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The Two Jacobys: Contradiction, Ironies and Challenges in New Left Critical Social Psychology after Jordan Peterson

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Russell Jacoby is one of the most influential intellectuals who came out of the New Left engagement with critical theory in America. Now teaching at UCLA, Jacoby has penned a number of books and articles on the history of both Marxism (2002) and radical psychoanalysis (Jacoby 1975; Jacoby 1986), a range of social criticism on the decline of both education and utopia (Jacoby 1994; Jacoby 2000; Jacoby 2007) and, earlier in his career, he produced dense works of Frankfurt School style social theorizing published in *Telos*, a major center for critical theory in America (for example, see Jacoby 1971; Jacoby 1975; Jacoby 1980;). Most importantly, he is the author of *The Last Intellectuals* (1987), a brilliant polemical text that almost single handedly kick-started a debate about the role of the intellectual in a North American culture dominated by the research university and the academy.

Sociologists have written a massive literature on the role and function of the intellectual (Collini 2006; Collins 2000; Gouldner 1979; Kadushin 1974; Coser 1965), but no-one succeeded as Jacoby did in taking an obscure term like the “public intellectu-

al” that had been thrown around vaguely by the literary critic Irving Howe and the sociologist C.Wright Mills in the 1950s and early 1960s, and then refining and developing its meaning in order to create a serious and spirited debate in the public sphere about the responsibility of the intellectual. There are plenty of polemics and manifestos that re-assert the need to speak truth to power (Said 1993; Chomsky 1967) but Jacoby offered an original analysis of the problem not simply an inspirational call for a solution, although he did that as well. Jacoby’s claim that American intellectual life had been damaged even impoverished since the 1960s because of the dominance of the academic field, gave rise to a massive amount of academic scholarship, travelled into the journalistic field and helped create and shape new and productive discussions about the role of the professors in modern American society.

Although intellectuals outside the United States do not tend to use the term “public intellectual,” as much or with the same meaning, the debate did spread around the world, especially in the English language, and there is a comparative literature on



the diffusion and meaning of the concept (Fleck and Hess 2010; McLaughlin and Townsley). Widely criticized for nostalgia, for missing the importance of new feminist and black scholars and ignoring both the value of traditional academic peer-review scholarship and as the transformative nature of social media in our time, academics love to hate Jacoby but few can ignore him and many left intellectuals are inspired by him. As Eleanor Townsley has pointed out, journalists love the concept of the “public intellectual” as it is a useful trope that helps them in their duty, dictated by the interests and culture of the journalistic field itself, to trash academics for being too narrow, writing badly and, it seems sometimes, for being tenured! (Townsley 2006). All in all, however, it has been a lively and mostly productive debate.

Yet little has been written on Jacoby's career and writings as a whole and scholars, critical theorists and psychoanalysts have not confronted what I will argue here is a major contradiction in his thought between the early Frankfurt School influenced Jacoby and the public intellectual Jacoby of his later years. The early Jacoby wrote and thought like German philosopher Theodor Adorno and was deeply embedded in Frankfurt School philosophy and internal debates within Marxism and psychoanalysis, writing dense philosophical articles on Lukacs, Korsch, the narcissism and the crisis of capitalism, and the politics of subjectivity and the unconscious (Jacoby 1971; Jacoby 1975; Jacoby 1980; Jacoby 1985; Jacoby 2002).

The later Jacoby ironically emerged in the more than two decades between *Social Amnesia* (1975) and *The Last Intellectuals* (1987) as a public intellectual who wrote clear, effective and well-written social criti-

cism calling for radical intellectuals to engage the general reading public in ways that look nothing like Jacoby's own 1970s writing in *Telos* and are totally different from anything his intellectual hero Adorno ever wrote. This contradiction Jacoby's work and the irony represented by the two different Jacobys can be illuminated by looking critically at the place of Erich Fromm in his social theorizing and social criticism. Jacoby ironically played a dual historical role in the reception of Erich Fromm's ideas, helping destroy Fromm's intellectual reputation in the 1970s and 1980s while also being pivotal to the current revival of interest in this once “forgotten intellectual” and critical theorist.

There is, furthermore, a connection between the larger challenges facing critical social psychology one can see when examining Jacoby's *Social Amnesia* (1975) and the current polarized debate about the work and activism of Jordan Peterson, a controversial Canadian psychologist, therapist and writer. Peterson has put the politics of therapy at the center of current intellectual and cultural war debates and Fromm and the later Jacoby have things to contribute to these debates while *Social Amnesia* (1975) exposes a weakness in the theories of the male left/critical theorists from the late 1960s and early 1970s era. Jacoby's writings on Fromm represent an extreme position in a counterproductive debate between left and right, whereby Jacoby argued that just about any attempt to deal with individual psychological issues, internal emotional dynamics or the irrational choices made by human beings in capitalist societies is encouraging conformist adaptation to an unjust society.

Peterson's alternative extreme position is that the least harm that young people can



do today is to *not* try to change society but instead deal with their own individual psychological issues using a mixture of Jungian mysticism, evolutionary psychology and existential. It was Fromm, more than any other critical social psychologist or critical theorist, who outlined a vision for dealing both with large scale societal injustice and structures *and* individual psychological mechanisms, therapeutic interventions and live choices. Yet it was Fromm who Jacoby opposed for decades despite the fact that Fromm offers critical social psychologists today the single most powerful and compelling framework for a response to Peterson's reactionary agenda.

How is Erich Fromm Connected to Jacoby's larger Intellectual Project?

Why then will looking at Jacoby's account of Erich Fromm in particular then, illuminate these larger issues in the history of Jacoby's scholarship and the broader intellectual history of the New Left and the current politics of therapy? Simply put, Erich Fromm represents precisely the kind of public intellectual so persuasively argued for in *The Last Intellectuals* (1987) even though Jacoby was central to excommunicating him from the critical theory canon in his influential *Social Amnesia: Conformist Psychology from Alder to Laing* (1975). Contrary to the account of Fromm as a conformist conservative thinker outlined in Jacoby's early writings influenced, as they were, by the polemics of Adorno and Marcuse, Fromm was actually a brilliant critical theorist who engaged the public in debate and dialogue on important social, political and cultural issues of the time from a radical socialist humanist perspective without writing in the narrow academic style critiqued so brilliantly in *The Last Intellectuals*

(1987). If you only knew of Fromm from Jacoby's writings you would have gotten his work and politics all wrong, so it is worth looking again at this intellectual history especially as Fromm's critical theory is more relevant than ever today.

Fromm was, of course, a core member of the Horkheimer circle of critical theorists in the late 1920s and early 1930s who then broke with the Frankfurt School in the late 1930s over political, personal, scholarly and financial issues, a feud internal to the left that seriously damaged his reputation as a "critical theorist" (Burston 1991; Funk 1982; McLaughlin 1999; McLaughlin 2006; Wheatland 2009; Wiggershaus 1986). Horkheimer had access to a significant endowment fund for sponsoring radical social theory and research not linked to either organized politics or traditional academic disciplines, and he had recruited Fromm for an empirical study on the social psychological aspects of working and middle-class support for Hitler done in Germany in the late 1920s and early 1930s. The study, *The Working Class in Weimar* (Fromm 1982) was not published until after Fromm's death (Brunner 1994), and was a source of conflict between Fromm and Horkheimer, as were financial issues, personality conflicts and the status of Freudian theory in critical theory (Jay 1972; McLaughlin 1999; McLaughlin 2006).

