

Letters to the editor

Dear Sir,

I would like to contribute one quite simple idea. It is that groups whose purposes are overtly therapeutic (encounter groups, for example) more readily accept feelings which express anger, uncertainty, fear, doubt or disquiet at the beginning of a session than feelings of warmth, happiness, amusement or confidence.

This is certainly so in my group experiences. On one occasion I attended a group which was entitled 'ROGERIAN ENCOUNTER SESSION' and the group members had clearly become members in order that (a) they may learn more about the operation of groups, and (b) that they might encounter themselves. Several members (nearly all of whom were professional workers of one description or another) had seen films of encounter groups in operation, with all the trauma and drama of anger and tears which eventually gave way to a good gestalt. The group began with the familiar disagreements about whether the group should attempt to do *something* or not, and whether group members 'should say should'.

After a while a female member of the group said:

You know, I came here feeling very happy indeed. I was glad that I had now the opportunity to sit down and re-charge my batteries. I was glad that I could relax and that I wasn't expected to perform. I feel that the group is now deliberately trying to pressure me to experience tension and unease.

- if she had enough strength and didn't want to feel tense she might have left the group for a while. But she stayed, and did become uneasy, and the group seemed to accept her more readily for that.

This is only one example of a situation, and there are many more. Humour in groups is often frowned upon, and once I saw a person who was lively and happy at the beginning of a group reduced to sheer maddening anger at the constant pressure placed upon them. 'Your humour is just a mask for your inner unhappiness' and 'you don't take yourself seriously' and 'you're insulting the group' were the type of pungent comments addressed to this person.

Why some feelings should be more acceptable than others, I am not at all sure, but I suggest that there is now a developed and sophisticated ritual which takes place at encounter groups, based upon participant expectations that negative feelings which are present at beginning of groups will be converted to positive feelings at the end only if positive feelings do not get in the way too nearly.

Isn't it that we're supposed to laugh at each other when we know ourselves, and that we are not supposed to know ourselves until after the group?

Steve Murgatroyd

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Dear Sir,

On the bus yesterday I thought about *Self and Society* and offer the following: the entire magazine has a kind of talking-to-ourselves character; to an outsider (someone who is outside what is rather quaintly called (no, not quaintly - innocently) 'The Growth Movement' it could seem a series of drafts of chapters of a hermetic book, say. Which is a way of saying that the new reader is most likely to mutter to himself 'What in the world are they all on about?' in bewilderment, and give up.

This can't help sales much, I'd have thought. If the outside cover or first page contained a short statement of what you *are* all on about, it would be helpful; as it is, it's as if you don't bother to drop any hints to the reader. I find most of the articles and interviews opaque to a degree. Why not for example head an interview by giving some idea as to what the interviewer is well known for and why he should be interviewed?

It's no good saying 'but we are not all on about the same thing'. In fact that's all the more reason to make clear what the areas of agreement and disagreement etc. are within what you call the *growth movement*, which you could begin by explaining.

I think the flight from language and rational thought and logical method, which I take to be characteristic of most body-centered therapies, is an invitation to the woolly-minded to talk

gobble-de-gook. Certain words are used as charms, sort of, not guides to understanding; and the repeated assertion of X as a truth is taken to be proof of its truth. I've often had the impression when reading it of a number of panicking or panicked individuals desperately seeking a private escape from anxiety and despair (Which they can tell themselves *isn't* merely private, because after all it involves a *group*, doesn't it?) without ever having tried to *understand* themselves in any other way - by that most characteristically *human* way of language and clear thinking and honest introspection. Plus of course the making or 'perfecting' of the relationships one's *already in* - or into, as they will go on tiresomely putting it. However, I am aware that anything approaching this sort of method is almost by definition a Bad Thing, since respect for man's rational consciousness is equated with inhibition and alienation.

It does seem to me that romantic, 'life affirming' unitary theories are-ironically-mostly unable to theorize at all, not having provided themselves with sufficient intellectual hardware.

With love from the outside,

Yours,

May Roberts
London S.W.

