Love, Actually? Theodor Adorno, Erich Fromm, and the Possibility of Love in Capitalist Modernity

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Abstract

Love is not regularly associated with the Frankfurt School. Theodor Adorno and Erich Fromm are not regularly associated with each other. Yet, when we bring these Critical Theorists' works together, a rich discussion of love does in fact emerge. Love is viewed by both as a dialectical force, bringing two subjects into union while also allowing them to cultivate their individual selves. Fromm and Adorno operate within the same Marxist philosophical tradition, meaning that they share concerns about the increasing commodification of love and the disappearance of genuine, spontaneous relationships between people. The similarities are not endless, however, and important differences between them remain: Fromm, with his optimism and his concern for existential issues, maintains a belief in revolutionary political change and high spiritual ideals which the materialist pessimist Adorno resists as comfortable illusions. Through this philosophical encounter, two different faces of Critical Theory arise, one oriented towards an analysis of the present and the other turned towards hopes for the future.

Keywords: Frankfurt School, Critical Theory, Marxism, Love, Theodor Adorno, Erich Fromm

What Is Love?: Defining the Dialectic

Does it really make any sense to talk about love and the Frankfurt School together? Any reader would be forgiven for asking such a question: in the minds of many, a notion as noble as love must surely be a subject almost alien to any serious disciple of the great cynics Marx and Freud, especially those critics of modern capitalism as profound as Theodor Adorno. Marx himself believed that love and money were incompatible, the latter transforming all human relationships into standardised, calculated exchanges and thus destroying the potential for the nuances and playfulness of the former.[1] Freud did not offer a particularly cheerful prognosis either, with love and death—*Eros* and *Thanatos*—locked together in a constant civilisational struggle. Given what has been described as Adorno's extreme pessimism or even his fatalism,

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[1] Hardt, "For Love or Money," 679.

his despair at the absurdity of modernity and our impotence to change it,[2] why should we expect anything different from him or his other Western Marxist contemporaries when it comes to the potential for love in capitalist modernity?

If love is an unusual subject to associate with the Frankfurt School, then Theodor Adorno and Erich Fromm are even more unlikely intellectual bedfellows—or at least that is what traditional accounts of the Frankfurt School lead us to believe. Usually, emphasis is placed on Fromm's disgruntled break from the rest of the School at the end of the 1930s, an unhappy product resulting from both personal and theoretical disagreements. As Martin Jay notes, several of the School's other members disapproved of Fromm's portrayal of Freud as a patriarchal thinker and his interest in "existential issues" was regarded by some as naïve at best.[3] The strains between Fromm and the rest of the Frankfurt School were not merely intellectual either: it has been equally suggested that the Institute for Social Research's financial difficulties at the close of the decade encouraged the ousting of Fromm so that Horkheimer and others might secure funding from orthodox psychoanalytic circles.[4] Fromm's comparatively smooth integration into American society after exile from Germany, a process which culminated in his adoption of US citizenship in 1940, was another cause of friction: Fromm got on much better with the group's American colleagues at Columbia University and was seen by them as the lynchpin of the Frankfurt School's academic ecosystem, especially its efforts in empirical sociological research,[5] leading Horkheimer to mistrust Fromm's personal and institutional loyalties.[6] The relationship between Fromm and Adorno was particularly fraught. Right from their first encounter, Adorno had little sympathy for Fromm's earlier involvement in orthodox Jewish education centres, dismissing him as a mere "Berufsjude" or "professional Jew"—hardly a serious thinker.[7] This personal hostility seems to have continued even after Fromm's break with the rest of the Frankfurt School and Adorno became the first member of the Institute to publicly criticise his former colleague in 1946.[8]

Against this backdrop of animosity, we might ask why a comparison between Fromm and Adorno can be justified at all: how could such opposed thinkers be brought together in a fruitful fashion? As many recent Fromm scholars have been at pains to point out, however,

[2] Babe, "Theodor Adorno and Dallas Smythe," 112.
[3] Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination*, 101.
[4] Wheatland, *Frankfurt School in Exile*, 224.
[5] Wheatland, *Frankfurt School in Exile*, 76.
[6] Wheatland, *Frankfurt School in Exile*, 82–83.
[7] Jacobs, *Frankfurt School, Jewish Lives, and Antisemitism*, 55.
[8] Jay, *Dialectical Imagination*, 103.

comparison is worthwhile because the differences between Fromm and the rest of the Frankfurt School have been overplayed, especially when it comes to cultural criticism. Joan Braune, for example, underlines the fact that Fromm's early empirical work under Horkheimer's directorship—particularly his pioneering synthesis of Marx and Freud which led to his recruitment in the first place—had a lasting impact that other Frankfurt thinkers were later unwilling to acknowledge.[9] Even in the studies of contemporary Critical Theorists, Fromm's work is not given the attention we might expect of such a key intellectual innovator. Though major studies into the relationship between the Frankfurt School and psychoanalysis acknowledge his important role in introducing psychological theories to his colleagues, in the end they still prefer to keep discussions centred on more familiar figures such as Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse.[10] Despite Fromm having a reputation for offering pop-psychology, spiritual self-help, and utopian political visions in his works, a serious investigation of their contents in fact finds a critique of capitalist modernity which sings from the same Marxist-Freudian hymn sheet we find in Adorno. Both figures are also inheritors of a specifically German cultural environment which left its mark on many other twentieth-century intellectuals too, whether this be their engagement with the philosophical traditions of their homeland such as those founded by Kant and Hegel or their common political experiences of exile and emigration, though they were, of course, to develop their own stances towards them and their consequences.