The central theoretical conflict was that Adorno viewed Fromm's revisions of Freudian libido theory as wrong-headed and politically reactionary, a position Herbert Marcuse would later champion in the 1950s. After Fromm moved away from the Horkheimer circle, he became a major part of what has been called the "seeds of the 60s," (Jamison and Eyerman 1994) as a public intellectual force for radicalism from



the publication of *Escape from Freedom* (1941), *The Sane Society* (1955) through to his *To Have or To Be* (1976). Fromm became a “forgotten intellectual” in the late 1960s and 1970s, especially in the United States and among the proponents of critical theory in the American and German academia who tended to take Adorno and Marcuse’s side in the internal feud that had torn apart the Frankfurt School (McLaughlin 1998a). Marcuse developed Adorno’s critique of Fromm in an exchange first published in *Dissent* magazine in the mid 1950s (Marcuse 1955; Marcuse 1956a; Marcuse 1956b; Fromm 1955b; Fromm 1956b). Partly as a consequence (Richert 1986), Fromm was written out of the history of the tradition, as a set of “origin myths” regarding the early years of critical theory were created by historians and social theorists in the 1970s, particularly in the United States and Germany (McLaughlin 1999).

Jacoby spent the first decades of his career deeply embedded in critical theory networks, discourse and theorizing and indeed played an important role in damaging Fromm’s reputation among critical theorists and radical intellectuals. I will tell this story of the early Jacoby and Erich Fromm here, highlighting Jacoby’s writings in the late 1960s and his classic text *Social Amnesia* (1975). We will then shift to the later “public intellectual” Jacoby and how his work in the 1980s, particularly *The Last Intellectuals* (1987) played an important (unintentional) role in helping create a Fromm revival that is occurring world-wide. And then we will end with discussion of the contradictions, ironies and challenges this history exposes, especially in light of the massive debate about the politics of therapy stimulated by Jordan Peterson in the

twitter/social media universe from fall 2016 to today. But let’s begin with the story of how Fromm was marginalized within critical theory, and the role the early Jacoby played in all this.

Fromm and Critical Theory: How Jacoby helped re-write and distort the history of the Frankfurt School

When the history of 20th century critical psychoanalysis is written Fromm will be a central figure, despite the fact that from the 1970s till the early years of the 21st century his reputation as a serious thinker was put into doubt. In the years after the publication of *Escape From Freedom* (1941) till the middle of the 1960s, Fromm was widely cited in elite intellectual magazines and newspapers, cited in major sociology, psychology and political science academic journals and he was widely influential on psychoanalytic theorists and clinicians. For those of us who have been inspired and influenced by Erich Fromm’s critical theory and psychoanalytic insights, it has always been somewhat of a mystery to explain how his reputation declined so dramatically after the early 1960s, especially in the United States and English-speaking world.

There are legitimate and real criticisms of Fromm’s social theory but in the 1940s, 1950s and early 1960s he outlined a powerful theoretical critique of the social psychological roots of fascism in *Escape of Freedom* (1941) (McLaughlin 1996), kick-started a societal-wide debate on capitalist conformism in *Man for Himself* (1947) (McLaughlin 2001b), offered a powerful utopian vision for a socialist movement in *Sane Society* (1955), played a central role in popularizing the humanist Marx in English language political and academic debates in *Marx’s Concept of Man* (1961) and was, in



May Man Prevail (1961b), the most visible and prominent critic of the American role in the nuclear arms race and Cold War and the related anti-communist hysteria that would lead to the Vietnam War. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, moreover, Fromm was the most visible radical psychoanalytic theorist in the world (Burston 1991; McLaughlin 1998b; Roazen 1996), whose work was influential in psychoanalytic institutes, social work and among the religious left globally. By the late 1960s, he was largely ignored, dismissed and even discredited among serious scholars and intellectuals (McLaughlin 1998a).

There is now a substantial literature that convincingly shows that a large part of the criticisms made against Fromm were unfair, often motivated by political, personal and intellectual agendas and not substantiated by recent developments in psychoanalysis, sociology and critical theory (Braune 2014; Burston 1991, Bronner 1994; Chancer 2017; Cortina 2014; Durkin 2014; Funk 1982; Kellner 2016; McLaughlin 1996; McLaughlin 1998b; McLaughlin 2001a; McLaughlin 2006; Richert 1886; Roazen 1996; Silver 2017; Wilde 2004) There are the obvious usual suspects responsible for attacking Fromm unfairly, spreading half-truths, distortions and out-right lies about his ideas and politics in order to discredit his social theory: orthodox Freudians, dogmatic Marxists, neo-conservative critics of his radical humanism, defenders of American foreign policy and positivist social scientists more concerned with academic legitimacy than critical ideas. There is consensus that the Fromm-Marcuse debate in *Dissent* magazine in the mid 1950s, however, was a particularly important intellectual event that played a central role in undermining Erich Fromm's intellectual

reputation, as part of the Frankfurt School feud between Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse (Richert 1986).

Fromm's relationship with the critical theorists went back to the 1920s when they worked together in the dying days of the Weimar Republic and again in the 1930s in exile in New York City (Burston 1991; Braune 2013; Friedman 2013; Funk 1982; Richert 1986; Durkin 2014). In the early years of the 1950s, it should be remembered, Fromm was famous and Marcuse, Adorno and Horkheimer were relatively obscure academic figures with little popular appeal or scholarly status. How then, did this short exchange in a prestigious but ultimately low circulation and relatively marginal American left-wing magazine in the middle of the 1950s become so influential in damaging the reputation of a major intellectual figure of Fromm's stature?

Of all the factors that helped damage Fromm's reputation in North America it was not the Fromm-Marcuse debate itself that was key but the influence of Russell Jacoby's *Social Amnesia: A Critique of Conformist Psychology from Adler to Laing* (1975) and, to a lesser extent, *The Repression of Psychoanalysis: Otto Fenichel and the Political Freudians* (1983) that was pivotal. Usually one thinks of reputational damage being done by powerful gatekeepers and famous scholars but Jacoby was, at the time, an obscure American radical historian during the late 1960s and early 1970s who had trouble landing an academic position. He had written a number of polemical essays in relatively marginal American radical journals, particularly in *Telos*, an important outlet for critical theorists but one with little status among academic historians. *Telos* had been formed in 1968 and played an instrumental role in intro-



ducing Frankfurt School style critical theory in America but it was hardly at the center of intellectual life anywhere.

A look at the articles Jacoby did for *Telos* in 1970s and 1980s helps explain why Jacoby himself was marginal in the academic history profession of the period. His essays were not based on archival research as is the focus of academic historians; he published highly theoretical and polemic essays making the case for Western Marxism, Adorno and Frankfurt School radicalism based mostly on secondary published works. Jacoby was on the intellectual margins in America at the time, and his writings were a hybrid mix of polemics, history and theorizing that left him in no man's land between disciplines and thus largely unemployable in major research universities given the way hiring was done based on disciplinary standards. Neither a political theorist nor a historian, the young scholar Jacoby was in for a rough ride professionally.

A massive uptake in interest in the Frankfurt School in the 1970s changed Jacoby's prospects, at least to some extent. The historian Martin Jay had written the most influential study on the Frankfurt School just before the publication of *Social Amnesia* (1975), and Jay's *The Dialectical Imagination* (1972) was a competent if biased work based on archival sources and interviews that both secured his own reputation as a scholar and created room for the next generation of Frankfurt School historians and critical theorists (Jay 1972). The rising tide of critical theory scholarship in the 1970s that Jay helped create partly explains the success of *Social Amnesia* (1975) along with the long march through academic institutions that 1960s era critical theorists such as Jürgen Habermas, Douglas Kellner,

Stanley Aronowitz, Stephen Bronner, Nancy Frasier, somewhat later, Cornel West engaged in and which created support and space for critical theory in various academic disciplines by the 1970s and 1980s. While the broader intellectual context of post 1960s academic "critical theory" politics created a potential audience for Jacoby in 1975 that did not exist earlier in his career this does not answer the question of how Jacoby's polemics against neo-Freudians, particularly Fromm, both jump-started his own career and significantly damaged the reception of Fromm's work, a story to which we now turn.

Marcuse's Critique of Fromm: Conformist Revisionist?

