

Self-Development Seminars in Japan

HAGA Manabu

芳賀 学

*Since the mid-1980s self-development seminars have been attracting increasing attention in Japan. These seminars, many operated by service-industry corporations, promise dramatic achievements in self-realization to anyone who participates in a three- to four-day course. The initial seminar is followed by other courses that form a program requiring six months to a year to complete. Altogether several hundred thousand trainees—primarily young people—have participated in the training, the purpose of which is to help the trainees leave behind negative patterns of thought and experience the birth of a positive “new self.” Accompanying the development of this new outlook on life is the formation of a strong interpersonal network among the trainees, based on shared effort and shared emotion. The emotional relationship that develops among the trainees resembles in some ways the *gemeinschaft* relationship seen in communities of relatives and friends, but differs in that a fundamental anonymity is retained. Because of this anonymity the seminar creates an environment in which intimacy and personal freedom can coexist.*

“What sort of person are you?”

“I’m *this* sort of person....”

“Are you sure that’s really *you*? Or might it be simply an image that you’ve built up of yourself? Wouldn’t you like to know yourself better? Why not explore your own possibilities? Don’t be satisfied with answers that you get from others—find your *own* answers. That’s what X Seminar is all about.”

(*Seminar Pamphlet*)

THIS PASSAGE, from an introductory pamphlet distributed by a Japanese organization that operates self-development seminars, is a clear appeal to the human desire to explore the self. Implicit in this appeal is a belief in a “better self” whose potential can be realized

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through proper training. In Japan the human potential movement has been attracting increasing interest since the mid-1970s, especially among the young. Of the various methods employed by this movement the most popular has been the self-development seminar, which involves a course of lectures that will, it is promised, lead to an “encounter with the self just as it is” and a “realization of one’s true worth.” These seminars have succeeded in attracting several hundred thousand young people in spite of the quite stiff fees that are charged. Because of certain of the tactics that they employ, such as the enthusiastic solicitation of potential participants, self-development seminars have tended to be lumped together with the New Religions. What is their true nature, though, and where did they arise? And why is it that young people find them so attractive? These are a few of the questions that I wish to address in the present paper.

The Origin and Development of Self-Development Seminars in Japan

The Japanese self-development seminars have their roots in the human potential movement that emerged during the 1960s and 1970s in the United States, particularly on the West Coast. As I shall explain later in greater detail, the basic methodologies used in the seminars can be traced to techniques like encounter, transactional analysis, and Gestalt therapy. The two systems that seem to have had the most direct influence, however, are John Hanley’s Life Spring and Werner Erhard’s est (Erhard Seminars Training).¹ A sixty-hour concentrated course of training that promises dramatic attainments in self-realization, est is perhaps the closest prototype of the Japanese self-development seminars in terms of training methods, content, purpose, and even the sociological background of the participants.

The first Japanese self-development seminars appear to have been held in the mid-1970s. These were the Life Dynamics seminars conducted by the Ark International organization. Virtually all of the Japanese-run seminars that appeared during the 1980s were influenced, either directly or indirectly, by these Life Dynamics courses. Still, the human potential movement remained quite peripheral at this time, with virtually no influence on society at large. Seminars were attended by a few executives and entrepreneurs who had the money and leisure to indulge their curiosity in new things, but remained largely beyond the interests—or knowledge—of the average Japanese.

¹ Life Spring and est can, in turn, be traced back to Mind Dynamics, developed by Alexander Everett. Mind Dynamics emphasized different methods, however, centering on meditation and visualization.