In tension with these similarities, however, it is nevertheless clear that these two Frankfurt thinkers are also distinct intellectual figures in their own right: Fromm's extensive engagement with existential questions of meaning in life, undoubtedly a theme that would be anathema to Adorno, is a clear example of this. Moreover, it is also important to note that Fromm, unlike his younger colleague, was willing to declare open battle with Freudian orthodoxy, refusing to disguise his revisionism in either classical Freudian terminology or a narrative of returning to the original, purer meaning of psychoanalysis.[11] The two thinkers also had differing relationships with their Jewish heritage, something on display in their diverging receptions of the tradition of messianism. Nick Braune and Joan Braune argue that, while Adorno and many other Frankfurt thinkers were influenced by a sense of "catastrophic messianism," Fromm instead turned to "prophetic messianism" for inspiration. This was a vital

[9] Braune, *Revolutionary Hope*, 4.
[10] See, for example, Whitebook, *Perversion and Utopia*.
[11] McLaughlin, "How to Become a Forgotten Intellectual," 235.

way for him to legitimise his defence of hope in the future, something which helps explain and ground his work's generally more optimistic philosophical orientation.[12]

These differences, however, do not fundamentally alienate the philosophical projects of Fromm and Adorno from one another or negate their shared intellectual heritage. Rather, we can understand them as reflecting two different though genealogically related interpretations of what Critical Theory was or could be. As Kieran Durkin puts it, Fromm and Adorno represent a "relative bifurcation" in the history of the Institute for Social Research, with Fromm attached to its earlier stages of development and Adorno both the cause and representative of its later negative philosophy of history.[13] The sense of both commonality and difference between Critical Theory's Frommian and Adornean evolutionary branches elaborated above, then, opens up the potential for a productive—or perhaps even dialectical—conversation between Fromm's understudied thought and previously neglected elements of Adorno's philosophy, a gap in the scholarship with interesting implications when we consider the subject of love, a theme which lacks full-length chapters in many otherwise excellent overviews of Fromm's work,[14] not to mention those of Adorno's. Through exploring the meaning of love, there is thus potential for a richer understanding of the different guises Critical Theory can take.

Love is not a theme that many would associate with Adorno who is much better known for his critique of popular culture and discussions of aesthetics, a fact which makes it necessary to pin down what it could even mean in relation to his work. Love is notoriously difficult to define as a concept, and the word in both English and German can be used to denote everything from God's benevolent attitude towards creation to something as mundane as a preference for a particular kind of food. Debates over the meaning of love stretch as far back as ancient Greece (and probably even further still). Antiquity's philosophers delineated it into loose categories such as "eros" and "philia," and Christian thinkers elaborated at length on the meaning of "agape," thus introducing a mix of terms which emphasise different ways love might manifest itself in our lives.[15] More immediate to Fromm and Adorno's historical situation, love was also a theme which preoccupied the greatest German minds of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Though his views are often dismissed by the philosophers of today as hopelessly patriarchal, Kant wrote at some length on the nature of love in the context of marriage,

[12] See Braune and Braune, "Erich Fromm's Socialist Program," 80.
[13] Durkin, "Erich Fromm and Theodor W. Adorno Reconsidered," 112.
[14] See, for example, Durkin, *Radical Humanism*.
[15] See Helm, "Love."

characterising it in its ideal form as a form of "perfect equality and reciprocity in the surrender of the two spouses' lives and happiness to each other."[16] Hegel, too, took an interest in the nature of love, suggesting that it represented a meeting place between desire and law where other people become "unconditioned objects" and appreciated by us for their own sake.[17] Many of these thinkers were also well aware of potentially pathological forms that love could take. Pity was seen as one such manifestation and was lambasted by figures with a wide variety of philosophical instincts. This fact becomes clear when we consider that even Kant and Nietzsche find common ground in their view of pity as a distasteful way of suffering with others without providing them any true respite, all while giving the depraved a chance to exercise power by inflicting their pain onto the naïve other.[18]

Love also remained a key concern for some of Fromm and Adorno's twentieth-century contemporaries and rivals, too, a prime example being the existentialist philosopher Karl Jaspers. In his three-volume magnum opus *Philosophy* first published in 1932, Jaspers places "liebender Kampf," the loving struggle between equals, at the heart of the search for truth through communication, thus rendering love a foundational component of the philosophical thought process itself.[19] Ludwig Binswanger, a long-term friend and interlocutor of Freud, likewise puts love at the centre of his thought in his tome the *Formative Principles and Knowledge of Human Existence* first published in the 1940s. Rejecting Heidegger's notion of "Sorge" or "care" as merely the self serving the other without any higher union, Binswanger instead argues that love entails the creation of an ever-expanding, shared space in which real "Being-together" rules the roost.[20] While Heidegger saw Being-unto-death as the core of his ontology, Binswanger stresses this reaching out to the other as the foundation of human existence. Despite the complexities of these millennia-spanning conversations around love, however, there is a common aspect which both Fromm and Adorno manage to draw out, one not entirely at odds with their more existentialist contemporaries: love in the sense of a complete union between two subjects.

Fromm offers a direct discussion and definition of this kind of love in his 1956 English-language work *The Art of Loving*:

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[16] Papadaki, "Kantian Marriage and Beyond," 276.
[17] Bernstein, "Love and Law," 414.
[18] See Cartwright, "Kant, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche on the Morality of Pity."
[19] Jaspers, *Philosophie*, 351.
[20] Binswanger, *Grundformen*, 72.

> Love is an active power in man; a power which breaks through the walls which separate man from his fellow men, which unites him with others; love makes him overcome the sense of isolation and separateness, yet it permits him to be himself, to retain his integrity.[21]

Love is thus an art that must be practised and mastered, not something that we can passively receive from others without any personal effort. True to his Marxist roots, Fromm's definition of love contains a clear dialectic: it fosters a complete union between two people yet simultaneously promotes and strengthens their individual identities. In this way, love acts as a counter to the forces of both alienation and narcissism, allowing people to feel a sense of connectedness to others and develop themselves without a devolution into an atomistic individualism that promotes the subject at the expense of the object. As Daniel Burston notes, Fromm's conception of love also relies on an internal-external dialectic in the sense that, in order to be able to love others, we must first be able to love ourselves. Contrary to Freud's emphasis on narcissism and the self, Fromm argues across his works that "relationships based on reciprocal validation and individuated fellowship are not only possible but in fact a prerequisite to the emergence of authentic selfhood."[22]

Evidence for Fromm's belief in this internal-external dialect is again on display in *The Art of Loving* when he draws a distinction between "mature" and "immature" love:

