



THE GROVE

50TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

WELCOME TO THE GROVE'S 50TH ANNIVERSARY NEWSLETTER

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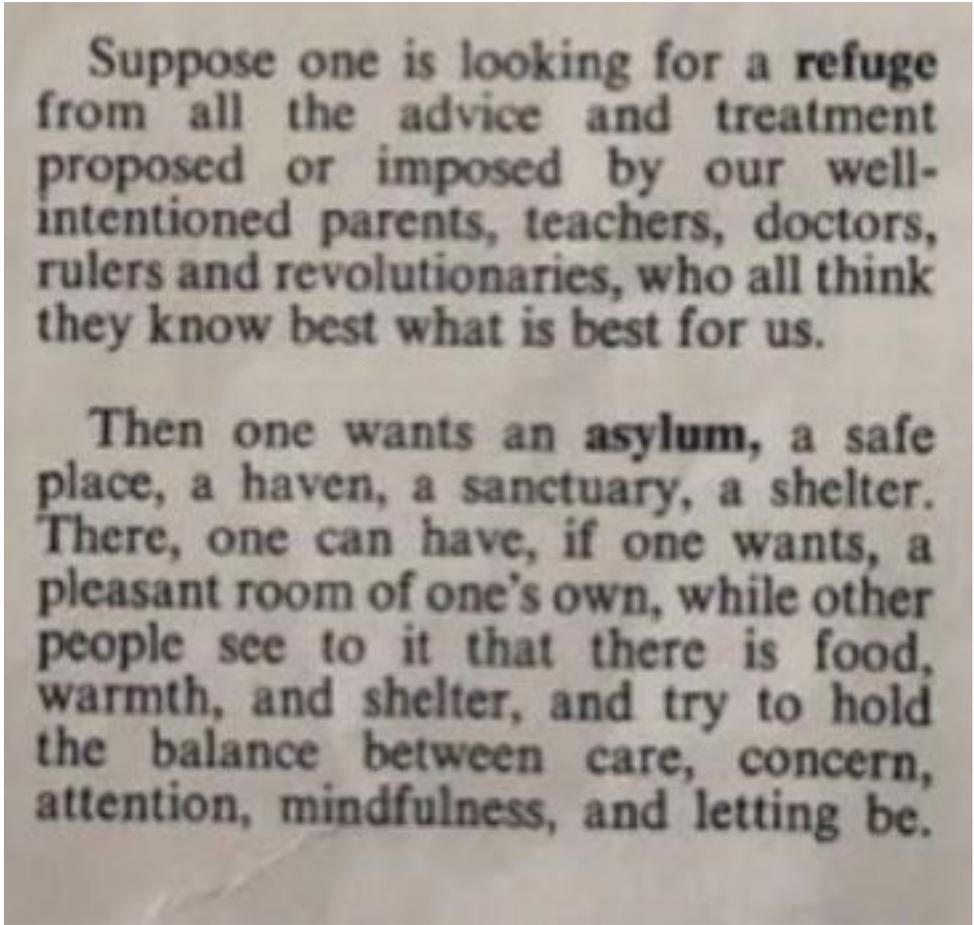
ON THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE GROVE

IAN MCMILLAN

The characteristic spirit of the culture, era, and the PA's approach to psychotherapy and community houses is clear in the attitudes and aspirations woven through these words.

This excerpt is taken from fundraising material published by the PA in the early 1970s, shortly after the training was established and the Grove was opened as a place of refuge and asylum for those in need. It is testament to the original vision and dedication of the house therapists over the years that we celebrate this milestone.

This last half century the original ethos has inspired guests and PA members alike, to cross a threshold and follow a path that challenged conventional thinking concerning the understanding and treatment of mental illness; the work continues today at both the Grove and Freegrove Road.



Suppose one is looking for a **refuge** from all the advice and treatment proposed or imposed by our well-intentioned parents, teachers, doctors, rulers and revolutionaries, who all think they know best what is best for us.

Then one wants an **asylum**, a safe place, a haven, a sanctuary, a shelter. There, one can have, if one wants, a pleasant room of one's own, while other people see to it that there is food, warmth, and shelter, and try to hold the balance between care, concern, attention, mindfulness, and letting be.

THE GROVE - PEOPLE BEING PEOPLE WITHOUT THE BULLSHIT - A LETTER OF LOVE

LUKE REYNOLDS

As I sit in my cozy private practice room in my home and think about my time at the Grove I feel quite sad I am not with the people there, not dwelling with them. I don't mean living with them, when I say dwell, I mean in a Heideggerian way, the sense of really being with them in the world.

There are not many places in the world where the noise and the everyday is not present, where true words are spoken, where fearless speech is practiced. Of course not always but more often than not.

We live in a world now where it is hard to truly search for a way to be without being told how we should be, who we should be, what we should hold valuable and how we should be cared for.

My experience of healthcare for what many call 'mental health', seems to be one of objectification, a reduction of the experience of being in the world. The GP or the psychiatrist says tell me your struggles and I will tell you the name of your brokenness, the medicine you need to take to fix it, or the behaviour you need to correct in order to fit back in. I only see the perpetuation of a

disconnection between body and environment down that path and the prolonged loss of meaning.

Care, as in - do it this way so that you don't make it difficult for others, this is the way you need to be - instead of - let's find a way that works for you, let's say the stuff you want to say and work through the outcome, let's see the way you're living, let's ask if that's how you want to be, let's give you time to find your way. Let's struggle together.

What I experienced and saw at the Grove (and Freegrove) was something I only find sporadically within current psychotherapy. It's a place where care doesn't lead to objectifying someone and their behaviour, where help is not thrust upon people, where therapists are not the expert and assumptions about 'care' are not inflicted on others in the world.

Of course it's not all plain sailing in this way of being because it's truthly - in the sense that it creates a clearing for moments of *I-thou* as messy human beings we can see one another, we can be

with one another without the bullshit... sometimes, because it's hard.

My belief is that this is more helpful than assuming we know what's best for someone and telling them how to be better.

“The meeting of two personalities is like the contact of two chemical substances: if there is any reaction, both are transformed” Carl Jung

The Grove and the people I met there during my time as a house therapist has changed me and the way I conduct therapy and myself in the world. I really hope that as we move into the future, more awareness of the way the Grove operates can come back into helping people who are struggling in the world.

I am smiling to myself as I write this, imagining the most-likely heated discussion I would have with my fellow humans in a house meeting if we discussed what I've written here.

For me I would like to say thank you to all the people at the Grove I came into contact with. I think often of them and the mantle of ‘clumsy uncle’ I was often given, which was probably true. I am humbled by the experience and hope I was helpful in some way.

I wish all therapists could have the experience of working in a house like the Grove and I hope that the industry of psychotherapy can in some way come back to this way of offering people a dwelling in which they can find some sanctuary.



THE GREEN GARDENER

NEFELI TSAKONA

To The Grove for all the time I've spent gazing at the garden through my window

so he stands there, right?

a warden to his fronded
beliefs
gnarled hands and
oaken-tree breath

deciduous matter the
whorls of his hair
foliage matted with
scandent vines
ferns sprouting thickly
over a furrowed forehead

poison ivy his thoughts
pollinated by seeds of
discontent
planted and ploughed
through centuries of
turbulent weather

he stands there so,

the green gardener
a monolith of ancient times
feet rooted in the land
of his ancestors
peat eyes fixed
immutably
ahead

his youth has ebbed
away through pores
of beaten skin and
the stems of his
arms dangle
flaccid

no sun nourishes
his blooms
no rain
quenches
the parched
stoma of his
mossy mouth

there is no breeze
to rouse the skeleton
leaves stratified
inside him
slumbering
spirits in an
abandoned
cemetery

the green gardener

resonating with the sluggish
flow of sap within his veins
standing statue stiff
alone
on

the
earth's lonely
edge

and his moth-eaten
boots have sunk
deep into the
compost of
history
where earthworms
curl like precious
pink pearls and
dispossessed
stories rest
dormant;

their
impending
germination
invisible to the
naked eye

THE GROVE, THE STRANGER AND POETIC PHENOMENOLOGY

KEVIN BALL

The history of the PA houses had twofold aim of a political and philosophical engagement with mental health. RD Laing's primary project was to re-conceptualise psychotherapy from an existential phenomenological point of view. The houses were a central part of this in offering a place of refuge to those who sought an authentic journey of the self. At least this is where I was at on my first day as a newly qualified therapist at The Grove. It is an honour to have worked in a place that is part of the history of psychotherapy internationally. I had become familiar with Husserl, Heidegger, Levinas, Derrida and Freud during my training. I encountered Levinas' work on the Other and hospitality, two ideas that are particularly relevant to 'the houses', as they are known. Levinas, in particular, had liberated the Other from the shackles of the self and spoke eloquently and provocatively about the stranger whom we welcome in our home; not to colonise or contain within our comprehending psychoanalytic or psychiatric gaze, but to meet the other, the residents, as radically Other, beyond my comprehension.