All of this changed in the late 1980s, at the time of the Japanese “bubble economy,” an economic boom of unprecedented proportions. During this period large numbers of young people in their twenties and thirties began to attend the seminars. They represented a wide cross section of Japanese society, including college students, white- and pink-collar office workers, and ordinary housewives. A corresponding increase was seen in the number of organizations running the seminars, many of them offshoots of earlier organizations. A number of the larger enterprises expanded their base of operations beyond Tokyo to cities in outlying areas. Those attending the seminars every year numbered in the tens of thousands, and there were over ten large companies (plus more than a hundred smaller companies) conducting courses of various types. By 1989 Life Dynamics had established seven centers throughout the country and graduated a total of more than seventy thousand people. Seminars run by other of the larger companies, such as Be You, iBD (it’s a Beautiful Day!), Life Space, and Forum, were attended by thousands of participants (Be You, for example, claimed 8,286 trainees in 1989 [KAKITA and FUJITA 1991, p. 122]). Thus the bubble economy period was one of rapid growth and great success for the self-development seminars (although there were also problems relating to contracts and recruitment methods that received wide—and critical—coverage in the mass media).

The lush years did not last long, however. The collapse of the bubble economy in the early 1990s, with the concomitant drop in the number of attendees and debts resulting from over-rapid expansion, forced the organizations to retrench. Many have pulled out of outlying cities and shortened the span of the remaining seminars, and some companies have given up on the self-development business altogether.

It may nevertheless be premature to predict the demise of the human potential movement in Japan. Scaled back though they are, the activities of the self-development organizations remain far larger in scale than they were prior to the bubble economy. Moreover, techniques similar to those used in the seminars have recently found their way into other organizations, such as religious groups and business corporations. What the end of the bubble economy thus meant for the human potential movement was not extinction but rather a process of sifting-out and selection.

An Outline of Seminar Activities

Let us now examine the activities of the Japanese self-development

seminars. The standard seminar format is as follows:²

Recruitment. Most people hear of the seminars through the introduction of family members, acquaintances, friends, work colleagues, or sweethearts. These recruiters, who are often quite enthusiastic in their activities, are generally people who themselves are attending the courses or who have finished the entire program. The seminar organization supports their efforts by providing introductory “guest events.” These generally last about two hours, and are held at regular intervals on weekday evenings. Although the majority of people attending these introductory events never actually join the seminars, in every group there are a few who do (some enthusiastically, some only to “save the face” of the friend who introduced them).

Basic seminar. The first activity participated in by the new trainee is the basic seminar. These seminars are held in large halls in urban areas and are generally scheduled for about twelve hours a day over a three- or four-day period (see figure 1). During the bubble economy period many seminars ran several of these courses a month, each attended by one hundred to two hundred participants. This, in spite of fees of approximately ¥100,000 (about US\$800 at the time). The elements of the basic seminar are pretty much the same as in the guest event, advanced seminar, and integrity network (IN): there are lectures by the trainer, exercises involving the participants (generally in a game format), and verbal “sharing” by the trainees of their experiences and reactions to the training. Through repetition of these three basic elements the basic course attempts to inculcate the seminar’s way of thinking into the trainees. At first the trainees tend to be a bit disoriented, finding themselves in strange surroundings with a large group of unknown people, but by the halfway point most have adjusted and are starting to find the activities interesting. Generally speaking, the basic seminar ends with most of the participants wishing for a little more.

Advanced seminar. The basic seminar is followed by an interview and “post-seminar,” during which the trainees are urged to move on to the second major level of the self-development course, the advanced seminar. This seminar is held for twelve hours or more a day over a span of four or five days, generally at a hotel outside the city or at a center owned by the seminar organization. Fees run between ¥200,000 and ¥350,000, but the larger organizations still manage to attract approxi-

² The terminology used in this paper is that of Life Dynamics, managed until 1994 by Ark International.