> Infantile love follows the principle: *"I love because I am loved."* Mature love follows the principle: *"I am loved because I love."* Immature love says: *"I love you because I need you."* Mature love says: *"I need you because I love you."*[23]

Narcissism, a consuming kind of love, is tied up with immaturity—it assumes that it should give only after it has received and holds up the material conditions of necessity as the governing factor in deciding whether to love someone. Fromm expands on this kind of self-absorbed attitude in his 1964 work *The Heart of Man* where he introduces the term 'necrophilia' to describe this instrumental view of others. Not only does Fromm associate narcissism with a death of the real other, he also presents it is a thoroughly deranged attitude to adopt, claiming that psychosis is in fact "a state of absolute narcissism, one in which the person has broken all connection with reality outside."[24] In contrast with a pathological state of self-love, then, mature love recognises that it is by giving that we shall receive, a conception which reveals Fromm's indebtedness to the Judeo-Christian religious tradition he was raised in and strictly

[21] Fromm, *Art of Loving*, 42.
[22] Burston, *Legacy*, 92.
[23] Fromm, *Art of Loving*, 69.
[24] Fromm, *Heart of Man*, 77.

followed until his mid-twenties. In operating with a generous spirit, love knits other people into our own being, rendering our sense of self dependent on cultivating loving relationships with others.

Interestingly, in his posthumous 1970 essay "Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda," Adorno observes a similar narcissistic psychological mechanism at work in extremist political sloganeering:

> The narcissistic *gain* provided by fascist propaganda is obvious. It suggests continuously and sometimes in rather devious ways, that the follower, simply through belonging to the in-group, is better, higher and purer than those who are excluded.[25]

Despite broaching quite different topics, both Adorno and Fromm highlight how narcissism encourages lopsided relationships in the sense that the subject expects to receive something, either love or status, without contributing anything themselves. The type of language used, terms such as "infantile" and that of "narcissism" itself, also reveals their common intellectual inheritance from Freudian psychoanalysis and perhaps even the psychological character analyses of fascism and the authoritarian personality which were led by Fromm when he worked with the Institute for Social Research in the 1930s.[26] In any case, Adorno's political analysis here reinforces the idea that the overcoming of self-centredness achieved through psychological maturity is an important waypoint in both his own and Fromm's discussions of love and personal development more generally, one which will resurface throughout this article.

The religious elements of Fromm's understanding of love, a strand of thought separating him from Adorno, are emphasised further if we turn to other contemporary Jewish thinkers such as Martin Buber. Writing in his 1923 book *I and Thou*, Buber defines love in similarly social terms:

> Love is responsibility of an *I* for a *Thou*. In this lies the likeness— impossible in any feeling whatsoever— of all who love, from the smallest to the greatest and from the blessedly protected man, whose life is rounded in that of a loved being, to him who is all his life nailed to the cross of the world, and who ventures to bring himself to the dreadful point— to love *all men*.[27]

Unlike what we have seen of Fromm so far, however, Buber also draws out a more terrifying aspect of love, the fact that truly loving someone involves taking on huge risks: the beloved is,

[25] Adorno, *Culture Industry*, 145.
[26] Berry, *Revisiting the Frankfurt School*, 197.
[27] Buber, *I and Thou*, 11.

in the end, still human, meaning that they are subject to all the vices and flaws human nature brings with it. Judeo-Christian love thus demands sacrifice, something implicit in Fromm's combat against narcissistic lust but not spoken out loud.

This partial omission is perhaps due to Fromm's orientation towards utopianism and messianism, a trait clearly on display in his 1961 work *Marx's Concept of Man* which features an interesting blend of politics and theology. Fromm argues, for example, that socialism appeals to the peoples of Asia and Africa not simply because of its economic policies and "achievements," but because it also offers "the spiritual elements of justice, equality and universality which are inherent in Marxist socialism (rooted in the Western spiritual tradition)."[28] Marx, for Fromm, is more than a political philosopher—he is also a prophet in the unironic sense of the word and his work thus contains key spiritual insight which brings together theological hope and political reality. In this hope for political-religious revolution, Fromm is drawing on and radicalising the messianism of earlier German-Jewish thinkers such as the Neo-Kantian philosopher Hermann Cohen. In his essay "The Messianic Idea" from the early 1890s, for example, Cohen likewise blends faith and hope:

> But man's hope is transformed into faith when he no longer thinks of himself alone, that is, of his salvation here and now, or of his eternal salvation […] Hope is transformed into faith when man associates the future with the emergence of a community whose concerns will reach beyond its everyday concrete reality. […] As faith in mankind, Israel's faith is hope. And it is this epitome of Israel's prophetism, this hope in mankind's future, that comprises the substance of the Messianic idea.[29]

That Fromm himself holds such a faith is evident from his opposition to Freud's characterisation of human nature. In his famous 1932 letter to Albert Einstein, Freud argues that there are two fundamental kinds of human instincts, "those which seek to preserve and unite" and "those which seek to destroy and kill,"[30] thus presenting human nature as a never-ending dualistic battle between love and hate. Fromm explicitly calls out this characterisation in *The Heart of Man*, instead arguing that our destructive tendency "is a *malignant* phenomenon which grows and takes over to the extent to which Eros does not unfold. The death instinct represents *psychopathology* and not, as in Freud's view, a part of *normal biology*."[31] In this quite Rousseauian view of man, hope in the future and the possibility of love is reasonable

[28] Fromm and Marx, *Marx's Concept of Man*, 13.
[29] Cohen, *Reason and Hope*, 123–24.
[30] Freud, "On Love and The Death-Drive," 8.
[31] Fromm, *Heart of Man*, 54.

since hatred is an unnatural perversion, meaning that a community based on love is absolutely possible given the right social and material conditions.

