

What lies beyond psychoanalysis? Fromm and Marcuse after the *Dissent* debate

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What historians inherit from the past are the scattered remnants of what were once broader, dynamic movements in society. The “source”, whatever its nature, confronts us with the task of reconstructing a changing social and political landscape from traces frozen in matter and memory. With the help of texts and images, we can tentatively infer what someone’s thoughts, actions, feelings were – and so it is for us here. This essay is an attempt to elucidate the turbulent personal and political relationship between two major social theorists – Erich Fromm and Herbert Marcuse – from 1955 onwards. It follows months of archival research conducted at the Erich Fromm Institute in Tübingen, and the Herbert Marcuse *Nachlass*, at the University of Frankfurt, both in Germany. The documents curated there enable us to discern how these two thinkers reacted to the political events and trends of their times, and to each other’s reactions to them as well. This is not merely an antiquarian exercise, because the changes that Fromm and Marcuse observed from the late sixties onwards still shape our own society. Insights into the political communities of the past may thus be highly relevant to understanding events in our own time.

Between 1955 and 1956, Erich Fromm and Herbert Marcuse conducted a lively debate in a series of four articles published in a fledgling socialist journal called *Dissent*, which was edited by Irving Howe and Lewis Coser. Howe and Coser had previously commissioned Fromm to write a short paper on “The psychology of normalcy”, which appeared in the first edition of the journal, in 1954. As of 1963, Fromm was still among the contributing editors of *Dissent*, and his correspondence indicates that he remained in touch with Howe on matters concerning democratic socialists in the US (cf. Howe to Fromm, March 1st, 1963). Their shared interest in Jewish tradition may also have provided some common ground. Like Howe and Coser, however, Marcuse taught at Brandeis, which may have given him opportunity and incentives for maintaining more frequent contact with them.

In any case, both Fromm’s 1954 piece and Marcuse’s 1955 article – which marked the opening round of the debate – were published in similar circumstances: “The psychology of normalcy” was an extract from Fromm’s forthcoming book *The sane society*, which would be published the following year. Similarly, Marcuse’s paper

on “The social implications of Freudian ‘revisionism’” would soon become, with some important modifications, the “Appendix” for *Eros and civilization*. But whereas Fromm’s 1954 piece was a withering assessment of consumerism and conformity in post-War America, Marcuse’s essay delivered a scathing critique of neo-Freudian and interpersonal psychoanalysis, including the work of Clara Thompson, Karen Horney, Harry Stack Sullivan, Patrick Mullahy, and Erich Fromm. In fairness to Marcuse, Fromm had certainly cultivated contacts with these people in the recent past. But Fromm felt profoundly misrepresented by “Marcuse’s procedure of lumping various ‘revisionist’ writers together” (1955b:342). He noted that the differences between them were as great as their similarities, and in years to come, sharpened his opposition to aspects of their work that he deemed false or politically shallow. In Sullivan, for example, he praised the “recognition of the uniqueness of every person and the respect for human dignity” (u-1949:7), as well as his remarkable sensitivity with psychotic patients. But he lamented the fact that “he also believed [...] that the American world is the best of all possible worlds and he was not seeing its great problems” (1991d-002-eng-draft-04:161). Horney deepened his awareness of (and opposition to) Freud’s patriarchal bias, but he eventually concluded that some of her categories were “superficial”, and that she lacked “an adequate concept of society” (1973a:110).

Fromm’s initial objections to being mischaracterized by Marcuse were reiterated forcefully much later, in a chapter written in 1969, which stated emphatically that “[t]here is no ‘cultural’ versus ‘biological’ orientation” in psychoanalysis, and that in the end, Fromm’s “theoretical concepts differ on fundamental points from those of Sullivan and Horney, just as these two authors differ between themselves” (1990d:1). Indeed, much of Fromm’s rebuttal to Marcuse’s initial attack only appeared in the late 1960s through the mid-1970s. By then, Marcuse’s ideas were very popular on the Left. By contrast, Fromm’s popularity was beginning to wane, and he was attempting to provide a systematic account of his humanistic approach to psychoanalysis (cf. Funk 1990). To that end, he took pains to differentiate himself emphatically from authors with whom he had been identified since the mid-1940s – both by detractors, like Theodor Adorno (1952, 1955), and by friends among the so-called “culturalist” group, such as Clara Thompson (1950). In depicting Fromm and these other analysts as part of a same “school” partaking in a “common attitude”, Marcuse (1955:226) was following (and strengthening) a larger trend in the reception of psychoanalysis in the 1950s, to which Fromm exhibited a somewhat delayed response. In 1955, for example, Fromm delivered his first public criticism of Sullivan’s model of personality, which he deemed

to be a-historical and expressive of an alienated standpoint (cf. Fromm 1955a). He also wrote in the same year that Horney's theories were "more remote from Freud's" than his own, and that "they constitute a fruitful and constructive continuation of Adler's thinking" (cf. 1955e:378). But apart from these remarks, there was little to distance him from Sullivan and Horney et al. at that time. So lumping Fromm together with all the other "revisionists" implied that Fromm was aligned not only with *theoretical*, but also with *political* antagonists of Marcuse's own position.

At first sight, all four papers – two by Marcuse, two by Fromm – revolved mainly around questions of psychoanalytic theory. And I emphasize "theory", not practice here, because Marcuse dismissed any discussion of the "*therapeutical* merits of the revisionist schools" (1955:225) as being outside his sphere of competence. Nevertheless, Fromm's rejoinder was largely written from a clinical perspective, focusing on Marcuse's deviations from Freud and correcting his statements about non-Freudian analysts. We encounter other subjects fleetingly along the way – from the relationship between progressive politics and "values" to problems of political and work organization – but they were overshadowed by intense disagreements on libido theory vs. interpersonal relations, and aspects of Freud's metapsychology. If we only attend to this side of things, then the "Fromm/Marcuse debate" really amounted to a clash between two irreconcilable positions on how to develop and apply Freud's intellectual legacy. However, when Fromm received the draft for Marcuse's "reply" – the third paper in the sequence – it included a segment which was deleted from the published version, and which seemingly had nothing to do with psychoanalysis. In it, Marcuse wrote:

'Nihilism', as the indictment of inhuman conditions, may be a truly humanist attitude – part of the Great Refusal to play the game. I cannot express it better than the editors of this magazine did (vol. II, no. 4, p. 416): 'There are times, such as the present, when negativism is the most positive task writers can undertake, when it becomes a form of political and intellectual hygiene. As long as the fish stink – and that, by and large, is what they continue to do – then it is necessary to say: the fish stink. This of course, may not please those who have gone into the fish business' (1956b-eng-type-01).

It was to this version of the text that Fromm presumably wrote his second, brief counter-rebuttal¹, and in retrospect, we can understand Howe's motives for not

¹ The extra segment is actually added later to the text, with different ink and alignment. The file seems to be a carbon copy of an original, with handwritten corrections, presumably by Marcuse himself. Fromm later adds some comments of his own while studying the file, most likely in the process of writing his counter-rebuttal, as the segments he highlights are pretty compatible with what he emphasizes in his final

publishing it, to avoid insulting a generous supporter of his journal. Still, the unpublished passage reminds us that this debate on psychoanalysis appeared in a socialist review, and that in 1956, Fromm was still collaborating with Stanley Plastrik and other editors at *Dissent* to organize “a gathering of independent socialists” of proposed international scale (Plastrik to Fromm, May 1st, 1956). So in couching his objections to Marcuse primarily in psychoanalytic terms, Fromm probably supposed that he was replying to a paper “in the same field”, as he wrote later in one of his unpublished drafts. “I did not think it necessary to take time and enter into a discussion”, Fromm wrote in 1968, “since he [Marcuse] based his thoughts on ignorance and distortion of Freud’s idea, on distortion of Marx, and a falsification of my position” (Marcuse Exzerpte, p. 1). Were Marcuse and Fromm simply talking past each other, then? No, for on closer inspection, their disparate claims about Freud and his ideas cloaked disagreements about “positivity” and “negativity”, “nihilism” and “optimism” – issues which the original debate merely touched on, but which become more salient later, as we shall see.

That said, despite growing disagreements on metapsychology and libido theory, Marcuse and Fromm found common ground elsewhere. For example, note their common admiration for Ernst Schachtel’s (1947) paper “On memory and childhood amnesia”. This paper inspired Fromm’s revision of the theory of dreams and of the dynamics of repression, as determined by “socially-conditioned filters” – language, logic, social taboos, and the corresponding “categories”, and Marcuse regarded it as “one of the few real contributions to the philosophy of psychoanalysis” (1956b:19). Fromm and Schachtel were colleagues at the William Alanson White Institute, and Fromm (1968a) continued to praise Schachtel’s (1937) insights on empirical psychology, from the early-thirties study on *The working class in Weimar Germany* (1980a), up to his (and Michael Maccoby’s) *Social character in Mexican village* (1970b). In reading Schachtel’s paper on childhood amnesia, we find the hypothesis that

The categories (or schemata) of adult memory are not suitable receptacles for early childhood experiences and therefore not fit to preserve those experiences and enable their recall. The functional capacity of the conscious, adult memory is usually limited to those types of experience which the adult consciously is aware of and is capable of having (1947:284).

critique. The way this copy found its way to Fromm is unknown to me, and it adds a little mystery that the segment quoted above is an addition to what is, on the rest, identical to the published version. Still, I see no reason so far for doubting that Marcuse himself was the sole author in all cases.

But whereas Fromm took this claim to be true for adult development in general, Marcuse thought it was “focused on the explosive force of memory, and its control and ‘conventionalization’ by society” (1956a:19). Perhaps it was – but so, for example, was Fromm’s (1947a) concept of the marketing orientation, and its precursor, the idea of an escape from freedom in the form of “automaton conformity” (cf. 1941a), which Marcuse formulated in his own language by saying that “the ego submits quickly to the required modes of thought and behavior, assimilating its Self to Others” (1969b:115). It is no wonder then that Fromm (1941a:120) indicated a lecture of Schachtel’s, called “Self-feeling and the ‘sale’ of personality” as one of his sources.

From this point onwards, the number of convergent thoughts and conclusions between Fromm and Marcuse are striking. They disagreed about Zen Buddhism, for example, but were in partial agreement in their attitudes toward existentialism, and in complete agreement with regards to behaviorism (cf. Fromm 1960a; 1973a, 1990e-f; Marcuse 1964:13). Besides, Fromm was a steadfast admirer of *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory*, which Marcuse published in 1941, the same year as Fromm’s first best-seller, *Escape From Freedom*. And in *Eros and civilization*, Marcuse adopted a notion of rational authority that was very similar to Fromm’s (1936a, 1941a). For example, he wrote:

Domination differs from rational exercise of authority. The latter, which is inherent in any societal division of labor, is derived from knowledge and confined to the administration of functions and arrangements necessary for the advancement of the whole. In contrast, domination is exercised by a particular group or individual in order to sustain and enhance itself in a privileged position (Marcuse 1956a:36).

