ERICH FROMM: FROM SOCIAL UNCONSCIOUS TO CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS

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The principle of the lesser evil is the principle of despair. Most of the time it only lengthens the period until the greater evil wins out.

Erich Fromm

Blending Freudian psychoanalysis with Marxism, existentialism, Buddhism, and humanism, Erich Fromm was once one of the most popular contemporary writers in the United States. His studies on historical materialism, matriarchal theory, the authoritarian personality, and the psychology of fascism filled hundreds of articles and more than twenty books including the international best-sellers ***Escape from Freedom***, ***The Sane Society***, and ***The Art of Loving***. His ideas were hotly debated by sociologists, psychologists, and cultural anthropologists alike who at times criticised his "congenital insensitivity to the normally respected boundaries between disciplines" (Sobel 1980, 355). Introduced to members of the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research by Leo Lowenthal, Fromm served as head of its social psychology division from 1934 to 1939. Lowenthal remembers Fromm as being extremely influential and suggests the connection between him and the Institute, particularly during the Frankfurt years, was "extraordinarily stimulating" (Lowenthal 1987, 51) In the 1940s, Fromm distanced himself from the Institute and in later years may be seen to have enlivened the intellectual discourse through heated exchanges with Herbert Marcuse over his approach to psychoanalytic theory. Yet, since his death, his work has tended to be forgotten and according to intellectual biographer Daniel Burston, "Fromm himself has fallen into obscurity" (Burston 1991, 1). Maintaining that Fromm offers scholars a useful alternative theoretical perspec-

tive, this essay revisits his fundamental philosophical concepts in an effort to illustrate how these insights may be of particular relevance to those interested in issues of class consciousness.

Fromm is a humanist thinker who insists that each person represents all of humanity; in all of his work he seeks connections between the field of psychology and the larger social structure. Three beliefs are fundamental to his philosophy: that human beings live with specific conditions of existence; that people are social beings who are primarily formed by the structure of their society; and that individuals seek to understand the purpose and meaning of their lives. For Fromm, any attempt to understand human beings must address the biological and social influences of the society in which they live as well as the ethical, religious, and moral problems with which they must cope (Fromm quoted in Evans 1966, 99-100).

Born in Frankfurt, Germany in 1900, Fromm earned a doctorate in sociology from the University of Heidelberg, trained as a Freudian psychotherapist in Munich and Frankfurt, and completed his education at the Berlin Psychoanalytic Institute. By the early 1930s Fromm begins to incorporate the matriarchal theory of nineteenth century Swiss anthropologist Johann Jacob Bachofen into his work. His socialist reading of Bachofen denies the universal applicability of the Oedipal complex and stresses the use of matriarchal theory to create a vision of an alternative reality. Fromm explains that while patriarchal societies emphasise duty and authority, through fear and subordination, matriarchal societies value love and compassion and encourage happiness and solidarity. Although Freud sees fixation on a mother figure as an incestuous pathology, Fromm suggests that Bachofen understands both the positive and negative elements of the matriarchal structure. The positive aspect of the matriarchal structure "is a sense of affirmation of life, freedom, and equality" (Fromm 1955, 45); unfortunately for Bachofen, these ties to the mother figure and to nature block the development of individuality and reason. The patriarchal structure also has strengths and weaknesses: "the positive aspects of the patriarchal complex are reason, discipline, conscience and individualism; the negative aspects are hierarchy, oppression, inequality, submission" (Fromm 1955, 47).

Describing patriarchy as the abuse of some for the benefit of one or others, Fromm connects class differences to the patriarchal structure suggesting it is "the prototype of all exploitation" (Fromm 1995, 39). Since the burden of childbearing rests only with women, in patriarchal societies the production of children may be seen as a crude form of exploitation, where even men from the poorest classes own property — their wives and children. In contemporary society, the patriarchal system encourages the continued dissemination of propaganda maintaining the inferiority of women. Fromm suggests that false claims against women, suggesting, for example that they lack moral judgement and are cowardly, vain, and less realistic, reflect the domination of men over women and help to discourage "rebellion" by cultivating stereotypical myths which attack women's self confidence (Fromm 1986, 27-28).

