

DISSERTATION

TOWARDS A DIALECTICAL ACCOUNT OF ECO-NEUROSIS: DEVELOPING A FRAMEWORK ON THE UNCONSCIOUS IN AN AGE OF ECOLOGICAL DEGRADATION

Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

TOWARDS A DIALECTICAL ACCOUNT OF ECO-NEUROSIS: DEVELOPING A FRAMEWORK ON THE UNCONSCIOUS IN AN AGE OF ECOLOGICAL DEGRADATION

In 2019, the United Nations Climate Summit in New York described climate change as the defining issue of our time. In an age of climate volatility owing to over-production and over-consumption, capitalism's transformation of nature has developed negative environmental impacts and physical health concerns. At the same time, research in psychology and related fields is uncovering worrying mental effects due to the changing climate. The production of uncomfortable psychological effects now has a direct corollary with ecological doom; burgeoning labels for this occurrence are climate anxiety, eco-anxiety. The prefix "eco" in front of the names establishes that mental conditions can be related to environmental shifts or transformations, including climate change. I wish to contend with these initial conceptual names and say they are too narrow in focus. I am presenting the term "eco-neurosis." I do this for two reasons, one I use it as an umbrella concept for all forms of emotional discomforts and maladies due to climate change (e.g., grief, mourning, anxiety, depression, etc.) Second, while psychological literature has abandoned the use of neurosis, post-Freudian psychoanalysis provides strong historical precedent for the use of neurosis as a concept that indicates the political rumblings associated with the term. Thus, I claim that Eco-neurosis (EN) is a byproduct of a historical civilizational development in the form of climate change. In effect, climate change is not only altering "business as usual" but appears to be leaving a mark on the human psyche.

DEDICATION

The process of reconfiguring one's ego is not done alone. I have many incredible people to thank for the thoughts that exist on this document. I humbly acknowledge the meaning of "no man is an island," I would like to thank my immediate family for their love, support, and belief in me even when I doubted myself many times throughout this journey. My mother, Rebeca McCormack, for being my rock; my brother Rafael Leal McCormack for listening to the ramblings of my wandering thoughts; my father, Rodolfo Leal; my aunt Maritza McCormack; my cousins David Gutierrez, and Jonathan Gutierrez, and recently my young and blossoming second Cousin Wendy Ruiz who has a heightened sense for all things hidden under the surface. Thank you for supporting my academic pursuits and for never letting go of our bond despite our overwhelming physical distance.

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For the many loved ones, including my Grandfather Rafael
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We miss you.

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INTRODUCTION

Climate change is upsetting organized capitalist activity or “business as usual” (i.e., infinite growth, consumption, and a materialistic ethos) in contemporary life. In 2019, the United Nations Climate Summit in New York described climate change as the defining issue of our time. The importance of the Earth’s climate is evident for humans as we need food, fresh water, fiber, timber, and shelter to survive and thrive. In an age of climate volatility owing to over-production and over-consumption, capitalism’s transformation of nature has developed negative environmental impacts and physical health concerns. At the same time, research in psychology and related fields is uncovering worrying mental effects due to the changing climate. The production of uncomfortable psychological effects now has a direct corollary with ecological doom; burgeoning labels for this occurrence are climate anxiety, eco-anxiety. The prefix “eco” in front of the names establishes that mental conditions can be related to environmental shifts or transformations, including climate change. I wish to contend with these initial conceptual names and say they are too narrow in focus. I am presenting the term “eco-neurosis.”¹ I do this for two reasons, one I use it as an umbrella concept for all forms of emotional discomforts and maladies due to climate change (e.g., grief, mourning, anxiety, depression, etc.) Second, while psychological literature has abandoned the use of neurosis, post-Freudian psychoanalysis provides strong historical precedent for the use of neurosis as a concept that indicates the political rumblings associated with the term. Thus, I claim that Eco-neurosis (EN) is a byproduct of a historical civilizational development in the form of climate change. In effect, what I wish to

¹ For the sake of conceptual clarity, I will be promoting the term eco-neurosis for the rest of this project.

argue is that eco-neurosis is the byproduct of the ideological and historical development of a collective human suffering that our experience of the environment is being ripped from us all.