In addition to the preceding, Marcuse’s concept of “true” and “false” or “superimposed needs” (1964:7-8) paralleled Fromm’s distinction between “artificially stimulated” needs, “irrational passions”, and “rational passions” (1955a:334, 1973a). They would have agreed that “true needs” are rooted in the anthropological “constants” of the species (cf. Marcuse 1972c), even though Fromm made a clearer distinction between desire elicited by external stimuli and suggestion, on the one hand, and character-rooted passions, on the other. Marcuse would also eventually come to differentiate between “*emancipatory*” and “*compensatory drives*” (Marcuse Na.3.374:6) – a noteworthy formulation, since Fromm (1992g) considered the development of the so-called “secondary potentialities” as of a compensatory nature. Similarly, aspects of Fromm’s concept of social character – that, as regards the orientation common to a group, people “want to act as they need to act” (cf. Fromm 1955b:347) – show up

frequently in Marcuse's writings, though with less differentiation between what Fromm (1941a) considered external sources of influence – “gangs, radio, and television” (Marcuse 1956a:97) – and the agency of the family, whose “role” Marcuse deemed to be in “decline” (1969b:112).

Finally, Marcuse's (1964, 1969a) reflections on the rise of violence in the US echo elements of Fromm's (1974b) concerns about the increase of necrophilous trends in American social character, and sometimes employed similar examples, albeit formulated in different terminology – “libido cathexis of technology”, “attraction to the mechanic”, “religion of technology” – as illustrations of the argument. Finally, judging from one of Marcuse's (1979a:32) last lectures on ecology, the idea that a “radical character structure” is rooted in an affinity to life became common to them both (e.g. Fromm 1963b:158,165; 1970b:25,82). Indeed, in one of his last planned lectures, Marcuse would even come to define “radical change” as “change of the predominant *character structure*” (Na.3.374:1). There could hardly be a more Frommian formulation than this.

Normally, when responding to the ideas of other thinkers, Fromm's (1962a) inclination was to stress the common ground concealed beneath their different terminologies. But the contentious exchanges over libido theory and the interpersonal-relations model in the pages of *Dissent* had a lasting impact on both thinkers, even when they were increasingly in agreement with one another. Besides, unlike Fromm, Marcuse was quite taken with the “hydraulic” metaphor in Freud's model of the mind, and was given to speculating about the displacement and “mobilization” (1969b:115) of certain drives by current political and media events. And because the source of these drives was framed in terms of libido-theory, Marcuse saw them and their satisfaction as ends in themselves, with no further reason for their existence other than the bodily-based need for sensuous pleasure. Fromm (1970d), by contrast was not enamored of Freud's metapsychology, and was seldom given to these kinds of florid conjectures: “Freud's *homo sexualis* is a variant of the classic *homo economicus*. [...] This social determination by the spirit of the market economy does not mean that the theory is wrong, except in its claim of describing the situation of *man as such*” (1970d:45).

That being so, it is interesting to note that despite subscribing to Freud's concept of death instinct – an idea Fromm was quite critical of – Marcuse was uncomfortable with its tragic implications for social psychology, and revised the theory in a way that brought him closer to Fromm, albeit inadvertently. After all, Marcuse followed Fenichel

in assuming that, “[i]f quantities of energy can be displaced from the sexual instincts to the ego instincts, then [...] sexual and ego instincts must derive from a common origin. Does not the same hold for eros and destructiveness?” (Fenichel 1935:369). Marcuse thus affirmed that the life and death instincts spring from a common *quantum* of energy, so that the more there is of one, the less there is of the other: “All additional release of destructive energy upsets the precarious balance between Eros and Thanatos and reduces the energy of the Life Instincts in favor of that of the Death Instinct” (1969b:119). This idea, in Marcuse’s own words, “militates against the dualistic conception” (1956a:28) of the instincts, which in Freud’s view, however, (1924) was absolutely necessary for his metapsychology to cohere².

Marcuse’s and Fenichel’s derivation of the life and death instincts from a single source may both be rooted in a misinterpretation of Freud’s remarks in *The ego and the id*, where he speculated that there might be “a displaceable energy, which, neutral in itself, can be added to a qualitatively differentiated erotic or destructive impulse, and augment its total cathexis”. Freud regarded this “displaceable and neutral energy” as “desexualized Eros” or “*sublimated* energy”; hence, not a product of the death drive (1923:44-7).

That being said, Marcuse’s misreading of Freud made it possible to reconcile his version of the death drive with the idea that it might be extinguished, or put “in the service of life” and subordinated to the life drives: “[i]t is the *failure* of Eros, lack of fulfillment of life, which enhances the instinctual value of death”; “as long as life grows, the former [derivatives of the death instinct] remain subordinate to the latter [sex instincts]”, so that in a pacified society “aggression would be subjected to their demands” (Marcuse 1956a:109,139; 1966b:xix). Comparably, in Fromm’s case,

² Actually, on closer examination, Fenichel was equidistant from both Fromm and Marcuse on this issue. The 1935 paper Marcuse cited approvingly presents a criticism of the death instinct on theoretical grounds, something Marcuse conveniently overlooked. In discarding the idea of an innate propensity toward death, and in his concepts of life and death, Fenichel was somewhat closer to Fromm’s (1962a) mature conceptions: “The young organism is full of prospective potentialities. Every stretch of life it passes through crystallizes out of it ‘structure’ which makes it ‘rigid’, limits its prospective potentialities and brings it nearer to the inorganic”. They would have disagreed, however, on the idea that the life process is “a course toward death”, as Fenichel (1935:371) puts it. Fromm agreed that “there is only one certainty in life: that all men die” (1973a:325), but would not reduce the life process to a gradual realization of this end – a claim which resonated with Freud’s (1920) notion that, with the death of the organism, the death instinct finally triumphs over Eros. Perusing the marginalia in Fromm’s copy of Fenichel’s article, it appears that he read it in preparation for the “Appendix” for *The anatomy of human destructiveness*, which examines Freudian instinct theory extensively. He doesn’t seem to have noticed the partial similarities noted above, but was focused instead on Fenichel’s comments on developmental issues – a pattern found in the marginalia in his other books as well; an interesting counterpoint to the relative neglect of “ontogenetic” issues elsewhere in Fromm’s published writings.

destructiveness was the outcome of “the thwarting of life” (1941a:179). However, Fromm also insisted on drawing a strong distinction between reactive, self-defensive aggression, which is already in the service of life, and destructiveness proper (cf. Fromm 1970h), something which is lacking in Marcuse – or perhaps merely hinted at in the idea of a subordination of destruction to life’s purposes.

In light of the preceding, we can only conclude that there was actually far more common ground between Fromm and Marcuse than the *Dissent* debate suggested. Indeed, this was increasingly the case the more time passed. And if we look for evidence of contacts between them outside of their published texts, their relationship appears to be even more complicated! After trading embittered accusations of “distortions” (Fromm 1955b:347) and “misinterpretation” (Marcuse 1956b:79), one might expect a strong enmity to ensue, but that doesn’t seem to have been the case. For example, in 1955 Marcuse wrote enthusiastically to Leo Loewenthal about a panel that Fromm and he participated in. “It was divine: Fromm was very emotional and excited; but the audience (almost a mass assembly) was enthralled by the intellectual Boxing Match” (apud Kellner and Pierce 2011:101). Fromm explicitly praised Marcuse’s work in a number of passages in *May man prevail?* (1961a) and *Marx’s concept of man* (1961b) – which, according to the typescripts we have left, were originally conceived as one and the same text (cf. an unpublished chapter III for *May man prevail?*, entitled “Marxist Socialism”, which has important similarities with *Marx’s concept of man* – 1961a-eng-type-01).

Of the remaining four letters between them, two were sent between 1963 and 1964, and concern preparations for Fromm’s anthology *Socialist humanism* in 1965. Characteristically, Marcuse’s (1965) paper partly criticized the main trend of the other contributors’ chapters, bearing the title “Socialist humanism?”, with a question mark. Still, Fromm published it. In Louis Althusser’s case, however, he declined, saying that “since the main point of this symposium is to show a common front, even in spite of a good deal of individual variation between the authors based on the principles mentioned above, your paper would not be in place” (Fromm to Althusser, January 8th, 1964). Marcuse was probably not aware of this exchange, but had likely more sympathy for Althusser’s theoretical stand, as he recommended that Althusser, Serge Mallet and André Gorz be called for the third Socialist Scholars Conference (cf. Marcuse to Menashe, November 23rd, 1966). Either way, we find Marcuse’s letter to Fromm (December 8th, 1963) asking him if he would be willing to review his forthcoming book – presumably *One-dimensional man* – “agreeing or rejecting: this doesn’t matter”.

So, despite their lively disagreements on psychoanalysis, Marcuse and Fromm seem to have had a grudging respect for each other up until 1965. They were not close on a personal level, but probably viewed each other as occasional allies, both politically and intellectually. As we approach 1968, however, the tone shifts somewhat. Judging from his notations, Fromm probably did not read the first edition of *Eros and civilization* very attentively. But his copy of the second edition has marginalia for what seem to have been at least three successive readings. He studied this and other writings by Marcuse intensively now, and drafted two lengthy critiques: one as an appendix to *The revolution of hope* (then called *In the name of life*, cf. 1968-000-eng-type-01), which he later withdrew, and which was originally entitled “Infantilization and despair masquerading as radicalism” (cf. 1990h-eng-type-01), and a “separate paper” on Marcuse’s take on psychoanalysis (1990g-000-eng-type-01, p. 16). But oddly enough, Fromm withheld most of what he wrote from publication, publishing only selected passages in different books and essays between 1968 and 1977, and again in the posthumously published book *The revision of psychoanalysis* (1990a). In his last interviews (e.g., 2000f), when asked about his attitude toward Marcuse, he remarked that he regarded the philosopher as a “naïve-romantic [*naiv-romantisch*]” (cf. 1977g-000-deu-type-01) in politics, as a “hedonist” in ethics, a defender of “bourgeois materialism” (1975i:55-7) in anthropological terms, which, all in all, located him in the tradition of “‘pornographic’ literature [...] from de Sade through surrealism down to the contemporary avant-garde of radical writers” (1990g:92).

The reasons underlying Fromm’s decision not to publish his lengthier commentaries on Marcuse are difficult to discern. After all, when he was negotiating for a new edition of what he considered his “most important papers which had never been published in a book” with Ruth Nanda Anshen, 20 years after the *Dissent* debate, he mentioned his “Controversy with Herbert Marcuse in *Dissent*, The Human Implications of Instinctivistic Radicalism, with a counter rebuttal, which are papers very much of wide interest today as much as then” (letters from January 21st, 1975, and February 18th, 1975). Marcuse, by contrast, seemed to move in the opposite direction. He never retracted his arguments in *Dissent*, nor acknowledged his affinities with Fromm explicitly. Still in 1975, he would be alerting students to the tendency in psychology to try to “to become sane in a sick society” (Marcuse Na.3.327:5). But from the late 1960s on, Marcuse positions were increasingly “Frommian”. For one, he reacted against Norman Brown’s fondness for mythological language, in terms that were curiously

reminiscent of Fromm's critique of Marcuse himself, particularly in his portrayals of Orpheus and Narcissus:

Eros lives in the division and boundary between subject and object, man and nature; and precisely in its polymorphous-perverse manifestations, in its liberation from the 'despotism of genital organization', the sexual instincts transform the object and the environment – without ever annihilating the object and the environment together with the subject" (Marcuse 1967a:179).