Much of the existing literature on the reception of critical theory and Fromm credits the Fromm-Marcuse debate in *Dissent* in the mid 1950s for damaging Fromm's reputation, but it is important to remember that it became influential only because of the interaction between two major intellectual currents and one polemical book: the orthodox Freudians in America, the political movement of the New Left and Russell Jacoby's *Social Amnesia* (1975). Marcuse was not a Freudian or psychoanalyst and most of Freud's followers in America were not political radicals, but in 1955-56 when the Fromm-Marcuse debate was published, the psychoanalytic movement was facing major challenges that made the exchange relevant to broader publics beyond the New York Intellectuals (Roazen 1996). Psychoanalysis had grown in status in America throughout the 1930s and then again in the immediate post war years, but by the end of the 1950s it was in decline. The rise of behaviorism and then the cognitive revolution in psychology, the attacks on Freud



launched by feminists in the early 1960s, growing hostility to psychiatry and growing medicalization alongside of the emergence of new drug regimes would soon lead to the marginalization of psychoanalysis in American academic and intellectual culture. Fighting an internal battle with various alternative versions of psychoanalysis from Adlerians, to Jungians and then the Neo-Freudians represented by Horney, Sullivan and Fromm, classical Freudians were on the intellectual defensive.

In this context then, many orthodox Freudian psychoanalysts and intellectuals influenced and shaped by classical libido theory picked up on Marcuse's critique of Fromm and popularized it in various books, articles and essays. Fromm indeed was a major critic of both orthodox Freudian theory but also the professional practice of the traditional psychoanalytic institutes (Burston 1991; McLaughlin 1998b; McLaughlin 2001). The fact that he was being attacked for his revisionism by an obscure German philosopher with a prestigious pedigree (Marcuse had studied with Heidegger) and a radical sensibility in a magazine of the left was an intellectual event that gave Freudians an opportunity to try to marginalize one of the major heretics from Freudian orthodoxy by highlighting and amplifying Marcuse's critique. And they did so (Burston 1991; Cortina 2014; McLaughlin 1998b; Roazen 1996).

The truth is, however, this debate remained largely a marginal New York Intellectual event until nearly a decade later when we saw the emergence of Marcuse as a major intellectual celebrity of the New Left, especially after the publication of *One Dimensional Man* (1964). Even then, most intellectuals and scholars were too focused on the Vietnam War and militant protests

on American campuses to care all that much about this debate. Marcuse had a certain celebrity perhaps even guru status for the New Left, to be sure, but his writings and specific critique of Fromm remained relatively obscure. Activists would read *One Dimensional Man* (1964) and Marcuse gave talks to New Left gatherings and had an influence through his students such as Angela Davis. But it was not until some among the New Left generation of radicals started to focus their energies on building academic careers that there then appeared a new set of writings on the Fromm-Marcuse debate as the Frankfurt School institutionalized itself in the academy throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

Leading the commentaries on the Fromm-Marcuse debate in a way that set the tone for the reception of Fromm among the New Left generation was Russell Jacoby's books *Social Amnesia: Conformist Psychology from Adler to Laing* (1975) and *The Repression of Psychoanalysis: Otto Fenichel and the Political Freudians* (1983). Jacoby is an excellent writer and consummate polemicist and he, more than anyone, was responsible for making Marcuse's critique of Fromm the conventional wisdom for a generation of critical theory scholars and, more surprisingly, elite intellectuals, not all of whom shared Jacoby's politics.

How Jacoby sold Marcuse's critique of Fromm to American academics and intellectuals

Jacoby's *Social Amnesia* (1975), in particular, repeated all of Marcuse's major criticisms of Fromm - that his revisions of Freudian theory purge its most radical elements, that Fromm's humanism and politics is conformist, and that despite Fromm's objections it is useful and appro-



appropriate to see his ideas as part of the Neo-Freudian tradition (for an excellent summary of the Fromm-Marcuse debate see Richert 1982). But Jacoby took the critique up a notch with style and bite. Jacoby attacked Fromm's therapeutic ideas and self-help advice, his theoretical analysis and his politics, arguing that the flaws he saw in each of these practices were linked to his Freudian revisionism.

The fact that he wrote twenty years after the original debate gave Jacoby the opportunity to amplify the critique by making the case that Fromm's book *The Art of Loving* (1956a) proves Marcuse's point. Writing before male leftists had to take seriously the feminist point that the personal was the political, Jacoby mobilized a late 1960s era sensibility to add to his political critique of Fromm's activities after the debate, and addressed Fromm's later criticisms of Marcuse as a "nihilist" that he articulated in various writings in the 1960s and 1970s. Jacoby writes that Fromm's allegedly liberal perspective, suggest that "with a little effort at home anyone can be spared a deadly and loveless world" (Jacoby 1975:37). Characterizing Fromm with his trademark sarcasm and wit, Jacoby writes, "Love and happiness are repairs for the do-it-yourselfer" in contrast to the view of critical theory where "these exceptions are confirmations of the very brutality and injustice they ideologically leave behind" (Jacoby 1975: 37). For Jacoby, restating Marcuse's critique with a new level of sharpness and vigour,

Sensitivity and warmth for the few, and coldness and brutality for the rest, is one of the stock notions and realities that feed the ongoing system. Love within a structure of hate and violence decays or survives only as resistance. The neo-Freudians

escape the social contradictions that sink into the very bowels of the individual by repressing them (Jacoby 1975: 37).

Jacoby links Fromm both to the Neo-Freudians and the broader tradition of "ego psychology," suggesting that "The 'positive appreciation' of the ego is the song and dance of social amnesia; it forgets the pain by whistling in the dark" (Jacoby 1975:42). Instead of a truly critical theory of the Freudian unconscious, Fromm "champions" "notions" that are "borrowings from everyday prattle: the self, values, norms, insecurities, and the like" (Jacoby 1975:45).

Jacoby was a master at appealing to orthodox Freudian assumptions and tropes. After the Fromm-Marcuse debate, Fromm had become more public in his critiques of Freudian orthodoxy, particularly when he published "Psychoanalysis: Scientism or Fanaticism" in the mass market magazine *Saturday Review* (1958) and the book *Sigmund Freud's Mission: An Analysis of his Personality and Influence* (1959). Orthodox Freudians always claimed that Fromm was anti-Freudian (a Freud basher in the language that would become common in the 1990s) but Daniel Burston and Paul Roazen have both documented how deeply committed Fromm was to the core insights of psychoanalysis, although there is debate about what the essential elements of the theory are (Burston 1991 Roazen 1996). There are legitimate criticisms to be made of Fromm's theories (see Chancer 2017 and Silver 2017), and scholars have made competent defenses of the libido theory that, while not the dominant consensus in the field today, that must be considered seriously (Jacobsen 2009; Zaretsky 2015).

My own view is that Fromm led the way to



the new consensus within psychoanalytic theory and practice around relational and interpersonal perspectives (McLaughlin 2001a; Cortina 2014) and these new theoretical perspectives open up more not less space for feminism, anti-racism and socialist (or at least social democratic politics) than earlier versions psychoanalysis. Moreover, from my perspective, the relative conservatism of reformist liberalism one sees within Freudian therapeutic institutes flows from the largely upper middle-class basis of the practitioners and the very nature of clinical work itself which inherently tends towards helping people fit in and adjust to the society they live in (McLaughlin 2017). This all has nothing to do with the alleged radical implications of libido theory but I will concede that it is theoretically possible Jacoby is right on this score while insisting that the evidence is not compelling. That debate can continue.