As his interest in matriarchal theory grows, Fromm becomes disillusioned with Freud and by 1935 considers him "a prisoner of his bourgeois morality and patriarchal values" (Jay 1973, 96). As Martin Jay explains in his history of the Frankfurt School, ***The Dialectical Imagination,*** Fromm's dispute with Freudian orthodoxy also signals his break with the Institute of Social Research. Institute members become uncomfortable with Fromm's reliance on matriarchal theory and renounce his divergence from

Freud. Max Horkheimer finds a "more revolutionary Freud," and maintains that because he focuses on human sexuality, Freud may be more of a "real" materialist than Fromm (Jay 1973, 101).

While Fromm rejects the paternalistic underpinnings of Freud, he continues to draw on Freudian theory throughout his career and often attempts to reconcile it with insights of Marx. He defines both Marx and Freud as radical thinkers who go to the roots of an issue and question the "clichés, ideas, rationalisations, and ideologies which fill people's minds and which form the basis of what they mistake for reality" (Fromm 1962, 14). Marx and Freud understand the deceptiveness of human perceptions and suggest that people embrace common-sense illusions because they help them to survive the day to day frustrations, problems, and pain of their lives. While Marx insists that individuals are created by society and Freud believes that people are formed by family experience (that he does not extend to the larger society), Fromm believes that both men seek to liberate human beings from the "chain of illusion" by helping them to see the truth of their existence (Fromm 1962, 26).

Although in his writings Marx defines the relationship between the economic base and the cultural and political superstructure, one problem with a variety of Marxist approaches is its inability to explicitly show how the base actually translates into the superstructure. Utilising psychoanalytic tools, Fromm conceives of two processes, the social character and the social consciousness, to illustrate how connections occur between the economic base and the ideological superstructure. Considering the social character his "most important contribution to the field of social psychology" (Fromm quoted in Jay 1973, 99), Fromm defines it as a dynamic character structure that the majority of the members of a class, society, or nation share. Each group is shaped by specific, historically based conditions of existence including methods of production and distribution, cultural traditions, and geographical and political influences (Fromm 1955, 79). The function of the specific social character is to shape class members toward the continued maintenance of the group, so that their behaviour is not determined consciously but is instead "one of wanting to act as they have to act and at the same time finding gratification in acting according to the requirements of the culture" (Fromm 1962, 79).

Different classes within a society develop a specific social character in which particular ideas are cultivated. Fromm explains that "ideas can become powerful forces, but only to the extent to which they are answers to specific needs prominent in a given social character" (Fromm 1941/1969, 308). For example, modern industrial society requires the labour of individuals who are disciplined, punctual, orderly, and willing to spend the majority of their time and energy working. If people had to consciously decide each day if they wanted to go to work and if they wanted to put effort into their work once on the job, or if they had to be threatened and forced to work, the functioning of contemporary society would be seriously threatened. Instead, Fromm suggests that a social character had to be created where the "social necessity for work, for punctuality, and orderliness had to be transformed into an inner drive" (Fromm 1962, 79). While the above traits may be necessary for the success of all industrial systems, there are other traits that may be seen to have changed in the U.S. capitalist system during the last century. Fromm calls the nineteenth century middle-class social character, which emphasised fiscal responsibility and saving, the "hoarding orientation" (Fromm 1962, 80). Since the accumulation of capital was a primary function of

nineteenth century capitalism, thrift and saving were emphasised in industry, schools, churches, and homes alike. While the economic system required that the middle class abstain from consumption, the social character of the group made individuals enjoy saving and consider thrift a virtue.

In the twentieth century, middle class society switches from a "having" to a "using" orientation (Fromm 1962, 80) and consumption becomes a virtue. In recent years a marketing orientation emerges in which individuals consider themselves "things" with potential market value and their sense of self-worth relates strictly to their socio-economic roles rather than to their activities as thinking and loving individuals (Fromm 1955, 142). People now sell their labour as well as their own personalities and experience themselves as commodities whose value is based on exchange rather than on use (Fromm 1947, 68). The marketing character represents totally alienated human beings, without deep attachments to others, who adapt to all conditions and desires. Ideas are sold much the same as other material items. Fromm explains that when people use the common expression, "I don't buy it," to mean "I don't believe what you say," that on a subconscious level they realise that the merit of ideas is now tied to market acceptance. In contemporary capitalist society, individuals, ideas, and things are all

> *experienced as commodities, as embodiments of exchange value, not only while we are buying or selling, but in our attitude toward them when the economic transaction is finished. A thing, even after it has been bought, never quite loses its quality as a commodity in this sense; it is expendable, always retaining its exchange-value quality* (Fromm 1955, 115).