Here Marcuse sticks to his embrace of polymorphous sexuality, but waxes utopian, relinquishing his earlier attachment to a purely "negative" rhetoric – "the positive is still the negative" (1956b:81); "the politically impotent form of the 'absolute refusal'" (1964:255). Breaking ranks with his erstwhile colleagues in the Frankfurt School, he now voiced the idea that critical theory need not refrain from "utopian speculation" (1969a:3) after all. He also put greater emphasis on the idea that a revolution should be carried by people who represent "a new type of man, a different type of human being, with new needs, capable of finding a qualitatively different way of life, and of constructing a qualitatively different environment" (1970b:7) – a true "change in the 'nature' of man" (1969a:5), which should however "*precede* the revolution" (1969a:18).

Fromm recognized this later change and was "glad" (1990h:129) about it, apparently. But he continued to criticize Marcuse's earlier positions, which were not always consistent with his evolving perspective on social change. Indeed, in the *Dissent* debate, Marcuse criticized the post-Freudians because, in their writings, "the social issues become primarily spiritual issues, and their solution becomes a *moral* task" (1955:234). In the late sixties, however, he claimed that "[p]olitical radicalism [...] implies moral radicalism: the emergence of a morality which might precondition man for freedom" (1969a:10); there should be a new "education of the whole man: *changing his nature*" (Na.3.235:6). He grounded the possibility of revolution in the "organic foundation of morality in the human being", including "an instinctual foundation for solidarity" (1969a:10), much as Fromm regarded "the drive for freedom" as something "inherent in human nature" (1965h:xv), part of "man's basic, natural equipment" (1983d:142), and biophilia – one of the central characteristics of the revolutionary character – as a primary, "biologically given quality in man" (1973a:398). In the *Dissent* debate, Marcuse had denounced Fromm for reviving "all the time-honored values of idealistic ethics as if nobody had ever demonstrated their conformistic and repressive features" (Marcuse 1955:231). But afterwards, he freely acknowledged that "dialectical materialism contains idealism as an element of theory and practice"

(Marcuse 1972a:3) – and even thought that moral conscience could act as “the conscience of humanity” (Na.3.219:2-3) in the political process, an idea akin to what Fromm (1947a) called “humanistic conscience”.

Of course, there were still relevant differences between these two thinkers. Marcuse, ever the Lamarckian, spoke about “cultural needs” which “‘sink down’ into the biology of man” (1969a:10). But even so, in comparison with the 1950s, he had moved much closer to Fromm. He wanted to work with people who had a “‘*biological revulsion*’ against cruelty, oppression, brutality, stupidity” (Marcuse Na.3.235:9) – an idea Fromm (1973a) would hardly have disavowed. As a measure of their silent proximity, we may mention the peculiar fact that in 1968, Marcuse published a lecture he had originally presented in 1956. Here we find him endorsing Fromm’s (1955a) humanistic concept of mental health – which were the main focus of Marcuse’s objections in the previous year as “essentially unattainable” without “‘curing’ the patient to become a rebel or [...] a martyr” (1955:231). Here he explicitly quotes *The sane society*, and goes to say that:

As a tentative definition of ‘sick society’ we can say that a society is sick when its basic institutions and relations, its structure, are such that they do not permit the use of the available material and intellectual resources for the optimal development and satisfaction of individual needs (Marcuse 1968a:189).

It is no coincidence that this essay was only made public again in 1968, in the book *Negations* – not far from a time when he would be telling students that “a whole generation” was being “educated in the knowledge and goals of a *sick society*”, and that a “‘*new sanity*’” needed to be achieved (Marcuse Na.3.235:7,11). Fromm’s copy of *Negations* is without any notations, so he was probably unimpressed by or completely unaware of this reference to his work – the only positive assessment of Fromm subsequent to his departure from the Frankfurt School in Marcuse’s later work. And so we come to the strange but inevitable conclusion that Fromm’s more substantive reply to Marcuse was not only delayed by 13 years – and even then, mostly withheld from publication –, but also unfolded at a time when they were as close as they would ever be in theoretical terms.

A letter to Marcuse dated 27th December, 1967 gives some indication of the reasons for this startling counterpoint. In it, Fromm outlined a plan for enlisting a number of intellectuals to criticize a recent biography of Marx written by Robert Payne, which Fromm considered to be “a distortion and falsification of Marx’s person and theory”. Among the 14 names he mentioned to Marcuse was H. Stuart Hughes. But

Hughes and Marcuse both gave Fromm similar replies. As chairman of his department at Harvard, and a prominent activist in his own right, Hughes was too busy to oblige, saying “it is better for people like you [Fromm] and me to devote our energies to expressing our own ideas in our form rather than diverting them towards rebutting the ideas of others” (letter from January 16th, 1968) – a strategy Fromm followed with regards to Marcuse in the fifties, perhaps to his later regret. Marcuse himself seems to echo Hughes here, saying: “I don’t know whether we should spend time and energy discussing the stuff, but it would, of course, be good if you could place some negative reviews in some of the journals and reviews with large circulation”. He thought “He [Payne] and his output are not taken seriously” (letter from January 22nd, 1968) But the fact that Fromm confided to Marcuse, and not to Hughes, all the people he hoped to involve in this collective undertaking tells us something. And it also telling that both his correspondents turned him down, as did I. F. Stone, saying: “I don’t know enough about Marx to venture on a task requiring such scholarship” (letter to Fromm, January 27th, 1968).

This was not the first time that Fromm tried to mobilize others’ for the sake of a cause, or the first time he felt frustrated by their lack of engagement. His correspondence with Clara Urqhart tells a similar story with regards to his plan for a “World Conference” with the Pope (cf. Funk 1992:84). Similarly, his letters to Lewis Mumford convey his “sad resignation” concerning Eugene McCarthy’s lack of political initiative after his defeat in the 1968 Presidential election (letter from December 8th, 1968). Fromm’s repeated disappointments along these lines attest to a deep-seated feeling of urgency and a sense of mission rooted in his childhood upbringing. Raised in an Orthodox Jewish home, his earliest role models for the public intellectual were the Old Testament prophets (cf. 1967b): men who occupied the public space, and spoke truth to power. Incidentally, Marcuse could be found saying that the prophets were “the first radicals” (Na.3.281:1). But Fromm’s engagement with this tradition went much deeper. It was one source for his life-long effort to reach a wide readership beyond specialist circles, and why he was attuned to swings of opinion among those who *hadn’t had* the opportunity – or the desire – to research and clarify their notions of Marx, Freud, or other prominent intellectuals.

Of course, Marcuse was also quite attuned to the public and political scene. But the public he addressed was different. Marcuse was interested in providing the then-emerging Left wing movements with justification and a theoretical grounding for their actions. And so we find him as a defender of the “new bohème, the beatniks and

hipsters, the peace creeps” (1966:xxi), the “Hippie subculture”, the politicized “Blacks”, and of course, also the “active minorities” and “the young middle-class intelligentsia” (1969a:35,51). Fromm, by contrast, was less sanguine about the counter-culture and the New Left, and was actively engaging with members of the American political elite, such as W. Fullbright, and most importantly, Eugene McCarthy (cf. 1992n). In short, Marcuse was closer to both the academic world and the New Left, while Fromm was concerned with the wider diffusion of knowledge and opinion, but also somewhat enmeshed in what Marcuse and his followers dismissed as “the Establishment”. This difference includes also their relation to independent efforts in political education. Marcuse (1969a) was very insistent on the role of the New Left as “educators” of the larger population, and was indeed involved with initiatives such as the *Radical Education Project* (REP), an association founded by the SDS with the “purpose of providing the New Left with an education, research, and publication program” (REP to Marcuse, June 3rd, 1966). Marcuse was invited to become a sponsor and accepted the role. Fromm was also included in the initial list of prospective sponsors, and seems either not to have accepted it, or not to have received the invitation.

Also the New Left had to take a stance about the 1968 National Democrat Convention. So it may have angered Fromm when, having signed a public letter with Marcuse in favor of McCarthy’s candidacy (“The People’s Choice”, *The New York Review of Books*, August 22nd, 1968), he also found him excusing the prevalent practice of calling “public servants or leaders” as “pig X or pig Y” (1969a:35). He was familiar – as we know from an unpublished draft – with the fact that “for the anti-authoritarian rebels, the authoritarians and their armed defenders, the police, are ‘pigs’” (1970f-000-eng-typ-001:11). But he didn’t believe that a complete rejection of electoral politics would be fruitful in the long run. Only after the political climate in the US turned more emphatically conservative did Marcuse go back to emphasizing that, when working in a non-revolutionary circumstance, “one must [...] work in and through the institutions” (1972c:4, my translation), “organize demonstrations” and “learn the political value of [their] *repetition*” (Na.3.313:6).

On reflection, then, Fromm’s criticism of Marcuse was very similar to Fromm’s criticism of late sixties and early seventies political movements. Indeed, Fromm’s view of many young American radicals and Marcuse was almost identical. Not that he confused the two. In fact, the papers he withheld from publication sometimes included a fairly nuanced attempt at distinguishing between the different stands – conservative, liberal, and radical – that were at play in American politics. At one point, he

distinguished between the “traditional patriarchal-authoritarian” lower middle class, the “post-authoritarian” middle and upper classes, and the “anti-authoritarian” radicals, tracing these differences back to the divide between “big cities and rural areas”, to “work in large plants and corporations” as opposed to other forms of work (1970f-000-eng-typ-001:10-1). He probably had more sympathy for the African American movements than for the student organizations: he wrote “negro violence is a necessary outcome of the misery of black ghetto life” (1992i:55), and confided to Lewis Mumford that some of his recent conversations had “confirmed somewhat an expectation I [Fromm] have that a number of the radical Negro leaders are quite capable of seeing things more realistically and rationally [than the SDS] if they speak with people whom they can trust” (letter from December 8th, 1968). Elsewhere, we find an analysis of the various trends within and alongside the New Left (cf. 1990i). Still, the convergence between his judgment of Marcuse and that of radical youth is too great to be missed.

In Marcuse, he criticized the (typically pre-1965) idea of a critical theory “without hope” (Marcuse 1964:257). He could not foresee that Marcuse would later be telling students that “if you feel only *despair, hopelessness, apathy* – you have given in to the Establ[ishment] propaganda” (Na.3.327:12), and thus wrote also of the late-sixties radicals:

There is something else they do not understand. You can appeal to people by appealing to their indignation, their ambitions, or even their hate. But you cannot move people to sustained, constructive and truly revolutionary action by any of these emotions. People can be motivated to change only if they have hope (1990i:122).