But Fromm went far beyond debating libido theory (he had done so in his various academic essays in the 1920s and 1930s, and had taken the critiques public in *Escape from Freedom* (1941), *Man for Himself* (1947) and *The Art of Loving* (1956a), to be sure) to offering a more sustained, direct and powerful critique of what he viewed as an authoritarian culture in the most orthodox Freudian institutes and a dogmatic missionary zeal that originated with Freud himself but which permeated the larger psychoanalytic movement. Fromm also made the case that Freudian theory was flawed by its 19th century bourgeois and patriarchal assumptions (Fromm 1959). Jacoby's *Social Amnesia* thus had a ready-made audience among orthodox Freudians who, from the late 1950s on, saw Fromm as a serious threat to classical psychoanalysis. It is one thing, of course, to

critique orthodox psychoanalytic theory in obscure psychoanalytic journals as most critics of Freud had done in the 1930, 1940s and early 1950s. When Fromm took these debates to magazines that potential clients might actually read, however, this was psychoanalytic civil war. Fromm paid a reputational price for it within Freudian institutes. Orthodox Freudians with a left-liberal bent, on the other hand, loved *Social Amnesia* (1975) and they reviewed it positively and cited it widely.

Jacoby's critique of Fromm was also about the politics of the 1960s. Jacoby had a bigger target to attack in the world of radical politics than Marcuse did in 1955-1956 when he debated Fromm in the pages of *Dissent*. In the middle of the 1950s, Fromm was just entering into more than a decade long period of intense political activities that included work with the American Socialist Party, global activism around both nuclear disarmament and human rights and anti-Vietnam activities and electoral campaigning in the United States. Fromm had outlined a set of political views in *The Sane Society* (1956) and had been active in the disarmament issues throughout the 1950s (the anti-nuclear weapons organization SANE bears the name of Fromm's book), and he wrote a manifesto that he wanted the American Socialist Party to adopt in the early 1960s.

Jacoby's political critique of Fromm largely ignored these details and *Social Amnesia* (1975) was effective in amplifying Marcuse's critique of what he viewed as Fromm's political reformism by drawing on some quotes and examples from his book *The Revolution of Hope* (1968). This book was written just after Fromm's work for Eugene McCarthy's presidential primary run in 1968 (Friedman 2013). This primary con-



test itself, was in the middle of the most militant protests against the Vietnam war in the United States that led to the riots at the Chicago Democratic Convention. Fromm was living in Mexico at the time while still being involved in American politics by giving speeches and money.

A little further context would be helpful. One of the things we learn from Lawrence Friedman's biography of Fromm *The Lives of Erich Fromm: The Prophet of Love* (2013) is that Fromm played the role of left wing philanthropist in the post war and Cold War periods, donating large amounts of money to various political causes particularly Amnesty International partly because of the jailing of his radical cousin by the East German state (Friedman 2013). Fromm had been living in Mexico since the early 1950s, but remained active in American politics speaking for political causes on college campuses, and he had thrown himself into the Democratic Party nomination campaign for Eugene McCarthy (Friedman 2013). As a part of that political activity, he had written the book *The Revolution of Hope* (1968) as essentially the practical and philosophical counterpart to the critique of modern society he had penned in *The Sane Society* (1955a), the book Marcuse had attacked in the Fromm-Marcuse *Dissent* debate.

Jacoby's critique of Fromm's political ideas in *Social Amnesia* was brilliantly polemical, sarcastic and played an important role in discrediting Fromm among many New Left era radicals. Fromm's *The Revolution of Hope* (1968), while written 13 year later, was not unconnected philosophically to the Fromm-Marcuse debate, because Fromm viewed Marcuse's radicalism as problematic partly because his invoking of the "Great Refusal" represented a way of refusing po-

litical engagement by not being "concerned with steps between the present and future" (quoted in Jacoby 1975:14). Fromm had articulated a set of political ideas in *The Sane Society* (1955) essentially based on some of the ideas in the anarchist, utopian socialist and communitarian socialist traditions. Fromm was deeply shaped by Marx and Marxism, but one of the major reasons why he became a "forgotten intellectual" among the left was that he was always a critic of orthodox Marxism, Stalinism and Maoism (Fromm 1961a; Fromm 1961b; McLaughlin 1998a).

Soviet Marxists were Fromm's most vicious ideological opponents, and Althusser and Fromm were bitter intellectual and political enemies (Anderson in Funk and McLaughlin 2015). Fromm did not do well with New Left activists who were attracted to Maoist politics (he had critiqued Maoism in detail in *May Man Prevail* (1961b)). Fromm made his opposition to Stalinism very clear in his best-selling book *Marx's Concept of Man* (1961a), the first widely available translation (by Tom Bottomore) of Marx's early human 1844 manuscripts in North America. The book included a long Fromm introduction that defends democratic socialist humanism against both Stalinism and capitalist ideology.

In many ways then, *The Revolution of Hope* (1968) was a political not an intellectual contribution, where Fromm was attempting to mobilize Americans active in the anti-Vietnam war protests and the New Left activism away from what he viewed as nihilist destructive politics that would lead to Weathermen inspired bombing or a withdrawal from politics in face of the right-wing reaction represented by Richard Nixon. Fromm was passionately attempting to create a democratic socialist/radical hu-



manist current in American intellectual life, fighting against conservatives, liberals and Stalinists but doing so while engaging in the Democratic party when needed. Jacoby's wing of the intellectual New Left opposed precisely this kind of "reformism" so Fromm was easy pickings for a polemical attack.

The reality is, however, that Fromm was not temperamentally oriented to practical party politics despite his willingness to put in time and money into the cause, something he himself acknowledged (Freidman 2013). And by 1968, Fromm was in his late 60s and had exhausted himself with effort, and was on the verge of a heart attack that would force his withdrawal from these political activities, and his eventual retirement to Switzerland for the decade of his 70s (Friedman 2013). The political options for a democratic socialist in America in the late 1960s were grim, with Martin Luther King dead, and the student movement in a period of militant opposition to the Democratic Party and their war in Vietnam, and with Richard Nixon in the wings speaking for the "silent majority" and their backlash to the civil rights, student, anti-war and feminist movements. Fromm was on the verge of entering into a period of political despair, and the practical ideas he outlined in *The Revolution of Hope* (1968) were simply not very politically compelling, certainly to young radicals who had seen the American state repress the Black Panthers and the anti-war movement in a context where the Democratic Party was clearly bankrupt and Nixon and then California Governor Ronald Reagan on the rise.

Jacoby tore apart Fromm's political ideas in *Social Amnesia* (1975) and the reputational consequences for Fromm in Frankfurt School circles were immense. The first

chapter of *Social Amnesia* (1975) is entitled "Social Amnesia and the New Ideologues," and he made Marcuse's critique of Fromm more powerful by linking him to broader intellectual currents than the neo-Freudians and by using Fromm's practical suggestions for social change against him. Jacoby quoted from *The Revolution of Hope* (1968) where Fromm had written "if people would truly accept the Ten Commandments or the Buddhist Eightfold Path as the effective principle to guide their lives, a dramatic change in our whole culture would take place" (cited in Jacoby 1975: 14). Jacoby mocks Fromm with a tone common in the late 1960s and 1970s among radicals, writing "If this dramatic change" seems unlikely or impractical Fromm has some other ideas on how to reach the future more quickly and efficiently (Jacoby 1975: 14). And then Jacoby discusses the proposal floated in *The Revolution of Hope* (1968) for the formation of a National Council called the "Voice of the American Conscience" of 50 or so Americans of unquestioned integrity who would deliberate and issue statements on major social issues that would gain media attention and shape debates.

Fromm had argued in *The Sane Society* (1955) that the localism syndicalist and communitarian socialist tradition should be drawn upon to create local discussion groups to help move the public away from the propaganda promoted by the corporate dominated media and the self-interest of professional politicians and political parties. In *The Revolution of Hope* (1968) Fromm developed these earlier ideas, suggesting the creation of local clubs to debate social issues, feeding into the National Council. Jacoby was not wrong to suggest these ideas were not well developed, but



he was scathing in his critique of Fromm's suggestion that schemes of this nature could play a role in changing society, arguing that Fromm's critique of Marcuse for not articulating concrete steps for social change were invalidated by his suggestion that this scheme could "alter the nature of society" (Jacoby 1975:14). For Jacoby, "The advocate of immediate practice, impatient with critical theory, turns into the homespun philosopher promoting the miracle effects of a little elbow grease" (Jacoby 1975:14).

