



quantified as economic functions, e.g., the worker who is employed as an atomized process toiling to the dictates of the technological rhythm and requirements of the corporation and the bureaucrats who run it. In this environment of abstractions a destructuralized picture of the world tends to arise, or as Robert Lane phrased it, people will moralize events rather than contextualize them.¹¹⁴

Facts lose the specific quality which they can have only as parts of a structuralized whole and retain merely an abstract, quantitative meaning; each fact is just another fact and all that matters is whether we know more or less. Radio, moving pictures and newspapers have a devastating effect on this score. The announcement of the bombing of a city and the deaths of hundreds of people is shamelessly followed or interrupted by an advertisement for soap or wine. The same speaker with the same suggestive, ingratiating and authoritative voice, which he just used to impress you with the seriousness of the political situation, impresses now upon his audience the merits of the particular brand of soap which pays for the news broadcast. Newsreels let pictures of torpedoes ships by followed by those of a fashion show. Newspapers tell us the trite thoughts or breakfast habits of a debutante with the same space and seriousness they use for reporting events of scientific or artistic importance.

Because of this we cease to be genuinely related to what we hear. We cease to be excited, our emotions and our critical judgement becomes hampered and eventually our attitude to what is going on in the world assumes a quality of flatness and indifference.¹¹⁵

Fromm wrote the above critique before the advent of television but has included this media and its reporting of news events in

¹¹⁴Robert Lane, Political Ideology (N.Y.: Free Press, 1962), pp. 350-356. Lane, however, reaches conclusions inhospitable to Fromm's analysis. His study is a good antithesis to Fromm's macrostudies and tendency to over conclude.

¹¹⁵Erich Fromm, Escape From Freedom, pp. 276.



later works. He is afraid that the individual will not be able to put the pieces together into a comprehensible whole thus leaving him bewildered and afraid.¹¹⁶

There is much to be said for Fromm's portrayal of contemporary man and his relationships and way of life. The way we do play roles in order to gain employment or acceptance into certain social groupings cannot be denied. The workers on the assembly lines often feel as if they are only human life machines or fail to see how their job fits into the entire process as a whole also contains much validity. Certainly there is much relevant commentary upon the vehicle of conformity as a method to alleviate the fears of separateness and loneliness. Finally his comments on how news events are reported support many objections to the phenomena of mass media techniques in providing information to the public. But to concede all of this still need not warrant Fromm's conclusions that society is composed of conforming automatons who have adopted the marketing orientation as a way to relate and fulfill their basic needs and who operate exclusively on external stimuli and not on the internal guidance of the self.

First of all, Fromm's picture of the worker suffers from its blurred composition. Is there no difference between skilled and non-skilled workers? Do both experience the same things while on the job? What percentage of the "working class" can be classified as non-skilled? Fromm does not approach these questions probably because he thinks that they are irrelevant since alienation, according to him, attacks everyone.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 277.



All critical texture of bureaucrat organization men in those
very flawed subject. Any opinion on the worker and his situa-
tion requires a strong base of empirical study and data. But
Fromm supports his theories by citing either outdated studies,
interprets the data in one way of many possible ways or issues
statements which carry the impression of being a priori.
Robert Lane, for instance, in his study of fifteen men (blue
collar or clerks) comes to conclusions which seriously question
the macrostudies of Fromm. Lane argues that the workers are
able to criticize management, that they do participate in
planning by suggesting alternative ways of doing a particular
job, that their work tends to socialize men and bring them
together in a human relationship and finally that the shop or
job offers a sense of fulfillment.¹¹⁷ Lane's study and others
like it do not demolish Fromm's contentions but they do seriously
limit the scope of its applications. Fromm's Marxist charges
against capitalism and technology cannot long ignore the
changing situation of the worker if it seems to be more than
a protest. For instance only 9.6 percent of the total work-
force are manufacturing operatives and kindred workers and of
this group a much smaller number work on assembly lines.¹¹⁸
Robert Blauner in his review of research of trends in industry,
has found that even in the highly mechanized auto industry
where assembly lines have attained an apex in use, "assembly

¹¹⁷Robert Lane, op. cit., pp. 246-8.

¹¹⁸U.S. Bureau of the Census, United States Census of
Population; 1950, U.S. Summary (Wash. D.C., 1953), Table
124.



line workers make up less than 5 percent of all workers in this complex.¹¹⁹ These facts are simply ignored by Fromm as being unimportant or insignificant although his indictment of the modern work system seems to rest primarily upon evidence from the work life of the machine tender, and more especially, the mechanically paced assembly line worker.¹²⁰ If Fromm substitutes this for criticizing the actual condition and feelings of the working man, he must take into account the research which has been done in these areas, for example, the micro-study of Massport. Even where he offers data as support for his theories, he does not seem to realize that his interpretation is neither the only possible one nor perhaps the most plausible.

For example, he cites the following data from two studies on job satisfaction: in the first study 65 percent of professionals and executives, 64 percent of white collar people and 41 percent of factory workers expressed satisfaction with their jobs; in the second study, the percentages were 66 for professionals, 74 for managerial persons, 42 for commercial employees, 56 for skilled workers and 43 for unskilled workers. He concludes that these data show a remarkable high percentage of consciously dissatisfied and unhappy persons among factory and clerical workers. Starting from other value premises than Fromm's some analysts might conclude that the percentages really tell us very little at all, while others might conclude that the figures are remarkably low.

Fromm also cites a poll on attitudes toward work restriction...in which 49 percent of manual workers said a man ought to turn out as much as he could in a day's work, while 41 percent said he should not do his best but should turn out only the average amount. He says these data show that job dissatisfaction and resentment are widespread...one might use such findings to indicate the strength of informal primary

¹¹⁹ Robert Blauner, "Work Satisfaction and Industrial Trends," in Walter Galenson and S.M. Lipsch. (eds.), Labor and Trade Unionism (N.Y.: Wiley, 1960), p. 354.

¹²⁰ Robert Lano, op. cit., p. 231.



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associations in the factory, an interpretation which springs from the fact that the HD percent is really a statisticity by law.¹²¹

The question of workers satisfaction and fulfillment as well as the nature of work itself is largely an empirical problem; so therefore Fromm's approaching this area chiefly with a Marxist socio-philosophy confuses the issues by not allowing him to make the necessary distinctions and refinements in his conclusions. To say that neither the worker nor the administrator control the forces of production must mean that someone or something else guides these processes but it does not clarify the matter by claiming that the machine (the created object) now rules the builder, for instance,

....society is not in control of the very forces it has created. The rationality of the system of production in its technical aspects is accompanied by the irrationality of our system of production in its social aspects. Economic crises, unemployment, wars govern man's fate. Man has built his world; he has built factories and houses, he produces cars and clothes, he grows grain and fruit. But he has become estranged from the product of his own hands, he is not really the master any more of the world he has built; on the contrary, this man made world has become his master, before whom he bows down, whom he tries to placate or to manipulate as best he can. The work of his own hands have become his God.¹²²

Despite the powerful poetic protest, this kind of passage does not carry us very far in our quest, what does work mean to contemporary man? What does he expect to derive from it and to what degree are his expectations met? What work play the crucial or essential role in one's life as Fromm argues et

¹²¹ John Schaar, op. cit., pp. 203-4.

