



= Spiegel 1981

## REMINISCENCE OF ERICH FROMM

White Society and Institute -- A Memorial Evening -- June 18, 1980

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Early this year I had a growing feeling that I should be calling Erich-- but this time did not--as occasionally I had felt pressed to call Ed or David to check out how Erich was. So, when a friend phoned to apprise me of Fromm's death, the sad news came with that curious sense of shock that long-delayed expectation evokes.

With Death comes the reintegration of the perception and image of the other person, that for a while seems larger than life, but actually is life; is that person. For once, the fragmented perceptions become the Whole, and that truly is greater than the sum of its parts. Is this the experience that primitives have spoken of as the spirit hovering over the body it has left; is it the projection of the synthesis?

Fromm in a very singular way is woven into my Self. He has been and now more than ever is a presence for me which Death sharpens. "Erich," (I wrote to Annis), "is a friend in the most profound sense, my teacher to whom I turned thirstily for nurturing the Self that was nascent within me. He provided for me missing pieces that I was seeking 'out there,'" (though I am indebted to many).

I became acquainted with him stimulated through Clara's description of him and his interests, his courage and achievement. I began following him about to the courses he gave at the New School and to analysts-in-training,



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before the separation of the White Institute-to-be from the Horney group, which in fact occurred because of the issue of his not being an M.D. and giving clinical rather than theoretical courses. Then he became supervisor, analyst, colleague, and friend to me. At times, I travelled to Bennington, and Mexico for analysis, and then to teach, at the newly founded psychoanalytic institute in Mexico. I later visited him in Europe and here and there. As friendship developed, met with his wife Henny in Mexico, who died suddenly, and then with Annis.

Psychoanalysis with Fromm, as I experienced it, was a great adventure, because of the depth of his immersion, the excitement of the play of ideas which were shared both ways, his sensitivity, astuteness and even wisdom about what was going on on the societal scene. And I experienced from him a deep respect for me as a woman--at a time when in the professional world of medicine, tolerance was pretty shaky--a respect too subtle for me at this moment to find the right words for. I remember also a discussion of the self doubt of a Black woman student, unknown to me, who, though she had fought and struggled for entry into the professional world, still had wondered with him about her innate intelligence because of being Black, and his heartfelt reinforcement of her.

He met a need I had, and have, for experiencing the world of literature, which emerged in our early, exploratory seeking for ground we could meet on. When my interest in literature--the novel--surfaced, which at that time was actually limited to the American and English, through him I entered the fantastic, mysterious world of Kafka, which still fascinates me.

From early days on, his interest in forces in society that impinged on the individual and shaped his or her private life, as well as the complexity of social character, answered a self-doubt I had about becoming an analyst and



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dealing in the one-to-one, isolated from the hurly burly of society.

Erich's profound concern for the person and his or her human qualities transcended social class. Later I saw this when he moved to Mexico in behalf of Henny's health. He had a vision of Mexico and its high culture that was new to me, and a respect for the native Indians and the mestizos.

He had an image of man that had vista, that included a capacity for nobility that added an excitement and hope about human potential, --and analysis.

He based his theory both on values and on the pursuit of personal experience, whether his own or others, and lived in accordance with these values. I have in mind his ideas about authority. Coming from an authoritarian society, in which he was outspoken, he honed fine distinctions between what he termed irrational, autocratic authority, and what he termed the rational authority of competence and expertise, in whatever field. As one's analyst or teacher, he saw himself as having rational authority for that time, in the functioning of analyst and analysand, teacher and pupil, and that as ripened and developed, would be replaced by their becoming his peers, that an equalization would replace even the rational authority. Thus it was between us, and so we gradually became friends, --as I am sure happened with others.

As analyst, he put aside formal methodology, the metapsychological format, in favor of Martin Buber's betweenness, of a touching of the selves of two persons. In my direct experience of Erich in Mexico, I told him of an experience in taking a walk along the mountain road at San José de Purua, of being afraid of the height and of clinging to the side, and he spoke of the security and comfort in reaching out to touch the hand of The Other.

I want to say something of this phrase of his, the touching, and of his quarrel with "methodology." Of the latter it could be said that he strove to



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dispense with formal methodology, that that was his methodology.