The terms climate anxiety and eco-anxiety have reached a critical level of concern among the public. So much so that in February of 2022, the New York Times published a Sunday article headlined “*Climate Change Enters the Therapy Room*,” which touched on the timeliness of the issue. The American Psychological Association (APA), and clinical psychologists more broadly, are also taking eco-anxiety seriously in recent years, although this was not always the case.² However, the term eco-neurosis is lesser known to the public and is not part of the APA’s report. Yet I believe the term/concept eco-neurosis (EN) provides a more complex nexus in which to identify the psychological phenomenon as part of a systemic (such as cultural, historical, and political) disturbance. By reinterpreting EN as a systemic effect, hidden layers of political magnitude emerge within the human and more than human worlds. In what follows, I will argue that EN is not just for the individual mind suffering symptoms of neurosis, but that it is the side-effect of a broader, cultural illness.

To cash out on the promise the last paragraph makes, this introduction—and the chapters that follow—explores and explains the phenomenon of eco-neurosis (EN): its constitutive elements, its causes, its effects in an unequal world, its relevance and prognosis, and its treatments based on a myriad of therapeutic frameworks. I provide a critique that shows what is missing from most approaches to EN. By drawing upon the tradition of critical theory I attempt to fill the gaps that other fields have not adequately addressed. To do this I lean heavily upon the

² Barry Ellen 2022; Organized psychologists have notably excelled at avoidance in the face of crisis, especially in the near silence of a “burning world.” Dr. Orange is a critical voice within the APA, stating, “The ethical corruption ran deeper, and more extensively, than almost anyone imagined. Most of us remained indifferent, or what is morally equivalent, silent.” Donna M. Orange admits organizations such as the APA holds a deplorable record in the face of moral emergencies.

theoretical perspective of Erich Fromm and link eco-neurosis to a concept of what I call a collective ecological unconscious (CEU).

The purpose of the concept of a CEU is twofold: first, it provides a framework to modify and reconceptualize eco-neurosis as a symptom of historical political relations in ways that other approaches/concepts lack. Second, it provides an ecological reorientation of Erich Fromm's theory. A CEU does this by reimagining certain Frommian ideas such as neurosis, relatedness, social character, and the social unconscious that speak to new developments (e.g., climate change and the Anthropocene) that feed the contemporary crisis. The established “common sense” (e.g., empirical, individualized, and ahistorical) responses of clinical psychology are epistemologically ill-equipped to resolve these problems. Therefore, the concept of a CEU is an attempt to confront the individualized and ahistorical iteration of what the clinical psychology literature understands as EN.

Below, I first define eco-neurosis and discuss the various schools of thought surrounding the phenomenon and its cognate terms such as eco-anxiety. I discuss the interpretations of the various fields that research EN. Then, I discuss the sources and consequences of EN, along with its differential politics in an unequal world. Then I claim EN has created new complications that play out in political and cultural dimensions rarely discussed in the general literature on EN. After that, I will present the unique elements of my overarching approach. I make the case for including a cultural, political, and historical interpretation for EN that so far is underdeveloped within the existing literature and discourse. I propose that a full understanding of EN requires an immanent critique of dominant Western assumptions of nature that are often concealed or implicit within existing discourses on EN, and I invoke the tradition of critical theory through

Erich Fromm to provide the foundational elements of this reinterpretation and critical intervention.

