

BOOK REVIEW

FIELD THEORY

by Harald Mey

Translated by Douglas Scott

Routledge and Kegan Paul, London. £5.50

This is a heavy book. It weighs 22 oz. It costs more than £5. Of the 325 pages, 50 of them are taken up by closely packed notes. And it is very difficult reading. However, there is much that is new, exciting and relevant to the humanistic psychology field. Mey is offering an alternative to the structuralist theory of social

organisation with a concept that is much more fluid and alive. The idea of 'Field Theory' comes originally from physics and in sociological terms describes social behaviour as the result of an interconnecting web of forces and energies. In encounter terms this seems blindingly relevant and workable. In the area of mass movements - for example, the growth of such apparently irrational social phenomena as totalitarianism - Field Theory makes a good attempt at explaining something which seems inexplicable by rational functionalist/structuralist theories.

His description of the 'tension-space' of two persons might almost be a description of an encounter group. 'People exercise some kind of power or force-effect on other people; that is to say, they induce forces in the life-space of those other particular people. Normally speaking, these induced forces take the form of fields of inner tension. These so-called 'stress systems' can lead to con-

ditions of unrest in people, and in extreme cases, even of neurosis.

But in the last resort, it is really only these fields of tension that drive men on to act at all, though the tension may be the result of inner impulses and interpersonal counter forces, or it may be the result of 'internal' and 'external' forces.'

THE ANATOMY OF MENTAL ILLNESS

by Arthur Janov. New York.

Arthur Janov's two books, *The Primal Scream* and *The Anatomy of Mental Illness* present a cohesive and in some ways original approach to the therapy of neurosis, psychosis, and other bodily and mental diseases.

He discovered 'the scream' while conducting a group therapy session in which he asked a young man to call out 'Mommy! Daddy!' As he began, the patient became upset; suddenly he was writhing on the floor in agony, screeching and finally convulsing. Finally he released an eerie scream after which he became quiet, saying 'I made it, I can feel.' Afterwards he was 'flooded with insights'. Soon afterwards another young man had an almost identical experience when asked to call for Mommy and Daddy. Other patients were helped through the same therapeutic experience and Primal Therapy and the necessary theoretical basis were developed over the ensuing years.

The therapy consists of a massive assault on the patient's defences, and must have taken some courage to develop. Sleep deprivation, solitary confinement in an hotel room, the withdrawal of all props and medicines, and what seems a thoroughly authoritarian approach are all used to soften up the patient before his three weeks of intensive, full-time indi-

vidual and individualized therapy. The methods of helping the patient to relive and re-feel early hurts and key character-forming situations are not well described, but they mostly eschew verbal interpretations and include such devices as wrapping the head in wet towels to bring on feelings of suffocation in appropriate patients who are needing to experience 'birth primals'. I personally am reminded very much of the screaming and screeching, the convulsions and the livid living-through of traumatic situations which we produced by the various 'abreactive' techniques during and after World War II in cases of traumatic neurosis. Various drugs and hypnosis were used to bring about the necessary abreactive crisis, but the technique was not so successful when attempts were made to extend it to other kinds of neurosis, as it was not so easy to reconnect the patient with the chronic and cumulative painful feelings of his character-forming years. Janov's claim is that by a systematic and progressive technique he obtains the necessary primal connection in virtually all cases. His description of patients' birth traumata in their birth primals accords well with those obtained in analysis during deep regressions in the occasional patient, and his description of the post-primal patient who is able fully to feel, without defen-

siveness, also seems to accord in some respects with the aims of analysis (contrary to Janov's assertion). There is nothing implausible either about his methods, so far as they are described or about the results he obtains, except that his claims are surely exaggerated.

It is one thing to review this book; it is another to form a balanced view of Janov and his pioneering work. One can say without hesitation that the book is fascinating and important, and that there is nothing really unsound, erroneous, or unscientific in his methods or assertions. For example, his chapter on the hypothetical neurophysiology of neurosis, while highly speculative, is brilliant and based on well authenticated findings. However these findings neither support (as he asserts) nor refute his own, so that his claims to have put his work on a sound physiological basis is essentially salesman-like rather than scientific. He has simply tried to explain his own results in neurophysiological terms, and has made a really interesting job of it. It is no mean feat to have done that, and the amount of work he and his collaborators have performed in this field alone is considerable. However, having read the books, and not knowing him or his work more closely, I find myself with certain doubts and reservations about his work. The preposterous claims, the messianic fervour, the suspicious uniformity in the verbalisations of the post-primal patients suggestive of 'brain-washing', the idealisation of the post-primal state and the post-primal patient, the absence of any snags or any real price to be paid, all add up to a certain defensiveness about Janov which cannot help but be reflected in his set-up and methods, so that we shall have to wait quite a time before a balanced view and a balanced approach evolve.

Janov asserts that the neurotic needs simply to connect with himself but only primal therapy can establish that connec-

tion. He says 'We must overthrow the sick system by force and violence.' The actual part played by the primal therapist is not very clear, but the powerful evangelical forces in the Institute must play a part, as some patients are beginning to have primals when they arrive there, simply from word of mouth or from reading Janov's book. Janov's prophetic fame has evidently spread before him. This happens with charismatic healers and people who feel themselves to be great men, and is a group phenomenon in itself which makes it doubly difficult to remain apart and objective, especially for the leader concerned. I am reminded of the claims of virtually 100% success by the pioneers in behaviour therapy.

Whereas I do not find that his section on the neurophysiological mechanisms of feeling-block, valuable though it is, provides evidence for or against the validity of his findings, the sections on birth primals and on the original research done in his Institute do provide most interesting data which go some way towards substantiating his claims. His brutal, ingenious, and overwhelming assaults on his patients open them up to a defenceless emotionality which is unprecedented in other psychotherapies, at least on such a scale, and which has profound effects on their autonomic nervous system, mostly in a direction of relaxation of nervous tension. The effects on pulse rate and in one or two cases on blood pressure are very remarkable, and there is a tendency for cortical rhythms to be slowed.

This work is in its early stages, and I hope we have by no means heard the last of it. Let us hope that Janov, as he rightfully establishes a subjectively secure and respected position, loses his irritating proselytism, and that we are spared the dangers and bigotries of another mass movement. I know that he does not have a monopoly of therapeutic success; if his

claim for this were well-founded, his discovery would be the first good thing that had happened in the whole of man's history. I can personally state that many of the things he claims only happen in

primal therapy have happened in my own analysis and in my analysis of others, although I would not claim the same startling success rate or the profundity of effect in all cases.