When he listened, it was total immersion, and an empathic flow back and forth. This did not preclude his formulating the inner logic of what was being said, or the line of reasoning that certain behavior or action was implementing. He stressed immediacy and spontaneity for the analyst, of voicing his or her experience with the patient, or an insightful interpretation, without a methodical waiting for the so-called "right" moment, which at that time was a favorite preoccupation of analysts (and that is still an appropriate issue to address).

He it was, I believe, who introduced the term and practice of "confrontation." This has been taken to have the quality almost of an adversary stance of the analyst in his or her presentation to the patient. What I have found it to be is the presentation of how the facts, whether in the outer or inner world, appear to the analyst's understanding, in order to bypass the quite human tendency to denial, evasion, and self-deception. It is confrontation by information of psychologic or other relevant facts, and not of an adversary.

Some of his ideas, because of the simplicity and the aptness of his phrasing, spread like wildfire, without benefit of attribution. One such was the notion of touching, which was an emotional touching. And to be out of touch with oneself, to lack that relatedness, he termed alienation, derived from his interpretation of Karl Marx, and also used by Horney. This expression, too, became the term of a decade.

On a parallel track with the analytic experiencing, he was interested in what has variously been called body-sensing, body re-orientation, which derived from the efforts in the World War II period, from Elso Gindler in Germany, and was the interest of I. A. Schultz in Autogenic Training. This approach was introduced here by Charlotte Selver, and has had interesting ramifications in



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its application. Fromm introduced me to this years ago, and in a number of ways I have maintained an active interest in it.

Not only did he give opportunities for experience, but he himself was avidly interested in ideas and reflections presented to him, ranging far and wide. For instance, he became particularly interested in one of my patients, and my approach in therapy, and actually for some years after neither I nor that patient was any longer in therapy, he remained interested in what was transpiring in her life.

While he was involved in subjective experience and in the world of ideas and values, he was very much a person of action in the range of his interests. The action was expressed in his participation concerning social issues, in shaping his ideas into articles and books, in arranging exploration of the religious approach involved in Zen, by setting up a Summer seminar at Cuernavaca with Suzuki, that several of our colleagues participated in. He had talent for innovating institutional structures in the world of analysis, --at the New School in psychoanalytically oriented courses for lay audiences, and at Bemington College; he was a founder of the White Institute, the Mexican Psychoanalytic Society with its associated Spanish-language journal. He was one of the originators of the plan for the International Federation of Psychoanalytic Societies, and of the International Forum. It is not common knowledge that Fromm was the prime mover in the operating principle that for a long time was unique to the White Institute, namely, the complete privacy and confidentiality of the psychoanalyses of candidates.

He was courageous in expressing his views, often controversial. These ranged from his adherence to Freud's thinking, translated into his own idiom and even re-conceptualization, to his views on society. He interwove philosophy,



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literature, with psychoanalysis, and coined the term humanistic psychoanalysis. He suffered neither fools nor arrogant authority gladly. He was loved and revered by many; he was attacked and demeaned by others. I witnessed on occasion of the latter, which I feel dishonored our profession, and this outspoken man here was silent and shy.

He had a talent for intimacy, but could be alone, meditative; he said he preferred even loneliness to being with people who either were trivializing or for whom he had an antipathy. He gave that to the nature of love, which included but went beyond altruism.

He stayed loyal to friends. A particularly poignant occasion was at the services at Chestnut Lodge for Frieda, his first wife, with whom he had remained friends. He was, on that occasion, immersed in his sorrowing, and shared in the Hebrew prayers.

Though Erich lived a long and fruitful life, he had periodically been ill, with increasing intensity as the years went on. He remained devoted to his wide range of interests, and though he had retired from therapy, the quality of sharing remained. And when I spoke to him in Switzerland several years ago about my interest in psychoanalysis in the Third Reich, and about Lou Andreas Salomé in her relation to Freud, his responses were fresh and enthusiastic as ever. He had an ongoing love of productivity, of creativity, and unwavering love of life.

A few days after his death, I dreamed reassuringly that when I asked a young woman who had had some recent working relation with Fromm, she told me he was quite well and was writing another book.

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