Though, as shall become obvious later, Adorno does not seem to share Fromm's enthusiasm for the potentials of the future—even the utopian element of his aesthetics sees modernity as tragic,[32] offering only fleeting moment of redemption—a surprisingly similar relational and dialectical notion of love nevertheless emerges from his scattered discussions on the topic throughout *Minima Moralia*, a collection of aphorisms written during his American exile in the 1940s. Among these philosophical fragments, Adorno offers a brief analysis of the ideal form of marriage:

> The only decent marriage would be one allowing each partner to lead an independent life, in which, instead of a fusion derived from an enforced community of economic interests, both freely accepted mutual responsibility.[33]

Adorno puts forward a dialectical conception of marriage, with each partner leading their own life while also willingly taking on responsibility for the well-being of their spouse. This formulation of a loving relationship contains within it an anti-capitalist spirit that is also present in Fromm's emphasis on love's ability to overcome alienation: love does not reify its recipient, rather it breaks outside of an instrumental view of human relations and generates a genuine form of reciprocity. This view of love is entirely consistent with Adorno's earlier 1939 essay "On Kierkegaard's Doctrine of Love," a short text originally written in English for the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*. Adorno criticises Kierkegaard's idea of love for its undialectical "inwardness" which leaves it "prone to conceive itself as the sole ground of the world."[34] Love under this framework becomes nihilistic, destroying the potential for real affection between neighbours as they come to regard each other as "nothing but the stumbling block to prove one's own creative omnipotence as one of love."[35] In other words, the inward-focusing nature of Kierkegaard's love means that it seeks a purity of expression that is not compatible with what are the inevitably messy relations we have with our loved ones, leading to an attempt to cast others aside and focus solely on the self. Though much of Adorno's criticism of existentialist thinkers, a theme he developed at length in the 1964 book *The Jargon of Authenticity*, might be seen as harsh, even dogmatic, the need to overcome the danger of isolation was in fact a point the existentialists operating in Kierkegaard's wake themselves

[32] See Rabinbach, *In the Shadow of Catastrophe*, 64.
[33] Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, para. 10.
[34] Adorno, "On Kierkegaard," 417.
[35] Adorno, "On Kierkegaard," 417.

raised. French philosopher Paul Ricoeur, for example, suggests in his 1947 analysis of Gabriel Marcel and Karl Jaspers that the task of contemporary existentialist philosophy is to "reflect on the community *of existing*" because it is "this community which preserves a sense of the word 'humanity'."[36] The necessity of a force which can cross the bridge between self and other, the vital role played by love, thus seems to have occupied the minds of thinkers across even hotly contested philosophical dividing lines.

For Adorno, dialectical thought is the only potential mechanism for such a liberating connection, explaining its presence in his later discussion of genuine marriage and his earlier hostility towards Kierkegaard's doctrine of love. As he underlines further on in *Minima Moralia*:

> Dialectical thought opposes reification in the further sense that it refuses to affirm individual things in their isolation and separateness: it designates isolation as precisely a product of the universal.[37]

Dialectical thought always approaches objects in their contexts, viewing them as part of a complex web of interactions much like the reciprocal relationship of pushing and pulling between married partners. This philosophical method refuses to reify any elements of the web by considering them abstractly without any reference to their living, contextual bonds. The living aspect of love's dialectic is made explicit by Adorno in his Kierkegaard essay where he notes that "love for the dead is the one which most rigidly excludes the reciprocity of love that necessarily takes the beloved one as living himself" and is therefore little more than "reified and fetish love,"[38] a form of self-indulgence without reciprocity. Fromm would hardly disagree with Adorno's understanding here and might even take it further by adding a psychoanalytic twist. Writing in his 1962 book *Beyond the Chains*, Fromm offers an interesting etymological link between the static state of alienation Adorno points to and the idea of the origins of madness itself:

> Tranference [*sic*.] is not the only phenomenon of psychopathology which can be understood as an expression of alienation. Indeed, it is not accidental that *aliéné*, in French, and *alienado*, in Spanish, are older words for the psychotic, and the English "alienist" refers to a doctor who cares for the insane, the absolutely alienated person.[39]

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[36] Ricœur, *Gabriel Marcel et Karl Jaspers*, 79.
[37] Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, para. 45.
[38] Adorno, "On Kierkegaard," 427.
[39] Fromm, *Beyond the Chains*, 41.

The psychoanalytic idea of transference points to a kind of alienation since the patient projects desires and fears onto the other which are not in fact there: just as in the "reified" patterns of thought criticised by Adorno, their relationship is frozen. The patient's felt connection is with an illusion rather than the living person before them and it is this state of isolation which, for Fromm at least, seems to be the typical manifestation of madness in modernity.

Falling Out of Love: Alienation and Commodification

Before being swept away by the liberating possibilities of dialectical love, however, it must be noted that Adorno almost immediately puts a dampener on what can actually be expected from love in capitalist modernity. In the aphorism from the 1940s *Minima Moralia* collection directly following his discussion of marriage, Adorno moves to the topic of divorce and the way in which it transforms the relationship between former lovers:

> Intimacy between people is forbearance, tolerance, refuge for idiosyncrasies. If dragged into the open, it reveals the moment of weakness in it, and in a divorce such outward exposure is inevitable. It seizes the inventory of trust. Things which were once signs of loving care, images of reconciliation, breaking loose as independent values, show their evil, cold, pernicious side.[40]

Hopes from the previous aphorism that love can break out of an instrumentalised set of human relations are thoroughly dashed. Dialectical reciprocity is in fact extremely fragile and is liable to collapse into vicious infighting—the economic principle of scarcity, whether natural or, as Adorno in a more Marxist vein might suggest, contrived, is always hovering in the background. Objects that were once symbols of union become points of contention as soon as love's aura is stripped away, with former lovers left squabbling for possession over tokens that they once willingly gifted each other.

The scepticism shown here towards love's practical ability to overcome reified human relations nestles nicely into Adorno and Horkheimer's wider critique of the "culture industry" in their 1947 work *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Addressing the presentation of love by the culture industry, the two philosophers assert:

> Works of art are ascetic and shameless; the culture industry is pornographic and prudish. It reduces love to romance. And, once reduced, much is permitted, even libertinage as a marketable specialty, purveyed by quota with the trade description "daring."[41]

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[40] Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, para. 11.
[41] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 111.

