersubjectivity, and the delight in recognising what had previously been hidden - spilled over into the general life of the community.

And in a community of English, French, Swiss, Dutch, German - and Greek - people, that there were a community at all rather than a group of separate and isolated people sounds like a piece of instant magic - and in a sense it was. It wasn't even the case that everyone was doing the same thing. Of the three main groups - the psychodrama/gestalt groups run by Dina, the massage groups run by Silke Ziehl, and the drama groups run by Jacques Salzer - some people went to only one, and some people to two. Yes, some people went to all three: but that a group of people - most of whom had not previously known each other - should within a day or two exude an atmosphere of friendliness and warmth that was real and not contrived seems to me a minor miracle. The greater part of it came from the energy and care put into the construction and organization of the centre: but much of it too from the strength of culture of the town - like the chorus in an old Greek play - always there, moving in and out, supporting the action.

The town of Skyros was a haven and protection for Achilles as a child, before he sailed with Odysseus to the wars in Troy. The bays and beaches are almost unchanged since that time; throughout its history, the great rock that the

town clusters round has served as protection against pirate and invader -without changing. Near its summit, the deserted monastery, with its white beauty cut into the rock, and the ruined Venetian fortress above it, serve witness to a time in the near past where even successful invaders were unable to change the main outlines of an ancient tradition. And since the town is on the other side of the island - and six miles away from the port, it is not stumbled across by eleven thousand wandering tourists every summer. The island has defended itself even against these invaders. In the main people go to Skyros because they want to. The Skyrians treat them as guests, and keep their ordinary way of life intact.

The technique of Dina's groups seems to involve just that: finding an old way of life - a youthful, original way of life, a child's life, intact, full of promise, but now hidden away, sheltered behind an array of masks that barely fulfill their original purpose, having had so many holes blasted through them by the virtues of modern civilisation. And to allow instincts and feelings that have been sheltering behind defence work for so long, free access to the outside needs some courage, even if that courage is born out of despair. The place to find it is a place surrounded by the forms of encouragement, of play, of fantasy, that the therapist and the group provide. Here you can try to imagine again a world different from the iron-built one that the modern world has led you to assume. The dominant feeling in Dina's group is of trust; hard work, no silly false reassurances based on wishing the world away, no cosy agreements, but a steady, firm commitment and approach to real parts of the self that have for far too long been shut away. As well as being painful, that can be fun. Responsibility - the ability to respond - shines through a technique like that: and that responsibility is based on tact, the ability to put out a hand, to know and feel its distance from another, and to care enough not to blunder past. And that's where the feeling comes round back to the island - intact: in touch.

And at the same time there was a medley of things going on. Although I wasn't on the island at the time to be able to go to Silke's groups, the people who did, tell me that going from the play and concentration on feelings in Dina's group to the body massage, and relating of feelings to body work with Silke, fitted a bit like hand and glove. The drama and self-expression theatre sessions run by Jacques ended by a dance creation of Achilles' boat in a floodlit performance in front of the Mayor and most of the town on the town's promontory. And as for the dance sessions, the Dutch-inspired self-feeling and exercise groups (early morning:) and the Italian reading groups that were going on somewhere in a cave; all that was beyond my ken. I prefer beaches and a swimmable sea during the day; and at night I found a particular liking for the discotheque over the beach that has a taste for late 60's music and where local Greeks insist that their ancient dance can take on any newcomers.

To return to London, to a fragmented island stuck together by high pressure, and where the islanders have forgotten their ancient dance, the pace of life seems less threatening, and my response to it stronger, living with the recollection of that Greek life, and feeling at least strengthened with fresh memories, and some new hopes.

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## Carole Drexel

### Looking-in, seeing out.

A few years ago I began a conscious exploration into myself. I had been unhappy for so long, it seemed. On the occasional day that I felt happy, it occurred because of circumstances that 'seemed' completely out of my control. Everything that I became involved in brought me temporary relief only. I had reached a place within myself of real need. Today I know that it is when I reach this point with any life situation that I am completely open to the answer. The space has finally been made to receive the help.

My help came one day in the early Spring. I was living in the country, on a farm. I received a phone call from a girl who had heard that I had a yoghurt culture and she wanted to know if she might have a starter from me. She was visiting from out of town. I said 'Yes' and we arranged that she would come right over. It was later in the afternoon that we ended up under a tree, with me lying on a blanket, experiencing a foot massage from her. Somehow, in the silence, I started to feel so many things, feelings I had not allowed myself to feel before.

That day was a beginning; a start at becoming aware at deeper levels and thus happier within myself.

This work has become the first priority of my life. To undertake the 'looking-in' process, that leads to total awareness, requires four things:

- i) sincere desire to grow within,
- ii) courage to experience feelings,
- iii) trust that I will be O.K. and
- iv) support from my friends.

Once I 'look' at a particular situation in my life and thus understand my feelings, the 'healing' process is felt. This 'seeing' will involve receiving a deeper understanding of my motivation behind my action. The healing comes with the understanding. Often, when I realise that I have a particular feeling (like jealousy, anger or fear for example), I think 'that's bad' - I think that I shouldn't have that feeling. It's not loving or nice. I then decide to stop feeling that way so that perhaps I won't have that awful feeling. I have found