¹²² Erich Fromm, Escape From Freedom, p. 136.



can it be merely a way (with its good and bad aspects) to provide for what man believes to be the better and more important things in life? What satisfactions, if any, does the worker derive in and from his work situation? Fromm also seems to assume that men were once in control of their lives, that their work had an encompassing enjoyment and provided a sense of fulfillment and gratification. While this may have been to some degree, the historical record certainly offers an alternative and often contrary view. As Schaar reminds us: "Fromm's discussion rests upon the implicit assumption that once upon a time man found meaning and dignity in work, but that now, owing largely to the institutions and the ideology of capitalism, this has been lost and men are chained to meaningless and degrading tasks. There is no evidence that such a golden age ever existed."¹²³

The modern work situation is a complex, rapidly changing, dynamic process which demands a more careful translation and explication than Fromm's massified world of robots and organization men. The interrelationship between the worker, his job and his social environment and quality of existence are questions not easily susceptible to overdrawn generalizations. The worker, as Lano's findings indicate, is a creature who must be studied in more detail and is not a species to be lost in an ethical or philosophical system--a point Marx forgot and one which Fromm should remember. By urging us that work should be more than an inescapable necessity,

¹²³John Schaar, op. cit., p. 265; also Daniel Bell, op. cit., pp. 27-8.



that it should provide men with a sense of dignity and fulfillment and that it should be integrated into the total dimension of one's existence does not necessarily contradict the actual conditions of the worker. It depends on how much and to what degree one demands that this be the picture. If one agrees with Fromm's assertions then the real and the ideal must stand in conflict but is this the only course? Concepts like self-fulfillment, development of character, mastery of one's life can be highly subjective and open to varied and diverse interpretations. It is not enough to compare, as Fromm does, what he feels to be reality with what he thinks that reality should be and thereupon find the former sadly lacking and deficient. The "is" may not be as undeniably clear as Fromm maintains nor is the "ought" as irrefutably as desirable as we shall see in the summary chapter.

Before considering the political implications of Fromm's analysis, several remarks must be made concerning his comments upon consumption and the use of leisure time. Fromm asserts that the alienated man operates on the principle of nonfrustration, i.e., the principle that every desire must be satisfied immediately, and that no wish must be frustrated:

If I do not postpone the satisfaction of my wish (and am conditioned only to wish for what I can get), I have no conflicts, no doubts, no decision has to be made; I am never alone with myself because I am always busy--either working or having fun. I have no need to be aware of myself as myself because I am constantly absorbed having pleasure. I am a system of desires and satisfactions; I have to work in order to fulfill my desires--and those very desires are constantly stimulated and directed by the organic machine. Most of the appetites are synthetic....¹²⁴

¹²⁴ Erich Fromm, The Sane Society, pp. 147-9.



Thus, keeping busy is a refuge, having fun or seeking pleasure cannot be equated with happiness and man's desires are being controlled or manipulated.

For Fromm one of the consequences of alienated work and life is the longing for laziness and the desire to escape boredom. This tendency for laziness whose ideal is the slogan, "You press the button we do the rest," is reinforced by the type of consumption necessary for the expansion of the inner market, leading to the principle succinctly expressed by Huxley in his Brave New World.... "never put off till tomorrow the fun you can have today."¹²⁵

One of the advantages of technology has been the decrease in the number of hours a person must put in at his particular job. The working man of today has more free time (time not spent working) than ever before and the trend seems to be that this decline will continue. For instance, in 1850 the work week has been estimated to have averaged just under seventy hours, the equivalent of seven ten-hour days a week or roughly six at from six in the morning, to six at night; in 1950, the average was 40.0 hours or five eight-hour days.¹²⁶ What is done with these surplus hours?

If an individual is estranged from his work, from the people around him and from himself and if he has been transformed into some sort of automaton or humanoid machine, it would follow that the excess of free time provided by modern techniques may not be as welcome as it first appeared. This

¹²⁵ Erich Fromm, The Drama of Christ and Other Essays, p. 103.

¹²⁶ J.K. Galbraith, The Affluent Society (N.Y.: Mentor, 1963) 25



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¹²⁵ Erich Fromm, The Depth of Christ and Other Essays, p. 103.

¹²⁶ J.K. Galbraith, The Affluent Society (N.Y.: Mentor, 1963) 259



dilemma is compounded further when we realize that the recipients of this time are people ordinarily not accustomed to having such leisure but instead are usually preoccupied with manual labor and the providing of the necessary goods for maintenance and comfort of their families. The professor, the philosopher, the artist or the scientist may fervently desire more leisure time so that they might study, reflect or reconsider but can the same be said of the worker or the bureaucrat whose intellectual capabilities or appetites run in different directions? What about Fromm's home mechanic or Tillich's home labor and leisure time?

Fromm has suggested, as we have seen, that boredom presents a particular problem for the alienated individual and that he attempts to escape the pains of being bored through a dual desire for laziness and by seeking pleasures or having fun. He must kill the time on his hands.

Contemporary man commonly finds that his life has been emptied of meaning, that it has been trivialized. He is alienated from his past, from his work, from his community and possibly from himself--although this self is hard to locate. At the same time he has an unprecedented amount of time on his hands which, as van den Haag has pointed out, he must kill lest it kill him. Society abhors a vacuum, and quickly fills this one with diversion.¹²⁷

Leisure has a double edge--on one side it is a desirable relief and freedom from work but on the other hand it illuminates the alienation of the average person by providing time for self reflection. He must either face up to his condition or he must seek to run away from it; Fromm believes that most men opt

¹²⁷ Bernard Rosenberg, "Mass Culture In America," in B. Rosenberg and D.E. White (eds.), Mass Culture (N.Y.: Free Press, 1957), p.7.



for the latter because introspection and self-criticism would prove too painful and frightening. Furthermore, that, serve the purpose of making it easy for the individual to run away from himself and from the threatening boredom by taking refuge in the many ways of escape which are offered by our culture. 128

People set out to have fun, to enjoy themselves, to relax and to get away from it all and most try to attain all of these objectives with as little effort as possible. Contemporary man becomes the great consumer thus even mechanics can also be seen to have consumers who take in drink, food, cigarettes, lectures, sights, books, movies; all are consumed, swallowed.... the world is one great object for his appetite: a big bottle, a big apple, a big breast.¹²⁹ Fromm hurls some of his strongest invectives against the pleasure seeking patterns by what he terms consumption hungry men who devour all the "fun" articles produced by their society. Although he laments about the objects sought, he seems more distressed about the manner in which they are experienced (or digested).

Our way of consumption necessarily results in the fact that we are never satisfied since it is not our real concrete person which consumes a real or concrete thing. We thus develop an ever increasing need for more things, for more consumption...our craving for consumption has lost all connection with the real needs of man...man today is fascinated by the possibility of buying more, better and especially, new things. He is consumption hungry. The act of buying and consuming has become a compulsive, irrational aim, because it is an end in itself, with little relation to the use of, or pleasure in the things bought or consumed. To

¹²⁸ Erich Fromm, The Sane Society, pp. 179-187.

¹²⁹ Erich Fromm, The Death of Christ and Other Essays, p. 99-100



buy the latest gadget, the latest model of anything that is on the market, is the dream of everybody, in comparison to which the real pleasure in use is quite secondary.

He always remains the passive alienated consumer. He consumes bill games, moving pictures, newspapers, magazines, books, lectures, cultural scenery, social gatherings, in the same alienated and abstractified way in which he consumes the commodities he has bought. He does not participate actively, he wants to 'take in' all there is to be had and to have as much as possible of pleasure culture, and that not...