Rather than a spontaneous and genuine relationship of give-and-take, love is reduced to the chase, a fetishised desire to consume the beloved and an attitude Fromm would see as characteristically necrophiliac. There is also a deep contradiction at the heart of the culture industry's presentation of love: it is simultaneously both pornographic and prudish. But how is this paradox to be understood? As Ross Wilson notes, according to Adorno the culture industry depends on "rigid aesthetic laws to which its consumers adhere. Everyone already knows what kind of thing they like. The response that matters is buying it."[42] Love as formulated by the culture industry is thus pornographic in the sense that it cuts up the human body into sexualised parts to be packaged and sold to the consumer, even venturing to market perversion as "daring" in order to give the allusion of subversiveness. Yet there is also a prudish side to this commodified love. By parcelling love up into neatly purchasable bundles, the culture industry denies its consumers any access to the real intricacies that underly a properly loving relationship, these being the dialectic of reciprocity that both Fromm and Adorno identify in their descriptions of love.

Wilson's stress on constriction can be taken further as, for Adorno, the tension between rigidity and spontaneity more generally underlies the hypocrisy of "bourgeois society" when it comes to love, a concern that he brings up again in *Minima Moralia*:

> Everywhere bourgeois society insists on the exertion of will; only love is supposed to be involuntary, pure immediacy of feeling. In its longing for this, which means a dispensation from work, the bourgeois idea of love transcends bourgeois society. But in erecting truth directly amid the general untruth, it perverts the former into the latter.[43]

Work under the modern "bourgeois" regime is increasingly routinised, with workplaces becoming more and more mechanised and workers finding themselves steadily more isolated from one another. In this suffocating environment, love is transformed into a naïve and hypocritical form of escapism: it must remain spontaneous against the tide of all other societal trends so that people can fumble their way towards an illusory realm of freedom which transcends the grim reality of the present. The final line gives us the sense that Adorno sees love as the proper basis for human relations, but that it is ultimately unable to survive in an environment so opposed to the spontaneity it requires. "Bourgeois love" is thus trapped in the same kind of immanent loop Adorno sees at work among cultural critics in his essay "Cultural Criticism and Society" published in his 1955 collection entitled *Prisms*. Like the alienated who

[42] Wilson, *Theodor Adorno*, 32.
[43] Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, para. 110.

in clinging to love at the same time destroy it, cultural critics fail to transcend the commodified culture of their times and in fact reinforce it since, in complaining about the objectification of culture, they once more turn culture into a series of "goods" which can be broken down and analysed.[44]

As we have already seen when it comes to the topic of messianism and as scholars such as Martin Jay have rightly pointed out, Fromm's work is generally marked by a more optimistic bent than that of Adorno and Horkheimer.[45] Some of Fromm's comments on love, however, act as a reminder that this characterisation of him as a straightforward optimist cannot always be taken for granted. In the 1956 book *The Art of Loving*, for example, Fromm expresses the same concern as Adorno for spontaneity and its importance for love:

> From birth to death, from Monday to Monday, from morning to evening— all activities are routinized, and prefabricated. How should a man caught in this net of routine not forget that he is a man, a unique individual, one who is given only this one chance of living, with hopes and disappointments, with sorrow and fear, with the longing for love and the dread of the nothing and of separateness?[46]

Modern society provides us with endless sets of premade desires and actions, allowing us to glide through life on autopilot, not stopping to consider what our desires might really be. Fromm is arguably even more pessimistic than Adorno here. Hypocritical bourgeois love, as a form of escapism, implies that a conscious sense of a self that is reaching for more than what society has on offer still lingers in the background. For Fromm, however, routine appears to threaten even this, with a man in the "net of routine" easily overwhelmed in a sea of desires that are not his own. This characterisation of modernity also reveals some of Fromm's indebtedness to the young Marx. Writing in the third of his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* penned in 1844, Marx claims:

> Alienation is apparent not only in the fact that *my* means of life belong to *someone else*, that *my* desires are the unattainable possession of *someone else*, but that everything is *something different* from itself, that my activity is *something else*, and finally (and this is also the case for the capitalist) that *an inhuman power* rules over everything.[47]

According to this understanding of false consciousness, then, we are not only materially alienated from the products of our own labour, but we are also spiritually alienated from our own desires. Marx suggests that we have become so lost and separated from ourselves that we

[44] Adorno, *Prisms*, 22.
[45] Jay, *Dialectical Imagination*, 100.
[46] Fromm, *Art of Loving*, 37.
[47] Fromm and Marx, *Marx's Concept of Man*, 234.

no longer have a sense of individual identity, leaving us easily manipulated by forces outside of our control.

For Fromm, this critique of stifling routine and imposed uniformity is by no means limited to capitalist society as he levels a similar charge at the idea of equality promoted by contemporary socialists and officially implemented by nations such as the Soviet Union:

> By equality one refers to the equality of automatons; of men who have lost their individuality. *Equality today means "sameness," rather than "oneness."* It is the sameness of abstractions, of the men who work in the same jobs, who have the same amusements, who read the same newspapers, who have the same feelings and the same ideas.[48]

This sense of equality is clearly incompatible with the descriptions of love offered by Fromm earlier. The knitting of others into our own sense of self requires spontaneous interaction with flesh-and-blood people, something that dealing in abstractions—what Adorno identifies as a motor of reification—cannot achieve. Underlying Fromm's criticism of both contemporary capitalism and socialism is a rejection of human relations as calculations, an idea that is present even in Fromm's much earlier works. In the 1937 essay "On the Feeling of Powerlessness" written for the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, he suggests that a neurotic feeling of powerlessness is typical of modernity, though at this point in time he is referring only to capitalist societies. In particular, Fromm elaborates on the psychological dimension captured in Marx's idea of the alienation of labour, arguing, for example, that due to mechanisation:

> The entire material world becomes a monstrous giant machine that dictates the direction and tempo of his life. The work of his hands, destined to serve and delight him, becomes an alien world which he submissively and powerlessly obeys.[49]

Fromm, echoing Marx and Engels' introduction to the *Communsist Manifesto*, expresses awe at the size and scale of the machinery produced by modern capitalism, yet also asserts that it is fundamentally alienating. Work is taken out of the labourer's hands and life becomes organised according to the clacking of production lines, leaving little room for a dialectic of love between individuals.