Eco-Neurosis: Surveying the Various Fields and Responses of Climate Anxiety

Eco-neurosis shares some similarities with other terms such as climate anxiety or eco-anxiety. Definitions of these terms compose a general roadmap of explanations. The term climate anxiety is a recent neologism currently debated and discussed among clinical/social psychologists, social scientists, and climate activists. Pihkala Panu mentions that recent research on climate anxiety, the materials gathered and found over a long period of research resulted in diverse, yet partly intertwining literature.³ Pihkala identified these research themes as:

- explicit studies about eco-anxiety, and the standard definitions of eco-anxiety
- social and political sciences
- theories of existential anxiety
- psychodynamic and psychosocial research
- research on pathological forms of anxiety and anxiety disorders
- studies about ecological emotions and ecological affects
- general theories of anxiety⁴

These research fields show how research on the terms “eco-anxiety,” “eco-angst,” and so on is deeply interdisciplinary and should be understood as a manifold of collected research from various fields ranging from the hard sciences to the social sciences. Yet despite this pluralism climate anxiety research has identified some general points of agreement: Pihkala notes that among general scholars of climate anxiety a common consensus is that the various named phenomena are described as a worry about impending doom, which also involves a growing sense of unpredictability and uncontrollability of the human/environment relationship.⁵

³ Panu Pihkala 2020, 7836–.

⁴ Panu Pihkala 2020, 7836–.

⁵ Panu Pihkala 2020, 7836–.

Despite some common areas of agreement, there are also significant disagreements about the sources and meaning of climate anxiety. Points of disconnection point to a lack of communication due to academic silos, and a fragmentation of research frameworks on climate anxiety giving rise to competing definitions. Consequently, scholars are using different terms for the same, or at least similar, psychological dispositions. For example, Pihkala Panu describes it as “eco-anxiety,” Daniel Goleman dubs it “eco-angst,” Valimaki and Lehtonen call it “environmental neurosis.”⁶ The differences remain in the roots of each orientation. For example, Pihkala chooses eco-anxiety to describe all anxieties related to the ecological crisis; Goleman describes it as the moment a new bit of unpleasant ecological information about some consumable product plunges us into a moment of despair at the planet’s condition; Valimaki and Lehtonen describe it as an eco-anxiety rooted in a cognitive dissonance resulting from the interdependence of man with nature and the cultural illusion of autonomy.⁷

In this section I provide synthetic weaving of several subdisciplines that study climate anxiety and cognate terms. I argue that, in most cases, these disciplinary perspectives, for all the insights they provide, are inadequate along three dimensions of analysis: cultural, historical, and political. The most significant disciplines or subdisciplines for the study of climate anxiety as clinical psychology, environmental theology, environmental philosophy, climate (environmental) psychology, psychoanalysis, and ecopsychology. As a disclaimer these disciplines are not mutually exclusive, but they bring a particular demarcation of competing explanations that satisfy some of the various dimensions but fail to provide a comprehensive explanation of all of them. For my argument the cultural, historical, and political dimensions of my own term EN deliver a guiding framework for understanding how EN has developed into a formative concept.

⁶ Panu Pihkala 2018; Goleman, Daniel 2009; Valimaki J, and Lehtonen, J. 37 (6): 341-344.

⁷ Panu Pihkala 2018; Goleman, Daniel 2009; Valimaki J, and Lehtonen, J. 37 (6): 341-344.

The cultural dimension speaks to a society's given narratives and the comparisons of those narratives across time and space. Second, the historical dimension analyzes the foundational historical elements of the phenomenon and the shifts over time that provide the evolutions of the phenomenon, the concept, and the fields of inquiry that use those concepts and study that phenomenon. Lastly, the political dimension touches on broader political structures, developments, and maneuvers that inform the evolution of EN. In sum, this section offers a situation for understanding how I define EN as a symptom of a maladaptation in awareness that drives a wedge between the human and more-than-human worlds fashioned in a political context.

The first field I am going to explore is clinical psychology. It is the established and traditional field for mainstream knowledge on mental health issues. The APA website notes that clinical psychology is the psychological specialty that provides continuing and comprehensive mental and behavioral health care for individuals and families; consultation to agencies and communities; training, education, and supervision; and research-based practice.⁸ Clinical psychology holds space for the majority diagnosis of psychopathology, it integrates a broad range of knowledge and skills of disciplines within and outside of psychology.⁹ The crux of clinical psychology is based on individualistic diagnosis, data driven science and behavioral observation.