Fromm finds the marketing orientation relates directly to a primary drive in contemporary capitalist societies in which the need to exchange is no longer merely a means to an economic end and exchanging has become an end in itself. While in the nineteenth century material possessions were acquired and cherished, current consumption patterns emphasise the continual acquisition of new things; people are eager to dispose of the "old" in favour of the latest brand or model. The marketing character encourages people to love purchasing things yet not to form any real attachments to their possessions. "What matters is perhaps the prestige or the comfort that things give, but things per se have no substance. They are utterly expendable, along with friends or lovers, who are expendable, too, since no deeper tie exists to any of them" (Fromm 1976, 134-35). Yet, Fromm is careful to point out that although most Americans equate luxury with happiness, the marketing social character remains a class-based concept. Acknowledging that a significant portion of U.S. citizens still live in poverty, he explains that in contemporary society there are now two classes: "one that lives in affluence and another whose poverty everyone else would just as soon not acknowledge" (Fromm 1986, 26).

The content of the social character is determined by the function of individuals in the social structure as well as the specific structure of the class or society. For Fromm, the family serves as the "psychological agent of society" (Fromm 1941/1969, 315) transferring societal requirements by influencing the socially desirable character formation of children. Since most family members conform to the social character of the larger group, they may also be seen to mold their children's character through culturally validated child-rearing practices. Fromm insists that it is not only pressures from the economic base which create a specific social character which in turn creates particular ideas. Ideas are part of a specific historical process and also influence the social

character and even the economic structures of society. The social character actually serves as a mediating force working between a given culture's socio-economic structure and its fundamental ideas and beliefs. The economic base influences the social character which affects its ideological foundations; ideas and ideals popular in a given class or society also influence the social character of the class which in turn affects the economic base of the group. The social character generally acts as a stabilising function for the class, yet when the traditional social character no longer relates to external conditions, it may become "an element of disintegration instead of stabilization," (Fromm 1955, 81) acting to destroy class unity rather than to reinforce it.

The social character is only one aspect of the connection between ideas and a specific social structure; another relates to those thoughts and ideas that are allowed to enter the consciousness of each society and those that are required to remain unconscious. Fromm incorporates the concept of the social unconscious to define areas of repression found among the majority of members of a specific class or society. He explains that commonly repressed elements are those particular contradictions that if known by more than a few would inhibit the successful operation of a society. Ultimately, "what is unconscious and what is conscious depends on the structure of society and on the patterns of feeling and thought it produces" (Fromm 1962, 128). Although no generalisations can be made as to the actual content of a person's unconscious, Fromm suggests that the unconscious represents the entire person minus that part which corresponds to society. Consciousness represents the social person, "the accidental limitations set by the historical situation into which an individual is thrown" (Fromm 1995, 122). While the idea of unconscious forces determining human consciousness has a lengthy tradition in Western philosophy, Fromm's concept of the social unconscious combines Freud's understanding of false consciousness, that "most of what is real within ourselves is not conscious, and that most of what is conscious is not real" (Fromm 1962, 89) with Marx's understanding that social existence determines consciousness.

The concept of the social unconscious may be particularly useful in understanding why class consciousness remains a secondary force in contemporary society. Although, on one level, individuals may identify with a class or group, Fromm maintains that every society develops a system of socially conditioned filters which work in three distinct ways to evaluate all experience. Fundamentally, language helps to determine which experiences will enter the consciousness of a particular class or culture. While some physical sensations such as pain and hunger may be easily perceived, more subtle or intellectually complex experiences may only be understood if there are words that have been identified and developed to explain the particular feeling or relationship. Since languages differ in their syntax, grammar, and root-meaning of words and also in the amount and type of words used to describe certain feelings and experiences, it seems clear that "the whole language contains an attitude of life, is a frozen expression of experiencing life in a certain way" (Fromm 1962, 118). Fromm's understanding of language resonates with work in cultural studies by scholars such as Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall. Williams views language as a conventional, dynamic, and continuous social process and suggests that individuals actually create their own reality through the practical material activity of signification, the social creation of meanings by the use of formal signs (Williams 1988, 38). Hall sees language as constitutive of culture; while he maintains that it is not that nothing exists outside of

language but that nothing meaningful exists outside of discourse (Hall 1997), Fromm would argue that language, while of central importance, is just one way social filters impact consciousness.