I was the host, representing the PA and would welcome residents into this dwelling. Yet, on my first day I found myself to be the stranger, entering their home and to be welcomed with a cup of tea that the residents had made. Everything had been reversed in an instance. Who is the stranger I wondered and who is the guest, as I stood on this unfamiliar, uncanny threshold. It was the perfect Levinasian moment, of being a hostage to the Other. It was humbling. The door was open, the windows were open, we met and I was invited to have a seat. But where? Was there a therapist's chair? Was I trained for having tea?

In Laing's autobiography, *The Making Of A Psychiatrist*, he tells of a seminar he conducted with a group of doctors. One asked him what he would do if a schizophrenic patient asked you for a glass of water? Laing said: 'I'd give them one. The response from the doctor was: 'I'm lost'. Here I was being offered tea by the residents. Would professionals be lost at this human gesture now? Sadly I think they would. I thought of Laing's famous aphorism about psychotherapy being two people meeting authentically.

With Heidegger this uncanniness was an encounter with my own solitude, my own nothingness, a mood of not-being-at-home-in-the-world. With Freud the feeling of uncanniness was the revelation of an interior secret - the stranger to myself from some other scene in my life. With Sartre it was the upsurge of the fragility of being, a rupture in my certainty, my ontological security. But this was all good, it was just what the phenomenological doctor ordered - putting yourself in parenthesis in the face of a real encounter with the Other. For Levinas this was the moment of hospitality; the encounter with the Other is through dialogue, in the sense that the Other's resistance to what I say puts me into question. I become hostage to the Other rather than the other way around. This presents a dilemma to the therapist who is trained to disseminate interpretations, to contain, to help understanding. For Levinas it is the Other's refusal to be known that gives the other their sanctuary, their safety in my presence.

The other day a patient said to me 'nobody understands me. They think I'm this, they think I'm that, but that isn't me'. I said 'you feel objectified'. The patient said 'yes, exactly'. The patient thought I understood her. But I didn't. I understood that others were trying to understand her and in this lost her Otherness. I was not trying to

understand and that gave the feeling of being understood. The terror of being understood is that it runs the risk of erasing the other, wiping them out with our knowledge, eliminating their existential subjectivity. Laing described this in chapter 4 of *The Divided Self* and Sartre did too in his famous phrase 'hell is other people'. For Levinas, heaven is the impossibility of understanding the Other and with it a moment of transcendence, the divine. All well and good but how can you recover some sense of being a therapist in this intersubjective threshold between self and other, in this house with doors and windows open, closed, ajar?

Ricoeur offers a form of phenomenology that enables some movement between therapist and resident. In his concept of 'translation' he offers a bridge between the gulf separating the self and the other espoused by Levinas and Derrida. Ricoeur felt that they had gone too far and exaggerated the difference between self and other. If our relation to the other is one of non-relation, where is the 'hermeneutic bridge', other than a trauma? We know, via Levinas, the rupture, but where is the repair? Ricoeur's answer is in the role of a translator and this idea helps enormously to position oneself as a psychotherapist in relation to others, while maintaining a phenomenological stance. What is at stake here is

the effacement of the difference between the hostile and hospitable Other and for this Ricoeur proposes the capacity for discernment, pronesis and dialogue. He calls for a 'linguistic hospitality'. While respecting what is untranslatable, translation 'though challenging, nonetheless grants pleasure and happiness, even as the translator mourns what is lost in translation' (Kearney et al 2009, p.14) This difficult exchange is an experience between host and guest that enables politics, gender, conditionality, the law, to become alive in a milieu of complex but not impossible translation. It introduces what is called 'diacritical hermeneutics', a vigilant and careful discernment. Kearney explains that this process in medical terms refers to the diagnosis of crisis in a fever and an act of separating and distinguishing between body temperature, nerve function etc. (Kearney et al p20). It is also close to the the spiritual practices of 'discernment of spirits' and the Buddhist method of 'skilful means'. This pronesis is what Ricoeur describes as a 'poetic phenomenology' because it brings to light multiple colours and shades of meaning in the context of what Lacan might call 'the law'. There are many examples of this and one that immediately comes to mind is Sartre's *Nausea*. Closer to home is Laing's phenomenological elaborations in *The*

Divided Self and *Sanity Madness and the Family*, but there is much room for this strange genre to develop.

When I look back on my time as a house therapist I wonder about the many dialogues I participated in from this diacritical phenomenological point of view and how these translations emerged. Laing's idea of mystification and his appropriation of Bateson's notion of 'The Double Bind' are examples of this skilful action, all converging on the path of liberation and clarity of thought. This is a hazardous difficult path full of happy moments and moments of pain. I mourn the loss of some translations and the impossible, untranslatable kernel. I also celebrate this impossibility and hope the The Grove maintains its impossible untranslatable kernel, so that it continues to strive to be a safe space for the Other

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PAINTINGS MADE OVER THE YEARS AT THE GROVE

LAURIE FITZGERALD



PAIN!

EILEEN LY

White light covers each blade of grass

Magnifies in microscopic detail

Each ridge and furrow.

Bright lines shoots up the highway

And amplifies the crawling of insects.

Fumbling stumbling fingertips over

Rivers of wet salty veins.

Harsh breath on a close day of a

Sick man in seizure

Drowning on dry ground.



THE GROVE CATS

LAURIE FITZGERALD



POLLY

Gender: Female

Time of Residency: Pre 2006

Temperament: Unknown

Known only by a photograph present

on the living room noticeboard for many years.

Pakito Armstrong

What's in a name?

Before coming to The Grove, Pakito had long lived with a Brazilian family, hence the name Pakito or Piko for short. His surname came from a resident Jon.

Jon and Sheila adopted him from a local RSPCA shelter.

Gender: Male

Time of Residency : 2006/7- 2017

Lived for many years here with his first owner Sheila and the residents who stayed here during his time.

Whilst Sheila moved on from the house in 2015, Piko remained until early 2017 when after a very expensive teeth cleaning, it was discovered that he had health issues that the then residents could not feasibly treat him for. It was decided that Piko would be reunited with Sheila where he spent his retirement in a lovely home near Cambridge.