Indeed, in a segment redacted from *The revolution of hope*, Fromm even speculated that it is “characteristic of fascist movements that they owe their existence to common hate, and their success to its mobilization and manipulation” (1968a-000-eng-type-05:VI-22-23). He was then still lacking his later differentiation between revolutionary aggression and political destructiveness (cf. 1973a) placing him not too far from Marcuse’s own take on “constructive” and “destructive hate” (1968b, s.p.). Of Marcuse, Fromm said that “if one is not concerned with steps between the present and the future, one does not deal with politics, radical or otherwise” (1968a:9) – again, in reference to the ending of *One-dimensional man*, where the idea was presented that “[t]he critical theory of society possesses no concepts which could bridge the gap between the present and its future” (Marcuse 1964:257). Of the radicals, he wrote correspondingly:

The great prophets, from Isaiah to Marx, also were critics, but they went beyond indignation and did not dwell on despair or hate. Their main effort was to explain, to convince, to warn, and most importantly, to show new ways, to show new alternatives. *The failure of the radical activists lies in the fact that they do not show alternatives* (1990i:121).

A third criticism of Marcuse was that he promoted “a straight regression to an infantile pattern”, “to the pregenital stage of the infant” – to which Fromm added that “H. Marcuse’s appeal to the young seems to rest largely on the fact that he is the spokesman for infantile regression” (1970f:105). Finally, a fourth criticism – namely that “[t]he core of the radicals, both the hippies and the radical activists, show as a rule no knowledge of, no interest in, and no concern with tradition” (1990i:121) – was obviously not extended to Marcuse. After all, they had both undergone a similar cultural education, to the point that Ronald Aronson, a former student of Marcuse’s, identified him not only as a professor for “Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Hegel, Marx”, but “as someone of the tradition” (1971:257-8). Nevertheless, Marcuse criticized students, not for despising tradition, but for their “anti-intellectualism” (Marcuse Na.3.235:2). In fact, he spoke against it very early on in his correspondence wirerepresentatives of the student movement. After Mike Davis reports on what he sees as SDS’s main shortcomings, Marcuse replies: “I detect in your report a strong anti-intellectual sentiment, almost inferiority complex . . .” (Marcuse to Davis, undated). He would later address the same issue publicly in conferences he gave to student associations, whereas Fromm – who occasionally engaged with the youth among his audience – preached that knowledge of the intellectual legacies of the past is the only solid basis to “challenge it and continue it in a critical way, not by repeating it” (cf. AUD-1968a)³. Marcuse’s later disappointments with the “*interminable* debates on what is Marxist, or Marxist-Leninist, or Trotskyist (sic), or Maoist strategy” (Na.3.327:12) eventually led him to a similar perspective.

Meanwhile, Fromm continued to criticize Marcuse’s apparent disdain for so-called “traditional values, by which he meant disregard for the “humanistic” axiological notions, whose “revival” he had hoped McCarthy would champion, and which he construed as the common ethical ground for humanists all over the world. To the extent

³ This recording presents Fromm tackling many of the political issues of his day and being interrupted by a young man who, angered by comments on tradition and the youth communes, proposes that they substitute his “talk” and the “boredom” it provokes for a love-in, where they would “sit and touch each other and love each other”. After some heat, the lecture proceeds with Fromm publicly criticizing Marcuse’s take on regression and the Great Refusal as forms of an “infantile paradise” (Fromm AUD-1968a).

that he considered these values – love, justice and reason – as universal, and not simply rooted in particular historical conditions, he thought that complete denial and disconnection from them amounted to deep alienation from oneself, and from the capacity to recognize in oneself the various potentialities that are given to each member of humankind. In a letter to Lewis Mumford dated January 23rd, 1969, we read:

It seems that these people and many of the younger generation and of the technologists believe that [...] the nature of man as he existed in all previous history has ended. In fact, that man is not an entity that could be defined, or even ~~foreseen~~ inferred, with the result, of course, that traditional values no longer have any validity whatsoever. [...] These people seem to confuse the fact that there are many manifestations of man's nature which one can understand in many ways, but the different manifestations do not alter the fact that man is one of the givens, with its own basic structure, conditions of existence and laws for change, flowering and decay. . . I am afraid that among the young generation there are many who are influenced by this view, and hence who are hostile to any theoretical discourse which deals with man as something real, rather than as "no-man"⁴.

Of this whole line of thought, however, we only have an accusation that Marcuse was an "alienated intellectual" (1968a:9), in Fromm's published work. As was the case with Marcuse, Fromm made only a few scattered comments on the negative features of the youth movement: that it was politically and philosophically naïve due to its repudiation of tradition (cf. 1976a); that it was a culture of passivity and regression (cf. 1970f), but also that it aspired to embrace better values, a new life and a new honesty (cf. 1983b). But once again, his correspondence tells a slightly different story. In April 30th, 1969, Fromm wrote another letter to Mumford saying that "the unrest among the students has also its positive and creative aspects. Actually I think one part of the radicals is motivated by the wish to destroy; another by a deep love for life. [...] But it seems as if the destructive ones over-shout the others". And indeed, among the drafts for *The revolution of hope* which were excluded from publication, we find the idea (in 1968) that "there are some [activists] who are mainly filled with hate against the existing order, and who are greatly attracted by violence", but that "it would be a rash

⁴ Significantly, Marshall McLuhan experienced a similar fate – Fromm includes him, sometime alongside Marcuse, in many of the critical passages which he later withheld between 1968 and 1970. Here's an example: "There are those, like Marcuse, who think that in a materially completely satisfied cybernated (and 'non-repressive') society, there are no more human conflicts like those [...] which are expressed in the Greek or Shakespearian drama or the great novels; ~~or those who believe, like McLuhan, that all that matters is the 'message', not its reality or truth~~" (1968a-000-eng-type-04, p. V-20-21). Of this, only the segment on McLuhan is manually excluded. Incidentally, it can be said that despite his openness to certain forms of modernism, Marcuse's (1978) aesthetics became more pronouncedly universalist as the years passed – he recognized something of universal and trans-historical in great art, and would thus probably have disputed Fromm's appraisal of his position.

and unjustified conclusion to believe that the radical activists consist mainly of such people” (1990i:120).

Were the reasons for Fromm’s reticence on these matters identical in both cases? Probably not. Fromm’s attitude towards radical American youth was more ambivalent and nuanced than his increasingly harsh attitude towards Marcuse, whom he deemed a man with a “brilliant brain”, but of “regressed emotionality” (Marcuse Exzerpte, p. 2). Nevertheless, Fromm was also aware that Marcuse had gone out on a limb, and was being threatened, both politically and professionally, in 1968. Evidently, Fromm continued to see Marcuse as a conditional ally in the larger context of American politics, because as his troubles deepened, Raya Dunayevskaya wrote to Marcuse that “Fromm would be for organizing any sort of committee that may be needed in your defense” (letter of July 14th, 1968). To be sure, Fromm was not the only person offering such help (cf. Marcuse Na.3.995). Still, Marcuse’s reply (July 24th, 1968) made no reference to his suggestion – or anything else in Dunayevskaya’s letter – other than saying: “Thanks for your good note”. The upshot of this exchange? In a letter from July 31st, 1968, Fromm now expressed doubt, “whether there would be much of a basis for a fruitful conversation” with Marcuse from then on. Even so, Fromm withheld the appendix on Marcuse from *The revolution of hope* for fear that it “might help Marcuse’s right-wing enemies” (Anderson and Rockwell 2012:158).

Evidently, Dunayevskaya tried to persuade Fromm to reverse his decision, but didn’t succeed – or did so only partially. In a letter dated August 10, 1968, she complained that:

I do not quite know who is responsible for the extraordinary publicity he has gotten recently, but his influence on the West European youth is greatly exaggerated. It isn’t only, as Daniel Cohn-Bendit put it, that there aren’t more than a dozen students who have studied his works (unless, he added, it be *Eros and Civilization*), but that they sharply disagree with his politics when they do hear him.

The recurrence of such references to Marcuse in Fromm’s private correspondence conveys the impression that Fromm asked his most trusted interlocutors about his rival’s growing popularity⁵. He was also interested in what other critics of Marcuse had to say. For example, we know that Dunayevskaya sent Richard Greeman’s “Critical Re-examination of Herbert Marcuse’s Works” to Fromm at his request (cf. Anderson and Rockwell 2012, p. 161,166), and that Fromm read Alasdair McIntyre’s

⁵ Unfortunately, in all three cases mentioned above, I haven’t found Fromm’s original sent message, only the reply he received, so this is limited to the status of a conjecture so far.

(1970) polemical piece, though McIntyre (1963) had harsh words for Fromm's work, too. And to put all this into a larger context, Fromm's private preoccupation with Marcuse's impact on the young grew amidst the failure of McCarthy's campaign, Fromm's chronic health problems, work on four different books (1968a; 1970a; 1970b; 1973a), and a number of other projects, including Fromm's unfinished attempt at systematizing his approach to humanistic psychoanalysis. From all this, it seems reasonable to suppose that Fromm's conflicts about criticizing Marcuse grew in proportion to his fear that Marcuse was becoming a more influential public intellectual.

Knowing this, we can tentatively infer the processes that yielded the odd juxtaposition between Fromm's stance toward Marcuse in the *Dissent* years and subsequently, in the late sixties. Evidently, Fromm regarded the 1950s debate as centered on the question of how best to interpret Freud: he replied as someone "in the field", and perhaps didn't think others – either orthodox or heterodox Freudians – would take Marcuse's point of view too seriously. He was already alarmed at what he saw as Marcuse's "human nihilism disguised as radicalism" (1955b:349), but remained convinced that – as he would put a little later – there is nothing wrong with affirming certain experiential values, as it was only in light of hope for a better life that criticism of particular social conditions could be sustained in a politically productive way. Later, when Marcuse's influence was on the rise, he was caught in a web of contradictory impulses. On the one hand, he wanted to win the hearts and minds of the young away from Marcuse, but couldn't endorse many of their attitudes, as his rival did frequently. On the other hand, he didn't want to strengthen the right against Marcuse or the militants whom he appealed to, but thought that radical social change would require very different forms of political organization. He wanted to see McCarthy elected, but didn't want to completely alienate McCarthy's critics on the Left, insuring that a broadly based humanist movement would continue even if McCarthy lost, as in fact happened. So, in the midst of many mounting challenges, Fromm experienced a simultaneous need to fight his rival, and to protect him, whenever possible, from their common enemies. This despite the fact that he now saw Marcuse's "influence" – as one of his drafts candidly puts, with my italics added – as "*a symptom and a danger*" (1990g-001-eng-draft-01, p. 1).