EN is defined within clinical psychology as “a chronic, in other words constant and strong, form of fear related to climate change.” Relatedly, in 2017, the APA, which is the main organization representing clinical or applied psychology, defined eco-neurosis as "a chronic fear

⁸ American Psychological Association.

⁹ American Psychological Association.

of environmental doom."¹⁰ The APA claimed the exacerbation of significant environmental problems that affect our planet may cause anxiety and fear of varying seriousness in people who have experienced the first- or second-hand effects of climate change. The APA also observed that gradual, long-term changes in climate can also surface several different emotions, including fear, anger, feelings of powerlessness or exhaustion.¹¹

Moreover, a review within the study described cases in which fear of extreme weather approaches the level of phobia and “unrelenting day-by-day despair,” which can be experienced during an environmental disaster or in anticipation of one. Similarly, watching the slow and irrevocable impacts of climate change unfold can increase worries about the future for oneself, one’s children, and later generations, which becomes an additional source of stress and anxiety.¹² Although there is limited data on how much of the world population is suffering from this recent psychological reaction, experts say that as climate-related problems grow, so will the number of people who are experiencing eco-neurosis.¹³ According to the APA, eco-neurosis manifests in various symptoms such as: sleep disorders, stress, anxiety, depression, and the development of posttraumatic stress disorder and suicidal ideations. As of today, there is no specific clinical diagnosis for eco-neurosis, but self-reported presentations include panic attacks, insomnia, obsessive thinking, and appetite changes caused by environmental anxiety and fear.¹⁴ Once again, it is likely that this problem will keep evolving and spreading as the effects of the Earth’s altering climate worsen.

¹⁰Clayton, S.; Manning, C.M.; Krygsman, K.; Speiser, M. 2017; I am referring here to the American Psychological Association and not American Psychiatric Association, which is responsible for publishing the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM); Huizen Jennifer, MedicalNewsToday, 2019.

¹¹ Clayton, S.; Manning, C.M.; Krygsman, K.; Speiser, M. 2017.

¹² Clayton, S.; Manning, C.M.; Krygsman, K.; Speiser, M. 2017.

¹³ In fact, one of the pioneering reports on the psychological impact of climate change (Mental Health and Our Changing Climate: Impacts, Implications and Guidance, APA (2017) already warned that public concern was growing.

¹⁴ Usher, Kim, Joanne Durkin, and Navjot Bhullar 2019 1233–1234.

Prominent clinical psychologists such as Daniel Goleman, Kim Usher, Joan Durkin, Bhullar Navjot, Barlow D.H., Grupe D.W. have diagnosed the issue of EN as a matter worth investigating through the lens of more behavioral practices such as cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT). CBT places an emphasis on helping individuals learn to be their own therapists. Through exercises in session as well as “homework” exercises outside of sessions, clients develop coping skills, whereby they can learn to change their patterns of thinking, problematic emotions, and behaviors.¹⁵ In this vein, treatment of EN would involve changing everyday routines and lifestyle choices to alleviate unsettling symptoms; this could include going on nature walks, playing sports outdoors, volunteering to clean up beaches, etc. CBT is the recommended treatment within clinical psychology because it lends itself to be observable, quantifiable, and measurable. CBT is justified due to observed changes in patient behavior, which provides empirical evidence of effectiveness for both the patient and the therapist.¹⁶

Moreover, as EN has gained prominence, clinical psychologists who specialize in “generalized anxiety theory” (GAT) have provided influential accounts of the phenomenon. The task and scope of GAT psychologists led them to view EN as a culmination of “uncertainty” and “helplessness” because of climate change. That is, there is a felt threat, but there is also uncertainty about its exact nature and duration.¹⁷ Other important concepts of GAT alongside uncertainty and helplessness include unpredictability and uncontrollability. Barlow and Grupe, two important GAT psychologists, explain: “Uncontrollability generates helplessness and feelings of powerlessness; in other words, a diminished sense of efficacy and a diminished

¹⁵ APA Div. 12 (Society of Clinical Psychology)

¹⁶Budziszewska, M., & Jonsson, S. E. (2022); note that CBT had some effect on dealing with the anxiety of the climate.