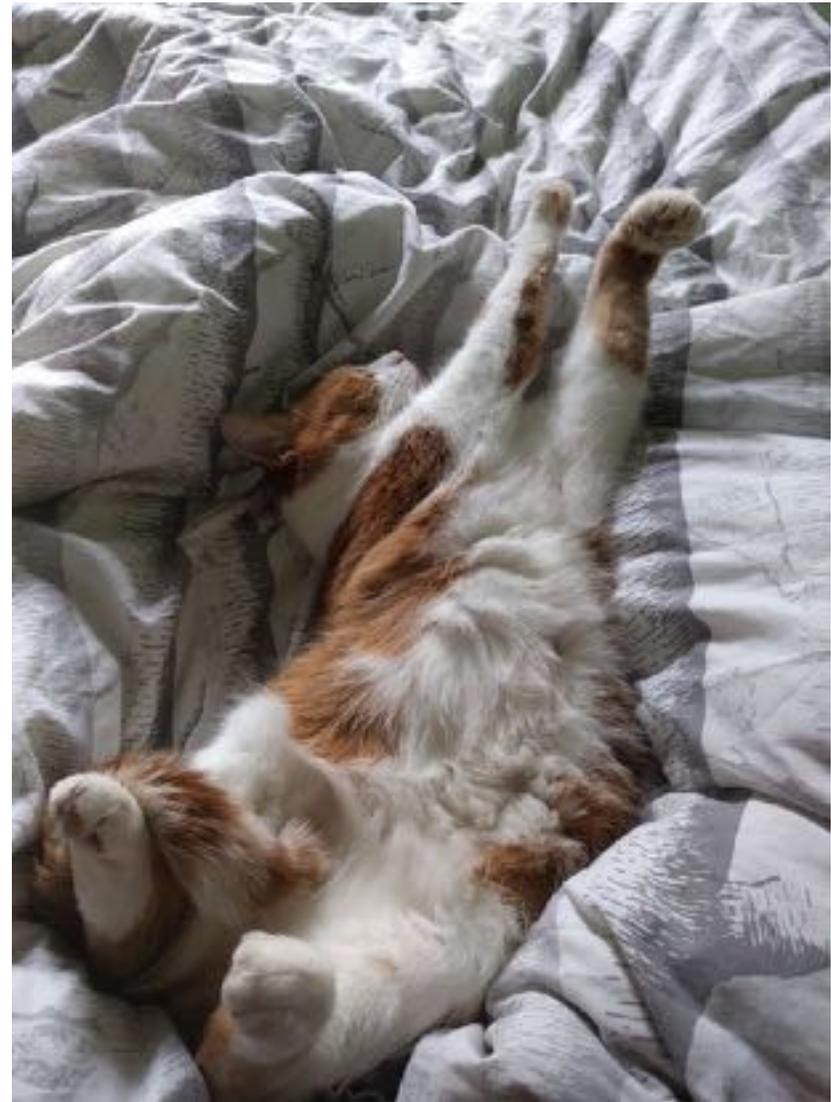


Temperament

Well contented and amicable by cat standards. Fiercely protective about his domain he would often come home with scratches from fighting other neighbourhood cats if they tried to enter his 'territory'. Wonderfully smart, especially when it came to food - he knew exactly where to press on my bladder (even covered by a blanket) to get me up in the morning and knew that if he pressed on my slightly loose bedroom door, the attached mirror would bang against it and again wake me up so I could feed him breakfast. In fact his machinations to be fed more meant we had to keep an AM and PM feeding checklist as he would cry to you as if starving, despite having been fed only minutes before.

He was our Garfield of sorts.

Rest in Peace Piko.



Persistence 'Bean' Fitzgerald

What's in a name?

Persistence (or Persi for short). Named so for her overwhelming persistence as a stray, sneaking into the house every chance she got whether it be through back doors, windows or scaling in from skylights. It was a cold winter and she wanted a home. My heart melted, named her and claimed her as mine - the house was not ready for a new responsibility but my life needed one desperately.

Persistence

Gender: Female

Time of Residency:

2019 - Present

When Persi came to the house she was small, flea ridden and scared. Large patches of fur on half her body were missing from over grooming (cats receive a dopamine reward when they groom so often stressed cats will over groom in an attempt to calm themselves).

Temperament: A middle aged princess who knows exactly what she wants and doesn't want. Happily settled in the house, she is often an addition at house meetings. She is also beloved and spoiled rotten by her extended family (my parents).



She is scared of spiders and other cats. Hates being left alone at night (with some prior planning I get one night away, any more and the protest vomits start appearing).

And it is in this fact that she has changed me irrevocably for the better. Before Persi I had been nicknamed by friends and family as “the house cat” for my habit of staying with friends, sometimes for days at a time. I was struggling to be alone, struggling with routines and finding my way. However, there comes along a cat who I want to take care of, yet who will not be left alone for the night without crying or pooping in the upstairs bath (her first form of protest). Choices had to be made. Let her go, or change.

She is still here - and I like to think we are both the better for it.



Bruiser

What's in a name?

Bruiser is named after his rather war torn appearance - split ear and scar across his eye. He has been for some time and is still living on the streets in the neighbourhood but is now a regular in our garden for food and strokes.

Gender: Male

Time of Residency : 2022 - Present

Bruiser first appeared to me in late 2019, at the time I remembered noting his appearance and was reminded of Piko - thinking of him as a little fighter. I gave him some food and didn't see him again for the next few years. When he appeared again in 2022 I was overjoyed he had survived the pandemic and fed him again.

Temperament: Scared but loyal, Bruiser is definitely a street cat - although as our relationship with him has built, he attempts to come into the house more. As we have a cat living here already this is partly unfeasible but our compromise is to feed regularly and spend time with him in the garden. He will often stare unhappily through the back door windows at this injustice during meetings, so I'm not sure how long this policy will last!



I believe he has spent some time with humans in his life. He is friendly yet has definitely experienced a lot of stress on the streets. He will hiss at strangers and is very nervous around feet or people stepping around him - adding to my theory that he was kicked by humans in a way that was traumatic. That being said, once you've gained his trust he wants nothing more than to pace in front of you receiving strokes and head rubs as he goes.



A PORTRAIT OF THE GROVE

ANDREA HEATH

The Grove was the first property bought by the PA, opening in October 1972. It is one of the two remaining PA community houses; the other is Freegrove Road in Islington.

Situated in the usually quiet conservation area of Stroud Green, it neighbours the distinctly different in character cosmopolitan and urban Finsbury Park. The Grove has rooms to accommodate seven residents.

The house and garden are partially hidden behind dark evergreen foliage, with Lime trees and other shrubs vanishing under a blanket of Ivy. A Passion flower vine has entwined its woody stems around the seasoned architecture of the porch and it's exotic

flowers and hanging orange fruits possibly save it from a regular cut as it climbs ever higher up the building spreading out over the kitchen roof and at times creeps in through open windows.

The Ivy, likewise knows no bounds, encroaching ever further in all directions, sending out its new stems like feelers, in search of a wall or other firm surface onto which to attach itself, wrap around, cling to and climb up, until it reaches sufficient heights to send out fleshy green clusters that feed and hide various creatures through the winter.

Springtime brings a visual drama to the entrance of The Grove when the lilac trees branches bow under the weight of its deep violet blooms, forming an arch

over the garden gate, framing the distinct lemon yellow front door. Beyond this door is a hallway, covered in a well-trodden brown carpet which leads to the kitchen and the communal living space before winding its way up the staircase to the first and second floors. Violet - blue light patterns cast across the green staircase walls from the stained glass window on the first floor landing, an original feature personalising the house and signifying its past wealth.

The communal living space looks out onto the garden offering a window to observe encounters with the local wildlife. Raucous parakeets gather in the tall birch tree in the far corner of the garden, occasional territorial aggression breaks

out between the neighbourhood cats, foxes pass through and a magpie regularly interrupts the house meetings as it noisily bathes in a rain pool caught in the lid of the water butt. An old discarded piano that could no longer be tuned has transformed into the 'bug hotel', tucked away behind a dilapidated shed whose primary purpose seems to be to hold up the ageing Jasmine. A large bay tree provides shade and damp for frogs, woodlice and other creatures.

The gardens population is a reminder of the web of life of which we are all a part and shows us the importance of the complexity of reciprocal relationships, where complexity is linked with resilience, sustainability and creativity.

Within these walls

House meetings take place three times a week in the communal lounge seated around a large circular oak coffee table. Recently observed as a 'symbolic campfire', it was reclaimed from the street by a former resident and carefully restored by a current resident. Underneath years of misuse and layers of stained varnish the oak's unique spiral wood pattern was revealed.

A small glass elephant sits in the centre of the table.

Hanging on the chimney wall is a large original oil painting bought from a local charity



COLLAGRAPH BY AMY ISON

shop. The artist is unknown, the signature merged and camouflaged into the surface texture of the image. The paintings muted palette and abstract composition creates an air of mystery that has taken our imaginations into African landscapes, wars, Central Europe, scenes of sinister events and back into the dynamics of The Grove. The wall opposite is left intentionally empty at the request of a former resident who benefitted from the



blank space for contemplation in meetings.