Moving from critique to mockery, Jacoby then went on to talk about the last page of the book, where there was a tear-out to be sent in with proposed candidates for the National Council, where Fromm emphasized that the lack of a stamp was a conscious choice since "even the first small step requires initiative at least to address the envelope yourself and spend the money for a stamp" (cited in Jacoby 1975:15). Returning to Fromm's critique of Marcuse in the *Dissent* exchange, Jacoby writes that "Social change for the cost of a stamp is the wisdom of the humanist denouncing as nihilism the theory exposing the post-card mentality (Jacoby 1975:15)" and "the revolution of hope is a Walt Disney production (Jacoby 1975:15). Jacoby then circles back to Marcuse's defense of "human nihilism" in the Fromm-Marcuse debate, approvingly quoting Marcuse that "Nihilism as the indictment of inhuman conditions may be the truly humanist attitude" (Jacoby 1975:15).

This is great polemical writing but there are other ways of thinking about the issues. With the historical perspective we have now, sitting in Trump's America, a more generous critical reading of this period of Fromm's work seems more compelling.

There have been many progressive changes since the 1960s and 1970s but attempts to transform capitalist modernity in systematical radical ways are extremely difficult and the forces of reaction are always in the wings. Fromm, like many intellectuals, especially if they get famous, did not really understand how political campaigns and left-wing organizations work. Fromm was wealthy from his many best-selling books, many speaking engagements, the money he earned from therapeutic practice and a significant pay-off he had received from the Frankfurt School back in the 1930s. He gave money to many political and social justice causes, and was particularly loyal to Amnesty International, but in the late 1960s he became particularly involved in Eugene McCarthy's primary campaign, as we discussed above. Fromm's suggestions came to nothing but was he so wrong, especially in light of social media and Cable TV-driven fake news, that we must find ways to educate and debate ideas face-to-face? Fromm's ideas did not succeed in practice but one could just as easily critique Adorno or Jacoby's own relative inactivity in practical politics with the same kind of mockery. Adorno and the early Jacoby told us in sophisticated philosophical language we have been defeated and are collectively screwed. They were ultimately, one could argue, just famous professors/intellectuals doing very little about our practical political challenges. Fromm, on the other hand, failed in many practical matters but succeeded in others and certainly cannot be accused of defeatism.

It is true, and here Jacoby was right, that Fromm was politically naïve. Friedman's archival research shows how Fromm exaggerated the influence the money he gave and the fame he brought to campaign had



on McCarthy. Lawrence Friedman convincingly shows that Fromm believed he was having intellectual and policy influence on McCarthy when it seems far more likely that the candidate liked Fromm's books but was more interested in his campaign donations and any publicity an endorsement from a famous leftist might have brought him. Friedman offers compelling evidence to suggest that McCarthy's interest in long letters he would receive from Fromm was less than central to his political activities in this period (Friedman 2013). Friedman also documents that Jacoby instincts were right; very few people returned the form.

This is not the first time Fromm's isolation from political organizations would damage the effectiveness of his engagement. An earlier example of this is important for understanding why the Fromm-Marcuse debate was published in the first place. The magazine *Dissent* had been founded in the early 1950s by Irving Howe and Lewis Coser, two anti-Stalinist democratic socialist intellectuals who wanted to create an intellectual space that was critical of the liberal center in the United States while not following or promoting ultra-leftism or pro-Soviet communism. Fromm was on the original masthead for *Dissent*, and while Howe and Coser would later become famous in their own right as a literary critic and sociologist respectively, in the 1950s Fromm provided much needed visibility and gave money to a marginal and precarious undertaking.

Neither Howe nor Coser much liked Fromm even in these early years of the magazine, however, viewing him as arrogant and politically naïve, and they would later break with him in the early 1960s in an embarrassing little incident where Fromm gave a

talk to the *Dissent* circle on a manifesto for the socialist movement he wanted the American Socialist Party to adopt (Howe 1984). Both Howe and Coser thought Fromm's socialist program was a reasonable enough piece of writing, but it did not represent the kind of strategic thinking needed for a socialist movement that was attempting to unite workers, intellectuals and social movements into a mass movement for change. They were certainly right as a practical matter, as Fromm's proposed platform was a visionary document that was far closer to the utopian politics the New Left generation would later argue for in the late 1960s and 1970s. It would not have found support among many of the most union activists and American Socialist Party members of this period. Everyone agreed, however, that it would work as a recruiting document, and it was printed up and distributed. One can be critical of Howe's political vision and his later relationship to the young sixties radicals in Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) as most New Left intellectuals were (Gitlin 1987). One can't also, however, credibly claim that Fromm was a conservative social democrat uninterested in utopian thinking when this incident illustrates the exact opposite. Howe disliked Fromm precisely because his ideas were too utopian not too conservative.

This Socialist Party faction fight was ironically connected to the Fromm-Marcuse debate because Fromm's relationship with Howe and Coser had certainly already been damaged in the mid 1950s when they themselves published Marcuse's broadside attack on one of their own editorial committee members in *Dissent*. Neither Coser nor Howe were supporters of Marcuse's politics especially later in the 1960s but



they respected him more as an intellectual than they respected Fromm and knew Marcuse professionally from Brandeis University in Boston where they all taught for periods of time. As a man of his generation, moreover, Howe viewed Fromm's psychological perspective as far too soft. One suspects that Coser and especially Howe enjoyed watching Marcuse attack Fromm so visibly in *Dissent* and the controversy did not hurt their magazine's circulation. Fromm certainly was naive about organized left politics, and this was as true in the late 1960s as it was throughout the 1950s and early 1960s.

Jacoby thus had an easy target to hit in his polemics, and Fromm's conflict with the *Dissent* network meant he did not have many defenders even on the democratic left. Fromm would certainly not have defenders on the neo-conservative right or among orthodox and Althusserian Marxists, as Kevin Anderson has carefully documented (Anderson 2015). Partly because of these complex political and interpersonal dynamics, American intellectual generally accepted the critiques of Fromm articulated by all his various critics including Jacoby, with the exception of liberal sociologist David Riesman who was close personal friends (McLaughlin 2001b).

Jacoby's success in damaging Fromm's reputation among critical theorists can also be explained by the fact that Fromm's counter-attacks on Marcuse in the years after the 1955-1956 debate were so angry, personal and excessive that he had left himself vulnerable to Jacoby's acerbic polemics. Lawrence Friedman suggests that Fromm perceived that he had lost the exchange in the court of intellectual opinion (Friedman 2013). It is certainly the case that Fromm responded with anger in his

writings throughout the 1960s and 1970s, often taking polemical shots at Marcuse. Jacoby quotes Fromm's attack on Marcuse from *The Revolution of Hope* (1968) where he psychoanalyses his former colleague as "an alienated intellectual who presents his personal despair as a theory of radicalism" (Jacoby 1975:14). There is also an extended critique of Marcuse in Fromm's *The Crisis of Psychoanalysis* (1970) that Jacoby references and negative remarks in *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (1973). These polemics and jabs made Fromm look bad, an opening that *Social Amnesia* (1975) exploited.