"I believe that his thinking is confused [...] and superficial", he wrote to himself, "and that it confuses young people" (Marcuse Exzerpte, p. 1). In the last letter we have from their exchanges, Marcuse wrote that he is "[h]oping to see you [Fromm] sometime in Europe this year" (January 22nd, 1968). He did. Fromm was the respondent to his

paper on a “Reexamination of the concept of revolution” (Marcuse 1968c) in a Symposium on Marx held by UNESCO in Paris. They later met at least two times in the *Salzburger Humanismusgespräche* organized by Oskar Schatz in 1968 and 1969 (1970a, 1970b). We have the proceedings for a portion of their interaction in two of these three meetings. They were polite, but no longer seeking common ground. And yet, similarities persist. As of 1969, Marcuse was insistent on the need to continue acting, regardless of the a reaction from the right – “student unrest is *itself the backlash*” (Na.3.219:12-3). By 1972, however, he was warning about an imminent “counterrevolutionary” backlash, and in 1975, defended the movement while criticizing it for having “failed to develop any adequate organizational forms and by allowing internal splits to grow and spread, a phenomenon that was linked to anti-intellectualism, to a politically powerless anarchism and a narcissistic arrogance” (1979b:5) – all qualities that Fromm himself had criticized from the beginning, and still considered problematic when, a year later, he noted that the movement had been “decreasing”, and tended to leave its members “disappointed, apathetic or destructive” (1976a:63).

If Marcuse had a flair for modifying his opinions to suit diverse audiences, or as spirit and circumstances moved him to, Fromm was far more cautious, valuing clarity and consistency in the life of the mind. That is why we frequently discover him refraining from public pronouncements on matters where he felt somewhat tentative, ambivalent or in danger of alienating or harming potential allies. That is also why he disliked Marcuse’s mercurial style, as expressed in his comment that, once Marcuse has “adopted a position that is essentially the one he criticized before”, “it is regrettable that he does not even comment on this change in the interests of intellectual clarity” (Fromm 1990h:129).

Further evidence for Fromm’s preference for consistency can be found in his reflections on America in the Cold War years (compare what he says on “indifference to life” in 1964a, 1970h, 1976a and 1990s, for example). And it is no coincidence that in 1972, he said that:

The older generation tends to have a character that is very much shaped by the conventional patterns and by the need for successful adaptation. Many of the younger generation tend to have *no character at all*. By that I do not mean that they are dishonest; on the contrary, one of the few enjoyable things in the modern world is the honesty of a great part of the younger generation. What I mean is that they live, emotionally and intellectually speaking, from hand to mouth. They satisfy every need immediately, have little patience to learn, cannot easily endure frustration, and have no center within themselves, no sense of identity. They suffer from this and question themselves, their identity, and the meaning of life (1992s:39).

Fromm (1955a) had been criticizing the “principle of non-frustration” as an infantilizing feature of American social character since the 1950s, but this idea of people who possess no core convictions, and ultimately no character, is more characteristic of his later years. It is followed by a subtle, but important shift in emphasis in Fromm’s writing – from the problem of “ideals” to the problem of “values”. As of 1961(a), Fromm still treated the two categories as more or less the same: he admitted the notion that an “ideal” could be the true embodiment of an experience of what the good is or can be; but his writings from the late sixties and the seventies point to a stronger distinction between ideals as, so to speak, the images or concepts bearing a certain experiential content, and what he called “effective [...] values”: the actual “goal” that “integrates the energies” (1973a:260) of a certain character constitution in a specific direction.

In embracing this notion of “character”, Fromm was now employing the term in a more conventional sense, but without abandoning his earlier belief that it denoted a (mostly unconscious) “system of strivings” (cf. 1941a). Now, he spoke of character as the expression of a measure of congruence between thought, desire, and action. There remained the notion – which Fromm (1962a) never gave up – that certain ideas were supported by the underlying strivings of the personality; but the goal was ascribed to the striving itself, and the “ideal” remained as its (conscious or unconscious) carrier only. Talking now in terms of “values”, Fromm thought about something that “guide[s] [...] actions and feelings” (1968a:90); about the inherent relation between passions, which are centered around certain goals, and the realm of *praxis*, of action. Though neither of them ever remarked on this, ironically, this way of framing things was not dissimilar Marcuse’s call for a “transformation of values into needs” (1964:233), since in any case there would be no values without needs for Fromm. He was increasingly of the opinion that holding deep convictions, and being able to devote oneself to a certain goal or passion (of a rational or pro-social nature – cf. 1991d), was one of the hallmarks of actually “having character”, both in the psychological and in the ethical sense; and that this, in turn, was a condition of successful and trustworthy political action.

For further evidence of Fromm’s preference for caution and consistency, note the exclusion of his posthumously published comments on *The art of being* from *To have or to be?*, which was published in 1976. Apparently, this choice stemmed from his concerns about the potential effects a text on practices of self-care could have when, by Fromm’s own admission, the market for “spiritual commodities” (cf. 1989a:13,17) was

on the rise – just as, a few years before, criticism or support for different trends in political life threatened to produce unpredictable results. Incidentally, Marcuse also came to recognize and criticize “withdrawal into a kind of private liberation drug culture, the turn to guru-cults and other pseudo-religious sects” (1979b:5) as a pitfall seducing some American youth. This “return into one’s self” or “*politics in the First Person*” – “the concentration on the sensibility and feelings of the person”, Marcuse felt, “threaten to come into conflict with the organization and ~~universalization~~ self-discipline required by an effective *political praxis*” (Na.3.374:13). But here lies a subtle and important difference. Marcuse had already recognized that drug culture had a potential for weakening the New Left: “sensibility is freed not only from the exigencies of the existing order but also from those of liberation” (1969a:37). And he was initially quite insistent on the irreconcilability of Marxism with Christian doctrine. But eventually, Marcuse came to think of “the great radical heretic movements” (1970b:10) as providing possible models for revolution, and considered that “the revival of the heretic element in religion is today, in my view, on the agenda” (1969c:187). He even included the “heretic movements” as part of a critical education in social history, when lecturing on education for a group of students (cf. Marcuse Na.3.235:13). These he saw as being radically different from the escapist and “pseudo-religious” phenomena attracting some youth. On this, Fromm (1992s) would certainly have agreed. He criticized a “naïve” interest in “Oriental religion” (1974a:86), and felt a much stronger sympathy for mystical and heretical sects, as against institutional religion (cf. 1979b). He would also have agreed on the problem with drugs, albeit for different reasons. In one footnote excised from *The revolution of hope* he wrote that:

. . . the current indulgence in drug consumption . . . creates a short-lived ecstatic experience without bringing about a change in personality. . . Sometimes these ecstatic experiences are compared to the enlightenment and the sense of union which we find expressed in the Christian, Jewish and Moslem mystics or in the *satori* experience of Zen Buddhism. But they are basically different. These enlightenment experiences are achieved on the basis of a total awakening of the whole personality, of his mind as well as of his heart, and not isolated sensations which look like but are not that sense of union which cannot be achieved by the consumption of certain chemicals. Those who don’t see the difference between the “instant Zen” produced by drugs and the state of mind of the enlightened Zen Buddhist or mystic probably have never seen what the latter looks like and hence don’t know how to distinguish between genuine union and its synthetic facsimile (*The revolution of hope* drafts, chapter III, p. 47)⁶.

⁶ Fromm may have originally written this with Alan Watts in mind. According to his friend Dom Aelred Graham, Watts understood “the hippies” as “a kind of parallel to the early Christians” (1968:7) – a

Now, to the extent that Fromm viewed drug taking (and other aspects of hippie culture) as a form of pacification, he thought it “doubtful that they will survive” (1990g:87). But to the extent that he saw in them an expression of a “religious mass movement” (1990g:86) – in Fromm’s (1950a) peculiar sense of religion, as a system providing a frame of orientation and devotion – he actually thought they had some potential. Indeed, we learn from another redacted passage that at one point, he said that the groups which had a greater chance for survival were those which would be able to reach a “fuller development” of the religious bases of their communion (1990g-001-eng-type-01, ad. p. 6)! Marcuse, on the contrary, saw in them much more precarious forms of reunion than the properly “political” groups:

there are enough communes which are simply nothing more than an attempt at private, personal liberation, which naturally cannot last and will soon collapse, if the communes do not remain in the political process, in the political education and work jointly with what happens outside and in front of them, they have in general no chance (Marcuse 1972c:4, my translation).

A culture of “passivity” was thus a problem for Fromm, not for getting in the way of political discipline, as was the case with Marcuse, but in terms of realizing the communitarian aspirations that were found among these same groups. Hence his appraisal of their search for “a new lifestyle” (1976a:91), “a new morality” (1983b:31), “a new honesty” (1983b:33). He could see group sex and sexual freedom as possibly expressions of “love of life” (1990g:86), especially outside the “post-authoritarian” middle-class of the times (1970f-000-eng-typ-001:11). But he could not see sensualism of any sort as more than an illusory solution, bound to fail:

To forget oneself, in the sense of anaesthetizing one’s reason, is the aim of all these attempts to restore unity within oneself. It is a tragic attempt, in the sense that either it succeeds only momentarily (as in a trance or in drunkenness) or, even if it is permanent (as in the passion for hate or power), it cripples man, estranges him from others, twists his judgment, and makes him as dependent on this particular passion as another is on hard drugs (1973a:263).

Indeed, Fromm even came to criticize Zen for being too focused on change of perception (1973a:278), and not as deep in its power for character change in comparison to more traditional Theravada forms of meditation (cf. Fromm 2009a). Marcuse (1957) was disinterested in any form of Buddhism, and disparaged drug-taking for dissuading

comparison Fromm would have abhorred, as he abhorred Watt’s understanding of Zen, from what we can learn in the transcript for his lectures on *The art of listening* (cf. 1991d-000-eng-type-04).

or distracting users from engaging in political action. But what did he see as the “kernel of truth in the psychedelic research”? Precisely “the need for such a revolution in perception, for a new sensorium”: “the dissolution of the ego shaped by the established society”, which, albeit “short-lived”, was based on the fact that “rebels want to see, hear, feel new things in a new way” (1969a:37). His concept of a “new man”, he tied to the “potentialities” of the human in general, just as Fromm would; but Marcuse gave a special emphasis to “sensibility and sensitivity” (1970b:8).

Here, perhaps, we may find an explanation for the fact that Fromm considered positions Marcuse held before 1965 to represent the actual core of his position, and was unimpressed by (and perhaps even unaware of) the striking similarity in their ideas on important issues as Marcuse’s thought evolved. Why? Because regardless of how they interpreted Freud, Fromm and Marcuse had fundamentally different conceptions of “the good life”, and accordingly, different conceptions of what constitutes a viable political and social organization. In my opinion, their divergent views can already be discerned in the *Dissent* articles, where these differences were encrypted in psychoanalytic language and relatively undeveloped. But they figure more prominently in the late sixties, when political circumstances forced the issue out into the open.