We are vigilant about the cracks in the walls expanding. The house was built on marshy ground and disturbance from the rail network, underground tunnels and roots from neighbouring trees have caused structural movement.

The dining table in the back room that for many years held expired and discarded objects has been cleared to create a meeting place to study and make art.

The use of The Grove's various spaces for individual and shared use and all aspects of housekeeping are a live engagement in the making of the community; responding to situations fluidly rather than relying on imposed structures.

Community can be a meeting place for the invisible and the irreducible, where time and place mirror others time and places, where we find out about ourselves in unexpected ways. These are experiences we make space for and learn from. This process has its own time and is in opposition to the pressures of market forces.

The Grove exists because of the commitment and fundraising efforts of the wider PA network but its life belongs to the residents who attend to the work of the house and create the space for attention and inclusion. All who have passed through leave an emotional imprint on the interior life of the house and stories are revived and revised through time as new stories are told.



We cannot make people feel at home, but we hope they may come to feel more at home in themselves and the world. The two are subtly and complexly linked. One does not follow the other, but they take place together.

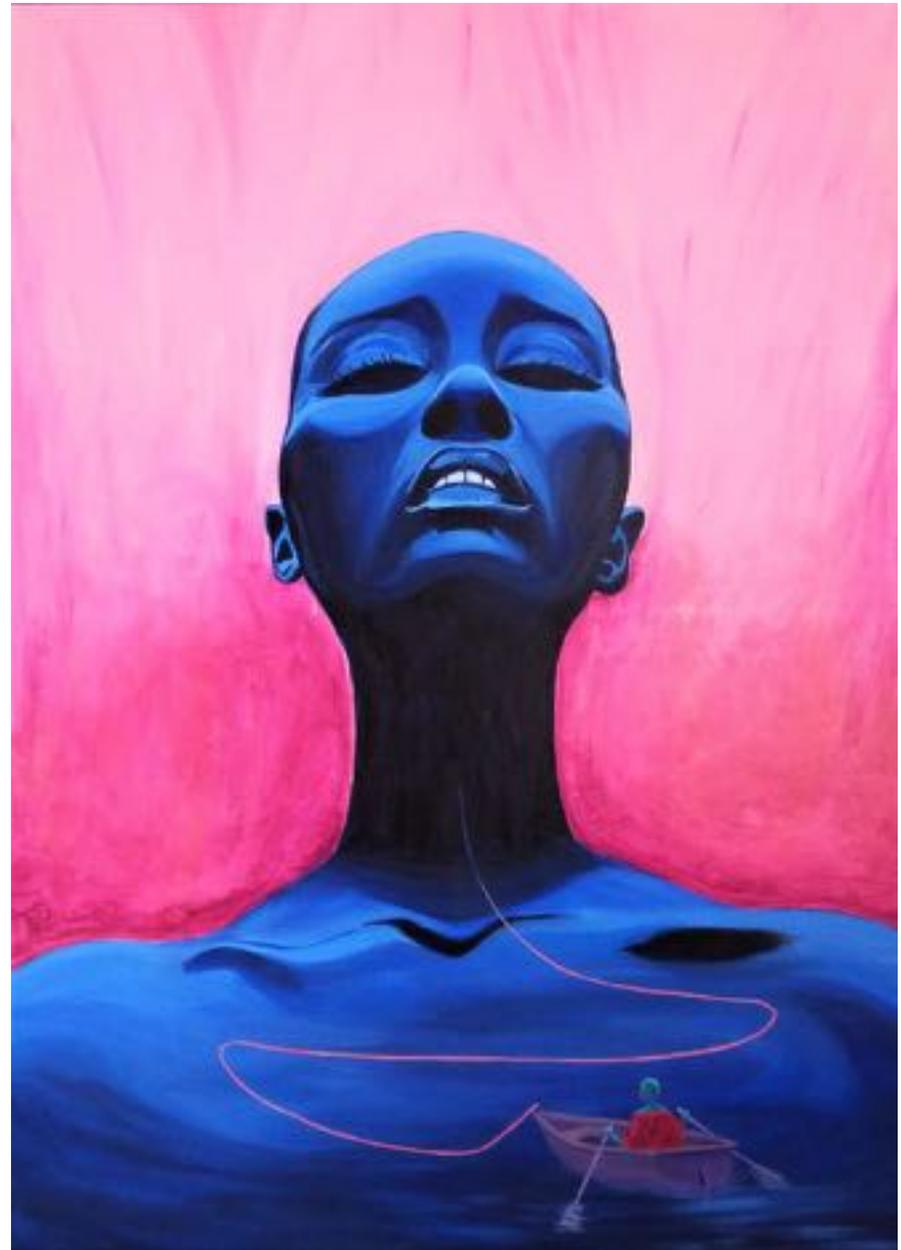
Paul Gordon, *An Uneasy Dwelling* (2010, p.83)



DRAWINGS BY EILEEN LY



LAURIE FITZGERALD



Leopard Slugs & Seaweed Dreams



THE GROVE

MILES CLAPHAM

I stayed in The Grove for some months in 1979, into early 1980. What was I doing there? I came from New Zealand, where I was a medical student, to spend a three month Elective period, part of the final medical year, with the Philadelphia Association. I wanted to meet R D Laing, and ideally work with him. I had read his books, particularly “The Divided Self”, and wanted to learn about the PA way of working with people suffering from what gets called mental illness. I was inspired by Laing, by David Cooper’s linking schizophrenia with capitalism, by Alan Watt’s “The Way of Zen”, by Carlos Castaneda’s stories of shamans and psychedelics, which I now understand to be largely fictional. Ironically, although “The Divided Self” inspired many doctors

to become psychiatrists not many were ‘Laingian’, and others reverted to a strong medical model approach.

I met Laing soon after arriving in London, we had a whisky in his study, and laughed about the ‘pink spot’ theory of ‘schizophrenia’. This was to do with early research into the idea that ‘schizophrenia’ was caused by a bad chemical in the brain. Supposedly they found a pink spot when the urine of people diagnosed with ‘schizophrenia’ was subject to electrophoresis – this research was later completely discredited. Other than doing a re-birthing workshop, I sadly didn’t see very much more of Laing. One positive aspect was Laing asking John Heaton to be my tutor and mentor.

I wanted to ‘work’ in one of the therapeutic communities that the PA founded and looked after, of which I knew virtually nothing at the time, only having read Mary Barnes by Mary Barnes and Joe Berke. Interesting the work with shit. A couple of years later when I was a junior psychiatrist I briefly had a patient, a young man in Hackney Hospital. He was admitted when I was away for a week or so, he had been acutely psychotic – I’m not sure what a better word would be. He was seeing clocks freezing, or melting like Dali’s famous image, and experienced time has having changed. He was very frightened and had other hallucinations – I can’t remember it all. But the extraordinary thing for me was a few days before I saw him, while I was

still away, he had gone into the loo, defecated but got the shit out of the toilet, fashioned it into a figurine which he said represented his uncle, and stamped on it. Immediately he more or less 'came to', all his hallucinations and seemingly psychedelic experiences vanishing. He was on no medication, as he refused it. He didn't speak in detail about his uncle but I understood that the man was in some ways abusive. When he was talking to me I was impressed by his lucidity, and I agreed with him he should be discharged. I discovered I could not go to the houses like a medical student attached to a hospital ward where it is assumed, if one is on a placement on that ward, that one has open access to the patients and their files. Technically the patients needed to agree – although the agreement when I trained was more or less expected. In contrast, here I had to

go through the process of coming into the house like anyone else, phoning up (on a pay phone) to arrange to meet the people living there, visiting, explaining myself to the few who met me, trying to find out if they agreed with my joining the house. I realised the other residents did not want me there as an observer, if I stayed there I was a resident like anyone else. One resident was Dr Steve Tictin, a psychiatrist now back in Canada, who had been a sort of apprentice with David Cooper, and did not want to formally train as a psychotherapist. Another was Anna, who did some voluntary work for the PA. They had their other reasons for being there as I did, but it betrayed my 'professional' mindset that I related more easily to these two. It helped that they were much more visible, more often in the kitchen, than the other residents.