Figure 1. A Typical Three-day Seminar

Day 1 (9:00 AM–9:00 PM)

- Orientation
- Explanation of procedural rules
- Explanation on methods for maximizing the seminar's potential
- Interpersonal encounter game
- About "borders" and "programs"
- Group-formation
- About promises
- About fear
- About "life games"

Day 2 (9:00 AM–9:00 PM)

- About human relations
- About problems and the patterns that characterize them
- Experiencing things from another person's standpoint
- About how others see you
- Expressing oneself honestly
- About the makeup of the program

Day 3 (9:00 AM–9:00 PM)

- About your goals in life
- Selection game
- "Declaration and actualization" game
- About space for growth
- Concluding exercise

mately forty or fifty trainees to each seminar. Compared with the basic seminar the emphasis tends to be less on lectures and more on exercises in a few selected areas. These exercises generally continue for however long it takes all trainees to clear them. Building on the experience of "getting it" they gained in the basic seminar, the trainees learn how to actualize their "better self." The advanced seminar is mentally and physically the most demanding part of the entire self-development course, but for that very reason it provides trainees with the greatest feeling of satisfaction and spiritual fulfillment upon completion.

Integrity network. The third major element of the course is the so-called "integrity network" (IN). This is quite different in character from the preceding basic and advanced seminars, extending over a

period of one hundred days and involving low fees that are basically intended only to cover costs. During this hundred-day interval there are only a few activities run by the seminar organization: two-day seminars at the start, mid-point, and end of the period. The trainees are also expected to attend the weekly guest events and meetings held afterwards.

The stated purpose of the IN is to help trainees integrate into their daily lives the insights gained in the basic and advanced seminars. The emphasis is thus on practical methods to realize a new way of living. In most of the seminar organizations, however, the focus of the IN activity is, in fact, the recruitment of new trainees (hence the required attendance at the guest events). Seen in the best possible light, the recruitment activities, with all their attendant difficulties, provide the trainees with endless opportunities to learn how to actualize their goals, and thus comprise valuable learning exercises in themselves. Nevertheless, certain of the seminar organizations engage in dubious practices—like issuing recruitment manuals to their IN trainees and setting quotas for new entrants—that suggest they regard those in the IN course as little more than unpaid help.

Graduation. As described above, the self-development courses show a three-stage structure in which trainees progress from the basic seminar to the advanced seminar, and from the advanced seminar to the IN, much like students in the educational system. Upon completion of the IN the trainees graduate from their formal course of studies with the seminar organization. Graduation implies separation—even those former trainees who wish to retain some form of continuing link with the organization are given few opportunities to do so. They may continue their recruitment activities, of course, or act as unpaid assistants at the various courses, but that is about all.

Reasons for the Popularity of the Seminars

The self-development courses require a considerable investment of time, money, and effort from the trainees. As we have seen, completion of all three stages requires at least six months and costs between ¥300,000 and ¥500,000. Moreover, the recruitment activities usually connected with the IN stage can involve the trainees in much interpersonal conflict as they attempt to get friends and family members to enroll. Why then have so many Japanese young people taken the courses and remained with the program until completion? Certain peripheral reasons can be cited (the sometimes coercive tactics of recruiters, the affluence of the bubble economy years), but these are

not sufficient to account for the surprising growth of the seminars. Such growth would not have been possible unless a significant number of the participants felt that the benefits justified the expense.

In order to determine what these benefits might be, let us examine more closely the seminars' view of reality and their actual activities.

BASIC TENETS

The self-development seminars introduce the following tenets to the trainees, primarily through the use of lectures.

Life scripts and programs. The underlying concept of the seminars is that all human beings are born in possession of a perfect "essence," often compared to a diamond. All who can fully manifest this essence are capable of realizing the happiness and fulfillment of an "ideal life."

The existence of human suffering is accounted for in most seminars through the logic of "life scripts." This logic holds that at birth everyone lives in accordance with their diamond essence, but that in the process of growing up they acquire life scripts (for which the seminars use the English loan-word "programs") that suppress the functioning of this ideal self. Human suffering arises from programs relating to pride, concern with social appearances, and self-denying psychological habits (self-hatred, feelings of inferiority, etc.). People trade away true satisfaction in life for the false security offered by these mental crutches.

Escaping from the programs. The seminars present themselves as opportunities to escape from these programs. One's life, the seminars insist, is entirely the product of one's own choices. Hence each individual is the sole source of his or her entire experience of the world, including whatever unhappiness and misfortune it may contain.