The level of hostility Fromm had for Marcuse can be seen most clearly in an essay "The Alleged Radicalism of Herbert Marcuse" that Fromm wrote for an appendix to *The Crisis of Psychoanalysis* (1970) but which did not appear in print till after his death in *The Revision of Psychoanalysis* (1992). Fromm was aware of the political problems potentially caused by attacking Marcuse too sharply while Marcuse was being attacked by the far-right in Nixon's America so he refrained from publishing his more sustained critiques. The tone of Fromm's critique of Marcuse that he decided not to publish suggested that Fromm viewed Marcuse as "a radical who practices the Great Refusal" which involves "a childish sybaritic and egotistical experience" representing "cynicism masquerading as a super-radical theory" (Fromm 1992:129). This shows us how deeply Marcuse had gotten under Fromm's skin. Fromm had legitimate and I think quite compelling answers to the specifics of Marcuse's argument both about Freud and politics. But when Fromm went beyond critiques of ideas to offer psychoanalytic interpretations of Marcuse's personality at the time



when he had become famous as a militant representative of the New Left, Fromm left himself vulnerable to Jacoby's brilliant polemics that suggested that Fromm had collapsed the political into the therapeutic. Fromm had done so, on occasion, therefore Jacoby's criticism resonated with people even though Marcuse had been deeply unfair in his original polemics and Jacoby repeated these misrepresentations. Marcuse came to take some of the same positions on a number of issues that he had argued against in the debate, something Fromm was insistent on pointing out on a number of occasions but it did not matter at that point (Fromm 1992).

Jacoby's historical imagination and the quality of his writing, moreover, allowed him to contextualize Marcuse's critique of Fromm in the broader history of the Freudian movement, the topic of his next major book *The Repression of Psychoanalysis: Otto Fenichel and the Political Freudians* (1983). *The Repression of Psychoanalysis* was published not by the alternative Boston press Beacon as was *Social Amnesia* but by Basic books, a major New York based commercial press. Jacoby was on the path towards writing about public intellectuals as he did in the book that would bring him academic fame, *The Last Intellectuals* (1987) also published by Basic. And the path he took of deepening Marcuse's critique of neo-Freudianism led him to write the history of the left wing Freudians, starting with Otto Fenichel, a Viennese émigré Marxist psychoanalyst who, along with Wilhelm Reich, had pioneered just the kind of Marxist-Freudian synthesis based on libido theory that Marcuse argued was so important for the radical project. Marcuse's critique of Freudian orthodoxy had originated with Adorno in the 1930s when

Fromm was centrally involved with the Horkheimer circle, but neither Marcuse nor Adorno had extensive clinical knowledge of Freudian practice so Fromm's response to Marcuse on this point had a power and resonance. But Jacoby succeeded in changing the subject.

Jacoby played such an important role in diffusing the Marcuse critique of Fromm and helping him become a "forgotten intellectual," at least in the English-speaking world (McLaughlin 1998a) also partly because Jacoby did the historical digging that identified other Marxist Freudians who opposed Fromm's revision of libido theory. *The Repression of Psychoanalysis* (1986), Jacoby's most archival based book on the life and work of the Austrian Otto Fenichel highlighted a psychoanalyst who had known both Freud and Fromm and who had died young in exile in the United States, as did Reich. Intellectual movements love heroes who die young (Rodden 1989). And Jacoby succeeded in taking the Marcuse critique of Fromm out of the personal animosity that so clearly motivated both of them, particularly Fromm, and making the issue a larger political question about the radical Freudian tradition, something that had appeal for many American radicals in the 1970s and early 1980s. Jacoby gave this generation of critical theorists a compelling defense of two Marxist Freudian heroes, Reich and Fenichel in the years of the 1960s and 1970s sexual revolution and Fromm became the foil as an alleged cultural conservative in ways that were devastating to his reputation. Looking back at the intellectual and political limitations of Fenichel and Reich today would make it unlikely they would gain a mass following among contemporary young leftists, but Jacoby's New Left era work of historical re-



construction struck gold in in that period of American cultural history.

The broader cultural reception of psychoanalysis in America at the time was a key dynamic operating in the reception of the Jacoby version of the Fromm-Marcuse debate and the Fenichel-Reich alternative. Marcuse's original critique had found an audience outside of radical circles, because orthodox Freudians in the 1950s in America hated Fromm and the neo-Freudians because they were looking for allies for their own rather arcane internal battles for control of psychoanalytic institutes and training. Both Horney and Fromm had written extensively, very publically and critically about both orthodox Freudian theory and the practices of the psychoanalytic establishment. Proponents of Freudian ideas in America were pleased to see such an attack on Fromm in a high-status journal of the New York democratic left (McLaughlin 1998b).

The great liberal literary critic Lionel Trilling at Columbia University was a relatively orthodox Freudian, as was, in a different way, Erik Erikson, teaching at Harvard. And both Trilling and Erikson contributed to the delegitimization of Fromm's ideas. And when feminists started to attack Freud in the early 1960s, starting with Betty Freidan's *The Feminist Mystique* (1964), Freud's defenders in America were happy to try to further marginalize Fromm because he had been one of the first to publically critique Freud's patriarchal thinking (Burston 1991; Roazen 1996). There is a larger story to be told of why Fromm's influence on the feminist left and psychoanalytic feminist thinkers like Jessica Benjamin (Benjamin 2013) was not greater, but it ultimately had to do with a combination of Fromm's own limitations on gender analysis (Chancer 2017)

and the successful attempts to marginalize his ideas on the left coming from the Frankfurt School in the 1960s and 1970s and then Lacanians later on.

It is not an accident indeed, that the historian, public intellectual, orthodox Freudian and militant anti-feminist Christopher Lasch picked up the orthodox Freudian critique of Fromm in his *The Culture of Narcissism* (1979) and he had done the preface for Jacoby's *Social Amnesia* (1975), helping sponsor Jacoby into the intellectual elite and world of commercial press publishing. It required some fancy footwork to hide the conservative political views of many of the critics of Fromm in making the case for Marcuse's critique of neo-Freudianism, but Jacoby pulled it off brilliantly. Lasch, of course, was a radical Marxist historian in the 1960s (Lasch 1962; Lasch 1965; Lasch 1969), and by the 1970s and 1980s, he had become the author of a number of brilliant historical/polemical books such as *Haven in a Heartless World*; *The Family Besieged* (1977), *The Culture of Narcissism* (1979) and *The Minimal Self* (1984). Before his premature death in his early 60s in 1994, Lasch had become the most prominent thinker on the independent populist cultural conservative right. Not easy to categorize, Lasch was a critic of liberal communitarianism, socialism, feminism and far right Republicanism and Cold War liberalism on the basis of his unusual combination of commitments to class equality and local communities, relatively traditional family values, opposition to consumer, celebrity and market driven culture, proponent of democratic politics and orthodox Freudian theory (Lasch 1991; Lasch 1995). Lasch was Jacoby's teacher at Rochester University and one can't fully understand Jacoby's role in American intellectual life



without a discussion of their complex intellectual relationship, particularly around the question of Freud, Fromm and the Frankfurt School.

Studying with Lasch as a PhD supervisor was practically career suicide for the average young scholar, in retrospect, but in Jacoby's case this was an intellectual match made in heaven. While Lasch did do traditional intellectual history early in his career, by the time Jacoby entered graduate school Lasch had become what we now call (due to Jacoby, of course!) a public intellectual, writing well-written books of social criticism that were informed by his historical sensibility and knowledge but were actually theoretically informed interventions into the post 1960s culture wars published in commercial presses. Lasch would not have been able to vouch for the research capacities of a young historian in the field by this time, given his own second career as a provocative social critic. Moreover, as the New Left generation moved its way through the academic profession, Lasch was decidedly out of step with the climate of the times, as a strong critic of modern feminism, capitalist culture and the ideas produced in research universities.

Lasch was, however, a brilliant writer and polemist, and his criticisms of the modern culture of narcissism and the moral depravity of globalist and Ivy League elites were powerful, especially in light of the events of the past couple of decades and the rise of both social media and Donald Trump. Lasch may not have been able to help get Jacoby a job, but they agreed that Fromm's revision of Freud was a moral and political disaster, even though Lasch preferred the classics scholar writer and 1960s era counter-culture hero Norman O. Brown to New Leftist Herbert Marcuse. It is hard to imag-

ine that Jacoby today would defend Lasch's hostility to contemporary feminist thought even if some of Lasch's polemics scored points and could be re-integrated into a broader more balanced statement on contemporary cultural politics.