¹⁷ Barlow D.H. 2004.

control belief (or changes in a felt ‘locus of control’).”¹⁸ The field of clinical psychology determines that the mind under duress develops anxieties, which in turn leads to unhealthy coping mechanisms such as feelings of uncertainty and helplessness. Specialists in GAT have acknowledged that various feelings of anxiety point to the same phenomenon. Further, voices within clinical psychology such as Clayton et al. describe EN “as a chronic, in other words constant and strong, form of fear.”¹⁹

Climate psychology is the scientific study of the transactions and interrelationships between people and their physical surroundings (including built and natural environments, the use and abuse of nature and natural resources, and sustainability-related behavior).²⁰ Environmental psychologists investigate how people work with and respond to the world around them. Their research might ask why some people choose to recycle, what motivates people to adopt environmentally positive behaviors and why certain surroundings make people feel happy and productive. Environmental psychology is littered with various theories about the way humans act in our environment, including geographical determinism, ecological biology, and behaviorism. For the sake of conciseness, I will focus on behaviorism since the boundary of psychological inquiry is the focus here.

Behavioral psychology is an important approach within climate psychology since it has guided and matured how the field of climate psychology develops research. The behavioral approach has a close affinity to positivist logic. From a behaviorist perspective, the total environment cues certain behaviors, which then are followed by consequences (i.e., rewards or punishments).²¹ Behavioral psychology follows the Aristotelian principles (e.g., the law of

¹⁸ Grupe D.W. 2013, 488-501.

¹⁹ Clayton, S.; Manning, C.M.; Krygsman, K.; Speiser, M. 2017.

²⁰ Ackerman Courtney 2021.

²¹ Koger, et. al. 2010, 132.

identity, contradiction, and excluded middle) and focuses on short-term behavioral modifications as opposed to long-term psychological development. That is, behavioral psychologists would posit that “trying to change inner events like feelings or attitudes is a waste of precious time; instead let’s cut to the chase and target efforts directly on behavior change.”²² This implies the research focus on climate tends to investigate operational issues like resource depletion, pollution, and overpopulation and behaviors we can take to mitigate some of these environmental issues by incentivizing rewards for better behavior.

Some of the climate psychologists who discuss EN are Coverdale, Hogett, Clayton et. al. Climate psychologists describes EN “as a chronic, in other words constant and strong, form of fear.”²³ However, their behavioral perspective recognizes the unreliability and shifting nature of EN; due to its affective and perception-based roots. Therefore, some climate psychologists such as Coverdale, and Clayton et. al., hesitate to categorize EN as a formal disorder; rather, they assert that there are more cultural explanations to EN. Scholars like Coverdale, Hogett, Clayton et. al. believe more research is needed for this complex issue to be understood as a pathological disorder.

There are obvious limitations to behavioral psychology as it relates to environmental concerns. The most glaring limitation is that its focus is on external information and internal causes are ignored. The epistemological position of behaviorism stems from positivist assumptions.²⁴ The father of positivism Auguste Comte claimed that the social sciences should proceed from observations to general laws, as in the hard sciences. It was very much Comte’s view that the social sciences should mimic the fields of physics and chemistry. Comte was skeptical of introspection

²² Koger, et. al. 2010, Ibid.

²³ Clayton, S.; Manning, C.M.; Krygsman, K.; Speiser, M. 2017.

²⁴ The basic affirmations of positivism are (1) that all knowledge regarding matters of fact is based on the “positive” data of experience and (2) that beyond the realm of fact is that of pure logic and pure mathematics.

in psychology, convinced that in attending to one's own mental condition, the condition itself would be altered and distorted.²⁵ In other words, one's own emotions about their mental states cannot be trusted. Therefore, a behaviorist perspective focuses on externally observable behavior over the fuzzy "inner world."