I had met John Heaton in New Zealand, when he came there to meet Barbara Latham's family, after I had written to Laing, sending my letter to the Tavistock Institute where he worked when he published "The Divided Self". Laing passed my letter to John, who took me on for weekly supervision when I first arrived in London. John encouraged me in my reading of philosophy, and in my endeavours to join TheGrove. I also attended the Study programme, aka the Introductory Course, for that autumn term. I found the PA seminars inspiring and not a little intimidating. I admired John's teaching, John made me think of the English monk in "The Name of the Rose", rational, subtle, and humane.

The other aspect of my time in The Grove was my 'mental' distress. I had just split up with my girlfriend from New Zealand,

who had a little boy I had got close to (he was 3 when I met them). She was the first woman I was in love with, we had come to the UK together, but she went back while I had something of a breakdown. At least I was in deep confusion, with no idea what I wanted from life or love. I was often in a state of panic and derealisation. I started to go back to New Zealand, but after flying to Egypt and finding myself in a constant state of anxiety, I returned to the UK. The possibility of therapy seemed to offer some sort of safety. Having completed my Elective period, I had changed what I was doing with John to psychotherapy helped by encouragement from a friend. After my time in The Grove, I got a job as a junior doctor in London, not going back to the job allocated to me in New Zealand.

What do you want from a community? Notoriously Thatcher once said, “there is no such thing as society”, and then proceeded to wreck the society that was there. From a Buddhist perspective you could say that all things are transient and have no inherent reality, so that the society or community we aspire to, we wish for, and the community we find around us, is there because we desire it, we look for it, join it and participate. We create or co-create our community which exists because we see it, we hear it, we listen. Community, society is not a thing, not an object, not fixed, but a moving feast, a moment, a vision that swims into view, perhaps hovers there a while, and then fades, turns, becomes something else. We, or rather I, come and go too. I have to be there, even if distant, for the community to exist. It has been remarked that even a hermit is part of a community,

even if they want to be as far away as possible.

I thought of my stay at The Grove as a learning experience, after all I was in the UK for a little over three months for my elective, I was here to learn, I was a medical student, I wanted to encounter and understand what it was that Laing and the Philadelphia Association did, how they ‘treated’ those in distress who came to them. But the house was not a community if one thought of that as welcome, engagement with the others in the group, shared cooking and food, which was my experience in New Zealand living in shared student houses with 5 or 6 others.

Paul Zeal was the community facilitator and we met I think only weekly. I attended all the meetings in my eager student role, as did Anna and one other man, more or

less my age, but almost no-one else came regularly. Conversation was minimal, although writing now, 43 years later, I can't say much from memory. One or two things stand out. When Paul was away for two weeks, Laing was to stand in and be group therapist for the sessions. He attended, his presence alert and interested. There was one woman, who lived at the top of the house, in the room next to mine, who almost never appeared, and never came to the community meetings. Occasionally she did walk through the meeting, to get a cup of tea in the kitchen, her timing clearly meaningful. When her regular absence was mentioned to Laing, he said 'excuse me' for a minute and went upstairs. He spent the meeting talking to her. I was disappointed, hoping for some magic from his presence.

It was a strange time. Anna told me she was in therapy with John. She was older and seemed wiser than me. We talked of incest, and became briefly involved together, which ended not well. The only good thing was, she told me later, that it broke the spell of inaction, or disengagement from others she had been in for some time. Steve and I became friends, sadly since his return to Canada we have lost touch.

My other enduring memory is trying to read Merleau-Ponty. I was short of money, having to pay for supervision, staying in the house and the Introductory Course fees, so got a job for a few weeks with the Parks Department for Islington. Mostly I had to drive a truck to various little parks and pick up bags of leaves – it was autumn – or once, a pile of wood that the local kids in a housing estate had

collected for a Guy Fawkes bonfire. The pile was huge, the truck was small, and, we did a deal, the kids hid lots of the wood when I took the first load away. But sometimes, I parked the truck under a tree, and read a few pages of "The Phenomenology of Perception." But I didn't know how to let the presence of things touch me, I didn't know how to touch, well sort of, but I found Merleau-Ponty a realm too far. Then I found such texts impenetrable, now it is a bit different mostly, but reading is a discipline. When I heard something spoken I felt it could enter me, so I loved the seminars. Now when I read I want to hear the voice of the author, then I can more easily absorb it.

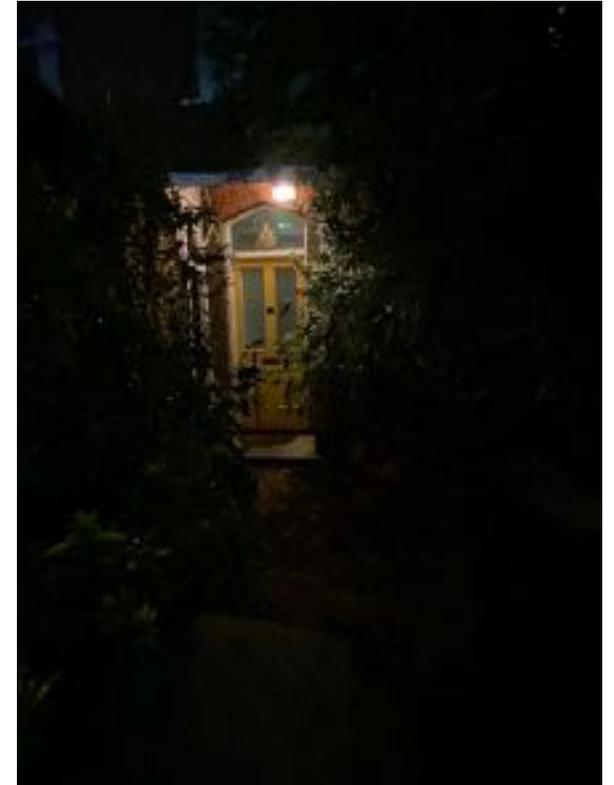
We learn through our bodies, through our presence, the other's presence, through participation. The jokey surgical adage,

“see one, do one, teach one” has an important truth in its apparent simplicity. I let my hands do what the teacher’s hand do, I embody the movements of the teacher, I am both student and teacher. When we get over our silly notions of walled off individuality and realise my ‘soul’ inhabits you as your ‘soul’ inhabits me, at least in part and in states of intuitive empathy, we can think this is what teaching really is about. Notions of teaching as information transmission sink into a reductive digital fantasy, which miss the point of teaching as a form of “Being-with-the-other”, in which ideas about personal limits and boundaries are questioned and, sometimes, overturned.

Here is one source of the danger inherent in teaching, as well as in psychotherapy, which can be and at times is exploited by those who feed off their power in such

situations. Power built in the imaginary but unfortunately with real effects.

The Grove was not particularly a place of hospitality. I say that, and then think, actually it accepted me, and I was left alone. Perhaps that was what I needed. It was as different from the psychiatric ward as it could be, it was a kind of lesson in “being-with-others”, painful, in some sense in tune with my own isolation and shutoffness. I didn’t stay there long enough to really see something through in that kind of space, partly perhaps I stayed too much in role as student. In the end I wanted to be in the ‘ordinary world’ – a different ordinary – so I moved to a housing coop, that was legalised squatting, and ‘ordinary’ parties.