Alongside side a fear of routinisation, Fromm—like Adorno and Horkheimer in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*—is also anxious about the commodification of love. For him, however, the heart of the issue lies less in the way that love is packaged by big industry and

[48] Fromm, *Art of Loving*, 34.
[49] Fromm, "Powerlessness," 60.

more in how everyday relations between people are increasingly organised according to the principles of market economics. It is no surprise that Fromm approaches the problem from this angle, especially since, as his former student Rainer Funk highlights, he views humans as being motivated by psychological drives which emerge from the historically conditioned and changing demands of the economy and society.[50] Though Fromm acknowledges the influence of biological drives on human behaviour, he also stresses that human psychology is profoundly influenced by cultural and societal norms, meaning that capitalist society will produce a specific, historically conditioned mindset in the people that live under it. In fact, in the 1937 paper "Man's Impulse Structure and its Relation to Culture" (which Horkheimer refused to publish, thus helping to precipitate Fromm's break with the Frankfurt School), Fromm makes even more radical claims about the relationship between individual and social psychology:

> Fundamentally it makes no difference whether an individual or a group is under psychological examination. The individual's manner of life is determined by society. Society itself is nothing without individuals. Freud, despite his centering of interest on the individual, recognized clearly that the difference between social psychology and individual psychology is only an apparent one.[51]

Fromm argues that, since the individual and society are so interwoven, there is no fundamental breaking point where the individual ends and society begins. This makes much of the discussion around love and alienation all the more pressing as it implies that the problems of society will inevitably become those of the individual: there is no means of insulating ourselves from the loveless world of capitalist modernity. This blurring of sociology and psychology, however, should also be noted as an important point of contention between Fromm and Adorno. The charge later levelled by Adorno at the psychoanalytic revisionists is that by collapsing the difference between individual psychology and group sociology they adopt an undialectical methodology which eliminates any basis for proper critical self-reflection.[52] Interestingly, this can be read as an implicit piece of optimism in Adorno's thought since, no matter how apocalyptic some of his prognoses for the survival of individual identity under capitalism may be, the fact that he believes in the possibility of Critical Theory at all suggests that individual psychology is yet to be fully submerged by the conformist culture industry and that a slim potential for dialectical thought and thus for liberation nevertheless exists, a line of interpretation maintained by some contemporary German scholars of Adorno.[53]

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[50] Funk, "Die allgegenwärtige Marketing-Orientierung," 52.
[51] Fromm, *Beyond Freud*, 17.
[52] Bloch, "The Origins of Adorno's Psycho-Social Dialectic," 504.
[53] See, for example, Schroer, "«Ende des Individuums»".

Fromm expounds upon his psycho-social view of the interaction between markets, mind and love roughly twenty years later in *The Art of Loving*, clearly casting it in a negative light:

> At any rate, the sense of falling in love develops usually only with regard to such human commodities as are within reach of one's own possibilities for exchange. I am out for a bargain; the object should be desirable from the standpoint of its social value, and at the same time should want me, considering my overt and hidden assets and potentialities.[54]

Love in modern society appears as a reified version of the dialectic that should form between genuine lovers. There is still a sense of reciprocity, but this is restricted to a purely transactional sense, a calculated search for the most economical partner. The relationship formed is not a selfless union—it is a form of egotism *à deux*, with each partner looking to maximise their own social status while giving up as little as possible. Fromm again arguably goes a step further than Adorno: instead of a desire to purchase the artistic reproduction of the reified beloved, commodified love for Fromm involves partners making a purchase of each other, albeit in mindset rather than in fact. Extending the metaphor of economic competition, Fromm also speaks of modern marriage as a form of "team," with "two people pooling their common interests, and standing together against a hostile and alienated world."[55] Rather than giving us a space for growth and therefore confidence to go out into the world, marriage becomes a kind of shield from the external, a huddling together of people who are essentially strangers as they find the alternative too unbearable. Whether this situation is really unique to the modern age is an open question, especially since, as some present-day critics have argued, many precapitalist societies encouraged dowries and other financial transactions as prerequisite for marriage, suggesting that this Marxist line of attack is in fact a form of romantic nostalgia.[56]

Revolution of the Heart: Immanence and Transcendence

Contrary to traditional accounts of the Frankfurt School, then, a great deal of overlap exists between the thought of Adorno and Fromm, at least when it comes to the topic of love. Both thinkers describe love in a dialectical manner, and both are sceptical about its feasibility in a capitalist society where routine stifles spontaneity and love is sold as a commodity. There is no denying, however, that there is a real split between the thought of these two thinkers, even if the gap between them has been overplayed by past critics. Though Adorno and Fromm

[54] Fromm, *Art of Loving*, 17.
[55] Fromm, *Art of Loving*, 142.
[56] Constable, "The Commodification of Intimacy," 54.

largely agree on the theoretical nature of love and the problems it faces, we can observe an increasing distance between them when they discuss love's realisability in and relationship to the strictly material world.

Though we can add a certain caveat given his insistence on the maintenance of a psycho-social dialectic mentioned above, it is nevertheless true that Adorno gives a characteristically pessimistic assessment of the situation. In his 1966 radio presentation and essay "Education after Auschwitz," he concedes that love forms a necessary part of overcoming the legacy of the Holocaust, but that he feels neither he nor anyone else can meaningfully "preach" about love:

> I do not want to preach love. I consider it futile to preach it; no one has the right to preach it since the lack of love, as I have already said, is a lack belonging to all people without exception as they exist today. To preach love already presupposes in those to whom one appeals a character structure different from the one that needs to be changed. For the people whom one should love are themselves such that they cannot love, and therefore in turn are not at all that lovable.[57]

Modern people find themselves in an impossible situation: they must learn to love each other but find that they are all in fact unlovable. As Rolf Wiggershaus stresses, "Adorno and Horkheimer considered all forms of spontaneity to be suffering increasing destruction,"[58] thus leaving little possibility that anyone will be able to break outside of this downward spiral. There is, of course, still the theoretical possibility that love would become possible if a different "character structure" was produced, but Adorno offers no real mechanism for how this might be immanently implemented. His reticence to speak about therapeutics or cure here is also indicative of Adorno's attitude towards psychoanalysis as a whole, taking little interest in pragmatic questions of treatment and instead using Freudian thought solely as a mode of critical analysis.[59]

Fromm, a practising psychoanalyst for many years, is by contrast much more interested in therapeutics, in part explaining why his revolutionary politics do in fact set out to cure the "character structure" Adorno laments. This aspect of Fromm's thought comes to the fore in some of his later works such as his 1976 book *To Have or to Be?*. In contrast to the inescapable trap that Adorno identifies, Fromm presents a romanticised vision of revolution:

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[57] Adorno, *Critical Models*, 202.
[58] Wiggershaus, *Frankfurt School*, 270.
[59] McLaughlin, "Origin Myths in the Social Sciences," 127.

