

Open letter to Will Grossman

ANGER, ENCOUNTER GROUPS AND GURUS

I am glad you wrote *'Myths of the Growth Movement'* in the Nov. 74 *Self and Society* because it has helped me to see where I stand vis-a-vis encounter groups, feelings, anger, and Indian Gurus.

When I am shouted at in a group I feel scared, but much less so if I know that you will not harm me. If I know you well, I sometimes feel a sense of relief - like the effect of lightening and thunder on a muggy day. I often feel better after I have shouted at someone or something.

What is all this about anger being a pseudo feeling? You ask me to examine myself deeply - then I will find your truth. Anger you say is a mask for fragile feelings of love, delight, hurt, grief and fear. When a baby screams with anger is he masking feelings? Are you sure your Guru - if indeed he said this - is not misleading you? Or is it sacrilege to suggest that? Feelings you write, are a consequence of our conditioning, are *only* a response to one's self-conception. Are a baby's feelings a consequence of his conditioning, a response to his self-conception? What are you talking about?

Feelings are vital at one stage of development, and irrelevant at another, you say. I suppose you imply that you are at this exalted higher non-feeling stage with the help of your Guru. You contemplate and comprehend your 'inner ultimate reality'. Presumably this inner reality excludes feelings, and your activity of contemplating is feelingless. If so you are dead.

But you approve of 'heart-feelings' which include love. So love is the only O.K. feeling? I am reminded of Haight-Ashbury and Flower power. It failed because we deny our angry selves at our peril.

Will Grossman, my anger may not reach you. It will probably make you hold on more tightly as you say. But you hold on more tightly because you want to. If I don't reach you it is because you won't allow me to. (your own words).

Anger is a form of contact for me, as is love. My loved ones let me know when they feel irritation or anger. I like that. I trust someone who shows me his anger. I also feel he trusts me that he is prepared to reveal his anger to me. (I speak of friends whom I know will not harm me. I distrust a fear a stranger's anger and his love). I believe that anger and love are closely related. Perhaps I agree that there are saints whose love is that going rejoining in another's aliveness and qualities, which has no need element. But for you and for me and for the vast multitude, our love is tainted with the need for love in return. This need leads to frustration, and frustration leads to anger. And

even the saints got angry! Anger is not all a negative result of frustration. Anger against cruelty is I believe healthy and positive.

Ronald Ullmann

Letters to the editor

Dear Sir,

Gestalt in Wonderland

I read the account of the 'experiment in living' which has resulted in the founding of a Gestalt Centre (*Self & Society*, Nov., 1974) and whilst I am delighted that the Centre has arrived at last, I am writing to express my disquiet at such a useful therapy as Perls' being associated with this kind of folksy whimsy-whamsy hippy thing with avocado pears (who can afford them?) and 'fresh spring water' (why?).

I'm sure the candles and garlands of flowers were charming, but I wonder what possible relevance they could have to the ordinary lives of real people. In my work as a marriage counsellor (Shades of the Establishment!) I meet people who have to cope with problems like being unemployed, not being able to cope with children, the nagging wife, the possessive mother or father, the husband who drinks and beats you up, the wife who won't or can't talk. No doubt lots of them would like a spell of total isolation feeding on peaches and mangoes, but they're not going to get it in this world!

My own training in Gestalt (with Bob Selman) taught me to be in closer touch with my own feelings and it taught me a technique for helping other people to get in touch with their feelings such as fear, inadequacy and anger and with some of their hitherto unrealised strengths: - their hope and their joy. I now see Gestalt therapy as a most useful tool which takes its place as a valuable method which I use when appropriate for that particular person. I don't see it as a religion, or a way of life, or even as the only effective therapy - for example I find Carl Rogers' non-directive counselling of more general use, especially with the kind of person whose difficulty is over - rather than under-reaction, and for the person without much feeling of self (see Virginia Axline's 'Dibs'

for a fine example of non-self-indulgent counselling).

Gestalt was a very important step for me so I don't want to knock it. But any help must be applicable in the real, everyday life of that person, as it was and is in mine, to be of any true or lasting value. I know that an experience as disturbing as Gestalt leaves some people with a need to change their present way of life, but I feel it is a great shame if people's own original ideas for change should be influenced by supplying this unreal environment as a pattern they might follow. There is, I think, a very real danger that the A.H.P. will divorce itself totally from real life as it seems to have done so disastrously in America; already many of the accounts of experiences in groups reported in '*Self & Society*' seem to suggest that this is something that happens 'There' once a week and is then switched off for home and work. If we want to change society, it will have to be done by real parents and real teachers and real social workers (in the widest sense of the term) being prepared to commit themselves more deeply to the people, and most especially the children, with whom they come into daily contact. Dropping out is not just easy, it is also robbing the community of those who might accomplish the greatest change.

I notice I keep using the word 'real'. Perhaps what I'm trying to say is that staying with the feeling, staying with the tediousness of everyday life is not the easiest way, but I feel that this is where all the growth movement should lead. I should be very sad to see the Gestalt Centre end up as a rich man's playground.

Yours sincerely,

Brenda Rogers