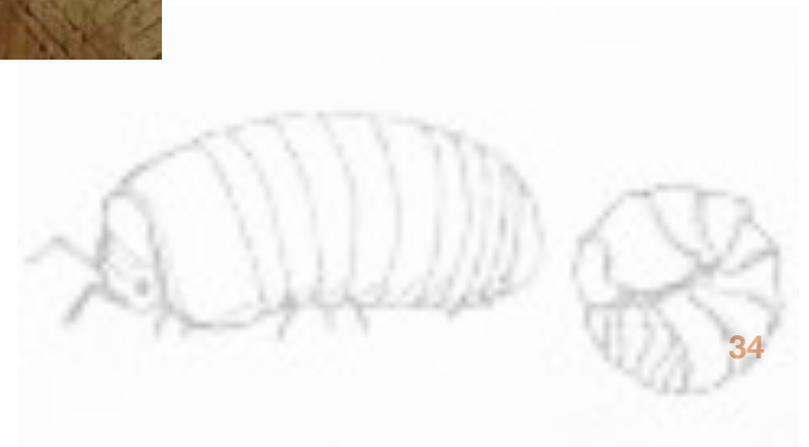
odysseus: we now set out on our odyssey.

sailor: [raising hand] what's an odyssey?

odysseus: a long journey named after the only survivor.

sailor: oh ok wait what.





ORIGAMI BY EILEEN LY



LAURIE FITZGERALD



LOCHNER FAMILY

gon7o

Pinker was a man in his 60's; medium height, grey, short hair, thin, his facial skin had an even number of folds which hung on his chiseled cheekbones. He wore couture suits, which made him look like a hyperreal wax figure of himself. Pinker stood behind Trent, Lochner's oak table, facing a bunch of his closest family sitting on the recently re-upholstered chairs. Deceased Trent Lochner's wife, Alexandra, and her son Douglas with his wife Philippa. Pinker held a piece of paper, and with a stern look, moving the paper closer and further from his eyes to get the best focus of the text, he addressed the household.

"My friends, I am glad to see you all here, albeit at such a sombre moment of great loss of a husband, father and a friend". He paused before resuming. "So, without further ado, I'd like to read out Trent's final will".

One could hear someone adjusting a chair, and somebody clearing their throat with a muffled cough.

Trent didn't have much in his possession, just a couple of properties; the current house, in which all the Lochners' currently lived, a semi-detached seaside house, a car, and two companies. One was an investment firm which was quite successful, basically a website, cleverly designed without a need for much maintenance. The second was overseas co-ownership, funnily enough, of a small town football club. Nothing too fancy.

So the house was passed on to Alexandra and the seaside house for some reason had been given to a charity. Both of the businesses now were in Douglas's possession, as he had been managing both of the companies for a while now it didn't come as a surprise.

The news about the seaside house made Philippa extremely sad, more so because for some time she had been daydreaming about herself and Doug spending more time at the seaside. But alas, it wasn't going to happen as she had imagined it. She shrugged off the sadness with a fantasy about how she would take the longest bath after this was all over. But her mind kept wondering. Now,

probably, in order to buy a new seaside house they would have to either sell a company, or rent, but that was still too fresh of a thought to think about.

After the reading of the will Alexandra thanked Pinker and invited everyone to the dining room, she had hired a chef who was chugging away with preparations of meals. A pleasant aroma of roast vegetables and rosemary had filled the room. It was on the south side, so it had lots of light throughout the day. The open-plan kitchen had a high-end island with an easy access fridge, stove, cooking hobs, sink. Chef had planned out all of the courses and had several dishes in the process. Looked busy.

All four sat at the table.

There was a sudden thud and flash of blinding light, and one could see the chef, ripped to pieces with utmost force, his innards had splattered all over the back side of the white kitchen wall in a chaotic pattern. Similarly Pinker was bleeding from his chest and was barely conscious. Philippa was gasping for air, and her eyes were wide open, filled with horror and disbelief, peering into her husband.

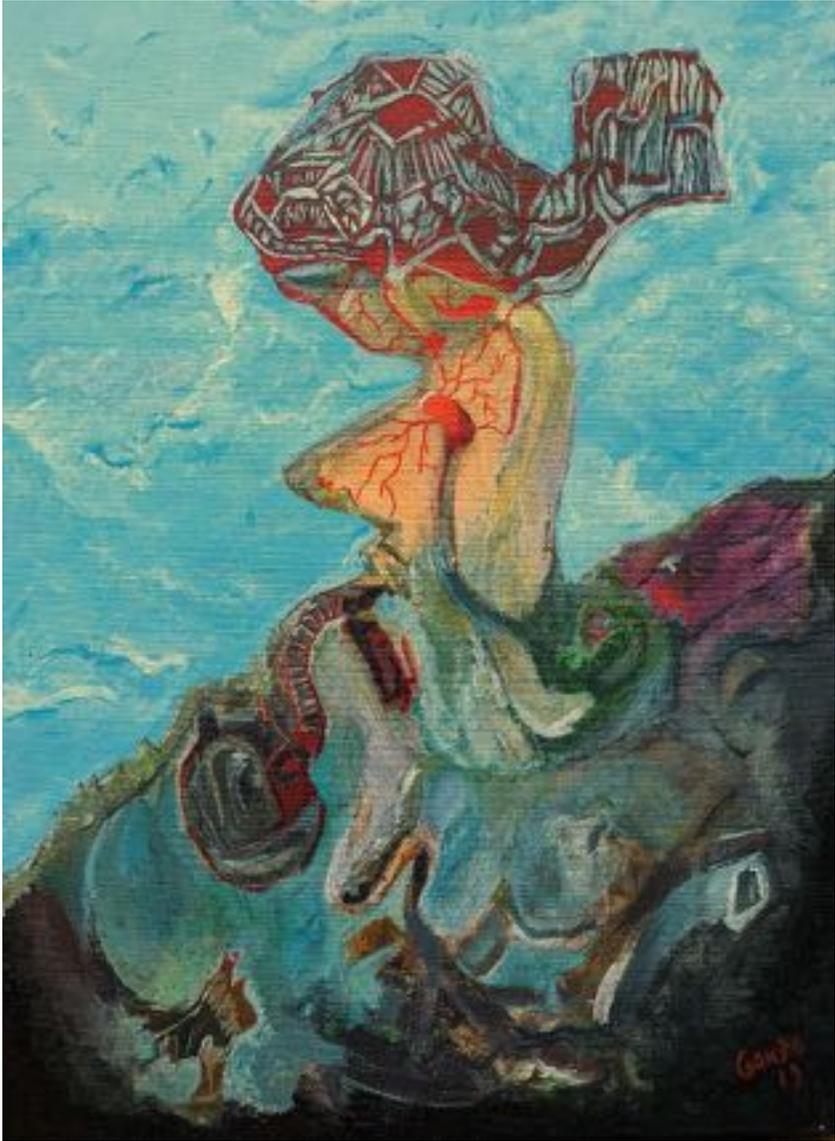
Meanwhile Douglas and Alexandra looked expressionless and unshaken in the slightest by the grotesque bloody scene of the ripped-apart chef, or Pinker, whose life hung on a thread, nor by Philippa's facial expression that pleaded for help. It just didn't register. Then they gave a slow nod to each other.

Douglas went first, slowly lifting his both hands to the back of his head, forcefully clawing into his scalp, tearing it apart, it made a noise of grinding meat and crackling cartilage. Pinker at his last remnant of life tried to make a cry for help, but was so exhausted that it sounded like a squeal of a deflating balloon. Alexandra followed. With the same motions as Douglas. In about twenty seconds both had shed their skin as a cocoon and appeared to be made entirely out of some kind of highly luminescent organic material. The table, the will, the seaside house, the firms, all diminished to insignificance in a blink of an eye. All gone.

The silent wheezing and sobs of the wounded were broken by Alexandra's utterance in a low pitched voice.

"Oh, Trent, poor Trent he had figured us out, I was getting used to this role".

PAINTING BY gon7o



BY LAURA LAUBERTE

Before joining the Philadelphia Association, I was working with breastfeeding mothers and had trained as a doula. I have supported many mothers with breastfeeding but did not have the courage to be present at the others birth.