To be blunt, Fromm had a hard time with the New Left. “I am one of the few, if you like, radical writers and socialists who is in deep disagreement with the larger part of the New Left and their pseudo-revolutionary and often destructive and unrealistic policies”, he wrote to Tristan Coffin (February 1st, 1974). Marcuse, by contrast, had a much greater affinity with the student movement, because his expectations for the structure of a politically radical movement were quite different. Marcuse wasn’t as wary or dismissive of entertaining “utopian” ideas as his “negative” conception of critical theory appeared to imply. Indeed, the last sections of *Eros and civilization* are actually his first statement on the experiential elements he deemed part of an emancipated society. *Eros and civilization* also asserts that “where religion still preserves the uncompromised aspirations for peace and happiness, its ‘illusions’ still have a higher truth value than science which works for their elimination” (1956:73). And when *One-dimensional man* equates “opposition” and “qualitative difference” (1964:79) in passing, Marcuse is but a step away from the idea that revolutionary opposition should be preceded – or, better, constituted – by the growth of a qualitatively different way of life, including a new morality. “*Redefinition of needs*” would be the “prerequisite of qualitative change” (1964:245), he says in his earlier formulations, and around ten years later, he says that that there should be “a morality of liberation which overcomes, in

ourselves, the cynical and brutal morality of the Establ[ishment]” (Na.3.327:8). Fromm himself recognized “some similarities” between his thought and Marcuse’s, but still regarded it as “the very opposite of my own position” (Marcuse Exzerpte, p. 1). He accused Marcuse of not being clear enough on what the “new needs” and the “new man” would look like (cf. his letter to Mumford from April 30th, 1969) – but there is reason to suspect that the problem was not only the indeterminacy in Marcuse’s writings, but the fact that his and Fromm’s (1976a) ideas for an radical social transformation were actually incompatible.

In the interval between the *Dissent* articles and the late sixties clashes, the most salient reminder we find of the debate in Fromm’s writings refers to Marcuse’s “negative” denunciation of love and other values. He still felt the need to comment elsewhere, a few years later, that “[t]hose who take the problem of love seriously cannot help being social critics” (1959d:131) – nothing like the conformism Marcuse saw in him. That this rebuke stung a little harder than the rest was probably due to a special sensitivity on Fromm’s side, because – apart from dealing with the core of his intellectual project – it touched indirectly upon what I would consider as the basic antagonism between his and Marcuse’s concepts of “the good life.” It is not so much, as Fromm (1968a) would have it, that Marcuse was in absolute despair and lacked love of life. He, too, talked about the “*political* fight” as the “fight for life” (1966b:xv). But the “life” they loved was different – this and other concepts point to different experiences, and this experiential realm, alongside the social relations it both presupposes and entails, is where the conflict actually takes root.

This can already be sensed in a comparison between Marcuse’s “Eros” and Fromm’s “biophilia”. There is room, in Marcuse’s notion, for sexual enjoyment (cf. 1964), but also for tenderness (cf. 1969a). The experiential *locus* for his concept is still, however, the organism as a subject of *pleasure*, whereas Fromm’s biophilia, Marcuse would consider more “sublimated” in nature, as it is modeled after the experience of *joy*, rather than voluptuous pleasure. Arguably, these are just poles on a continuum which the notion of Eros, as formulated by Freud (1920), for example, can accommodate. And Fromm (1966a) was by no means an antagonist of sexual pleasure *per se*. But Marcuse’s (1956, 1964) differentiation between simple “sexuality” and “Eros” proper includes not only the idea of a reactivation of the partial instincts and the perversions, but also the notion that the whole body can be a subject of enjoyment, as Freud (1905-24) insisted with reference to pleasure in skin touch, and to the possibility of a circulation of the libido among all the organs. If read with an eye to the partial instincts,

Marcuse's position indeed tends to a "Sadean" conception of the body, in which its different portions represent sources for diverse pleasures composed out of different and perhaps dissociated segments. I think, however, that in Marcuse's works this coexists with the idea that "Eros" represents an *integration* of the enjoyment across the whole body – an idea which coincides, more or less with the sort of happy vividness or "emotional intensity" Fromm (1990i) ascribed to life-oriented phenomena and phenomena of abundance.

The fact that Marcuse opted for expressing himself in the same language as Freud certainly didn't help Fromm in acknowledging these commonalities between them– but, in the end, it was also this that lay behind Marcuse's claim for the "explosive contents" of Freudian analysis, not only the (alleged) equivalence between primary narcissism and fulfilled unity, or between Orphic conduct and contemplative pacification. Fromm (1970c; 1990h) was correct in sensing that in these cases Marcuse's idea of good life was very much in contrast to his. Still, it doesn't seem to me that Marcuse's imagination was *so extremely different* from Fromm's as was de Sade's. After all, he was also quite outspoken as regarded his aim of reaching "the liberation of the mind, *and of the body*, from aggressive and repressive needs" (Marcuse Na.3.235:6). There was more room for ambiguity here than Fromm recognized, but in the end, I don't think this would have led to reconciliation. They had irreconcilable differences, but their source lay elsewhere.

To elucidate this point further, consider a peculiarity in the documents: the copy of the second edition of *Eros and civilization*, which Fromm annotated extensively, is filled with marginalia. But two chapters lack any markings: "Phantasy and Utopia" and "The Aesthetic Dimension". The excerpts he took from the books also indicate disinterest in these segments of the book, which Marcuse deems to be pivotal, while all the more "psychoanalytic" sections – including the discussion on Orpheus and Narcissus, but also the "Philosophical Interlude" – are annotated. But those two chapters – as well as everything Marcuse wrote on art until the end of his life – are probably the best source we have for understanding the root of his conflicts with Fromm! If, after 1965, they both could agree on the necessity of a reorganized moral life, Fromm (1950a) was much closer to what he identified as a universal "humanistic religious" ethos, while Marcuse spoke explicitly about an "aesthetic ethos" (1969a:26).

In fairness to Fromm (1974b; 1991a), he cannot be said to have been insensitive to art. At one point, he likened the role of the psychoanalyst to that of the artist: "the psychoanalyst is not by any means an artist or dramatist, he is no Shakespeare, but he

must have the eyes of a dramatist and be capable of capturing the reality of man (*des Menschen*)” (1966j:6, my translation). In many of its fundamental aspects, he was in total agreement with Marcuse’s (1978) mature aesthetics:

Great art has the same function as science. It penetrates the common sense picture of man and nature which like common sense thinking is formed and also distorted by society. Art exposes the *essence* of phenomena, their true reality by penetrating the deceptive surface aspects. The artist is by necessity *critical* of the common sense way of seeing and hearing; as far as he is an artist he is a *radical*, because he goes to the roots; he is an *internationalist*, because he touches upon a reality of existence common to all men. If it is the function of science to make man's thought more *critical*, it is the function of art to make man more *sensitive* to all phenomena of life. The scientific and artistic truth both have in common that they go further than conventional thought and perception in touching reality, that is the forces behind the static appearance (1965m:4)

Indeed, Fromm briefly studied literature on surrealism and pornography during the years when he was composing his later criticisms of Marcuse. He believed that there was a “destructive tendency” that could be followed “from Marinetti’s Manifesto of 1909 to those trends in surrealism which are expressed in Breton and eventually in the cadaver-loving philosophy of Marcuse and Brown” (Fromm to I. F. Stone, March 8th, 1968). From 1968 on, de Sade joined Marinetti in Fromm’s (1964a; 1973a) accusations against the apology of sadism and destructiveness. In reading a book by Herbert Gershman on *The surrealist revolution in France* (1969), he noted his impression that the movement was characterized by its “shoking [sic], sadistic, destroying” intentions, and in a footnote excluded from his posthumously published text on “Sexuality and perversions”, Fromm wrote:

The most insightful and brilliant study of sado-masochism I find in Susan Sontag’s [sic] *The Pornographic Imagination* in her *Styles of Radical Will*, Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, New York, 1969. She characterizes de Sade’s interest in the obliteration of personality as being one from the view point of power and liberty, and with this characterization introduces a viewpoint [...] close to my own concept of sado-masochism (1990g-001-eng-type-01, p. 13).

He read Sontag’s essay with much attention, and more than once, as Sontag contended that “[d]eath is the only end to the odyssey of the pornographic imagination when it becomes systematic; that is, when it becomes focused on the pleasures of transgression rather than mere pleasure itself” (1967:62). In the *Story of O*, Sontag saw a “vision of the world” in which “the highest good is the transcendence of personality” – that is, “the extinction of consciousness”, “death itself” (1967:55,57). It is an interesting excursion in the world of the arts, and not an accidental one, because surrealism and situationism were part of the political and cultural *milieu* in which Marcuse was read in France. Of course, Marcuse could be critical of surrealism, as in

the claim that “it has long since become a commodity” (1967b:115) – display a profound interest in the possibility of turning imagination into a political force – “the technician as artist, society as a work of art” (1967c:128); “[m]oral, psychological, aesthetic, intellectual faculties” as “factors in the material production itself” (1972a:3). In fact, he included “surrealism” alongside the religious minorities and socialist groups as part of the history of significant political radicalism – a comparison Fromm would certainly have abhorred (cf. Marcuse Na.3.235:13).

That said, Fromm didn’t think of artistic practice, and the sort of sociability artists find between themselves, and with the public, as models for political organization and struggle. Sure enough, he recognized the creative process as one in which a certain union may be found between artist and object (cf. 1956a); he discussed the prevalence of narcissism among artists, but also thought narcissism could be checked in the work process (cf. 1964a; 1973a). But – think about it – one of his models for a great artist was Pablo Casals, who indeed was one, but why so? Because, among other things, Fromm (1974b:108-9) admired in him the capacity to sustain effort and find liberation in his regular musical practice of Bach. This trait – which Fromm usually called “discipline” (1973a:271) – is lacking in his image of a personality without a core, without convictions. It is also lacking in what he saw as Marcuse’s idealization of the perversions and of polymorphous sexuality.

Fromm distinguished between “authoritarian” discipline which is imposed from without, and is hostile to life to a state of effort and concentration that is the “expression of one’s will” (1956a:78). He said “[w]ithout effort we can’t attain any of our goals in life, no matter what the advertisements may claim to the contrary. Anyone who fears effort, anyone who backs off from frustration and possibly even pain will never get anywhere, especially not in analysis” (1974a:84), and presented a combination of “patience and discipline, to learn, to concentrate, to endure frustration, to practice critical thinking, to overcome one’s narcissism and greed” (1973a:271) as the requirements for the practice of any *art*. Of course, Fromm wasn’t merely referring to art in the aesthetic sense, but to “life” itself, or an “art of living” (cf. 1993c) – and thus his thinking includes an enthusiasm for ethical transformation and “devotion to a goal” of personal change and liberation, whose model may be sought in some religious teachings, which Fromm in some cases admired so much (cf. 1989a; 1992s)⁷.