In this way the seminars thoroughly individualize responsibility for everything that happens in life. This opens a concrete path to the attainment of happiness: "Live with clear goals," the seminars advise, "then actualize them through efforts directed entirely to the here-and-now." If you are dissatisfied with your present life, then form a clear idea of how you wish to change it and direct all of your mental and physical energies in that direction.

The seminars teach that if one's goals are clear then the ways of realizing these goals are endless. Try one way, and if it doesn't work just try another. Anything that obscures the clear formation of goals or obstructs the flexible application of the means to these goals can be immediately adjudged as unnecessary. The above-mentioned programs relating to pride and self-doubt are typical examples of such

obstructions—to cling to them is, in effect, to choose unhappiness for oneself. The seminars reject such mental attitudes and stress the importance of a positive approach in which the individual works with others in an affirmative manner for the purpose of realizing his or her goals.

Characteristics of the seminar way of thinking. How then does the seminar view of reality differ from that of the ordinary Japanese young people that comprise the bulk of the seminars' clientele?

In fact, the outlook espoused by the seminars, with its rejection of a transcendent ethic and stress on the role of the individual in creating his or her own reality, is in many ways similar to the sense of values held by many of Japan's young.³ There is among them an importance placed on "being oneself," on finding happiness through the realization of one's inherent individuality, and on the application of personal effort as a means of shaping one's present reality. What is distinctive about the seminars, however, is the degree to which they stress these factors. For example, although most young people do recognize the primary importance of personal effort, they also accept the influence of talent, fortune, family status and a wide variety of other factors that tend to diminish the weight of the individual. The seminars, in contrast, hold to a thoroughly achievement-oriented individualistic worldview in which everyone has the potential to realize happiness regardless of circumstances, and in which everyone is totally responsible for the reality they have created for themselves through their own choices.

The primary effect that this outlook has on trainees is to give them a more positive sense of their capabilities in effecting change. As they internalize the seminar worldview they discover an approach to reconstructing their own lives that is different from any they have known before. With their acceptance of this new way of thinking they see their own unhappiness and dissatisfaction as the result, not of bad luck, insufficient talent, or lack of family connections, but of their own failure to act positively to change their own circumstances. The seminars thus provide a theoretical framework that encourages and underpins the trainees' efforts to reassess themselves and embark on direct activities to leave behind lives of reluctant resignation for better, more positive existences.

A PLACE FOR EXPERIENTIAL UNDERSTANDING AND EMPATHY

The self-development seminars utilize a variety of methods to get

³ The self-development seminars also exact strict obedience to the rules outlined in the contract. For this reason SHIMAZONO characterizes the seminar way of thinking as close to what Bellah labels "therapeutic contractualism" (1992, pp. 41-42).

across their prescriptions for the universal attainment of happiness. Intellectual presentations of their way of thinking play a comparatively minor role—it is not to listen to lectures that so many young people have come to the seminars. The courses' success is due in large part to the fact that they allow the trainees to experience the validity of the concepts for themselves, supplementing lecture teaching with an interesting assortment of exercises and sharing experiences. It is this aspect of the training that tends to have the deepest effects on the trainees and to impress them as the most therapeutic in nature.

Exercises. These are primarily communication games carried out under the supervision of the trainer by the trainees themselves or by combinations of trainees and assistants. These games vary considerably in form and content, with several dozen types being used over the entire self-development course, from the basic seminar to the IN. For reasons of space it is impossible to examine all of them, but several representative examples are described below.