My maternal and therapeutic journey has brought about a lot of transformation. This process was significantly supported by connecting to female only spaces and women's experiences. These experiences, in particular working with mothers, and being a mother myself, have enabled me to be in the moment, in-the-body, outside the patriarchal gaze of language, what Julia Kristeva refers to as a “subject in process”. The birthing experience starts from preconception, and the delicate, unsettling, shifting internal states in dreams and fantasy and possibilities, to either have or not to have a child. The movement from preconception to conception and uncertainty, do I want this, am I ready to hold life, give birth, and care for life? Sometimes it is a very difficult journey to conceive and once impregnated holding on to that which one is pregnant with, the daunting shadow, question, do I want to keep

holding on or not. Then the months of pregnancy, working through daily repetitive struggles and new challenges with an unknown life carried and growing inside, secret, within an embodied state of care from within and without. Now the challenge of welcoming this body and its needs and demands or not? Then the act of birth, called labour and its various stages of transgression of thresholds of everything known, such as pain and the birth of life from within a life, the ultimate peak experience that female physiology is capable to hold.

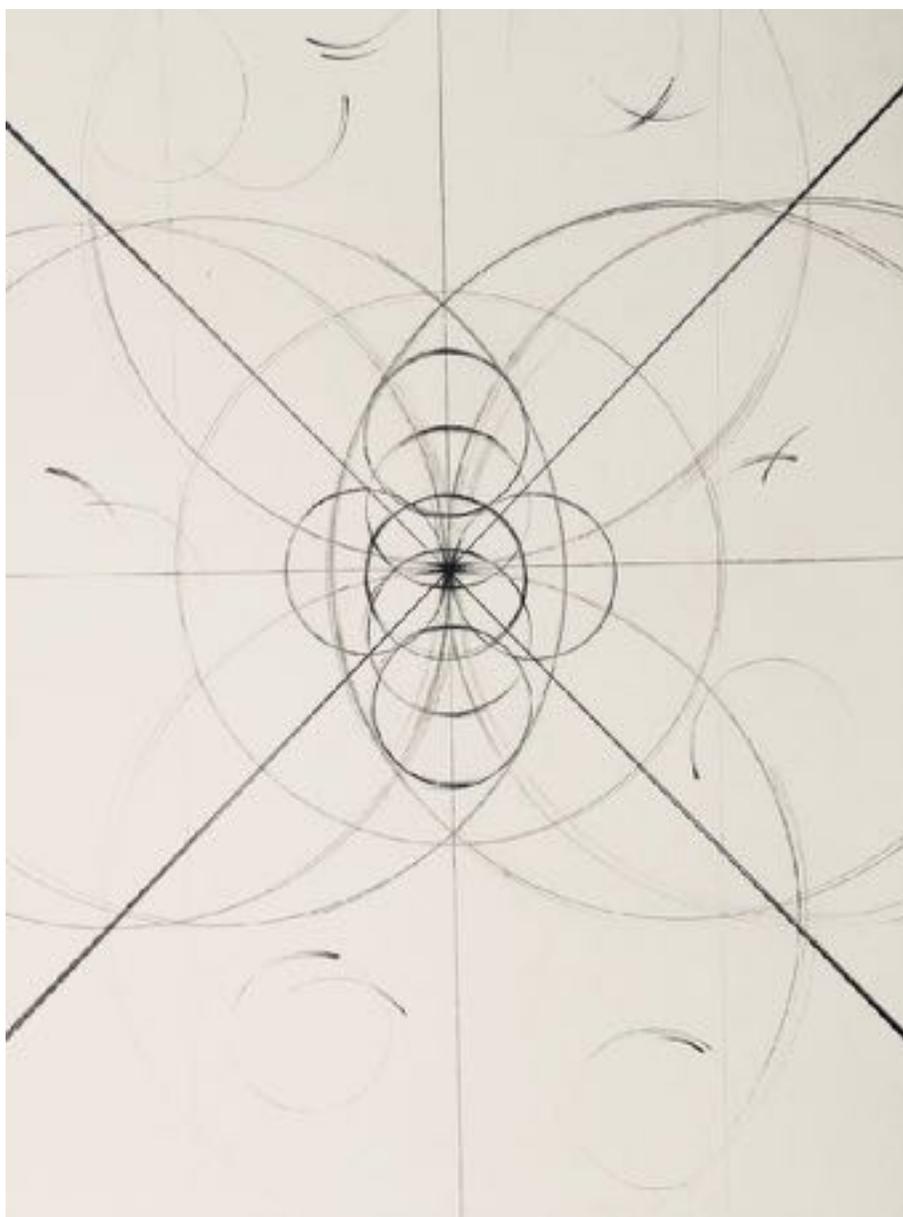
This journey is the climb through the physiological and emotional states of human experience in which transitional and facilitating space for life is protected so as to let life follow its own birth process. The length and complexity of this process is largely misunderstood as our own subjectivity, life, is appropriated by those who want to think for us instead of thinking alongside us. There is creativity and there is something about witnessing, about being in waiting, being in creativity that I want to say something about. This journey could be a therapeutic space, or The Grove, a place where witnessing takes place.

Knitting as I write this speaks to the process of stitching life's connections together. After many years The Grove has invited me to start knitting again. This is a house where knitting and crocheting takes place, as well as poetry writing, music making, painting. We knit and crochet in the meetings and sometimes I am being taught how to do this. I find this teaches me to be present, and it teaches me about co-emergence. I have knitted in my childhood, and I am grateful that this creative practice has been brought back into my life, including childhood memories. In a way I am being taught to remember.

I think crocheting and knitting helps me to witness myself and feel inwards, and at the same time it helps me to be with the experiences of others. Since this is what we do as a community in the house I think it helps us to witness each other, each in our own process of labouring something, each in our different stages of labour on any given day, in our different moods and each in our different desire, or lack of desire, in our different willingness or capability that day.

Michel Odent's work (he is a man, and a doula) has been an inspiration in understanding the role of midwifery for a labouring mother. The depth of his research on human and animal physiology, scientific knowledge, and his first-hand experience working with labouring mothers is a deeply binding thread I found whilst training to become a doula. His work guides and grounds me in the phenomenology of the body. His work teaches doula's and midwife's how to witness, how to be with someone who labours, and most importantly how not to disturb the process of labour in the other.

All of the human physiology is connected, and the experience of this physiology is dependent on the complex and incredibly coherent system of emotional and chemical processes in the body, like notes in a symphony. Odent speaks uncompromisingly about the environment that supports this interdependent connection and makes the experience of the body and mind coherent, makes it a lived experience that has the potential to be understood and integrated. To bring this about he calls for the recognition that the space around the labouring mother needs to be protected, that this space is unique, a radical space with a radical potential. Creativity takes place in this space if human beings can labour



alongside each other, labour takes place if human beings are creative together.

With trauma we know that the person is often left in limbo, frozen, and struggling to birth themselves. They need what Winnicott called a ‘facilitating environment’, to feel held, and witnessed so the life of being a person in the world, with one’s own voice and desires, can emerge. I want to think of the house as a radical space where people can labour undisturbed, where creativity can take place undisturbed... Being at The Grove can feel like witnessing labour, can feel like protecting labour, can feel radical... should feel radical... This is why I am here...

We, the therapists, the midwives, the doulas, need to refrain from the well meaning questions in regards to the progress of labour, “how is it going, let’s see how far have you dilated?” ... because this disrupts the symphony of the chemical and emotional, deeply internal processes in the body, disrupts the phenomenology of the body, the creativity of the body, and sets back the process. When Michel Odent suggests that a useful position of a midwife is a midwife who engages with her own knitting, and allows for the other’s bodily sovereignty and agency to emerge, this echoes Winnicott’s understanding of play in which the process of playing,

as well as capacity to play and play in safety is more important that the content of the play.

Undisturbed labour means integrated birth, it can even be an orgasmic birth...Michel Odent talks about this in “The Functions of the Orgasms, The Highways to Transcendence” (2009). The stories of women experiencing this kind of birth are mythical, yet he talks about this from the perspective of his experience and research of human bodies. Odent's point is that the ‘fetal ejection. reflex’ is involuntary, it can be witnessed, and by this he means the body has its own agency and desire to reach peak experiences, the climax, if the conditions are allowed for. This creates meaning.