⁷ Another intriguing way of gauging the relationship between Fromm and Marcuse is in their relation to Alfred Whitehead. It should be remembered that the first occurrence of the notion of “Great Refusal” in Marcuse (1956:146) is derived directly from Whitehead, precisely in a commentary he made on the arts. Later, in *One-dimensional man* (1964:228), he wrote approvingly of Whitehead’s idea that “[t]he function

Despite his intemperate fondness for Freud's metapsychology, Marcuse bridled at all talk of "ego mastery", arguing that it denotes domination, and is inherently or incipiently conformist, like Freud's valorization of "genital primacy". But while Marcuse (1956) spoke emphatically about the "progressive function" of regression, he that he was not in favor of overthrowing the conquests of the mature ego completely (cf. 1964, 1967a, 1969a). Nevertheless, he found Fromm's emphasis on ethics quite suspicious. Incidentally, the fact that Fromm included the concept of "will" in his notion of discipline touches upon the heart of his idea of human change. For this reason, Fromm (1955a) included a change in "practice of life" as a requirement *sine qua non* for characterological transformation. This was yet another aspect of Fromm's ideas that Marcuse (1955) deemed "conformistic" in the *Dissent* debate, which amounts perhaps to a certain absolutism his writing retained in the notion of "Great Refusal", and which Fromm disliked for its inability to discern nuance and transition in transformation – both subjective and social. We learn from another redacted segment that Fromm thought both Marcuse and Sartre wrote within the "apocalyptic" tradition of messianism: "give me freedom (socialism, the new society etc.) or give me death" (1968a-000-eng-type-01, p. 11). While I don't think that this is a fair evaluation of Marcuse's position, especially in later years, it reflects a lacuna in his style of thinking and writing, which was insensitive to the problem of "transition", and thought of "qualitative difference" as a sudden precipitate, not as the product of painstaking and slow modification, as Fromm (1970b) would have it.

As we reach the late sixties, this state of affairs changes slightly. Marcuse never gives up the notion of Great Refusal, nor does he completely do away with the rhetoric and the vocabulary of "negation". He always celebrated "negation" as a principled "rejection" of participation in the established society, coming from people who have become "incapable of tolerating" the existing state of affairs (Marcuse Na.3.235:6,9).

of Reason is to promote the art of life" – "(i) to live; (ii) to live well; (iii) to live better" (1929:4,8). Needless to say, Fromm couldn't have agreed more, at least on the nominal level – and indeed, he seems to have read his copy of this book with great pleasure. He takes note of this reference to Whitehead as he reads *One-dimensional man*, perhaps with some puzzlement in seeing his rival affirm a position so close to his own (cf. *One-dimensional Man Exzerpte*). Other aspects of Whitehead's argument – the distinction between Ulysses' and Plato's "reason" – are on his mind as well when he writes his marginalia on Marcuse's notion of performance principle (cf. 1956:159, Fromm's copy). But we need only remember Marcuse's rejection of all "teleological philosophy" in the same book to measure his distance from Fromm. In context, this may be read as a declaration of rejection, or at least mistrust, of negotiating with philosophies such as Thomism, which – bearing the Aristotelian inheritance – were to a certain extent on the same conceptual sphere as Fromm's (1947a) ethics, but also to theistic forms of philosophy and social theory. Fromm remained always more open to dialogue with the religious traditions, theistic or not, than Marcuse.

Politically, this develops into a hope that “absenteeism, wildcat strikes, individual and group sabotage” (1972b, p. 27) and other forms of spontaneous “refusal” might pave the way for social change. He thinks capitalism could end with a “diffuse, decentralized disintegration”, adding from dispersed “rebellion” in a series of local communities (Na.3.286:10, my translation). But he very clearly starts envisioning more of a gradient between present and future possibilities, and he wants them, much like Fromm, embodied in people living here and now – “practice here on earth” (Marcuse 1969c:188), “in the flesh” (Fromm 1962a:177)! The practice he would like to see, however, he tied not to values or to a “religious” source of inspiration, but to an idea of imaginative freedom, in which social reproduction and the “free exercise of human faculties” would be reconciled in a collective effort to change the environment and sociability alike (cf. 1969a). Marcuse (1970a), too, recovered the ancient, “technical” sense of “art” – but instead of translating it into the ethical suggestion for an art of living, he rather liked the idea that technique could merge with art and the imaginative faculties, and thus open the room for a fusion between phantasy and reality in the very production of the social realm.

In this, Marcuse aimed at achieving a “harmony of the faculties” (1969a:37) – much like Fromm’s (1947a) concept of individuation and the development of character involves the integration between intellectual, sensuous, and affective powers. His model for the politically successful agent was thus, for some time, and in some respects, the artist – not, as in Fromm’s case, as a passionate disciplined artisan, but as a daydreamer who lived out his daydreams. This may account for the peculiar fact that, after a thorough criticism of behaviorism and operationalism, followed by a conception of technique as embodiment of domination, Marcuse eventually defended the “translation of values into technical tasks” (1964:232): to a certain extent, his “imaginative-phantasistic” conception of social reconstruction wished for a collapse of the difference between work and play.

In the *Dissent* debate, Marcuse (1955) had criticized Fromm’s and other’s treatment of work as “creative work”, but from *Eros and civilization* on his own writings fluctuate incessantly between the aspiration for an abolition of work, its merger with play, and a more sober position which still recognizes some dualism between “the realm of necessity and the realm of freedom” (cf. Marcuse 1964, 1969d). Fromm (1968a) criticized the view that play and work could be made completely equivalent – because he thought that work performed in non-alienated circumstances need not be toil, but can be a vehicle for personal growth (1956, 1965, 1970b). Marcuse agreed with

Fromm (1991e) in differentiating alienated work from work in general, but may not have grasped that work could be anything other than toil: in Marx, he wrote, “the construction of a socialist society is a creation rather than a production” (1970b:8) – but for Fromm “production” would hardly have been separated from creation. Rather, it would have been distinguished from “busy-ness” in the sense of a compulsive or compulsory act, which expends considerable energy but doesn’t enhance the agent’s sense of well-being.

If Fromm (1957a, 1968a) had for a long time posed the alternative between “socialism” and “robotism”, and was increasingly mistrustful of automation and cybernetics, it was only much later that Marcuse wrote– “Men and women can be computerized into robots, *but they can also refuse!*” (Na.3.374:15). But sadly, from the *Dissent* debate onwards, Marcuse incapable of distinguishing between Fromm’s (1947a) notion of “productiveness” – which is, first and foremost, a production of oneself, not of things – from the demand for “productivity” in the industrial sense. This was a mistake. At the same time, Marcuse (1958) was more sensitive than Fromm to the difference between relations of production on a structural level, and the local organization of work – which had implications for their political views on socialism. This was already hinted at in Marcuse’s “Reply” from 1956, but never elaborated fully. In Fromm’s drafts for his criticism of Marcuse, however, it did not escape his attention (cf. Marcuse Exzerpte). On the contrary, he was attentive not only to their differences with regards to Freud, but also with regards to Marx and to politics. If we scrutinize what Fromm wrote but withheld from publication, we eventually find that the deepest source of disagreements between them were never fully articulated, not only because Fromm withdrew much of what he wrote from publication, but also because *he never finished writing everything he planned*. The oldest sketch for his appendix to *The revolution of hope* includes, as topics to be addressed, not only “the distortion of Freud” – which is what he mostly discussed until the end of his life –, but also “Marx”, Marcuse’s “theory of revolution”, and his relation to “decentralization”, among other topics familiar from the published writings, such as “hopelessness” (Marcuse Exzerpte, p. 1-3).

Now we can pinpoint one of the blindspots of the original *Dissent* debate: centering on what Freud meant, initially, prompted Fromm and Marcuse to overlook the extent to which Fromm’s anthropology was shaped by the influence of Marx and a number of other relevant sources. The *1844 Manuscripts* are particularly important for understanding his concept of affirmation and of passions (cf. Fromm 1968h), and in this, once again, his conception and Marcuse’s were very close and very distant.

Marcuse (1956, 1958) was close enough to humanistic interpretations of Marx to incorporate the idea of an optimal human development, of the free interplay of human faculties, the problem of overcoming alienation, and many other topics familiar to Fromm⁸. But his *psychology* was less Marxian than Fromm's – or rather, it was comprised of themes and categories that pertain equally to Marx and the German idealist tradition, and Freudian notions, whereas Fromm develops a different form of integration between these sources, retaining Freudian dynamics and partially his topology, but changing his phenomenological notions fundamentally.

Fromm's allusions to revolution and decentralization are more important, however. They point to the most important practical correlates of their theoretical differences. At the end of the day, they had fundamentally different conceptions of what a progressive political movement should look like. Fromm is not correct that Marcuse was strictly against decentralization – not for the late sixties, by any means, when the idea occurs that the “centralized bureaucratic communist [...] organization” (1969a:89) should be one of the targets of the emerging political movements on the economic. He would even come to say, a few years later, that “decentralization belongs to the essence of socialism” (Na.3.286:11, my translation)! Fromm was right, however, that Marcuse (1969d) was mistrustful of the idea that a form of “humanistic planning” in Fromm's (1970e) terms would facilitate a revolution in production. Marcuse thought “those who are to exercise the socialist control must have *the new consciousness, the new vital needs and goals, the new values*” (Na.3.235:12) beforehand, otherwise they risk falling into exploitation again. The main difficulty lay in the fact that Marcuse's political and economic strategies were at odds with each other. Economically, he favored a higher degree of centralization, of “planning” and “collective control of the process of production and distribution” (Marcuse Na.3.235:12); but he advocated a very decentralized organization for the New Left, “widely diffused, with a high degree of autonomy, mobility, flexibility” (1969a:89). He envisaged “some kind of diffuse and dispersed disintegration of the system, in which interest, emphasis and activity are shifted to local and regional areas” (1969e:124), and at an earlier point, even wrote that “whatever the peace movement has achieved [...] it achieved by its conscious failure to relate, by its break with the other [social] ‘sectors’” (Marcuse to Davis, undated). Still in 1968, he said that “without organization there cannot be an effective movement”

⁸ Here, Marcuse's (1956, 1958, 1969d) differences with Raya Dunayevskaya and Gustav Bally on workers' organization and the concept of work are among the most telling indicators, in a comparison with Fromm.

(1968d, s.p.), but an emphasis on the need for finding a form of organization “that combines spontaneity and discipline” (1972d:11, my translation) is only typical of his later years.

Now, compare this with Fromm’s (1968a) proposal of American civil society organized in terms of Groups and Clubs – the former as very small, ethically oriented communities aiming at personal and social transformation; the latter, as larger units, variously composed, but brought together by common interests and by a concerted and sustained reactivation of local political participation. Fromm (1955a) was also in favor of regular communal gatherings or “town hall” style meetings as part of political life, whereas Marcuse thought in terms of cultural guerilla and a political-strategic dispersion of antagonistic action. Only with the dissolution of the sixties’ enthusiasm did Marcuse go back to emphasizing the need for an “organization of direct democracy” – “a strategy of small groups political and psychological in one” (Na.3.327:7) – and the relevance of “winning quantitative strength” (1972c:3-4, my translation). Before that, he authorized the New Left as a “vanguard, or leading minorities, or catalysts” (1968e:9) – “the masses always come afterwards!” (Na.3.235:14). He imagined them as the would-be actual leaders of a new society – “this kind of elite is the hope of a free society – those with education, training, and capacity to rule” (1968d, s.p.) – or more modestly as having a “strictly preparatory” role (1968c:15), being the harbingers of the more progressive ideas of the times – “I never proposed that an intellectual elite governs” (1969f:130). From the point of view of the status quo, Marcuse’s proposal would be one for exceptional political action developed by minorities, whereas Fromm’s would be a transition from a cumbersome and bureaucratic form of representative democracy into intensive day-to-day political participation by the mass of people.

