

WENCKE MUHLEISEN

talks to

VIVIAN MILROY

- V. We had an article on AAO two years ago and this seemed a very exciting development. What I would like to know from you is just what you are doing at Friedrichshof.
- W. Well, in Friedrichshof we are trying to tame the beast in human beings. That is we don't accept the picture of a human being as a very kind being, a very gentle being, a very humanistic being and all this but instead a being who is only going to take responsibility for society or himself if he gets something for it. And I have this feeling that within our society, the human being is getting very little and this is a very dangerous situation. Human beings don't feel responsible for what is going on in society. What Friedrichshof can offer to human beings is ultimately to make them responsible for society. First to help communication which is something we are all very hungry for. And we use every kind of artistic expression which should belong to the education of every human being like talking, singing, dancing. And this means a lot to me because I feel I **am** what I can **express**. I am what other people see in me and can give back to me. I am what I am in communication with others.
- V. How much is Friedrichshof somewhere to go and stay and enjoy oneself - and how much is it to go and learn things there and then go back and try to change the ordinary world?

- W. Well, on the one hand Friedrichshof is just an experiment where about 80 people are living including children and there is a school for the children. And then people come not only to live with us but to take part in some of the courses in personal development, in art, in theatre or seminars for psychology. We feel this gives inspiration to people to use in their lives. But also Friedrichshof functions as a model. People come there and see how we live and they go back and try to do something similar. They too can learn to have open relationships without owning another human being. This is one of the central points: in fact the absolutely central point of Friedrichshof, which I think is the reason why Friedrichshof, compared with other communities, has survived. Friedrichshof has survived for ten years and it hasn't fallen into some of the traps that other communities have fallen into like the traps of political ideology or extreme politics or the trap of mysticism or religion. And I think it has survived because we have tried to open up relationships, which is a very difficult thing to do.
- V. A lot of communes have tried open relationships in various places from time to time and one of the great problems of course is jealousy. Do you have a trick for dealing with jealousy?
- W. I want to divide jealousy into two kinds. The easiest kind of jealousy to get rid of like when say we have a couple relationship for maybe five years and I have a lot of investment in the relationship and then maybe one day you get interested in another woman and I am really getting frightened because of losing my five years investment. And if you go, I have to go on the free market and find someone else. But this kind of jealousy is easy to lose in the group for there your interest in another woman would not be so disruptive. We go on because we live together and we can go on developing our relationship even if there is another woman or other women. This is possession-jealousy which is the easiest jealousy to deal with. The other one and the more dangerous one and this is deep inside of us and is because most of us have too little love, too little atten-

tion, too little tenderness when we are small and this is giving birth to a very irrational need for love. Like we want very much to have the security of one person and this person will give us all the security and love we need. And this I call irrational jealousy, irrational need for love and this is the hardest form to deal with. Our great interest in Wilhelm Reich enables us to see the connection between our private feelings and our parents and family. It was a big help to us to see that my private feelings are not private, and we can work together on it. And I don't have to feel desperate because other people feel exactly the same and we can work on it together. But one of the main tricks lies in our communication -not so much in our past but in our **here and now** communication. For me the important thing was that I found that competition -which has the thing I was most frightened of - has become for me something that I can develop from. Imagine that Jilly is my rival - well now instead of reacting with inferiority, I discovered that to compete can be a very positive thing. For example when I look at Jilly and I know her I can try and learn something from her instead of what one normally does and say "Oh dear this woman is so dangerous for me". It means I don't have to be in competition with other people but I can learn from them. This is because of Friedrichshof, because of having these open relationships. You see in ordinary society we compete in a very negative way with money and with elbowing our way through. This is the important thing - not to see people as enemies one has to compete with. You can love several people - you don't have to exclude other people. It's something you have to learn, I feel that I am growing up once again in a different way.

- V. Of course jealousy is more difficult perhaps with older people.
- W. Yes, but we don't have so many older people. The average age is about 35 but it is perhaps interesting to see how Friedrichshof would look at older people. In society being older means being out of production, out of communication,

out of sexuality. It seems to me that we have gone back to the days when the family was very big and society was very small - like a village. Older people, because they are older, they have more experience, and have learned more, they hold a very strong position in society. Like our children - the older children feel responsible for the younger children and the younger children accept the older children as authorities. The children when they're about 4 or 5 years old, they live in the children's house without their parents.

V. Would you like to tell us more about free sexuality?

W. Well, it does not mean what it's normally supposed to mean - like chaotic relationships here and there without any responsibility towards each other. On the contrary the basis of free sexuality is living together over years, having children together and working together. Simply stated, it says that no man has the right to own a woman and no woman has the right to own a man. But of course it doesn't mean that we all have the same relationships with each other. We are not all the same. So there are different relationships; some are stronger - some are weaker; some are more tender; some are more aggressive but there are no relationships that are exclusive, that exclude the others. But of course relationships change. Sometimes my relationships are stronger with some people than with others. This has been setting free a lot of energy in Friedrichshof, the energy which is normally bound into drawing yourself back, avoiding competitive relationships with other men, other women. And it also meant to us a big confrontation with all of our negative programming, from our childhood, from society. When you live in Friedrichshof you are very open to criticism because you can't withdraw; you have all the time everybody's eyes on you; you have to, as it were, earn your communication bread. And this is quite new and it means that we feel our problems much more strongly. That is why we are so much engaged in creative work, in group dynamics and in regression work and all these things, so that we can face our complications in a positive creative way.

And it becomes very "heady" after a while to be allowed to have so many intimate relationships with so many people. It's like a wonderful present - like we are given permission to have these relationships and to have an environment that allows us to have these relationships. One of the effects of this is that we are not so preoccupied with sexuality as we think people normally are. Sex isn't such a big subject at Friedrichshof. On the other hand, we don't have to invest all this energy in getting a partner, meeting people, because we don't have to meet them because they are there anyway. So it seems we have a lot of energy free to develop other interests, research, experiments, etc. This is very important for me personally because when I think back to it, sexual relationships, jealousy, competitiveness, all this has been sucking my time, even if I was not aware of it at the time. And of course this releases a lot of energy and a lot of sexual energy and you suddenly start to discover your - sexuality, not only with one person. We realize that sexuality isn't like a cake, if you gave one slice to somebody, then there is less left. Sexuality isn't like this. Then we don't need all those guilt feelings about the other relationships. For me personally it's been like an explosion in many ways, I think this is perhaps because I am a woman. That is not to say it couldn't be the same for a man but I speak as a woman and I know how it is to be a woman in this society. Our modern society is a very strong patriarchal system where nothing very much has changed at all in spite of the woman's liberation movement. And so one can say that free sexuality for women is a way of getting rid of slavery. But men don't see it like that because they are not slaves, they see it instead as losing their property and rights and so on. I think this is very special at Friedrichshof - the relationship between women and men. I see Friedrichshof as one of the very few societies where equality is practised. The basis of equality as we know is the material situation. At Friedrichshof everyone has the same material situation, everyone is responsible for himself; he has to see how to get money together to pay for everything. We all work together, there are no classes, no material differences. And here at Friedrichshof women are really free - and really equal.