Social filters also direct the thinking of people as to what is logical and what is illogical. Western cultures traditionally follow the philosophical principles of Aristotelian logic which are based on the law of identity (A is A), the law of the excluded middle (A cannot be A and non-A), and the law of contradiction (A is not non-A). From an Aristotelian perspective, it seems impossible for something to at the same time, and in the same respect, belong and not belong. Yet, another type of logic exists in Chinese and Indian cultures and in the philosophy of Marx and Hegel, which utilises paradoxical or dialectical thinking. Fromm draws on Lao-tse's general principle, "Words that are strictly true seem to be paradoxical" as well as Chuang-tzu's maxim: "That which is one is one. That which is not-one, is also one" (Fromm 1956/1989, 66) to illustrate the prevailing assumption of paradoxical logic that A and non-A do not necessarily exclude each other.

Differences in Aristotelian and dialectical logic illustrate how experiences contradictory to the accepted logic may be viewed as nonsense. For example, while Freud's concept of ambivalence, simultaneously experiencing feelings of hate and love for the same person, is quite logical from the perspective of paradoxical logic, in U.S. culture which is based on Aristotelian logic, the majority of people would say the concept does not make sense and would therefore have a difficult time becoming aware of their feelings of ambivalence. The reception of Fromm by some academics also offers a pointed example of how social filters may direct the logical thinking of individuals. Researchers have questioned Fromm's dialectical thinking, referring to it as "contradictory thinking." Critics have trouble comprehending how Fromm, an extremely religious man, could also be an atheist; they wonder how he could reject the paternalist underpinnings of Freudian theory yet consider himself a Freudian psychologist throughout his career. One popular explanation for Fromm's seemingly contradictory thinking is that after he emigrated from Germany he changed "from a radical scholar to a fashioner of platitudes that he glibly dispensed to an idolatrous public" (Burston 1991, 22). Looking back at these debates from a 1990s perspective it seems clear that rather than understand the dialectical logic underpinning Fromm's thinking, social filters have helped to create cultural preconceptions in these individuals which influence their own understandings and experiences and ultimately affect their own assessments of Fromm.

The third part of the social filter, which Fromm considers most important, prevents certain feelings from reaching the social consciousness and tries to remove them if and when they appear. Social taboos prevent certain ideas and feelings to reach the level of consciousness because they are considered dangerous, improper, and even forbidden. "The irrationalities of any given society result in the necessity for its members to repress the awareness of many of their own feelings and observations" (Fromm 1962, 123-24). Fromm asks if it makes sense for the United States to spend millions of dollars storing agricultural surpluses while at the same time millions of people in the world are starving? He wonders about Americans living in affluence and yet experiencing so little joy, of all the technological advances and yet the chronic boredom of the populace, and he suggests that most people rarely notice the irrationalities and contradictions of society. He explains that in each society the repression of the "aware-

ness of facts" must be "supplemented by the acceptance of many fictions" (Fromm 1962, 124); these gaps are filled through ideology, generally known as education and information that is imparted in schools, family, church, and through the media. Contemporary cultural studies scholars often focus on absence in their critiques of cultural products and, like Pierre Macherey, find that meaning emerges from an examination of the relationship between what is explicit and what is concealed, missing, or hidden (Macherey 1989, 85). Mike Cormack finds absence crucial to all texts' ideological structure and cautions that what is at stake is not simply the avoidance of some issues but how the ideological argument is worked out unproblematically (Cormack 1992, 32).

Yet, Fromm's understanding of social filters addresses motivational issues and may be seen to extend beyond a basic recognition of the centrality of absence. He notes that it is the fear of isolation and ostracism (and the resulting loss of identity) which causes individuals to repress the awareness of information contrary to the society; people must close their eyes to things which their group claims do not exist and must accept as the truth that which most members say is true, even if their own eyes convince them that the information is false. What people consider "true, real, sane, are the clichés accepted by ... society, and much that does not fit in with these clichés is excluded from awareness, is unconscious" (Fromm 1962, 127). In contemporary capitalist society, individuals confront a "covert authoritarianism" which manipulates them through signals and makes it difficult to distinguish between the authentic and the facade. People are "under the illusion that they think, but actually, Ôit' thinks in them" (Fromm quoted in Evans 1966, 28). The prevailing ideology is so ingrained in their consciousness that most people believe that they are thinking actual thoughts even though, according to Fromm, they have never had an authentic thought in their lives.