Environmental theology takes a different orientation, in comparison to the APA. Robert Jacobus gathered that environmental theology corresponds to an environmental perspective that posits (1) nature is created, (2) nature is divine and (3) nature is emergent.²⁶ Thus, based on these internal logical axioms three environmental theologies emerge, (1) God exists eternally, and the environment is God's creation, (2) the environment is God and (3) the environment emerged from physical conditions.²⁷ The main interlocutor within environmental theology (ET) interpreting the phenomenon of EN is Panu Pihkala, who defines climate anxiety as "a wide-scale reaction to the state of the planetary ecosystems."²⁸ ET research indicates that an existential interpretation of EN should be added to the APA's diagnosis of a mental health concern. For example, this would mean that it would be strongly misleading to think of EN as an anxiety disorder. On the contrary, as Pihkala mentions, EN is based on an accurate appraisal of the severity of ecological crisis. Practical forms of EN cases can lead people to re-evaluate the situation, search for better information, and to make changes in individual and collective life.²⁹ For example, individual changes could look like freezing leftovers to avoid waste, using food waste as fertilizer, turning lights off often, and gathering in public gatherings to provide solidarity to feelings of anxiety caused by climate change.

²⁵ Herbert Feigl, "Positivism," *Britannica*.

²⁶ Jacobus Robert J. 2001, 2.

²⁷ Jacobus Robert J. 2001, 3.

²⁸ Panu Pihkala 2020, *Ibid*.

²⁹ Panu Pihkala 2020, 7836–.

Environmental philosophy approaches EN from a different angle of vision; it understands the cultural dimension of EN as an interrelation of society and nature. In other words, culture is an impacting force that is informing the way we interpret the phenomenon and its discomforts. Environmental philosophy examines human beings' relation to nature and the natural environment: it reviews philosophical understandings of nature and conceptions of nature's value and entitlements; it explores how humans are to live with and in nature, and to what degree nature is or is not implicated in human identity.³⁰ It emerged out of Western philosophical inquiries, but has also come to include indigenous, as well as Eastern, philosophical approaches as well. Thus, environmental philosophy assumes that different societies understand and relate to their natural environments in different ways.³¹

Solastalgia, coined by the environmental philosopher Glenn Albrecht is original term used to describe psychological symptoms of environmental distress. Solastalgia is formed by the combination of the Latin words *sōlācium* (comfort) and the Greek root *-algia* (pain, suffering, grief), and it describes a form of emotional or existential distress caused by environmental change. Solastalgia, according to Albrecht, is a set of psychological disorders that occur in a population following destructive changes in their territory, whether through human activities or the climate.³² The Medical journal *Lancet* included solastalgia in 2015 as a term related to the impacts of climate change on human well-being.

Additionally, a differentiation can be made between solastalgia linked to distress about what is currently happening as opposed to eco-anxiety about what may happen in the future. Therefore, solastalgia affects people who have already suffered the consequences of a natural

³⁰ Mathews Freya 2014, 2.

³¹ Mathews Freya 2014, 13.

³² Panu Pihkala 2020, 7836–.

disaster, contrasted with eco-anxiety, which is the *anticipation* of impending climate doom. However, the similarities lie in the affects they produce such as fear and worry and a general anxiety of further damage or over the possibility of recovery. For Albrecht the concept of solastalgia defines eco-anxiety as “a generalized sense that the ecological foundations of existence are in the process of collapse.”³³ Albrecht further describes it as “non-specific worry about our relationship to support environments.”³⁴

Psychoanalysis provides a particularly interesting dimension to environmental problems, namely the recognition that environmental problems are deeply rooted in unconscious motives. Recognizing this fact begins the crucial project of becoming conscious. The source of this finding is identified in Sigmund Freud’s contributions to the field. Freud’s work has had a huge impact on Western culture and began the practice of clinical psychology.³⁵ Before this time, the idea that emotional problems could be treated as mental illness was not even conceptualized, much less accepted or implemented.