This pursuit of pleasure and digestion of fun-educing artifacts does decrease the anxiety level to some extent but it does not bring forth the happy man. Fromm does not equate happiness with divertimento or entertainment and although the hectic exploration for pleasure does little more than anesthetize the inner feelings of doubt, apprehensiveness and alienation, the narcotic becomes addictive so that it must be taken in larger and more frequent doses. Aron van den Haag supplements this viewpoint in his comments on the bored person and his quest:

though the bored person hungers for things to happen to him, the disheartening fact is that when they do he empties them of the very meaning he unconsciously yearns for by using them as distractions....no distraction can cure boredom...the bored person is lonely for himself, not, as he thinks, for others. He misses the individuality, the capacity for experience from which he is debarr'd. No distraction can restore it. Hence he goes unrelieved and insatiable...nevertheless, the message of much popular culture is 'you, too, can

130. Erich Fromm, The Sane Society, pp. 122-123. Space and purpose dictate only a partial and quite brief discussion of mass culture, but the reader can consult the following for more detailed analysis and study: B. Rosenberg and D.K. White, op. cit., Eric Lanabee and Rolf Hoyerjohn (eds.), Mass Leisure (Glencoe, Free Press, 1956); Hendrik Rultenbeck, Varieties of Modern Social Theory, (N.Y.: Dutton Press, 1963); Walter Dill Scott, The Decline of Leisure (N.Y.: Simon & Schuster, 1962); Daedalus, (Spring, 1967).



be happy,' if you only buy this car or that pair of shoes; you will be thrilled, you will have adventure, romance, popularity--you will no longer be lonely and left out if you follow this formula... whatever the formula, nothing can be more tiresome than the tireless, ceaseless pursuit of pleasure... when time is endlessly killed, one lives in an endless present until time ends without ever having passed!

Pleasure seeking by modern man cannot bring happiness precisely because his line of conduct is guided by automation or alienated thinking. Man and their thought processes are guided and manipulated by outside sources: 'I believe something to be true not because I have arrived at the thought by my own thinking, based on my own observation and experience but because it has been 'suggested' to me.... I may be under the illusion that my thoughts are my own when actually I have adopted them because they have been presented by sources that carry authority in one form or another.¹³¹ Man has sold himself completely on the market and so in pursuing fulfillment and development of the self he is actually adjusting an object whose activity (physical and rational) are guided by reading the signals from an external beacon. Actually most people are caught in the great illusion that they are the sources of their decisions, that their thoughts are original, and that they are not being dictatorially compelled or coerced by some higher authority or tyrant. They think that they select the manner in which they shall relax, that they pick out the items which shall satisfy and satisfy them.

¹³¹ Ernest van den Haag, "Of Happiness and Despair: We Have No Measure," in Rosenberg and White, op. cit., p. 535.

¹³² Erich Fromm, May Man Prevail, p. 26.



Most people are convinced that as long as they are not overtly forced to do something by an outside power, their decisions are theirs, and that if they want something, it is they who want it. But this is one of the great illusions we have about ourselves. . . . We have become automatons who live under the illusion of being self-willing individuals. This illusion helps the individual to remain unaware of his insecurity. . . . he lives in a world to which everybody and everything has become instrumentalized, where he has become a part of the machine that his hands have built. He thinks, feels, and wills what he believes he is supposed to think, feel and will; in this very process he loses his self upon which all genuine security of a free individual must be built.¹³³

Individual: neglect the development and accomplishment of their real needs and potential for satisfaction of those created by society and its advertising agencies. Modern advertising dulls the critical capacities in its marketing of products for consumption through its appeal to the emotions, to the desire of man to fit in with his peers. Slogans are repeated over and over in a hypnotic manner so that the name of the product will remain even though the content of the advertisement is forgotten. Social acceptance, status, and sex underline the selling technique, e.g., one buys mouthwash primarily not for its medical benefits but rather because mouth odor can ostracize one from social groupings--"Bad Breath Anonymous" or if "he kissed you once, will he kiss you again?" The criteria for selecting a product is social and not individual even though many ads broadcast that the use of their particular product will separate one from the crowd and thus distinguish him by giving him a specialness, a uniqueness which others do

¹³³ Erich Fromm, Escape From Freedom, pp. 218-9, 223, 279; Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis, p. 106.



possess. Marcuse, however, argues that these are basically false needs superimposed upon the individual by a society which demands the repressive development of the individual as necessary for the perpetuation of the prevailing social institutions and interests.

False needs are those which are superimposed upon the individual by particular social interests in his repression....most of the prevailing needs to relax, to have fun, to behave and consume in accordance with the advertisements....belong to this category of false needs.

Such needs have a societal content and function which are determined by external powers over which the individual has no control. The development and satisfaction of these needs is heterogeneous.¹³⁴

In short, modern man is being manipulated and controlled so subtly with such subliminal suggestive potency that he has persuaded himself (or has been persuaded) that the labyrinth of illusion is the true reality. They erroneously assume that what they are seeking really constitutes their true needs and wants. Contemporary man is unable (and/or unwilling) to distinguish between what he "really" needs and what society tells him he requires: the gulf between reality and fiction has been bridged by the techniques of modern advertising and propaganda. Men ride a merry-go-round but fear to ascertain its direction, its destination for to ask the question is to threaten the security, the solution to the problem of existence which he has accepted and whose premises he acts out in his life.

All our energy is spent for the purpose of getting what we want and most people never question the promise of this activity: that they know their true

¹³⁴ Herbert Marcuse, One Dimensional Man (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), pp. 5-7.



wants. They do not stop to think whether the aims they are pursuing are something they themselves want ... when they stop to think in the midst of all this frantic activity, this question may come to their minds: 'If I do not get this new job, if I get this better car, if I can take this trip - what then? What is the use of it all? Is it really I who want all this? Am I running after some goal which is supposed to make me happy and which eludes me...?' These questions when they arise are frightening, for they question the very basis on which man's whole activity is built, his knowledge of what he wants. People tend, therefore, to get rid of these disturbing thoughts... Yet all this bespeaks a dim realization of the truth - the truth that modern man lives under the illusion that he knows what he wants, while he actually wants what he is supposed to want.¹³⁵

Politically the ramifications of this mode of being strike at the very heart of democracy and the belief that people should have a significant voice in those decisions which affect their lives. Unfortunately the political life of modern man differs very little, if at all, from his work or leisure situation. Fromm contends that the Lincolnian formula of government of, by and for the people is merely a credo, a belief which has a tenuous correlation to the way politics takes place in an alienated society.

...the problem of democracy today is not any more the restriction of franchise but the manner in which the franchise is exercised. How can people express their 'will' if they do not have any will or conviction of their own, if they are alienated automata, whose tastes, opinions and preferences are manipulated by the big conditioning machines? Under these circumstances universal suffrage becomes a fetish.¹³⁶

¹³⁵ Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*, pp. 277-95. For a more detailed theory concerning the role of advertising and its impact on the way people mould their lives, consult Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*. (N.Y.: Knopf Co., 1964), pp. 405-7. Ellul believes the purpose of advertising is to create a way of life and in so doing it has three functions: 1) creates needs which correspond to some ideal way of life; 2) creates a psychological collectivism; 3) appeals to majority of people by using general



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The selection of candidates often resembles the consumer market in which various wares are offered to the public through the agencies of the mass media. Fromm notes the increasing use of public relations firms who are hired to present a pleasing and acceptable package to the voters.

In an alienated society the mode in which people express their will is not very different from that of their choice in buying commodities. They are listening to the drums of propaganda and facts mean little in comparison with the suggestive noise which matters as them. In recent years we come to see more and more how the wisdom of public relations counsels determines political propaganda. Accustomed to make the public buy anything for the building of which there is enough money, they think of political ideas and political leaders in the same terms. They use television to build up personalities as they use it to build up a soap; what matters is the effect, in sales or votes, not the rationality or usefulness of what is presented.¹³⁷

Of course all of this is done with the greatest skill and effort so that the appearance of rationality is maintained. The difference between candidates over specific issues often tends to be vague and, in many cases, non-existent. Political campaigns rely on the same lessons learned by commercial advertising: cloak your appeal in pseudo-rational terms and appeal to the emotions. Schurpeter, whom Fromm often cites as support, describes the relationship between politics and commercial advertising in this way:

The ways in which issues and the popular will on any issue are being manufactured is exactly analogous

psychological laws. As a result of this a new type of human being emerges who identifies with the way of life wanted by advertising techniques.