- 1 *Dyad exercise.* In this exercise two players sit facing each other close enough that their knees lightly touch. The players meet each other's gaze throughout as they take turns speaking for a set time on a theme assigned by the trainer. The speaker says anything that comes to mind, while the listener avoids all response. The themes assigned are various, such as "Things about the other person that make a good (or bad) impression on me" or "A secret I don't want to tell the other person." The game reveals the participants' communication quirks and allows them to find out what sort of impression they make on other people. One young woman commented that "whether praised or criticized, I was shown aspects of myself I hadn't been aware of," and characterized the experience as "refreshing" (KARITA and FUJITA 1991, p.128).⁴
- 2 *Goals-and-methods exercise.* Each member of the group must cover ten meters in a way differ from the preceding members. Thus the first may walk, the second run, and the others crawl, hop, or somersault. The purpose of the exercise is to show the importance of determination in the fulfillment of one's goals, and to demonstrate that the number of methods for the realization of these goals is infinite.
- 3 *The red/black game.* The trainees are divided into two groups and cast votes of "red" or "black" according to the following rules.

⁴ This type of insight is also seen in the negative feedback exercise, in which negative impressions are expressed unexpurgated to the other person.

When both sides vote red both are docked three points; when both vote black both receive five points; when one votes red and the other black the former receives five points and the latter loses five (FUTAZAWA and SHIMADA 1991, p. 35). The trainer explains that the purpose of the game is to win by assembling as many points as possible in the course of six turns. Most teams attempt to defeat the other by casting only red votes, since the rules suggest that this gives them the greatest margin of victory. The result is that both sides end up with large minus figures. The trainer then explains that the secret to gaining points is to trust the other team and vote black. The lesson for life is that the key to winning—achieving success—is a matter not of attaining happiness only for oneself, but of trusting others and attaining happiness with them.

- 4 *Selection exercise.* The trainees form two large rings, one inside the other. The rings revolve in opposite directions so that the trainees are faced by new people, one after another. With each new partner the trainees must decide what to do: ignore the partner, meet his or her gaze, shake hands, or hug. Toward the end of the game (with the skillful direction of the trainer) most of the trainees are choosing to hug their partners. In this way the trainees experience the warmth of other human beings, see that they are fundamentally acceptable to people, and thereby learn the importance of close relations with other people. Upon completion of this exercise one male trainee commented, “For the first time I realized that I could be accepted even by someone I didn’t know. I felt reassured and encouraged” (KAKITA and FUJITA 1991, p. 131).
- 5 *Return-to-childhood meditation.* In this exercise the trainees close their eyes, imagine their present selves, then gradually move back, stage by stage, to a picture of their infant selves lying happily in their parents’ arms. Along the way they recall experiences both pleasant and unpleasant. The trainees rediscover their original pure selves at infancy, and see how they began to accumulate life scripts in the process of growing up. Another element of the meditation is imagining the lives of one’s parents. One follows one’s father and mother back to their infancy, pictures what they must have felt like, and goes over the events of their lives. In this way the trainees learn to empathize with their parents’ joys, sufferings, and hopes for their children. At the same time they realize their own feelings of affection toward their parents.
- 6 *Expressing desires.* This exercise follows the form of the dyad exer-

cise. One trainee asks the other what he or she most wants, and the other responds with whatever comes to mind. At first most trainees stick with neutral responses like “a car,” “a house,” or “a vacation,” but as the exercise progresses they start to run out of things to say and turn to subjects they are ordinarily too embarrassed to mention, like “love,” “courage,” and “security.” The hope in this exercise is that in the process of exchange the trainees will realize the goals that are truly important to them.

- 7 *Declaration exercise.* The trainees form slogans about their future selves, declaring themselves to be “such-and-such a type of person.” Each must then act out this slogan in front of the trainer and the other trainees until the content of the slogan is recognized by the audience. Through the precise expression of their slogan and the audience’s acknowledgment it is hoped that the trainees will gain a concrete sense of their ability to live in accordance with their new resolution.
- 8 *Transformation drama.* Like caterpillars metamorphosing into butterflies, the trainees must act out their transformation from an ugly old self into a beautiful new self. The trainer assigns various “new selves,” like a pop singer, belly dancer, or ballerina, choosing for each trainee the one that seems most difficult for that particular individual to portray. By carrying through with the role-playing, helped along by the encouragement of the audience, the trainees give themselves the opportunity to discover their own inner potential, the importance of determination, and the satisfaction of solidarity with one’s companions.