Advertising and other media help to mold the appropriate social character necessary for the functioning of each specific class or society. Fromm is particularly concerned with the overt and covert manipulation of individuals through the constant propaganda of advertising and probably would find the recent advertisement for "The Ultimate Fireplace Video" a particularly relevant example of his concerns regarding the ability of people to distinguish actual experiences from manufactured illusions. For only $12.95 plus $3 postage and handling, viewers may enjoy, for sixty minutes, the "warmth" of a "relaxing" and "romantic" fireplace that is "maintenance free."[1] No chopping wood or other work is involved and viewers need not worry about cleaning cinders and soot or problems with smoke-filled rooms. The advertisement informs potential buyers that all they need to do is to "Simply put this video into your VCR and your TV screen becomes an old-fashioned fireplace for you to enjoy. Turn up the sound and you'll hear the soothing pop and crackles of burning hickory" (Ultimate Fireplace Video Advertisement 1997, 20). It seems clear that the producer of the ultimate fireplace video considers the realm of the real and corresponding issues of authenticity no match for expedience, cleanliness, and ease. But perhaps more frightening is the apparent success of "virtual" products which are purchased by hundreds of thousands of consumers each year.

The inability of individuals to recognise their false sense of consciousness, to understand that their thoughts, feelings, and ideas are often imposed by outside forces, may be seen to connect with issues of freedom and authority. Fromm describes how over the years, the authority of the Church was first replaced by the authority of the State and then in modern history is replaced by an "anonymous authority as it is

represented by public opinion, culture patterns, common sense, or 'science' " (Fromm 1947, 87) which act as tools of conformity. Unaware of these pressures, on one level most people live under an illusion of individualism and yet they feel insecure and powerless. Human beings have become automatons, thinking and feeling what they should think and feel, yet disconnected from others and ultimately from themselves. This loss of self results in a lack of confidence in one's own identity and in an increased need for conformity. When people give up their individuality and spontaneity in an effort to conform, they merely go though the motions of living and they actually become less alive. "Psychologically the automaton, while being alive biologically, is dead emotionally and mentally" (Fromm 1941/1969, 281). Fromm explains that while on the surface individuals seem optimistic and satisfied, on a deeper level they remain unfulfilled, unhappy, and desperate; people yearn to be different and independent yet they conform so as not to risk rejection and isolation. The focus on conformity in modern capitalist society has helped to transform the meaning of equality. Equality now means "sameness" rather than "oneness;" it eliminates differences and effectively destroys individuality. The specification of human beings is similar to the standardisation of commodities; equality through common interests, values, and entertainment is encouraged. Yet, Fromm points to the rise of alcoholism, drug addiction, and suicide to illustrate how attempts at "herd conformity" have also helped to increase the discomfort and anxiety of Western culture (Fromm 1956, 14-15).

Passivity is one of the most characteristic features of modern industrial society; people continually consume an array of products, including television, motion pictures, sporting events, liquor, and cigarettes from "boredom preventing (and boredom-producing)" (Fromm 1968, 38) industries, yet, they are rarely satisfied. While these industries may succeed in preventing a conscious sense of boredom, they require little activity or effort and they actually increase human boredom on a subconscious level. Passivity is considered one aspect of the alienation process; passive individuals do not actively relate to themselves, or to the outside world, and they feel estranged, anxious, powerless, and lonely.

Alienation pervades modern culture; human beings rarely experience themselves as active participants in society but instead as impoverished things, dependent upon outside powers to give meaning and satisfaction to their lives. Human sexuality is exploited to disguise the lack of intimacy in contemporary alienated existence; individuals react to each other as abstractions, machine to machine, using each other as necessary. While people have developed a variety of technological products, for the most part they now stand apart from these creations, often feeling powerless and estranged from what they have produced (Fromm 1955, 124-125). Fromm's humanist stance which recognises human agency in the creation of new technologies, differs fundamentally from the technologically deterministic position which insists that technology itself is responsible for changes in society. Still other scholars such as Stanley Aronowitz view the elimination of labour in the work force as a "major strategy of capital" (Aronowitz 1990, 115) which recognises that workers can no longer be trusted to produce economically competitive goods. Yet, Fromm maintains that in contemporary capitalist society, people have become slaves to the very machines which their own hands previously built (Fromm 1947, 4). No longer seen merely as substitutes for human physical energy, human thinking is being replaced by cybernetics and automation,[2] and for the most part human work is now defined "as the performance of

acts which cannot yet be performed by machines" (Fromm 1955, 180).