> Right living is no longer only the fulfillment of an ethical or religious demand. For the first time in history the physical survival of the human race depends on a radical change of the human heart. However, a change of the human heart is possible only to the extent that drastic economic and social changes occur […][60]

The language of the "human heart" that Fromm deploys here risks obscuring the fact that he is really talking about material changes in our social and economic environment and not about fantastical ethical ideals. As already observed in his 1937 essays "On the Feeling of Powerlessness" and "Man's Impulse Structure and its Relation to Culture," Fromm's combination of Marx and Freud leads him to view our psychology as in large part forged by our material and social environment, meaning that what he elsewhere terms our "Gesellschaftscharakter," our societally formed personality, can be altered by a revolution in the material world.

Fromm's later thought also becomes difficult to reconcile with that of Adorno due to its increasing integration of more existential concepts. One of the fundamental ideas discussed in *To Have or to Be?*, for example, is the distinction made between the "having mode" and the "being mode":

> By being I refer to the mode of existence in which one neither *has* anything nor craves to *have* something, but is joyous, employs one's faculties productively, is *one* to the world.[61]

In societal terms, the distinction between having and being is the difference "between a society centered around persons and one centered around things."[62] Fromm believes that human beings have two fundamental attitudes with which they can approach the world: either they can desire to clasp onto and possess the external world, or they can take on a more self-reflective attitude that delights in watching the world unfold without the desire to control it. Discussing the clash of optimism and pessimism between our two Frankfurt thinkers, Wiggershaus states that Fromm, in contrast to Adorno, "saw the rare, but still extant, spontaneity in Western culture as being the spiritual point of departure for the solution of the central problems."[63] Though Wiggershaus does not recognise the materialist element of Fromm's solution in the form of political revolution, the spiritual aspect that he highlights is clearly on display in the existential having-being distinction. Despite his pessimism about the future of love we have seen elsewhere, Fromm still holds out that individuals have a capacity to choose the manner in which they approach themselves and the world, an ability that seems to be somewhat independent of

[60] Fromm, *To Have or to Be?*, 34.
[61] Fromm, *To Have or to Be?*, 47.
[62] Fromm, *To Have or to Be?*, 48.
[63] Wiggershaus, *Frankfurt School*, 270.

their material conditions, thus appealing to a transcendent vision which Adorno would unequivocally reject.

The analysis of this transcendent mode of being has a clear precedent in Fromm's earlier discussions of love. In *The Art of Loving*, for example, Fromm argues that a form of meditative "concentration" is necessary in learning to be alone and thus also in learning to love others:

> Indeed, to be able to concentrate means to be able to be alone with oneself— and this ability is precisely a condition for the ability to love. If I am attached to another person because I cannot stand on my own feet, he or she may be a lifesaver, but the relationship is not one of love.[64]

By entering a higher meditative state, we come to understand our interconnectedness with others while also establishing a view onto our existence that is above the material world and thus independent from it. While the higher state is ultimately one of separateness, it is this isolation that dialectically produces a genuine understanding of the warmth human love offers us and its necessity to our being, an attitude which seems to pre-empt Fromm's later interest (like so many of his contemporary American colleagues) in the ideas of D.T. Suzuki and the book on Zen Buddhism he himself would come to publish in 1960.

Given the clear spiritual tone of Fromm's claims here, it is no surprise that his ideas on love received support from some of the explicitly religious thinkers of his day. German-American theologian and philosopher Paul Tillich, himself Adorno's *Habilitation* supervisor and a friend of the Horkheimer circle during its American exile, approvingly cites Fromm in a 1965 conversation with the psychotherapist Carl Rogers, his last public appearance before his death in the same year:

> So when I shall speak now in popular terms, which is very dangerous always, I would say: faith and love are the two concepts which are necessary, but faith not in the sense of beliefs but in the sense of being related to the ultimate, and love not in the sense of any sentimentality, but in a sense of affirming the other person and *even* one's own person, because I believe with Augustine, Eric [*sic.*] Fromm, and others, that there is a justified self-affirmation and self-acceptance.[65]

In a similar philosophical move to Fromm's "being mode," Tillich's gesturing towards the absolute points to a kind of longing and forms of love which do not depend on the possession of things but on a sense of unity with the wider world, perhaps even the cosmos. As the earlier

[64] Fromm, *Art of Loving*, 168–69.
[65] Tillich and Rogers, "Theologian Meets Psychotherapist," 174.

comparison with Martin Buber demonstrated, Fromm has a great deal in common with religious existentialists, highlighting a spiritual strain in his thought which seems to be in constant tension with his materialist claims about the formation of character. It is possible to reconcile these two strands within Fromm's thought, however, if we take a moment to reflect on where his life and career began, namely the study of orthodox Judaism. As Rainer Funk notes, Fromm's Jewish upbringing was one which defined itself against both "liberal Christianity" and "a Judaism that was willing to assimilate to bourgeois society," a theme he explored further in his doctoral dissertation on how communities of the Jewish diaspora managed to survive without simply conforming to their host societies.[66] In this context, spiritual transformation is maintained by a material, political choice (or, as was tragically the case for many Jews, forced, external compulsion) to separate from the mainstream of capitalist society: the spiritual thus need not be viewed as an abstract plane separate from the "real" world as it can directly influence how people choose to interact with their societies. At the same time, it also important to recognise that Fromm is not advocating for this kind of separation in his own work, instead arguing that broader society should be changed to make love and spiritual transformation possible rather than forcing them to survive by retreating from the limelight.