Sharing experiences. The following is a typical experience of “sharing”:

During the red/black game I felt that I could have coordinated things a lot better than the person who was serving as leader. I’ve always regarded myself as someone who could do anything, wherever or whenever it was, and I’ve always been critical of others. No matter what people asked me to do, I could always come through. This was because people trusted me to do it, and because I didn’t want to be thought disagreeable. Even after I started work I was arrogant about my ability to get things done. I was always trying to look good in front of my superiors. “I’m best, you’re second best!” Until now I’ve always believed that I was living in the way I wanted to, but actually I was just a critical onlooker. Before I left home this morning, my husband told me that I look pretty today.

(KUBO1993, pp. 60–61)

This sharing occurred on the third day of a basic seminar. Such sharings, which comprise one of the basic elements of the seminars, involve the expression of experiences and impressions that come up in the course of the program. Scheduled between lectures and after exercises, they account for a considerable portion of the entire seminar's time. Although they occur in a considerable number of forms (group sharing, individual sharing, etc.), a common feature in all of them is that the actual sharer always speaks individually. The content is unimportant as long as it relates to some insight the speaker has had. Thus clarity of expression receives little stress, and trainees tend to say all sorts of things pretty much as they come to mind. Sharings may involve short personal histories, as in the example above, or they may be short exclamatory observations like, "A very warm feeling is welling up," or, "I realized that I'm a rather high-strung type."

One of the functions that the exercises and sharings serve in the context of the seminars has already been touched upon above: they provide opportunities for the trainees to experience and validate for themselves the way of thinking taught in the seminars. Although they may not always fully succeed in this, there is little doubt that they do manage to get across a clear message that is quite in line with the seminars' tenets. Thus the cycle of lecture, exercise, and sharing drives home such central concepts as the essential value of human existence and the universal potential for realizing a better life. The lectures provide the trainees with a conceptual framework, the exercises afford them experiences that they can then organize within this framework, and the sharings encourage them to verbalize and thus anchor their insights. In this way the trainee gradually comes to understand the seminar's general principles in terms of his or her individual existence—the philosophy of the seminar is, in effect, translated into the personal life context of the trainee.

It is for this reason that so many physical and emotional reactions are seen in the course of the self-development seminars, including tension, excitement, and sadness.⁵ As the trainees attain an experiential grasp of the concepts taught in the seminar and reassess their lives, they report an increasing sense of metamorphosis from their old, negative selves to new, positive selves. This is accompanied by a sense of catharsis in which feelings of fear and inferiority are washed away and replaced by self-esteem, confidence, and assertion.

⁵ Most of the seminar exercises are neither so difficult as to be impossible nor so easy as to guarantee success to everyone, a level of difficulty corresponding to what CSIKSZENTMIHALYI calls the "flow channel" (1975). The exercises are thus capable of manifesting almost all of the characteristics of the "flow," the basis of all pleasure.

This, however, is not the only function served by the exercises and sharings. Another equally important function relates to the sense of fellowship that they foster. During the course of the seminar the trainees witness the exercises and sharings of numerous other trainees. Encouraged to express their feelings and reactions, they experience in a very direct way the disappointments of the red/black game, the tearful memories of the meditations on their parents, and the warm physical acceptance of the selection exercise. The sharings are expressed in words that directly reflect the feelings of the speakers, and it is not unusual for the relation of a particularly painful memory to be accompanied by genuine outpourings of emotion. As the trainees observe these things they come to feel a deep sense of identity with the other trainees. With their own eyes they see that other people suffer, worry, and fight to overcome their shortcomings in very much the same way that they themselves do. This sense of identification—this seeing of oneself in the sufferings and triumphs of others—is strengthened by the warm physicality of the seminars (as typified by the hugs of the selection game). The result is to break down feelings of isolation, foster a sense of confidence, and highlight the importance of interpersonal relations.