¹³⁶ Erich Fromm, The Sane Society, p. 165.

¹³⁷ Ibid., pp. 166-8; also Dogma of Christ and Other Essays, pp. 199-200; Escape from Freedom, p. 151.



to the ways of commercial advertising. We find the same techniques of creating favorable and unworkable associations which are the more effective the less rational they are. We find the same evasions, the reticences and the same trick of producing opinion by reiterated assertion that is successful precisely to the extent to which it avoids rational argument and the danger of awakening the critical freedom of the people.¹³⁶

Many current political practices indicate that Fromm's analysis contains much validity and relevance. The increasing use of P.R. firms to run campaigns, the use of polls both national and local, public as well as private, the borrowing of market research techniques and, finally, the heavy emphasis on television time and the carefully planned programs and messages--all of these support Fromm's contentions at least to the degree that all of the modern techniques are being utilized in an attempt to reach and affect the political behavior of the public. But simply because these methods are used does not mean that they are effective.

First of all, one treads upon uncertain ground in assuming that if a firm can sell toothpaste that it can market a candidate with the same methods. How much people are influenced by commercial advertising, and the extensive use of the mass media is not as patently clear as Fromm would have it. At times he almost becomes another Dr. Werthan in formulating direct cause-effect relationships where the case might very well be far more complex and indirect. For instance, Don Martindale in his study,

¹³⁶ Joseph Schumpeter, "Two Concepts of Democracy," in Anthony Quinton (ed) Political Philosophy, (London: Oxford Press, 1967), p. 167. For an empirical study of the influence of television on political behavior confer. R. Rubin, Political Television (Belmont: Wadsworth Co., 1967).



American Society, found that "with motivation research resources that the person in the buying situation acts compulsively, unconsciously guided by hidden images;" hence it is believed that women will pay more for cream than soap for while the latter claims to rub them clean, the former promises beauty.¹³⁹ Martindale cites the facts that in 1953 fifty-three dollars was spent for each man, woman and child in America in order to persuade him or her to buy industrial products, usually through brand identification and image formation:

It was found that less than 5% of the people loyal to a given brand of cigarettes, whiskey, or beer, could actually distinguish them from others. Then why not manufacture brand loyalty? David Grilley's advertising film advised a mustached man with a black eye patch to advertise an obscure brand of shirt and panty-waist sales soared. Procter and Gamble's Luiza builder's personalized their soap: Ivory soap was personified as mother and daughter on a pedestal of purity; Creamy as a glamorous, sophisticated woman. The company's two shampoos, Gillette and Golden Shuff, was differentiated in the image of a professional distician and a warm, robust, motherly character.¹⁴⁰

It would seem that these findings sustain Fromm's perspectives and most certainly, he would list these facts as evidence for his own position but might one, approaching the data from another framework reach different conclusions. For instance, in a highly competitive market a company may have to stress more than the particular product in order that his article may receive attention--a product, regardless of its quality, must have some sort of audience; hence advertising

¹³⁹Don Martindale, American Society, (Princeton: Van Nostrand, 1960), pp. 40-1.

¹⁴⁰Ibid., p. 42-44.



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stimulates interest by projecting images to the prospective consumer. That a person will purchase a certain article chiefly because of its "promises" rather than its intended function does not necessarily mean that the buyer is a robot whose tastes and needs are being artificially manufactured and stimulated by some giant machine. Nor does it warrant the epithet that the whole process is basically fraudulent. Advertising may influence the first purchase but it cannot guarantee continued patronage. From minimizes and often overlooks the importance of the quality and performance of the merchandise; there must be some meaningful relation between the advertisement and the actual operation of the item, precisely because the customer will demand a payoff from the promises. Moreover he neglects all those ad campaigns which failed to put across a product even though millions of dollars were spent and a highly successful agency controlled the program. People very often do know what they need, what they need it and demand quality and results in performance: that advertising exerts influence cannot be denied; that the entire process is one of total manipulation by subliminal techniques over sponge-like robots whose will and desires and wants are dictated from external sources rests upon unproven and empirically questionable inferences.

The transfer from the commercial world to politics is perhaps even less pellucidly evident. Fromm is not alone in presuming that introduction of public relations firms and advertising procedures and methods greatly influence the voting behavior of the public--many aspirants for office pay these



firm large sums of money in order to win an election. For instance in the 1968 Presidential race the GOP spent 5.2 million dollars for television time while the Democrats paid close to 3 million; the candidates were on the air waves for a total of 96 hours and 11 minutes with the Republicans buying 110 spot announcements at 2.5 million and the Democrats purchasing 37 spot places for \$84,215; the three major candidates together spent 8.9 million dollars (more than twice the 1964 campaign).¹⁴¹ How much effect did all of this time and money have upon the outcome of the election? How much attention was given to these programs by the mass of the electorate? Did these political announcements change any votes or did they merely reaffirm set beliefs and attitudes? Or are most people indifferent to the high financed bombardment and make their selection for other reasons? Finally what kind of evidence can be brought to bear to substantiate one's contentions?

The figures cited for the 1968 election indicate that considerable effort was made to reach the voter and influence his choice but they do not prove that it was successful nor does it tell us its degree of persuasiveness. In fact, how do people react to the multitude of messages aimed at directing their political behavior? The campaign scenario for Fromm is basically one of rather successful thought suggestion and behavior control based upon those machinations of advertising found to work on the commercial market. His thesis, however, cannot develop into an acceptable picture of reality without

¹⁴¹ FJC Report on 1968 Presidential Election (Preliminary Report), Jan. 3, 1969.



the sufficient empirical data. His theory is not illiterate, nor implausible; it is simply an old yet unproven. The major studies, The American Voter and V.O. Key's Responsible Electorate, in fact, present findings concerning the election and his political actions which seriously disprove Fromm's generalizations. The authors of the former study conclude that the average voter is not as irrational or as prone to visceral or emotional reaction as has been assumed.¹⁴² Nor can Fromm's analysis provide us with any insight into why a candidate using a reputedly successful PR firm with proven methods fails to win an election or loses one and wins another. In short, more research and study must be done before any verdict can be rendered, at least if it is to be in Fromm's uncompromising terms.

The second element in his political description are the feelings of helplessness, powerlessness and insignificance of the isolated citizen whose political self-image, and importance amounts to very little. He feels that he does not control his life nor participate in major political decisions which affect the direction of his country and ultimately his own way of life. In developing his thesis Fromm postulates, albeit without specific nomination, the existence of a mysterious elite who make the crucial decisions. His structure is comparable to a pyramid but he does not specify the identity of the key decision makers and he seems less concerned with specifying who they are than with emphasizing the powerlessness of the individual.

¹⁴² Cf. Angus Campbell, et al, The American Voter (N.Y.: Wiley, 1964); also Murray Edelman, The Symbolic Uses of Politics, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1964).