The surrender to the phenomenology of the body allows for the emergence of peak experiences and co-emergence outside the Symbolic, what Bracha Ettinger calls 'Matrixial border-spaces'. These kind of spaces with their radical political and ethical implications need protection. This applies to therapeutic spaces and echoes RD Laing’s vision of providing people with a space to have their own journey. For Laing people are driven ‘mad’ by not been allowed to have their own experiences.



PA COMMUNITY HOUSES

PAUL GORDON

Since they were set up in the 1960s, by RD Laing and his colleagues, the PA houses have tried to provide places of genuine asylum, that is of refuge. People use the houses in very different ways - some retreat, staying in their rooms as much as possible. Others make great efforts to establish some community life, making meals, organising chore rotas, suggesting outings, and so on. But no one can escape what has brought them there.

Time and again, we hear people say the house was at times awful, hellish even. Everyone wants to leave, at some point. And yet people do stay, face their demons, both in their own therapy and in the regular meetings that are the hub of the house's life, as well as in the ordinary life of the house.

Of course, the houses don't work for everyone, but then nothing does. Many are interested, come to visit, but cannot take the crucial step to move in. Others do move only to leave soon after, disappointed that the fantasised community they imagined just isn't there for them, or that it's all too much work, which, of course, it is. Some people find it hard to believe they are acceptable and

do whatever they can to prove themselves right, testing everyone's patience, tolerance and understanding.

But those who can make the leap of faith and move in and, more important, stick with it, benefit hugely. Those of us involved in the houses have seen people whose lives were saved, many more whose lives were significantly altered.

Time is central to what the houses are about. We have never imposed limits on how long people stay. It would be absurd to say to someone in severe distress or seriously dislocated, 'You can make this place your home but you must leave within six months or even two years.' People who do not feel at ease in themselves or in the world, can take this sort of time just to begin to feel at home.

This fact, that there are no short cuts, is something our culture with its deadlines, time limits and targets finds almost impossible to accept. Yet, time and again, we hear former residents say that it was this sense of not being pushed, of not being treated, that made a difference to them. The gift of time is one of the most

important things that we give to people who are suffering. Without it there would be nothing.

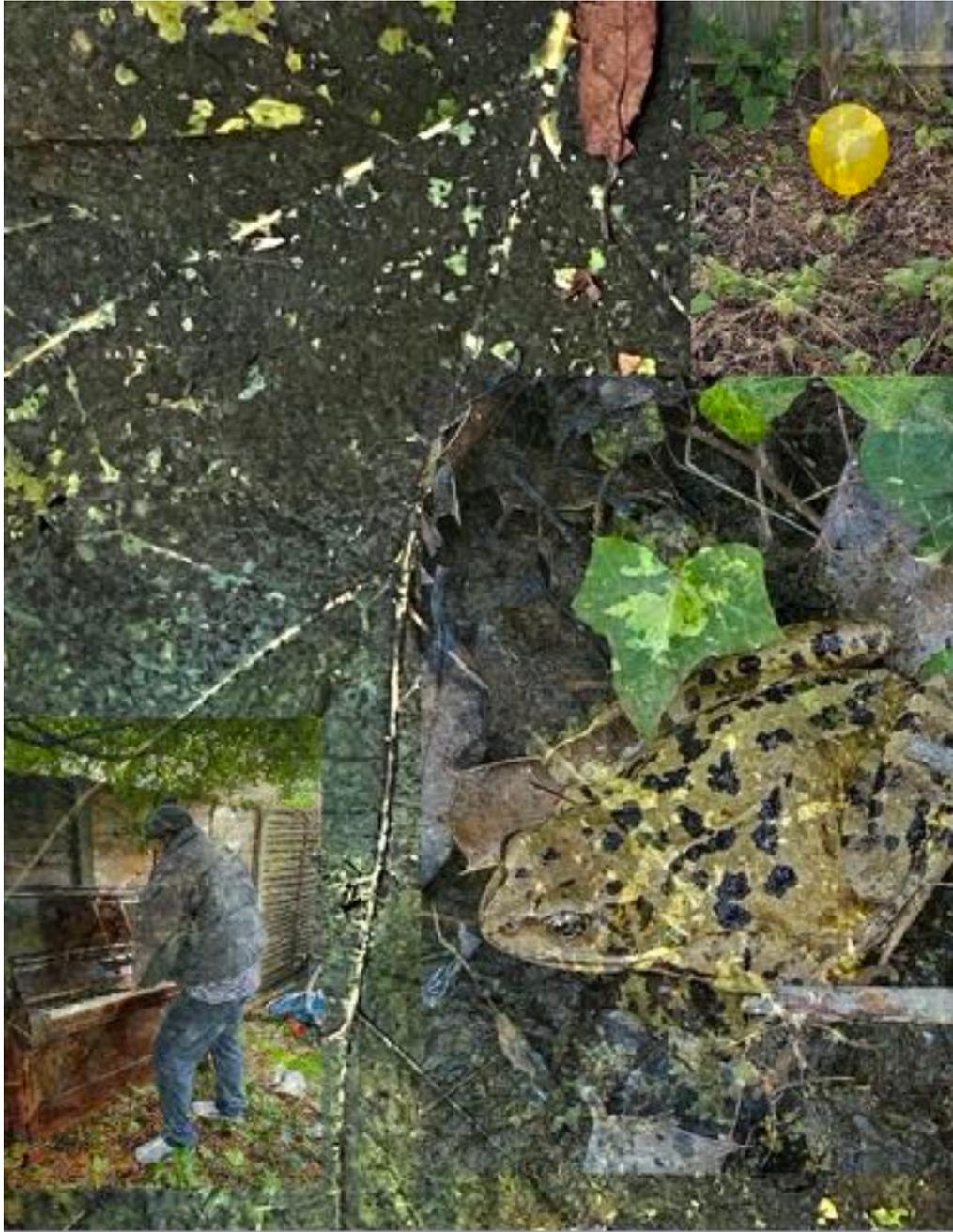
Our residents pay a genuinely affordable rent. But the benefits are not just financial. The people who have come through our houses have been able to make real relationships. They have been able to find meaningful work or study. Instead of just surviving to start living.

Talk of community is everywhere and it is cheap. Our houses, albeit in a small way, continue to affirm the true meaning of community, something always in the making, to be struggled for. For it is through being with others that people may find a more meaningful place in the world, hope where before they felt only despair.

The world has changed fundamentally in so many ways in the forty years since the first PA communities. Yet we continue to hold to the idea that mental disturbance, emotional distress, psychological suffering - call it what you will - can, in time and with patience, be made sense of and, more important, worked through.



Paul Gordon, involved in PA houses for many years is the author of *An Uneasy Dwelling: the story of the Philadelphia Association community houses*, published by PCCS Books (2010)



Articles about the PA houses can be found in the 'download' section of the PA website;

['A Home Is Broken: The Closure of a Philadelphia Association Household'](#) By Marie-Laure Davenport

['When Philosophy Meets Practice: Setting Up a Philadelphia Association Community Household'](#) By Dr Christina Moutsou

Further Reading;

Cooper, R (1989) 'Dwelling and the Therapeutic Community'. In Cooper et al., pp 31 - 35.

Friedman, J (2004) 'The Odyssey, community and therapy' in P Gordon & R Mayo (eds), *Between Psychotherapy and Philosophy: Essays from the Philadelphia Association* (pp. 117-30). London; Whurr.

Paul Gordon gives a rigorous historical account, underpinning ethos and place within the broader organisation in 'An Uneasy Dwelling' (2010)

Bruce Scott offers the testimonies of 14 people who have lived in a PA household in *Testimony Of Experience: Docta Ignorantia And The Philadelphia Association Communities*

**This newsletter was put together by
the Grove Community. For further
information about the PA Community
Houses please contact the PA office**

office@philadelphia-association.org.uk

Editor's Note

The Philadelphia Association is a fellowship of enquiry, not a defined school of thought. As an Association we are not necessarily in agreement, and therefore any view or opinions in this newsletter/publication should not be taken as representing the views of the organisation as a whole.