This difference between a “minority” politics in Marcuse’s case and a “majority” politics in Fromm’s case is in my view intimately related to their different models, in the arts and in religion, for radical social transformation. Biographically, it leads back to their different relations to McCarthy, as well as to Fromm’s more “ecumenical” temperament, as opposed to Marcuse’s individualistic style of thinking up to the early seventies. That said, it is also important to note that Marcuse was gradually persuaded that among the “most urgent *tasks of the left*” was the formation of a “united front” and the “suspension of the ideological skirmishes” (Na.3.310:6, my translation). Even so, Marcuse’s preaching of “the artist as technician” – of a certain collapse between imagination and work, so as to live social life as a constructive form of play – would require a more individualistic *modus operandi* than Fromm’s ethical approach, in which

communal bonds are strengthened through shared aspirations towards certain (collective) ends. In Weberian (1921-2) terms, we are talking about two different forms of organizing the reproduction of status groups. Marcuse's notion fluctuates between a stylization of society and a stylization of oneself, whereas Fromm valorizes the constructive efforts of inspired groups for moral reform, which necessarily includes a strong reference to others in its constitution.

Evidence for that can be traced in their different concepts of solidarity, for example. Fromm's (1962a) notion of solidarity was deeply tied to his rejection of nationalism and tribalism ("incestuous symbiosis"), and his idea of a universal human nature, and his desire to cultivate the capacity to embrace cultural differences as a local or particular expression of something universally given to the members of the species. This approach is congruent with his belief that there could be decisive and beneficial political progress without a descent into violence and chaos. The idea that a new society could emerge, organized democratically in lively groups despite these differences is a morphological correlate of the "humanistic" concept of solidarity: unity in difference. In Marcuse, we find reference both to a "violent solidarity" of the New Left, and to solidarity as "autonomy: self-determination" (1969a:88). Of course, Fromm affirmed that true solidarity does not result in deindividualization, but in context, I read this proposal in Marcuse's writing as an expression of the difficulty he had in reconciling the risk of fragmentation between the New Left groups, which he would later acknowledge and criticize, and a fear for authoritarian forms of "sticking together" in their wish for political discipline. He and Fromm could agree on the idea of solidarity as "cooperation" in "work and purpose" (Marcuse 1969a:88,91), but my estimation is that, beyond the formal definition for this or that word, they were coming at these ideas from very different perspectives on how (and what!) it means to engage people to collaborate for political purpose.

This tension had consequences for their conception of how political action should actually occur. Among Fromm's drafts on Marcuse, we find the isolated sentence: "leads to putsch" (Marcuse Exzerpte, p. 3). This annotation suggests that Fromm feared Marcuse's "minority" tactics as possibly leading to a backlash. He regarded the idea of a violent revolution in the US "unrealistic" already in 1955(a), and developed this into the notion that a breakdown of the US political system would have as its consequence a "brutal dictatorship" (1968a:98) – hence one more reason for sticking to the elections. In fact, he wrote to Mumford in April 30th, 1969:

Psychologically speaking it seems to me the revolutionary tendencies which aim at the violent over-throw of the present system resemble the fascist model and not that of classical revolutionary concepts from Marx to Lenin. Both Marx and Lenin were deeply convinced that revolution is possible only if you have, if not a majority, at least a large part of the population with you. The idea of the coup by which a small minority which has little support in the total population, can seize power, is typically Nazi and Fascist.

Of course, we can only speculate what Fromm told Marcuse when he discussed his paper on revolution at the 1968 Paris Symposium,. But we know he was unhappy with what he read, as his markings on the respective paper indicate (side by side with the expression “new needs and new values”, he writes: “phraseology”). To be sure, Marcuse’s approach was more complex than Fromm acknowledged. For one, Marcuse held the idea that the political minorities should work as anticipators and “catalysts” of a change that would, indeed, require the participation of the mass and majority of the workers, otherwise it wouldn’t happen: “a radical social change is naturally unthinkable without the great majority of the working class” (1972d:11, my translation). This went both for the US and on the level of international relations and anticolonial struggles (cf. Marcuse 1967d; 1969a; 1972a). Still, he had earlier felt the need to justify revolutionary violence as “counter-violence” against the violence of the status quo (cf. Marcuse 1965a; 1966a), and hence didn’t quite discard the possibility of a political revolution in the strong sense, as Fromm did in the American context. In this respect Marcuse oscillated between rejection – “the situation is not at all revolutionary. It is not even pre-revolutionary” (Marcuse 1968f:6) – and encouragement – “cultural revolution but not (*yet*) political and economic revolution” (1972a:79). So they could agree on the need for a “cultural revolution” or “renaissance” as something not reducible to political and social revolution, but not on the human content and substratum of this revolution. Hence another of Fromm’s complaints against radical youth: “the concepts of many of them are naïve and they have not even made up their minds whether this is a revolutionary situation in which revolutionary tactics are adequate or not” (Fromm to I.F. Stone, March 8th, 1968).

And indeed, the difference between their aspirations was already evident in the contrast between *The sane society* and *Eros and civilization*. In the former, Fromm wants to transform passive consumers back into active, engaged and well-informed citizens. In the latter book, Marcuse’s blend of Orpheus and Narcissus expresses a mixture of the desire for “pacification of existence” (1964:220), the satisfaction and quietness of desires, and a heightened valuation of the realm of imagination as a source for well-being. So Fromm and Marcuse are never so close or so distant from each other

as they are in their valuation of the political function of imagination. But whereas Marcuse (1956) privileged *phantasy* and its embodiment in the arts as the model for the political ethos he wished for, Fromm (1947a) privileged the notion of *vision*, of prophetic ascent, as his guideline. Whereas individual “phantasy” presupposes the suspension of the immediate relations to others and a displacement of one’s interest into the inner world of dreams and daydreams, “vision” implies a directive element to action, as well as coordination of activity with others. In the one case, reality is potentially overbearing: fulfillment of phantasy is increasingly unstable when it passes from a “community of daydreams” (Sachs 1920) into an attempt at acting together, as it must reconcile – not merely the variety of individual desires, but the singularity of focal points of repression, from which phantasy originally sprung, and which threaten to be overstepped in the act. In the other case, acting on behalf of a “vision” brings the singularity of each one’s wishes in greater harmony with shared communal aspirations, but precisely for that reason, its power in feeding collective action is somewhat diminished, the more interest is diverted from the image, back into current existence.

These different structures in action imply also different relations to *authority*. Fromm deemed Marcuse’s radicalism to be a form of rebelliousness, more than a genuine revolutionary impulse. It formulates the anticipation of a better life with reference to what can be felt, here and now, as relief from burden and fear. To allow ourselves an incursion in the jargon: “the negative” remains tied to “the positive”, and does not truly move beyond it. On the other hand, Fromm himself was not exempt from idealization of authority, albeit not exactly in “authoritarian” terms – as can be seen in his relation to those whom he considered as “Masters of Living”. This is but the other side of the difference we pointed before, in their relation to *satisfaction* – or, more precisely, to the kinds of satisfaction they envisioned. The two aspects are intertwined: Marcuse’s hedonism and Fromm’s eudaimonism express in ideal terms two different forms of dealing with desire and renunciation⁹.

⁹ As evidence of what I have in mind, take the following discrepancy in translation: among the passages from Fromm’s 1930s works that Marcuse (1955) quoted in his first *Dissent* article, one is particularly worthy of attention, as it presents an occurrence of the concept of a “productive development of the personality” already during Fromm’s Freudian phase. The German original reads: *Die Sexualität bietet eine der elementarsten und stärksten Befriedigungs- und Glücksmöglichkeiten. Wäre sie in den Grenzen, wie sie aus der Notwendigkeit der produktiven Entfaltung der Persönlichkeit, nicht aber aus den Zwecken der Beherrschung der Massen bedingt sind, zugelassen, so würde die Erfüllung dieses einen wichtigen Glücksmöglichkeit notwendigerweise zu einer Verstärkung der Ansprüche auf Befriedigung und Glück in anderen Lebenssphären führen, Ansprüche, die, da ihre Sättigung materielle Mittel erforderte, zu Sprengung der bestehenden gesellschaftlichen Ordnung führen müssten* (Fromm 1934a:215). Marcuse considers that the subject for the second sentence are “the possibilities” in his personal translation for the *Dissent* debate, whereas Fromm’s version into English, prepared years later for *The crisis of psychoanalysis*, takes it to be still “sexuality”. In Marcuse, there appears as “spheres of

In conclusion, the Fromm/Marcuse debate in *Dissent* was on the surface a quarrel over Freud's legacy, and the most fruitful (and faithful) ways of interpreting and applying his ideas to the social and political landscape of mid-1950s America. The sweeping severity of Marcuse's attack and the somewhat anemic character of Fromm's initial rejoinders rendered it difficult to discern that, on a deeper level, their disagreements were the product of different political sensibilities, which entailed different appraisals of the "revolutionary character" and the modes of sociability and collective organization and action required to bring about radical social change. Fromm's orientation was deeply informed by Marx's thought, but was predominantly prophetic and ethical in character, while Marcuse's orientation was chiefly artistic and aesthetic.

The Fromm/Marcuse debate occurred in a period of relative stability in the United States, but was followed by a series of political upheavals surrounding the Cuban missile crisis, the civil rights movement, Vietnam war, the Black power movement, the failure of Eugene McCarthy's bid for the Presidency, the Nixon presidency, etc. In the midst of these tumultuous events, Fromm nevertheless sought to create an international movement to promote socialist humanism, and to enlist Marcuse's help in doing so. But as the 1960s unfolded, Fromm and Marcuse adopted very different attitudes toward the New Left, the burgeoning student movement and the (bold but ephemeral) counter-culture, Fromm's being acutely ambivalent, Marcuse's being predominantly positive. During this same period of time, Fromm deepened his reading of Marcuse's work, and sharpened his critique of Marcuse, who soon became the darling of the New Left. But though Fromm continued to criticize Marcuse, here and there, till the end of his life, many of his reflections on the problematic nature of Marcuse's positions were never published for fear of harming Marcuse – an occasional ally, as well as an adversary – and strengthening his enemies on the Right. Moreover, the bitter aftertaste of the *Dissent* debate lingered on, coloring Fromm's perception of

human existence" what Fromm call "areas of life". But, most importantly, Marcuse translates as "limits set by the need for the productive development of the personality" what in Fromm's authorized translation appears as "the full extent required for the productive development of the human personality". Marcuse thus interprets the "necessity" ("*Notwendigkeit*") of personal development in terms of a restriction posed to personality; he reads "*den Grenzen*", "limits", so to speak, "from outside in" – which is in accordance with his idea that the "productive character" would be a conformist concept. Fromm, to the contrary, sees in that "necessity" precisely that which is antagonistic to the socially imposed restrictions to human development, and hence reads "*den Grenzen*" as something working "from inside out", assuming the point of view of the personality.

Marcuse, whose positions (on various issues) shifted appreciably in this period of time, often in ways that came to resemble Fromm's ideas and intuitions.

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