Although people have and use many things, they are often afraid of any changes to their social structure because their "feelings and thinking processes are atrophied like unused muscles" (Fromm 1992, 96). Human beings may be seen to live in a symbiotic relationship with technological products; they tend to "worship" machines which give them the illusion of power and yet on a deeper level resent these technologies and feel that without them they are powerless. In this viscous circle, as machines become more powerful, people feel weaker and they compensate for their feelings of inadequacy by "constant and never-ending consumption" (Fromm 1995, 71). Two principles may be seen to guide modern technological societies; things are now done simply because they can be done. Once it is accepted that something "ought" to be done simply because it is technically possible to do it, Fromm maintains that humanist values are "dethroned, and technological development becomes the foundation of ethics" (Fromm 1968, 32-33). The second principle requires "maximum efficiency and output" (Fromm 1968, 33) lessening individuality and creativity, and significantly contributing to the alienation of workers. Fromm suggests the tendency of modern societies to overemphasise technological progress stems from a pathological attraction to death and decay (necrophilia) which leads to valuing mechanically made things that are not alive and a corresponding indifference toward life. Alienated individuals have little hope and generally consider life meaningless. Feeling deceived "many people see only a single gratification as a way out: namely, to destroy life itself in order to justify themselves and their own failure" (Fromm 1995, 81).

The process of alienation exists in the acquisition and consumption of commodities as well as in the way people spend their leisure time. Fromm explains that an individual is always changed after participating in a real activity, yet in the alienated form of pleasure, the experience is consumed, and nothing changes in the person. In contemporary society "having fun" exists primarily in the consumption of images, food, entertainment, and knowledge. "The world is one great object for our appetite, a big apple, a big bottle, a big breast; we are the sucklers, the eternally expectant ones, the hopeful ones — and the eternally disappointed ones" (Fromm 1956/1989, 78-79). Fromm finds the taking of snapshots by tourists one of the most significant examples of alienated pleasure consumption. Tourists occupy their time taking pictures and do not actually see anything apart from what they view through the camera. The camera "sees" for them, producing an alienated memory through a collection of snapshots which substitute for the authentic experience that they could have but do not (Fromm 1955, 137).

However, for Fromm the process of alienation in contemporary society is not total. He maintains that people are not only members of a specific class but that they are also members of the human race. While individuals are afraid of complete isolation from their social group, they also fear losing their humanity which is represented by their conscience and reason. "The greater the conflict between the social aims and human aims, the more is the individual torn between the two dangerous poles of isolation" (Fromm 1962, 127-28). Fromm explains that the ability for individuals to act according to their conscience depends on their ability to go beyond the limits of their own culture to become citizens of the world. Awakening begins with the "shattering of illusions, with disillusionment" (Fromm 1976, 28); it questions the surface "reality" looking for root causes and understanding. Insisting that human beings have an inherent moral code and conscience, Fromm rejects claims that principles such as jus-

tice and equality are merely historically based ideologies. He asks, "If people had no natural moral sensibility, how would it be possible to incite them to such violent passions by reporting to them atrocities their enemies have allegedly committed?" (Fromm 1986, 143). He believes that at birth all human beings are psychically healthy. It is class-based exploitation that instils hatred, hostility, and pain and frequently cripples people.

Although members of exploited and discriminated classes and racial, religious, or social groups may be more aware of the contradictions within the social unconscious, class position does not always make people more independent and critical. Sometimes class status will make some of its members insecure and eager to accept the prevailing ideology. There are also social factors which help to determine resistance and awareness of the social reality:

> *If a society or a social class has no chance to make any use of its insight because there is objectively no hope for a change for the better, the chances are that everybody in such a society would stick to the fictions since the awareness of the truth would only make them feel worse. Decaying societies and classes are usually those which hold most fiercely to their fictions since they have nothing to gain by the truth. Conversely, societies — or social classes — which are bound for a better future offer conditions which make the awareness of reality easier* (Fromm 1962, 131).

Fromm maintains that the process of awareness requires an awakening from illusions and an understanding of what the material conditions of existence actually are rather than what individuals want them to be. Finding the individual and the social unconscious intertwined and in constant interaction, Fromm suggests that individuals must work to determine the social reality of their own culture. To do this, they must go beyond the individual realm to the social unconscious; they must understand the specific social dynamics and critically appraise their society from the standpoint of universal human values.