The real decisions do not lie any more with individual members of the parliament, representing the interests and wishes of their constituency but with the party. But even these decisions are made by influential key personalities, often little known to the public.... between the act of voting and the most momentous high level political decisions is a connection which is mysterious. One cannot say that there is none at all, nor can one say that the final decision is an outcome of the voter's will. This is exactly the situation of an alienated expression of the citizen's will. He does something, voting and is under the illusion that he is the creator of decisions which he accepts as if they were his own, while in reality they are largely determined by forces beyond his control and knowledge. No wonder this situation gives the average citizen a deep sense of powerlessness in political matters (though not necessarily consciously so).¹⁴³

The sense of powerlessness and meaninglessness reduces the role of citizen to an almost a ceremonial formality since real control and decision resides in a small, influential group. Those who feel politically powerless do not believe that their vote, or for that matter any of their actions, can determine the outcome of a policy suggestion. This feeling arises from and contributes to the belief that the community is controlled by a small number of powerful persons who remain in control despite the outcome of the elections.¹⁴⁴ This kind of sentiment has been the clarion call for many groups in American

¹⁴³Erich Fromm, *The Sane Society*, p. 170; Richard Snyder and E.H. Wilson (eds.), *Roots of Political Behavior*, (N.Y.: American Book, 1949), p. 194.

¹⁴⁴Harvey Levin, "Political Alienation" in Eric and Mary Josephson (eds.), *Man Alone: Alienation in Modern Society* (N.Y.: Dell, 1966), p. 200; also compare Jack Walker, "A Critique of the Elitist Theory of Democracy," *American Political Science Review*, vol. 69, (June, 1960), pp. 305-25; David Spitz, *Patterns of Anti-Democratic Thought*, (N.Y.: Free Press, 1965); Franz Pappenheim, *The Alienation of Modern Man*, (N.Y.: Monthly Review Press, 1959).



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regular, and it is not restricted to any one focal point on the continuum of belief and ideological persuasion. Both the extreme right and the New Left, for example, agree on one point-namely, that they are not taking part in the meaningful political decisions and that a small clique "pulls the strings" and although they disagree over the objectives this elite controls, their thinking is surprisingly similar. They are confused bewildered, and engaged in a complex society over which they exert no influence or restraint. Morris Rosenberg summarizes this feeling of motivations which can obstruct political involvement:

In our complex, urban mass society individuals devote themselves to minute specialized tasks woven into the complex fabric of the economy. The great economic and power bases, controlled by great corporations and unions, thrust the individual about with pressures too powerful to resist. As a consequence the individual is likely to feel overwhelmed and powerless...he feels that a lonely individual can do nothing to change the way society is run. Raising his own weak voice against the massive power of the mass media and the political giants is futile. For this reason, many people do nothing but vote, convinced that they can have no substantial effect in any event.¹⁴⁵

The average citizen cannot cope with the mass of data, information and propaganda that pour forth daily from often competing and contradictory sources. He must form opinions on such diverse topics and policies as foreign aid, the space program, domestic expenditures, budgetary requests, tax policies, school programs etc. on the basis of the information he acquires

¹⁴⁵ Morris Rosenberg, "The Meaning of Politics in Mass Society," Public Opinion Quarterly, vol. 15 (Spring, 1951), pp. 6-9; Philip Selznick, "Institutional Plurality in Mass Society," American Journal of Sociology, vol. 56, (Jan., 1951), pp. 320-331.



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but even if he attempts to elicit the facts, he becomes confused and perplexed: "While he reads his newspaper regularly, the whole world is so alienated from him, that nothing makes sense or carries real meaning; he reads of billions of dollars being spent, of millions of people being killed; figures, abstractions, which are in no way interpreted in a concrete, meaningful picture of the world."¹⁴⁶ The average citizen is caught between the rhetoric of democracy which tells him that the people are the government and the realities of politics in which he feels like a pawn, a passive receptor of decisions made by others. He is confronted with an information explosion but finds himself unable to comprehend or fit together what the pieces of news might imply for his future. More and more the individual relies upon the specialists who, because of their expertise, can understand and prescribe what course of policy and criterion society should adopt.¹⁴⁷ The citizen belongs to

¹⁴⁶ Erich Fromm, *The Sane Society*, p. 295; P. Rosenbaum, *op cit*, p. 101. For a discussion of this topic in terms of the dichotomy between the personal and impersonal worlds of the individual consult Snyder and Wilson, *op cit*, pp. 125-6.

¹⁴⁷ Fromm's Populism, especially in his comments on the issue of life and the need for specialists, can have strange implications. For instance, compare this statement (*op cit* Fromm *Freedom*, pp. 275-6) with George Wallace's guideline "DON'T READ FROM and know the man in the street. To suspect that Wallace has not read Fromm and know the latter has negative views on Dr. Wallace and this comparison merely serves to indicate how a doctrine can be held by such disparate men. One kind of smokescreen is the assertion that the problems are too complicated for the average individual to grasp. On the contrary it would seem that many of the basic issues of individual and social life are very simple, so simple in fact that everyone should be expected to understand them. We let them appear so enormously complicated that only a specialist can understand them...actually and often intentionally--to let us discourage people from trusting their own capacity to think about those problems that really matter."



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the policy only in a formally technical sense but not in any significant or influential way. He might vote, he will pay his taxes and will obey the laws but he will not (and/or cannot) participate in the crucial policy-making and decisions. In short the religious pay, pray and obey has its secular counterpart with the paying, sleeping to voting.

Even the nature of authority contributes to political alienation. In the past power was concentrated in one office or figure who made overt commands and open demands upon his subjects. People not only knew who had the force to compel obedience to his decrees but also who to replace, by force if necessary, if those orders became severely oppressive or tyrannical. Authority was visible, concentrated, and as such incontestable; but today authority has assumed a new identity manifesting itself in more subtle and subliminal forms: "Authority in the middle of the 20th century has changed its character; it is not overt authority, but anonymous, invisible, alienated authority...it is disguised as common sense, science, psychic health, normality, public opinion; it does not demand anything except the self-evident; it seems to use no pressure but only mild persuasion."¹⁴⁶ The relationship between ruler and ruled throughout history had been direct and unequivocal but today the ruled may comply and still conform to an authority more amorphous but no less powerful. For Fromm men in a democratic form of government are not more free than their predecessors simply because the kings, tyrants and nobles have been eliminated;

¹⁴⁶ Erich Fromm, The Sane Society, pp. 138-9; Sanctus Fromm, p. 199.



the type of restraints have merely changed form but not effectiveness upon the freedom of the individual. Man may have been liberated from the old forms only to fall prey to the special confinements of modern society.

Because in the fight for freedom in modern history the attention was focused upon combating old forms of authority and restraint, it was natural that one should feel that the more these traditional restraints were eliminated the more freedom one had gained. We fail sufficiently to recognize that although man had rid himself from old enemies of freedom, new enemies of a different nature have arisen; enemies which are not essentially external restraints but internal factors....we are proud that we are not subject to any external authority, that we are free to express our thoughts and feelings...the right to express our thoughts, however, means something only if we are able to have thoughts of our own;...we neglect the role of the anonymous authorities like public opinion and common sense which are so powerful because of our profound readiness to conform to the expectations everyone has about us and our equally profound fear of being different. In other words, we are fascinated by the growth of freedom from points outside of ourselves and are blinded to the fact of inner restraints, compulsions and fears which tend to undermine the meaning of the victories. Freedom has men against its traditional enemies.¹⁴⁹

Man has been liberated from the external bonds which prevented him from acting and thinking as he saw fit. He would be free to act according to his own will if he knew what he wanted; thought and felt but not knowing these things he conforms to anonymous authorities and adopts a false self.¹⁵⁰ But obedience and conformity to the new mode of authority do not reflect the seriousness of the problem as seen by Fromm--only in rebellion or disobedience can the consequences be explored.

¹⁴⁹ Erich Fromm, Escape from Freedom, pp. 124-5, 266.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 281-2.