In response to this the trainees tend, as the seminar progresses, to form communal networks to support and cheer each other on. Short-lived though they may be, these networks comprise another important element of the self-development seminars. With their shared efforts and shared joys, they account in part for the feelings of belonging and enthusiasm that so many trainees report after the end of the program.

Characteristics of Seminar Communication

The open expression of feelings and desires that the self-development seminars encourage and the sense of fellowship and identity that they foster lead in turn to the formation of a communal sense that resembles in many ways a *gemeinschaft*, a relationship characterized by strong reciprocal ties of feeling and kinship, usually between friends and relatives. In particular, one sees in both forms of relationship the same kind of self-contained, highly emotional communication. Yet there are several aspects of the seminar relationship that differ considerably from the *gemeinschaft*.

The first difference involves the fact that the self-development seminars comprise a kind of service-industry “communication space” artificially created on a contractual basis between the seminar organization and the individual trainees. Thus the trainees are complete

strangers until the start of the basic seminar, and any relationships that emerge are, in general, limited to the period defined by the contract. In this they differ fundamentally from the type of long-term, ongoing exchanges characterizing most relationships of the *gemeinschaft* type.

The second difference is that the seminar organizations enforce ground rules that restrict the behavior of the trainees. These always include such regulations as, "Follow the directions of the trainer, and participate in all exercises" and "If you wish to say something raise your hand; when the trainer calls on you, stand and speak."⁶ Such regulations effectively place all seminar communication under the control of the trainer; exchanges between the trainees are pretty much limited to the exercises and the sharings. The resulting situation is fundamentally different from the type of communication seen in the *gemeinschaft*, where members are free to address other people in the group at their own discretion.

The seminar style of communication, moreover, shows a number of features not seen in ordinary, everyday conversation. As mentioned above, the trainees are encouraged during the exercises and sharings to express their own feelings and insights directly, without restraint and without concern about what the others might think. This helps the trainees to verbalize directly what is on their minds without tailoring it to the expectations of the audience. This does not mean, however, that there are no restrictions on what may be said, at least during the sharings. Comments on the exercises and other sharings, for example, are excluded by the trainer as departures from complete concentration on the here-and-now. Thus the type of thoughts and impressions presented during the sharings are quite dissimilar from the sort of things one hears during ordinary talk. The difference is also clear in the type of reactions the sharings evoke (or rather, are allowed to evoke). The only response permitted to the comments of other trainees is courteous applause; even the trainer does nothing more than acknowledge the statement, then clap. Thus the listeners are given no chance to express substantive reactions to what is said during the sharings. The sharings, in other words, are a series of monologues (i.e., self-expressions) that are never allowed to develop into dialogues.

Seminar communication is thus designed to exclude any explicit

⁶ Other ground rules relate to security (no violence, no divulging the experiences of the other trainees), the rhythm of the seminar (no watches, no eating, no drinking, and no smoking during seminar activities), and postseminar lifestyle (no sexual relations with other trainees, and no major decisions—ones that will affect the course of the individual's life—within six months of the end of the course).

interaction between the trainees. This is not to say, of course, that no interaction of any type takes place—for example, the speakers experience a sense of fulfillment from having expressed themselves in front of others, while the listeners empathize with the speakers and obtain insights into their own situation. Still, this is not the same as if the speaker was expressing his or her thoughts with the expectation that a response would be forthcoming from a specific person. Our conduct is usually shaped by the elements of anticipation (how will the other person react to what I do?) and what might be called anticipatory anticipation (how will I react to that reaction?). In the sharings, however, neither of these elements are at work—any communication that occurs is tacit in nature.