> *Only if one has experienced the dimensions of the unconscious in one's personal life can one fully appreciate how it is possible that social life is determined by ideologies which are neither truths nor lies or, to put it differently, which are both truths and lies — truths in the sense that people believe them sincerely, and lies in the sense that they are rationalisations which have the function of hiding the real motivation of social and political actions* (Fromm 1962, 132).

It is Fromm's humanistic optimism in the potential of human beings to awaken from illusions that may be seen to have actually lead to his break with the Frankfurt Institute. Adorno and Marcuse specifically point to Fromm's overriding sense of optimism in their dismissals of his continued relevance to critical theory. They question how a critical scholar who explores the authoritarian nature of contemporary society, could speak of individual happiness and suggest that human beings may be able to create their own authentic culture. As Marcuse argues, "in a repressive society, individual happiness and productive development are in contradiction to society; if they are defined as values to be realized within this society, they become themselves repressive" (quoted in Jay 1973, 108). Yet, Fromm does not take these criticisms lightly. He attacks Marcuse's hopelessness and maintains that Marcuse exemplifies "an alienated intellectual, who presents his personal despair as a theory of radicalism" (Fromm

1968, n. 8-9). Insisting that Marcuse's conceptualisation of human beings, in technological society, actually promotes the idea that people will return to an infantile state, he warns those who consider Marcuse a revolutionary leader that revolution has never been based on hopelessness. Fromm finds Marcuse's lack of understanding and knowledge of basic Freudian concepts to hinder his attempts to synthesise Freudianism and fundamentally finds his notion of critical theory "a naive, cerebral daydream, essentially irrational, unrealistic, and lacking love of life" (Fromm 1968, n. 8-9).

Rejecting hopelessness as yet another symptom of alienation, Fromm explains that hope is a necessary component of the structure of life and human consciousness. He maintains that hope is a paradoxical state of being; it is neither the forcing of activities that cannot occur nor the passive waiting for things to happen. "It is an inner readiness, that of intense but not-yet-spent activeness" (Fromm 1968, 11-12).

romm insists that people must strive to attain an active and creative relatedness to other members of their class, to themselves, and to nature. He names this relatedness to others, the productive orientation, and explains that this orientation, based on a love of life (biophilia), addresses physical, emotional, and mental responses in all realms of human experience. Suggesting that the productive orientation is a person's power to use his or her abilities actively, consciously, and reasonably, he explains that "productiveness is an attitude which every human being is capable of, unless ... mentally or emotionally crippled" (Fromm 1947, 85). In the area of action, Fromm finds the productive orientation in art and other creative work while in the realm of thought this relatedness is expressed through reason. Reason, the blending of feeling and rational thinking, is seen to go beyond intelligence in the comprehension of the "essence of things and processes" (Fromm 1947, 102) through an understanding of the deeper meanings, connections, and relationships. Productive thinking requires an intimate relationship between an individual and the thing or process that he or she is contemplating which actually defines the thinking process from the beginning; the individual becomes affected by and responds to the object and sees it as it is, instead of as he or she wants it to be.

In the domain of feeling, the productive relationship is shown in love, in the union with others and with nature, "under the condition of retaining one's sense of integrity and independence" (Fromm 1955, 32). The concept of productive love, whether it be a mother's love for her child, the erotic love between two people, or an individual's love for humanity, is an active concern for life based on "care, responsibility, respect, and knowledge" (Fromm 1947, 98). Fromm views love not only as an attitude but a character orientation which affects an individual's relationship to the entire world rather than toward one specific person. Love is an affirmation of life; within a mature, productive social character, happiness, freedom, knowledge, and responsibility are all rooted in the capacity to love. He insists that the basis for rational hope is grounded in the productive orientation. It requires the productive use of one's abilities and powers as well as the courage to hold to one's opinions and values even though they may be unpopular; ultimately this orientation is rooted in the confidence in one's power of thought, observation, and judgement (Fromm 1956/1989, 111).

While love has always been central to the Judeo-Christian ethical theory Agape, in recent years scholars such as Aronowitz find that love has become debased and now means the "domination, exploitation, or objectification of a person" (Aronowitz 1973, 61). Yet, cultural critic bell hooks suggests that in contemporary American society the

problem is not the debasement of love but the collective failure of progressive and radical groups who emphasise material considerations, to acknowledge love. She maintains that shaping a political vision without an understanding of love often results in the "continued allegiance to systems of domination — imperialism, sexism, racism, classism" (hooks 1994, 243). Like Fromm, hooks suggests that an ethic of love, with its quest for justice and freedom, can help people understand and challenge existing systems of domination.