It will be recalled that the symbolic myth of Adam and his rejection of God's authority spelled the beginning of man. By saying no to external authority, Adam said yes to himself and his powers of reason. In disobeying God, he became a free, thinking man; the act of disobedience broke the bonds with nature and marked the beginning of human history. From repeatedly stresses the importance of rebellion in the evolution and development of man.

Man has continued to evolve by acts of disobedience not just in the sense that his spiritual development was possible only because there have been men who dared to say no to the powers that be in the name of their conscience or of their faith. His intellectual development was also dependent on the capacity for being disobedient, disobedient to the authorities who tried to muzzle new thoughts and to the authority of long-established opinions which declared change to be nonsense.¹⁵¹

In rebellion against irrational authority, man developed a sense of self, a sense of communion with his fellow men echoed by Camus' "I revolt, therefore we exist." The one who rebels, the revolutionary should not be confused with a rebel or a fanatic. From marks the rebel as one "who is deeply resentful of authority for not being appreciated, for not being loved, for not being accepted and who wants to overthrow authority because of his resentment and to put himself in its place;" the fanatic is a person totally and completely immersed in a cause which he has deified and to which he has submitted himself completely.¹⁵² The revolutionary character is one who identifies

¹⁵¹ Erich Fromm, Beyond the Chains of Illusion, pp. 180-1.

¹⁵² Erich Fromm, "The Revolutionary Character" in Fromm's Essays on Christ and Other Essays, pp. 154-6.



with humanity, who transcends the limits of his society and who is able to employ what Fromm calls the critical mood; one is not a revolutionary "because he utters revolutionary phrases nor because he participates in a revolution."¹⁵³

The crucial point is that he is able to say no to one set of rules (or authority) while affirming another. There comes to the fore the dialectic which underlines most of Fromm's concepts and ideas, i.e., every act has a dual nature--to deny the command of our authority is to discharge the precepts of another sovereignty.

Disobedience is a dialectical concept, i.e., actually every act of disobedience is an act of obedience and every act of obedience is an act of disobedience. Every act of disobedience, unless it is empty rebelliousness, is obedience to another principle. I am disobedient to the idol because I am obedient to God. I am disobedient to Caesar because I am obedient to God, or, because I am obedient to principles and values, to my conscience. I may be disobedient to the state because I am obedient to the laws of humanity. And if I am obedient, then indeed I am always disobedient to something else.¹⁵⁴

But this disobedience presumes (or at least Fromm does) that authority be relatively external, overt and visible so that people know that they were submitting themselves to the dictates of another and if the commands were irrational then the individual could deny their jurisdiction while positing a counter or contrary rule. In the struggle between the thesis and antithesis a sense of self emerges for it is the I that doubts, that protests, that refuses. What can be said of modern man now that

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 167-4, 170-1.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 167-8; Fromm, Beyond the Chains of Illusion, p. 190.



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the nature and form of authority and obedience has undergone a transformation and reconfiguration. Can the marketing man, the automation rebel in any meaningful sense against the anonymous, faceless authority of our times?

The 20th century is a century of the modern industrial system that creates the organization man, a system of vast bureaucracies which insist on the smooth functioning of those whom they control--but by manipulation rather than by force....the organization man is not one who disobeys; he does not even know that he is obeying. How can he think of disobeying when he is not even conscious of being obedient? He is just one of the boys, one of the crowd. He is sound. He thinks and does what is reasonable....

...who can disobey an electronic computer? How can we say no to the kind of philosophy whose ideal is to act like an electronic computer, without will, without feeling, without passion? Obedience today is not recognized as obedience because it is rationalized as common sense....the individual is frightened to death by the power of the Big Bureaucracies, by the bigness of everything--the state, industrial bureaucracy. He is not only frightened, he feels utterly small....he is intimidated and glad to accept authority. He accepts the orders he is given in the name of common sense and reason in order not to feel that he has submitted.¹⁵⁵

Thus modern man seeks security, desires to eliminate the feelings of meaninglessness and powerlessness by conforming to the way of the crowd or more disastrously to the preachings of the demagogue or fascist ideology which offers meaning, a path in the labyrinth of existence, a single solution to the complexities of modern society. In short, the automation is the potent seed for mass movements and the precursor of totalitarianism. Man cannot tolerate the anxiety of mass society and looks for the word of warmth and security.

¹⁵⁵Erich Fromm, The Revolutionary Character, pp. 163-70; The Sane Society, p. 139.



looked so superficially, might begin to function well enough in technical and social fields; but he would be doomed to overlook the very serious shortcomings behind that comfortable veneer. If life loses its meaning because it is not lived, not because it never is, if we look only at the economic needs of man as the normal person is concerned, if we do not see the unconscious suffering of the strange, unclassifiable person, then we fail to see the forces that shape human existence, even for those who are "the majority" to accept our ideology and our world, if only we really understand and observe a political structure and the which allegorically give meaning and order to an individual's life. The struggle of the heart which ten individuals will see for the political purposes of Fascism.

Perhaps the major flaw in Fromm's analysis lies in his suspension and contraction of an example into a rule, also his relatively tendentious for almost irreversible movements and in his proclivity for overlooking, misreading, or narrowly interpreting the data. He often approaches his subject with a philosophical outlook where an empirical technique might be more applicable. This is not to deny the role of philosophy in the study of contemporary society but it does caution and remind the scholar that many of the topics under discussion lend themselves to an empirical method and that even those which can be philosophically dealt with are conducive to much debate and disagreement. The psychic condition of man at work, for instance, can best be studied through rigorous psychological testing than by Marxist socio-philosophical framework. The problem under research contributes greatly to the choice of method and any comprehensive study on this scale attempted by Fromm must employ a variety of tools each designed to scrutinize

¹⁵⁶ Erich Fromm, Escape from Freedom, p. 256. For extended reading on this theme consult Paul Fester (ed.) Existentialism, (Boston: D.C. Heath, 1957) especially Section 4 and the bibliography.



a specific area.

Politically Fromm's belief that alienation is total and that it affects all men despite their position or role in society leads him to several questionable conclusions. First of all do in fact all men feel politically alienated defined as sensing that they can do nothing to alter the behavior of government and that their views and opinions make no impact upon the decision makers? Robert Lane reported that the working class men of Eastport are not alienated in the Frommian sense and that there exists a dynamic tension which the men are able to balance and cope with in their fundamental allegiance to government as well as their feeling of importance.¹⁵⁷ These feelings are not always constant, nor are they immune to modulation but their stability and depth certainly call Fromm's contentions into question. Wayne Thompson and John Horton in their study of political alienation have found a definite relationship between powerlessness and social-economic status (SES): people in the upper SES, usually professionals or managers with college education, expressed less alienation than those lower on the scale; but of those in the lower SES categories only the aged, those from rural areas and those with very minimal education indicated an extreme degree of political alienation.¹⁵⁸ These findings were updated and corroborated by the Louis Harris Survey, released on December 16, 1968, which

¹⁵⁷Robert Lane, Political Ideology, pp. 161-166.