A final difference between *gemeinschaft* relationships and seminar relationships is the sense of anonymity that prevails in the latter. Not only are the trainees strangers before entering the basic course, but, more importantly, they remain in an anonymous association throughout the course and after its conclusion. Although it is true that during the seminar the trainees learn each others' names, exchange secrets, praise and criticize each other, and even hug,⁷ this does not signify that they have thereby recognized the distinctive individuality of the other person. As explained above, seminar communication is a form of self-expression that is directed towards no one in particular; there is, moreover, a constant, moment-to-moment shift in speakers during the exercises and sharings. Human relationships are generally forged in an interactive process where people learn about each other's personalities, ways of thinking, and past experiences, and where they gradually acquire an inner basis for anticipating how the other will react in any given situation. In the seminar context relationships of this type are almost impossible to form, in spite of the intimacy of many of the interactions that take place. The relationship-forming process may indeed get started, but by and large the other trainees remain little more than generic specimens of humanity.

Conclusion

Monologue-style seminar communication, lacking in verbal interaction and anonymous in nature, creates a distinctive atmosphere within the confines of the course.⁸

⁷ In Japan hugging is a very unusual act except in extremely intimate relationships, as between spouses and lovers.

⁸ Maintenance of this anonymity appears to be a conscious element of seminar policy. For example, when organizing basic seminars the organizations make efforts to separate

For example, the exercises often involve the revelation of personal secrets and the direct expression of opinions about other trainees. Such statements touch upon matters of individual pride and privacy, and thus lead to a considerable psychological tension. In ordinary life it is hard to imagine any situation in which so many intimate communications would be exchanged in so short a period of time. Despite the tension of the seminars, though, they have another side, one that is quite frank, open, and relaxed: negative impressions may be verbalized about other trainees without resulting in bad feelings, and positive impressions may be verbalized without suggesting that one desires a relationship of friendship or romance. Generally speaking, such comments serve only as occasions for self-reappraisal ("So that is how people perceive me").

The reason for this lies in the anonymity that prevails at the seminars. One only has to imagine what would happen if someone tried to put together a self-development group composed entirely of friends and close acquaintances. Most of what goes on in the seminar—the praise, the criticism, the hugging—would take on a quite different coloring. The participants would most likely spend most of their time attempting to decipher the hidden meanings of the other participants' actions and words, and never get around to examining the contents of their own minds. Actually, it is more likely that the entire enterprise would never get off the ground—the participants would be probably be too conscious of the enduring interpersonal repercussions of their acts to ever get into the frame of mind necessary for the seminar.

For this reason anonymity comprises the most productive form of relationship for the seminars. The individuals who praise, censure, or hug a particular trainee are largely unknown to him or her, and are likely to remain strangers once the seminar is over. It thus becomes less likely that their conduct will be attributed to either malice or good will. This reduces the number of interpretations that can be put on the other trainees' words and actions and increases the likelihood that they will be accepted at face value. It is anonymity that enables the comments that come up during the dyad exercise to be taken as a mirror reflecting the way one is seen by others, and anonymity that allows the hugging of the selection exercise to serve as an expression of general—not individual—human warmth.

In *gemeinschaft*-type communities of relatives, friends, and religious cobelievers, the warmth and security provided by the strong

new trainees who are prior acquaintances. The above-mentioned rule limiting the trainees' postseminar relations can also be seen as an expression of this.

interpersonal relationships are inevitably accompanied by a corresponding psychological burden of ties and responsibilities. This tendency is particularly pronounced in Japan, with its strong cultural tradition of group identification. The young people of today still seek security and warmth, of course, but they are less willing than earlier generations to shoulder the concomitant psychological burdens, as seen in their weakening commitment to the *kaisha* and in their growing preference for superficial relations with their friends. Owing to the element of anonymity the self-development seminars have succeeded in providing intimacy and security with little of the attendant inconvenience. To put it another way, the seminars have managed to create a communication space in which the healing atmosphere of the *gemeinschaft*-type relationship coexists with the individual freedom of the *gesellschaft*-type relationship. This space may thus comprise a form of utopian ideal for the youth of Japan, living as they are in a society that is gradually moving towards individualism. It is not, however, a utopia in which they can long dwell.⁹

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⁹ The same coexistence of self-sufficiency, emotionality, and anonymity can be discerned in other aspects of youth culture, including pop music concerts, discos, computer communications, and certain telephone dial services.