But it is clear that Jacoby had a role model for writing public intellectual books that took theory and cultural politics seriously. Lasch helped sponsor Jacoby into the American intellectual elite (Kadushin 1974), something he could do even while not having real influence in academic history. And together Lasch and Jacoby hammered away at the theme that Fromm was simplistic thinker. Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987) had argued that Fromm was responsible for the radical excesses of the 1960s (Bloom 1987) while Jacoby had earlier (Jacoby 1975) argued that Fromm did not go far enough in his radicalism. Somehow the conservative attacks on Fromm from the 1940s to Bloom got forgotten. Largely because of the Fromm-Marcuse debate, and with Jacoby's help and Lasch's seal of approval, Fromm became widely known in America as a conformist, simplistic, conservative and shallow thinker as he was written out of the "origin myths" of the Frankfurt School (McLaughlin 1999).

The Irony of the Public Intellectual Jacoby and the Challenge Represented by Jordan Peterson

There is a remarkable irony here, in that Jacoby helped ruin the reputation of Fromm, critical theory's great public intellectual, before going on to gain fame arguing against just the kind of arcane obscure writing that was exemplified by Adorno and Jacoby's own first articles and books. A re-read of Jacoby's early writings in the



critical theory journal *Telos* help us understand why he had difficulty getting an academic job in the early years of his career; the essays could be read as being pompous, are narrowly framed around obscure philosophical questions, can be difficult to make sense of and marred by ultra-radical political polemics that do not read well today in Trump's America. Jacoby's two books in the seventies on Freudian "radicalism" had allowed him to develop some academic voice and stature and made his reputation, but his first book in the early 1980s published now by Cambridge University Press entitled *Dialectic of Defeat: Contours of Western Marxism* remains more or less irrelevant as both scholarship and politics as was his earlier writing.

It is not clear that Jacoby's writings from this period had any political influence on the politics of American society, they made only a small contribution to the academic history of radicalism and his critical theorizing has not aged well. It was only after Jacoby wrote *The Last Intellectuals* (1987) a brilliant polemical critique of the academic form of writing that the American research university produced that his career took off, helping him to eventually secure a position at UCLA in 2009, partly as the scholar who popularized the concept of the "public intellectual." Jacoby is not wrong that there are serious problems with the way current academic standards and disciplinary practices marginalize creative thinking and quality teaching in what he calls the Velvet Prisons of the modern university (In an excellent 2013 documentary on Jacoby's career and work). Fromm would have agreed as a critical utopian thinker whose work influenced Paulo Freire, challenged the orthodoxy of academic scholarship, and embodied just the kind of public intel-

lectual orientation and vision that Jacoby argued for and defended in *The Last Intellectuals* (1987).

The unfairness to Fromm in Jacoby's earlier works caused damage even beyond Fromm's reputation because of his dual suggestion that theoretical adherence to a particular Freudian theory had inherent political implications and his excessively sharp division between politics and therapy. The truth is, one can be a political radical, conventional liberal or cultural conservative and believe in libido theory. The same can be said for objection relations, interpersonal, Kleinian or even Lacanian theorists; you can be grounded in these theoretical frameworks and hold a variety of political positions. Theoretical and clinical issues need to be debated out on their own terms, leaving broader political issues to be discussed on political terms. Jacoby's extreme insistence on the link between theory and politics here was reflecting and channeling the sectarian New Left view of the late 1960s and 1970s.

It is true, of course, that there is a real danger to be avoided of turning political issues and a structural analysis of society's social problems into self-help, therapeutic or excessively individualistic questions. One can argue whether Fromm found the right balance, and reasonable people can agree to disagree. But the idea that trying to help individual human beings deal with their personal pain, interpersonal relationships and moral dilemmas through clinical practice without adherence to Freud's libido theory is somehow a neo-liberal or even a conservative political act is absurd.

It is precisely on the basis of this point that the recent rise of Canadian psychologist Jordan Peterson exploits a weakness in the



culture of the contemporary left that Jacoby played a role in creating. The details of the Peterson case are too complex to be outlined and debated here, and for those of us on the democratic left, it is clear that he is a serious political adversary who has mobilized hundreds of thousands perhaps even millions of young people on the basis of his anti-political correctness and anti-left YouTube videos, his unique combination of Jungian mysticism and Western positivist social psychology and his best-selling self-help book *Twelve Rules for Living* (2017). The key issue for our purposes here is that while Peterson's position that young people should clean their rooms and deal with their own personal problems as opposed to working to change the world is deeply reactionary, his appeal was partly made possible by the polarized position on these issues that Jacoby's critique of Fromm helped create and institutionalize.

At the very center of Jacoby's critique of Fromm in *Social Amnesia* (1975) was a deeply problematic assertion that one must choose between trying to change the world by addressing historical and structural sources of injustice OR look inside for psychoanalytic insights into one's unconscious patterns of self-defeating behaviors and irrational emotions. The best answer to Jordan Peterson's "clean your room" polemic is Fromm's position that people should be aware of both the political, historical and structural barriers to productive and decent lives as well as the psychological mechanisms that can best be dealt with through therapy, self-help and the efforts of friends, families and professionals. It was precisely Fromm's insistence that Marcuse, Adorno and the Marxists of his generation were not dealing seriously with the clinical basis and implications of Freud's

thought that helps explain why Fromm then, like Peterson today, had readers and followers in the millions.

The issue of libido theory and the specific insights of various thinkers including Fromm and Peterson, and feminist psychoanalytic thinkers like Nancy Chodorow, Lynn Chancer and Catherine Silver are topics for a much longer and broader discussion, ideal for the pages of *Free Association* (Chodorow 1987; Chancer 2017; Silver 2017). There is much to debate about both Fromm's politics and his therapy as we envision ways forward (Cortina 2014; Durkin 2014; Funk 2009; Wilde 2004). A left that successfully responds to the political threat from the right and center represented by Peterson will have to dig deep into the history and theory of therapy and emotions in order to provide better answers and ways forward than Fromm was able to provide in the 1930s through to 1980 (Cortina 2014). Fromm, by the way, understood the dangers of promoting too much self-help as opposed to political engagement and took out sections of the widely influential *To Have or To Be* (1976), a founding document of Green politics, precisely because he worried about reinforcing cultural narcissism (see Fromm's *The Art of Being* 1989 for the text he took out the book at the last minute). But it is clear that dismissing all therapeutic or practical attempts to bring relief and psychological guidance to people who suffer in our societies today unless the therapist-theorists adhere to Jacoby's idiosyncratic combination of orthodox Frankfurt School and Freudian orthodoxy is a recipe for a political marginalization. This will leave a vacuum that will most certainly be filled by the Jordan Petersons of the world.

Peterson must be responded to politically



because his popularity is helping build the political right. Peterson supports traditional sex roles and patriarchal cultural norms, more or less, as did Christopher Lasch, and is also pro-capitalist and deeply hostile to the left. To the extent that young radicals today reproduce Jacoby's style of sarcastically dismissing attempts to offer advice for living and psychological insights as he did with Fromm in the 1970s, then this contemporary left will fail in understanding and responding to the Peterson challenge. Jacoby was blind to the power of Fromm's ability to mobilize, inspire and educate hundreds of thousands even millions of people, a style of public intellectual work we need to reproduce and build on today in order to fight the cultural right and the forces of reaction.