¹⁵⁸Wayne Thompson & John Horton, "Political Alienation as a Force in Political Action," Social Forces, vol. 38 (March 1960), pp. 199-5; also Dwight Dean, "Alienation and Political Activity," Ibid., pp. 185-9.



report of half a billion (50% of total) "problems" that they were alienated from the mainstream of society. The groups who felt most "disconnected" were the old, the blind, the poor and those who never went beyond the eighth grade; the degree of alienation decreases as one moves up the social ladder and away from minority groups.¹⁵⁹ These studies must be carefully evaluated before reaching any definite conclusions and although they do not "prove" that Fromm is wrong, they do seriously challenge his sweeping generalizations. Most of most of the criticism are attributed from government and the political sphere is a question not easily answered without serious and qualified evidence and research and, furthermore, since this data has been rigorously obtained, it must not be prejudiced to fit into a preconceived pattern or mould. Fromm seems disheartened in that the classical populist belief in the common man and his abilities to run government is not touched by the inner workings of the Real Politics. He fears the consequences of apathy, non participation and of elite control for he believes that these are symptoms of a decaying democracy.¹⁶⁰ He is worried over the apparent lack of vigour and intense interest in governmental affairs and construes this as a major symptom of political alienation and estrangement from the decision making process. The discrepancy between what he construes to be the ideal and the reality of politics causes apprehension,

¹⁵⁹ Louis Harris Survey Report, (December 16, 1968);

¹⁶⁰ It appears that Fromm is challenging the proposition "it can't happen here" by trying to demonstrate that America can fall prey to fascist rule. As Germany did in 1932.



anxiety and a great deal of dissatisfaction with what he thinks is going on in society today; in other words, Fromm often allows what he wants to color or influence what he sees thus resulting in a frequent misinterpretation, overestimation and exaggeration.

First of all, although he does not use the term, his automaton resembles mass man who appears to some sort of undifferentiated glob of humanity. Fromm has forgotten Spinoza's admonition concerning equating the majority of people with a mass: "the people are a mass only in the sense that they are numerically many; they are not necessarily a mob or an irresponsible or inchoate multitude."¹⁶ The terms mass, automatons, golems, etc., provide a poor analytic tool for research because of their normative connotations which oftentimes serve as rhetorical devices in argumentative polemics.

Fromm's implications concerning the few who really run the affairs of the nation and who control the daily events which affect the lives of the majority encounters several analytic difficulties: The polarization of the population into mass and elite, or the few and the many "cannot do justice to the complexities, the multifarious character and the indeterminateness either of social interaction or of man." Such a division neglects what Truman calls the intermediate social and political structures or what Fell terms the middle level of politics. Truman notes such an oversimplified conception of society can lead to disparate conclusions, e.g., one that the elites control society or another, that the masses are in

¹⁶ David Spitz, Patterns of Anti-Democratic "Thought",



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power, precisely because they understand, or fail to take sufficient notice of the importance of the intermediate structures which include a great array of various groups and associations. This mass-elite dichotomy overlooks the various levels and types of power relationships by flattening out and compartmentalizing the political and social system. Do the masses have any influence upon the elite? How does one identify these elites? There is a danger in confusing a ruling elite with a group of individuals who have more influence than any others in the system--in every organization some individuals have more influence than others....but it is fallacious to assume that the absence of political equality proves the existence of a ruling elite."¹⁶²

In addition, Fromm's theories do not explain the phenomena of the non-participant. He explains it by claiming that a person does not take part because he feels that it would make no difference if he did. Might not the non-participant be basically satisfied with how the system is operating and thus choose not to vote because of this factor? Why do many people who vote in final elections fail to do so in the primaries? Explaining the overt political behavior, especially in terms of voting participation, is not as uncomplicated as might appear. Robert Lane suggests that one can feel part of the system but

(N.Y.: Free Press, 1965), p. 139.

¹⁶²J. Cook, "A Critique of Liberal Democracy and Social Control," American Political Science Review, vol. 51 (December, 1957), pp. 1029-36; D. Truman, "The American System in Crisis," Political Science Quarterly, vol. 74 (1959), pp. 481-97; Robert Dahl, "A Critique of the Ruling Elite Model," American Political Science Review, vol. 52 (June, 1958), pp. 463-69; Daniel Bell, op cit., p. 64.



not participate, thus, although relatively passive in terms of participation, yet be unalienated. In short, what is the relationship between democracy and participation? Why do people get involved in one area but not another? Why do people vote the way they do and what measure or standard does one bring to bear in order to determine the rationality of the process?

Furthermore Fromm's opinions on the will and sense of reality of the common man neglect what Schumpeter, he believes in the abilities of the average citizen, reminded us:

It (sense of volition and reality) consists of the things that directly concern himself, his family, his business dealings, his hobbies, his friends and enemies, his township or ward, his class, church, trade union or any other social group of which he is an active member--the things under his personal observation, the things which are familiar to him independently of what his newspaper tells him, which he can directly influence or manage and for which he develops the kind of responsibility that is induced by a direct relation to the favourable or unfavourable effects of a course of action.... How this comparative definiteness of volition and rationality does not suddenly vanish as we move away from those concerns of daily life in the home and in business.... In the realm of public affairs there are sectors that are more within the reach of the citizen's mind than others.¹⁶³

By concentrating almost exclusively upon national and international affairs Fromm overlooks or underestimates the meaning of the other levels of political behavior and the relationship of these other segments to the citizen. To depict the state as an object of idolatrous worship and the political process as alienated robots being manipulated by some kind of machine or some mysterious elite is to misunderstand the nature of

163 Schumpeter, *op. cit.*, pp. 162-4.



politics in America. Fromm commits the same similar epistemological error as elements in the New Left who, because of their ideological persuasion, allow the ideal to transform the real into a caricature or an object for criticism or censure. It is simply not true that all authority has gone underground even though some people cannot discern who makes the decisions which affect their lives. For instance, the scapegoat or conspiracy theory has served many masters--to the radical right it has been the communists in high places; to the know nothings Catholics were the foil; to many white Americans the minority groups (or their leaders, those infamous outside agitators); and the nefarious Establishment or Power Structure has been the object of attack by the Leftist elements in our society--but all of these groups coalesce in their belief that they are not the masters of their fate and that someone or something else has the real power and authority. This perspective is the result, partially at least, of an overactive zeal for reform or protection of the status quo or some ideal in the past. Fromm's anonymous authority is a partial truth which may fit some situations, especially in the social realm but certainly cannot describe the bulk of influence relationships. If anything, the increase of communications has isolated and exposed those who have authority and hence who decide what is to be done. Reformation of defects is not aided by amorphous references to enigmatic but powerful forces, machines, modern techniques of manipulation. It is well to remember that the politics of democracy does not depend totally on mass participation, nor on an astute understanding and comprehension of all the issues



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by the population, on a feeling of meaningful involvement by all of the citizens--it may desire all of these but it can function well until the ideal can be realized, if at all. The average citizen and his relationship to his government runs a course far deeper than Fromm may realize.

These men have absorbed the standard values of democracy; they believe in the rule of the many, government by the people; they believe that in the least analysis--they, not the elite, run things. At the same time they hold that representative government may be won, are often fallible and usually vulnerable to a variety of influences. And these are not compartmental beliefs but are held in full knowledge of each other...their views of democracy are not greatly rationalized; they are it whole and take it pretty much for what it is. More than is a segment of a totalitarian system held together by the rationalizations of reality; it is not necessary to dissolve politics into cynicism and then to rebuild it again with a myth of state, folk, race, class or charismatic or golden age gone by.¹⁶⁴

In summation, Fromm has found modern society guilty of dehumanizing and alienating man by not fulfilling his basic needs and by forcing him to adopt a social character and orientation to his environment which only contributes to his estrangement. Man is separated from his neighbor, his work and from himself; in order to be a success he constructs a series of desirable traits for sale on the business and social market. Modern man is completely and unequivocally alienated. He is bored at work, finds no respite in his leisure time, feeds artificially created needs and is controlled by technology and the needs of society. The contemporary solution to the problem of existence has been a failure and a primary source

¹⁶⁴Robert Lens, op. cit., pp. 279-80.



of anxiety, phobias and the psychic sickness of man in our society. In our discussion of these points we have analyzed Fromm's argument and have pointed out its analytic and methodological flaws and caveats; therefore much of the following will merely abridge and reinforce what has preceded it.

