



ENCOUNTER



INTRODUCTION

More than ever before, man is asking the existential questions "Who am I? Why am I alive? Where am I going?" And as he looks around for answers to these intensely personal questions, he finds, more than ever before, traditional solutions void of significance and meaning. For many, God is dead or at least has suffered a debilitating stroke. Deprived of the religious panaceas once provided by church dogma and ceremony, man is increasingly aware that he must look elsewhere for personal fulfillment and spiritual salvation. Science, too, has failed to uncover the golden road to immortality and omnipotence, and instead offers the terrifying spectre and possibility of instantaneous and mass annihilation. Even capitalism, that once sacred cow of western civilization, is losing her gilded sheen. Amidst unequaled affluence and prosperity, man finds his life becoming more and more externalized and regimented; the result is a separation between one's self and one's socio-economic role and function that on one hand creates a sense of alienation, aimlessness and insignificance, and which on the other maintains and heightens this anxiety by creating a spiritual wasteland totally devoid of means with which man can overcome his emotional ennui.

More and more aware of the obvious bankruptcy of these time-tested solutions, people have begun to realize that it's necessary to look inward for new and meaningful answers, to embark upon an exploration into self-awareness, in order to combat the growing sense of unreality about themselves and their lives that characterizes our modern "schizoid" world. For those interested in this magical mystery tour, the "encounter" section provides an almost overwhelming number of starting points which, while heading toward the same goal, take the traveler along two different routes - encounter/confrontation and psychodrama.

Basically, encounter strives for awareness and growth through intense, honest and intimate interaction with one's self and with other people. Sometimes oriented around a particular issue, more often left wide open to follow the needs and interests of the individuals involved, an encounter group generally revolves around the need and the inability of people to deal honestly and openly with themselves and with others. To overcome the fear and hesitancy of revealing and expressing personal feelings, problems and emotions to other people, a variety of techniques such as touch and trust games, sensitivity awareness, gestalt exercises, or simply an emphasis on here and now interaction might be used to develop, over time, feelings of caring, trust and cohesion within the group, creating an environment where personal barriers and defenses can be dissolved and disposed of, and where people can finally begin to talk with rather than at, and react to instead of against, other people.

Psychodrama, in both the once-a-week meetings or the weekend long marathons, also deals with the personal problems and conflicts mentioned above, and often uses many of the same techniques as the encounter groups. In addition, however, the predominant emphasis is on the acting out of, rather than the rapping about, one's feelings and problems through scenes which may recreate a moment in the past, deal very specifically with the present, or jump ahead to some hypothetical time in the future. Within each scene the participant is forced to face the emotional and psychological realities of the moment being reenacted; unable to hide himself away behind his intellectual and rational defenses, he is open to experience the intensity and the depth of his own feelings, to break through the emotional blockage that isolates him - from himself and from others.