When I was a young radical and graduate student in the 1980s, I used to be active in the Democratic Socialists of America, a political formation that the young Jacoby would have dismissed, but an organization that has grown massively today in the wake of the Bernie Sanders movement. In the course of recruiting for the organization after a talk by Barbara Ehrenreich in Dayton Ohio in the late 1980s, I met an older woman activist interested in our work who causally asked me what my own research was. I am writing about Erich Fromm, telling her about the research that would eventually lead to my PhD in sociology and an academic career home here in Canada. "Erich Fromm?" the woman exclaimed, "I left my husband after reading *The Art of Loving*, a book that taught me that I did not have to take that crap anymore!" Of course, helping people make better personal choices that allow them to avoid destructive relationships, toxic people and self-defeating behaviors is not a

substitute for a radical political agenda and program for change. But Peterson has succeeded on a mass scale at linking personal advice and psychological insight to a broader political agenda on the right, just as Fromm did from the left in the 1940s through the 1970s. We need to return to this kind of work as part of what the left does, an obvious example of how the personal is political, as feminists once taught us.

This is not easy, and Fromm's work had many limitations, but *Social Amnesia* (1975) too easily dismissed the challenge we face with radical critique from on high, something that simply is not good enough. There is a brief tentative positive comment by Jacoby on Fromm in the excellent documentary on Jacoby's life and work, but he has not revisited his assessment of Fromm in a sustained way (2013). This an unfortunate fact and oversight given the rethinking of Fromm's critical theory that has been going on among critical theorists around the world who are trying to bridge the divide between Fromm, Adorno and Marcuse that has so weakened the critical theory project (Bronner 1992; Durkin forthcoming 2019; Kellner 2016)

Jacoby is now, of course, not a young critical theorist fighting the battles of Freudian and Frankfurt School orthodoxy as he did in *Social Amnesia* (1975) but is a well-regarded, if grumpy, social critic and writer. He has made extremely useful contributions to the culture war debates in the United States in *The End of Utopia: Politics and Culture in an Age of Apathy* (Jacoby 2000), *Dogmatic Wisdom: How the Cultural Wars Divert Education and Distract America* (1994), *Picture Imperfect: Utopian Thought for an Anti-Utopian Age* (2005) and *Bloodlust: On the Roots of Violence*



from *Cain and Abel to the Present* (2011), books that read in a style far closer to Fromm than to Adorno. *The Last Intellectuals* (1987) was right to critique the ways in which creative and serious intellectuals are marginalized in a research university that prioritizes careerism and technocratic scholarship more than it rewards the ideas that are certainly Jacoby's own strength. Jacoby managed to build a career despite the rewards structures of the contemporary research university and thus can help inspire new generations of intellectual radicals.

If you are a young radical intellectual interested in deflating the pomposity of tenured Marxists there is no-one who writes polemical book reviews that challenge academic posturing better than Russell Jacoby, as can be seen in his hysterically funny take-down, ironically again published in *Dissent* magazine, of Marxist sociologist Erick Olin Wright's book *Real Utopias* in Jacoby, Russell. "Real Men Find Real Utopias" (Jacoby 2011). Wright is a highly respected sociologist but Jacoby convincingly makes the case that the abstract and technical nature of his projects and writings represent exactly the kind of politically irrelevant academic left that Jacoby has so brilliantly critiqued in *The Last Intellectuals* (1987).

Moreover, when one of Wright's fellow elite sociologists tried to defend him from Jacoby's barbs by emphasizing that he had been a President of the American Sociological Association who was widely respected in the field, Jacoby powerfully showed how absurd it is to try to make political points by highlighting expert credentials and professional stature. Young radicals who have internalized the cultural rules of hyper-professionalized academic culture are

sometimes making this same mistake today, when they try to defeat Peterson politically by challenging his scholarly expertise, an elitist strategy that makes Peterson more not less powerful and influential among young skeptical of mainstream media and academic experts. Jacoby is right that too many radical intellectuals today are academics first, and this helps explain Peterson's success in the polarized cultural wars on questions of "political correctness." We have to answer political challenges with political arguments made in clear language with evidence and reason, one of the great lessons of the later Jacoby.

Jacoby has found his place in the American academic and intellectual field and his almost single-handed creation of the debate about the public intellectual in America was an enormous intellectual and political contribution that ironically played a significant role in helping revive Fromm's reputation. Scholars and intellectuals today now have a category for understanding Fromm's work that was not available in the 1960s when he was seen as too popular to be a major academic figure and too theoretical to be a political intellectual influential on the social movements of the 1960s (McLaughlin 1998a). Jacoby rose in stature in the late 1980s with his argument for clear writing and Fromm's reputation is being revived as I write. This is being helped along by the current cultural climate that began in the late 1980s and early 1990s when many journalists, scholars and intellectuals were tiring of just the kind of arcane jargon and academic insularity that Jacoby was rooted in during the first two decades of his career, as one of Adorno's major supporters in the United States. It was Jacoby more than anyone else who provided the language and analysis that



helped mobilize internal criticisms of the modern research university, an important challenge for young radicals of this generation who wish to change the world not simply build academic careers.

The story is not over, indeed, because there is now a Fromm revival happening, with books being published on Fromm (Durkin 2013; Friedman 2013; Funk and McLaughlin 2015) and serious attempts to restore his reputation within psychoanalysis (Cortina 2014; Frie 2003; Silver 2017), sociology (Durkin 2014; Chancer 2017; Langman and Lundskow 2016), political theory (Wilde 2013), social work, and education. Moreover, intellectuals who were trying to understand what Fromm was about and what he was doing, knowing that he was not simply being an academic social scientist, a clinician exclusively focused on healing or political activist linked to social movements, now have a category that helps us understand Fromm's efforts to connect these levels of analysis and activity. Of course, Fromm was a scholar and a psychoanalyst but in the end, his great contribution to ideas and politics was as a public intellectual, who operated both within and between the academic, clinical and political fields.

Intellectual history, like human history itself, is full of surprises and it is worth keeping track of and building on the positive and hopeful ones. Jacoby was terribly wrong on Fromm, but he helped keep alive the critical theory tradition in America and created a new appreciation for the importance of the public intellectual, a combination of contributions that can only benefit the revival of Erich Fromm's vitally important insights and legacy. Moreover, it is the brilliance and clear writing of the later Jacoby that young scholars need to

model themselves on, as we avoid the sectarianism and smugness that all too many young radicals are exhibiting in social media as they attempt to dismiss and discredit Jordan Peterson with unfair and intellectually dishonest rhetoric. One can't marginalize Peterson with bogus claims to disciplinary orthodoxies, inflated expert credentials and the impenetrable prose that Jacoby lampooned so brilliantly in *The Last Intellectuals* (1987). Peterson is promoting reactionary politics but his criticisms of the research university and corporate liberalism's over reliance on identity politics based laws and organizational authoritarianism has resonance among millions of young people concerned with their own declining economic prospects and psychological sense of security.

Fromm's radical humanist psychoanalytic perspective provides an essential foundation for the work we must do to politically marginalize Peterson's even though Fromm's theory requires more revision not the kind of theoretical return to Freudian purity Jacoby argued for. Psychoanalyst Mauricio Cortina compellingly argues that Fromm helped kept alive a *revised* view of Freud that highlighted the centrality importance of love and relatedness as primary human motivations (Cortina 2014). Cortina is certainly right that talking about how to build love, relatedness and compassion in our lives and society is the opposite of conformism and is in fact among the most radical things we can do in today's neo-liberal capitalist market-place alongside of political projects for organizing for change (Cortina 2014).

It would be a mistake, however, to think that Peterson's appeal is simply to authoritarianism and reactionary culture politics although that is there as well as he taps in-



to the larger context of Trump's authoritarian, cruel and mercilessly world-view that uses scapegoats and hate to divide us. Part of the appeal of Petersons is his ability to speak to young people with authenticity and authority along with existentialist and depth psychology-inspired insight; we need to do more of this from the left. The answer then, and the only serious answer for radical intellectuals concerned with transforming the world, is to get out of our academic ghettos and write books, essays and articles that make the case for our politics to the public with clear prose and principled politics as Erich Fromm and the later Russell Jacoby did with such skill and commitment.

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