At the outset, we have quibbled Fromm's use of the term alienation. Beginning with an essentially Marxist definition, he expands it to cover every facet of estrangement by life. At times alienation is very specific, notably in his comments on the worker, while at other times it becomes vague and somewhat trivialized. Fromm, however, is not all general concerning the concept of alienation, as Kenneth Keniston, a student of alienation among the young, notes:

The ambiguous concept of alienation has in recent years become increasingly fashionable and popular as a result, increasingly devoid of any specific meaning. Here and there, the term is used to characterize whatever the author considers the dominant malady of the 20th century....

In practice, then, alienation has become an increasingly rhetorical and at times entirely emotive concept, often synonymous merely with the feeling that something is wrong somewhere and that we have lost something important.¹⁶⁵

Does alienation mean powerlessness, meaninglessness, helplessness, isolation or self estrangement; or in fact does it contain elements of all of these? If so, which component is essential or are they equal in importance? At times Fromm stresses self estrangement but this presupposes a "real self" or a capacity for productive living. Self estrangement then becomes a nebulous term with more extensive normative connotations

¹⁶⁵ Kenneth Keniston, The Uncommitted, (N.Y.: Dell, 1962), p451-



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then explain a "depression."¹⁶⁶ Self-alienation at answers the question: Alienated from what?—and is alienated from himself; but what is this self? He have already seen that the self posited by Fromm is not undeniably empirical but rather a model put together by a questionable mixture of metaphysics, logic and humanistic idealism. Similarly he reasons that the laws of human nature are known and that in accordance with them, people can lead the good life. Of course this itself rests upon a knowable and universalizable nature of man and his needs; that disagreement and controversy surround these topics does not deter Fromm from his postulating his theories as given and accepted facts.¹⁶⁷ Finally, his broad usage of the term alienation does not confront the possibility of someone being alienated in one area or sphere of life while not so in another. He does not present any convincing argument as to why alienation must essentially be self-alienation and why this mode of estrangement permeates through every phase of an individual's existence. Is self-estrangement the same as alienation from others; can one be alienated in politics but not so socially or religiously?

Fromm's definitional or conceptual difficulties are compounded by his methodology which might be termed an ambitious macro-study of modern society. In many ways his method and findings can be profitably compared to another keen social observer,

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 464; Melvin Serman, "On the Meaning of Alienation," *American Sociological Review*, vol. 24, (1959), pp. 730-39; JOHN SHERMAN, *op. cit.*, pp. 415-6, 416.

¹⁶⁷ Henry Leibel, *In Search of Authority*, (Chicago; Free Press, 1961), p. 117.



Alain de Tocqueville. Both men observed American society on a grand scale and both relied a great deal on the general impressions they received through their observations. Although Fromm has the benefits of much more research and information than his predecessor, he either uses that poorly or not at all. As a result, the works of Fromm and de Tocqueville are laden with brilliant insights, meaningful criticisms and much that is logical, highly debatable or simply erroneous. The overstudy is conducive to omission, evasion and understatement of many of the finer points in a society. When viewed from the viewpoint of a single social system, the concept of alienation can be examined in an environment about which we are more adequately informed than with the whole of society.¹⁶⁸ Without rigorous control the overview or whole society approach can tend either to overwhelm the researcher or predispose him to select only those features which seem applicable to his philosophical orientation thus causing him to overweight certain phenomena, underestimate the significance of others or to dull a well taken point with exaggeration and rhetoric hyperbole.

If it is granted that mass society is compartmentalized, superficial in personal relations, anonymous, transitory, specialized, utilitarian, competitive, acquisitive, mobile and status-hungry, the obverse side of the coin must be shown too, --the right to privacy, to free choice of friends and occupation, status on basis of achievement rather than of ascription, a plurality of norms and standards, rather than the exclusive and monopolistic social controls of a single dominant group.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁸ John P. Clark, "Measuring Alienation Within A Social System," American Sociological Review, vol. 74 (December 1959), p. 652.

¹⁶⁹ Daniel Bell, op. cit., p. 30.



Furthermore in canvassing the entire social universe, Fromm attempts to unite and integrate the approaches and tools of history, cultural anthropology, psychology, psychoanalysis, sociology, political science and philosophy but the basic difficulty with this method is that it inevitably makes use of poorly defined concepts, and assumes as established, findings that are, at best, controversial hypothesis; "The integrative method often deals cavalierly with evidence and blithely disregards profound problems of methodology and philosophy."¹⁷⁰

Modern society with its dynamism, its emphasis on technology and efficient production, with its large metropolitan centers undoubtedly creates much anxiety and tension within the individual who seeks to define his place in the complex vortex. The nature of human existence and the mode of relationships between men and their environment, social as well as physical, may not be the same as the Gemeinschaft Societies of the past, but this does not necessarily mean that the contemporary situation is worse or that the alienating factors are greater than before; it may simply mean that they are different. Events change far more rapidly today than ever before but can not one conclude with Bell that social disorder and anomie need not be the inevitable outcome because such change and innovation have been built into our culture.¹⁷¹ Furthermore, that men exhibit traits of the automaton is one thing; that they have in fact

¹⁷⁰Kurt Sholl, A Critical Commentary on Erich Fromm (N.Y.: American Publishers, 1967), p. 38.

¹⁷¹Daniel Bell, op. cit., p. 37.



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been transformed into robots is quite something else. Ironically Fromm in describing the loss of human qualities as portrayed by the automation robs the actual richness and quality of human existence. The men of the real world are not the ideal; they do not display all the qualities which Fromm would like nor the degree he desires but this does not prove that they have been confused and estranged in a machine-like society. Fromm talks in terms of man in typological categories and forgets that society is composed of men who are fallible, destructive, happy, sad, contented, uneasy, proud, complacent, envious, fools but also--in short, men who confront life in a multitude of ways and with a variety of characterological traits. They are not stereotypes.

In spite of these criticisms and qualification, however, Fromm's services cannot be lightly dismissed. He stands first and foremost as a humanist who sincerely desires that man have all the means at his disposal in order that he might lead the good life, the moral life, the excellent life. He reminds us that materialism can be a false god and that the golden calf of self-indulgence is merely a base metal. Fromm is basically a social critic who, despite his methodological and analytic shortcomings, serves man in perhaps a more important function than as an objective, value free social scientist. He castigates the evil, the destructive, the debasements--all of the forces, which might dehumanize man in contemporary society. He never loses his faith in the capacity of man to find a route out of the web of bewilderment and perplexity and in his faith he urges man on to seek out the light of humanistic existence.



His ideal may not be attainable and in fact may be perhaps not even desirable, but what society can afford the fear of the visionary, the utopian, the reformer? Even his foremost critic, John Cole, has conceded that

A society's critics are more to be valued than its pleasures and possessions, not to be valued indeed when anything but its dreamers and visionaries. When a man combines the two reactions, he becomes the finest of all workable engineers in the civil society. Such men are always in great supply and in our day a number of tendencies conspire both to reduce the number of those who enter upon the reaction of criticism and to restrict the "tools" of those who have entered it....

John Cole's must protest under these "tendencies", it is his praise of a man to say that he performs very well. Fromm's critic says that he is undeniably among the finest work of the synthesis and creator of our cultural and moral crisis. He can make no other claim to bring the forefront among them!

Fromm has given us a typology of alienation and his criticism does not match his conception of criticism. He will not deter or blind us in denouncing his efforts and his private writing ends. He judges society as harshly perhaps less as he loves man so much and for this must it be forgiven.

172. John Cole, op. cit., pp. 212-211.



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