Drawing on Marx's challenge to philosophers not merely to interpret the world but instead to change it, Fromm envisions increased class consciousness and ultimately the end of a class structure. He sees a new type of social character, oriented toward people rather than toward things which focuses on being rather than on having. While consumption pervades the having perspective, the being orientation focuses on activity, process, movement, and change and encourages the complete realisation of human potential (Fromm 1976, 13-15). Progress toward a being orientation requires the destruction of common sense illusions produced by our social world. Individuals must delve beneath surface perceptions to learn the real history, context, and causes for their situations. Insisting that the development of unalienated human beings must come before a healthy economy, Fromm explains that possessions must become functional, useful for a productive orientation rather than for passive consumption. All humanity must work to lessen the gap between the rich and the poor and all types of hierarchy and domination must be eliminated. Profit and expansion of enterprises must be regulated so that human beings can work toward "sane consumption." Complete atomic disarmament is of fundamental importance and decentralisation of industry and politics is thought to help all citizens actively participate in all aspects of society.

Fromm insists on the prohibition of all brainwashing methods used in industrial and political advertising. He finds these "hypnoid" methods a serious danger to critical thinking and mental health because they not only compel people to buy things they neither need nor want but because they sell citizens political representatives based on image and appeal rather than actual views and qualifications. Calling the bombardment by purely suggestive messages "stultifying," he explains:

> *This assault on reason and the sense of reality pursues the individual everywhere and daily at any time: during many hours of watching television, or when driving on a highway, or in the political propaganda of candidates, and so on. The particular effect of these suggestive methods is that they create an atmosphere of being half-awake, of believing and not believing, of losing one's sense of reality* (Fromm 1976, 173).

Fromm suggests that "liberation from the having mode of existence is possible only through the full realization of industrial and political participatory democracy" (Fromm 1976, 167). Each citizen must play an active role in social, economic, and political aspects of the decision-making process. Rejecting opinion polls as illustrative of a passive "spectator" democracy, where powerless onlookers choose between labels and brands rather than express genuine beliefs and convictions, he insists that an active participatory democracy requires access to information, discussion, critical reflection, and an understanding that people's decision making will have an effect. For Fromm, the commodification of information as news must be replaced with universal access to basic data on issues, problems, and alternatives necessary for making informed

decisions. The gathering and dissemination of information must serve the needs of the entire populace, and should go beyond surface explanations to help citizens understand the context for and the causes of pertinent events and issues.

Fromm describes a communication system which educates and informs its citizens and ultimately helps to dispel illusions in their material existence. His vision aligns with other communication theorists, most notably Raymond Williams who rejects both authoritarian and paternalistic control of information and insists that a democratic system must guarantee that all people have the right to offer and receive what they choose. Yet, such a communication system must also resist commercial control based on expectations of profitability (Williams 1976, 133). Like Fromm, Williams outlines a plan for public ownership as the only viable alternative to the current vision of communication as "simple" commodities now held by global corporations controlling the means of communication.

Williams also questions the role of advertising which not only sells goods but obscures fundamental issues and problems of late industrial capitalism. Although the consumption of goods does not give meaning and value to people's lives nor help them to understand the realities of frustration, loneliness, pain, and death, advertising "magically" conflates consumption with human desires and emotions. People do not only purchase material objects, they "buy" respect, success, beauty, and the power to control their environment. As he explains, "The magic obscures the real sources of general satisfaction because their discovery would involve radical changes in the whole common way of life" (Williams 1980, 189).

Finally, Williams reminds us that in a culture which "pushes distraction," over serious discussion of fundamental societal issues, most systemic criticism may be rejected as merely "another instalment of doom and gloom" (Williams 1983, 18). Yet, Fromm's critique of contemporary culture and his plans for a new social structure should not be summarily dismissed as the idealistic fantasising of a man past his prime; he offers realisable goals that could help turn contemporary capitalist societies back into "sane societies." As the new millennium quickly approaches, perhaps his is an alternative that is worthy of further consideration.

Notes:

1 The deluxe six hour edition of the "Ultimate Fireplace Video," is available for $19.95 plus $3. postage and handling. Also available is the ultimate fish tank, a video which depicts a tropical aquarium.

2 Fromm calls the combination of cybernetics and automation "cybernation" and suggests that this alliance is creating a new type of social and economic structure (Fromm 1968, 26).

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