In contrast to Fromm's greater willingness to contemplate the spiritual nature of love, then, Adorno appears more firmly rooted in the gritty realities of a lonely materialist modernity. Yet this is not to say that he has no sense at all of a higher or utopian vision for the future, just that, as others have already noted, Adorno fears stating what its specific content might be like lest this be used for the violent imposition of a particular political programme.[67] What this means exactly becomes more obvious in his 1952 essay "Revisionist Psychoanalysis" where he offers an interesting defence of Freud against Fromm and other psychoanalytic revisionists:

> One rightfully asked the revisionists, what they would have fundamentally against their teacher; they would presumably say, he lacks love. Groddeck's magnanimity and Ferenczi's empathetic tenderness are placed in contrast to Freud's coldness and aloofness. No advanced thinker or artist escapes this reproach. As he takes the utopia and its realization bitterly seriously, he is no utopian but faces the reality as it is in order not to let himself be stupefied by it. He wants to free the elements of the better that are determined in the reality from their bondage. He makes himself so austere in order to break the petrified conditions.[68]

In the first section of this article, it was noted that both Adorno and Fromm viewed love as a dialectical process between two people. Adorno's defence of Freud highlights that this process

[66] See Funk, "Foreword," xii.
[67] Whitebook, *Perversion and Utopia*, 79.
[68] Adorno, "Revisionist Psychoanalysis," 335–36.

can be expanded into a loving form of social critique: because he loves his patients and his society, because he believes that there is a genuine potential for their betterment, Freud (and it is tempting to believe that Adorno is talking about himself too) is ruthless in his analysis of them, clearing the rubble of hubris and corruption so that the best aspects of the self and society might grow in their stead. Looking at Fromm from this position, it is easy to see why Adorno would be dismissive of him: his soppy concessions to spiritualism encourage complacency by giving people a false sense that love remains possible even when political and economic structures are arrayed against it. As has already been noted, however, this would be an unfair characterisation of Fromm's thought, especially given that Fromm's optimism regarding spiritual transformation and love is not so naïve. In his 1978/1979 essay "On Marx and Religion," Fromm is keen to make a distinction between the idea of "religion" and of being "religious." "Religions" are institutional, meaning that they are subject to all the forms of corruption of any political or economic organisation. Being "religious," on the other hand, is in its purest form "brotherliness, human solidarity, and love." Fromm suggests that, in a Marxist utopia, the people would be so "religious" that there would be no need for "religion."[69] His utopianism and his belief in love is thus critical in the sense that it attempts to rescue the idea without becoming attached to any particular institutional manifestation of it, meaning that love always has the possibility of renewing its institutions.

Though it is tempting to conclude that Fromm and Adorno are wholly different thinkers after all, it is—just as was suggested at the beginning of this article—in reality still possible to see them as two different faces of the same intellectual tradition. As Stephen Eric Bronner defines it, Critical Theory has a dual nature and purpose which might allow for a reconciliation—though not a perfect unity—between Fromm and Adorno:

> Interdisciplinary and uniquely experimental in character, deeply skeptical of tradition and all absolute claims, critical theory was always concerned not merely with how things were but how they might be and should be.[70]

The similarity of the two thinkers' definitions of love and their understanding of the problems it faces in capitalist modernity stems from their shared Marxist philosophical background and common interest in Freud, two schools which together form the theoretical foundation of Critical Theory. Concerns about the alienation of modern people, the dangerous rise of narcissism, and the commodification of human desire are typical for thinkers from this

[69] Fromm, "On Marx and Religion," 97.
[70] Bronner, *Critical Theory*, 1–2.

tradition, and it therefore no surprise that this is where we find the most overlap between Fromm and Adorno. The social constructivism of Marx's thought is evident in both thinkers' discussions of love, with all the barriers to love addressed being social rather than biological in nature. The difference between Adorno and Fromm, however, is also to be found within the tradition of critical theory, specifically within the two elements that Bronner's summary foregrounds: the *is* and the *ought*. Fromm, though he concedes the state of what *is*, also clings to the *ought*, and thus in a sense remains more loyal to the positive, transformative impetus of Critical Theory. His insistence on our ability to practise meditative "concentration," to sync with the non-possessive "being mode," and to transform economic and structures through radical politics leaves an opening, albeit a slim one, to a spiritual plane where the hope of love is still possible despite the material hindrances placed in its path. Adorno, by contrast, offers an immanent conception of love, one that emphasises the necessity of critiquing the reality of what actually *is*, yet arguably also laying a foundation for (though something he never attempted) the riskier project of developing what *ought* to be, the focus of Fromm's attention. In theory, Adorno understands capitalism as making love materially difficult to achieve, if not entirely impossible—alienation and commodification are terribly high barriers to overcome. Even the utopian element of his thought concentrates on clearing the way for some unspecified future to supplant the rot of the present. And yet, despite all this, we cannot claim Adorno has entirely abandoned love as this would collapse the dialectical method on which his philosophical method relies and render Critical Theory a hypocritical exercise. His pessimism may well be profound but it is not final, just as in the same way that Fromm's optimism is revolutionary while attempting to avoid a slide into naivety. Some, comparing Adorno with Iris Murdoch and D.W. Winnicott, highlight the surviving dialectic in his understanding of love, the paradoxical bundling of distance and closeness.[71] Others note that Adorno's self-reflexive sociology "measures the reality of society in the light of its potential for emancipation."[72] What both of these points draw attention to is that, despite its harshness and its pessimism, Adorno embarks on his critique of modernity for a reason beyond simply wanting to tear apart our comfortable illusions: he loves his society enough to warn it of the coming abyss, perhaps even in the hope that we might be wise enough to avoid it after all.

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[71] Alford, "Love, Pity, and Humanity," 142.
[72] Müller-Doohm, "The Critical Theory of Society as Reflexive Sociology," 292.

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