There are three important principles of Freudian theory that provide a foundation in tackling ecological issues: 1. Much of human behavior is a result of unconscious motives. 2. Psychological conflict is universal, chronic, inevitable, and painful. 3. To reduce pain, humans unconsciously protect themselves against unwanted thoughts, feelings, and desires, using defense mechanisms to disguise and contain their anxiety.³⁶ For Freud, nature is hostile to human beings and civilization is a form of defense against its wild and untamed elements. Freud conceptualized humans as weak opponents in relation to nature. As a result, Freud accepts a certain level of

³³ Albrecht, G. 2012, 250.

³⁴ Albrecht, G Psychoterratica.

³⁵ Koger M. Susan and Winter Nann Du Deborah 2004, 64.

³⁶ Koger M. Susan and Winter Nann Du Deborah 2004, 66.

repressive force to tame the more chaotic elements of nature. Freud does have an interpretation of human relations to nature, but that relation is based on conflict.

However, psychoanalysis as a discipline has evolved over time, and many psychoanalysts are challenging or overturning the anti-ecological assumptions of Freud and many of his followers. For example, in 2013 Weintrobe took up the cause of "eco-anxiety" as a serious topic; Weintrobe focused on "denial" and "disavowal" as a response to the overwhelming contradiction of climate change. Weintrobe argued that there is a vicious circle between anxiety and denial. It is difficult to accept the ecological crisis and the climate crisis because it means accepting a potentially annihilating threat and thereby accepting the need for vast changes in the lives of individual and communities.³⁷

Nicholsen and Lertzman go further by exploring denial and disavowal. They explain that "different forms of disavowal are much more common. People find ways to both know and not know at the same time. This results in a vicious circle. Because of denial and disavowal, the problems get worse. This in turn breeds more anxiety."³⁸ Denial and disavowal are commonly used defenses to protect us from anxiety and the pain of impending loss and change that would follow if segments of humanity, specifically post-industrialized societies, truly accepted reality. Denial and disavowal are defense mechanisms, and these mechanisms produce symptoms of feelings of uncertainty.

The psychoanalytic perspective characterizes EN by the symptoms of uncertainty, unpredictability, uncontrollability, helplessness, fear, and worry in general. Interdisciplinary scholars Valimaki and Lehtonen demonstrate the severity of this change by stating:

The psychological factors involved in our adaptation to the consequences of climate change are numerous. Together they form a complex that has many

³⁷ Sally Weintrobe et al. 2013, 33-47.

³⁸ Panu Pihkala 2018, 549.

different roots in the sphere of our minds, such as our affects, basic sense of security of life, social orientation, economic adaptation, individual wishes, and fears, and, last but not least, our psychological make-up – the structure of the mind that has developed from infancy and adolescence to its adult form together, these factors have created a psychological condition that merits being called an environmental neurosis of modern man.³⁹

Valimaki and Lehtonen interpret environmental neurosis through the psychological maturation of the human psyche. In other words, child development determines much of the defense mechanisms expressed in adulthood; following the breadcrumbs of the stages of mental growth uncovers deeply rooted thoughts that stem from childhood experiences. The deeply rooted patterns of EN that stem from general development suggest that the sense of human security is embedded in deep psychological layers. Those inner layers originate in the vital, absolute dependence of the infant on her or his caretaker and from the basic trust that has developed when care has been adequate it follows from the structure of the mind that the developmentally early and functionally most primitive maneuvers are mobilized when a massive anxiety, covered or open, is actualized.⁴⁰ For example, Valimaki and Lehtonen recognize that “the real condition of man with respect to nature is not autonomous. On the contrary, our welfare is based on an uncompromised dependence on food, water, energy, and a biologically feasible atmosphere, all of which make the idea of man’s independence an illusion.”⁴¹ Because of humanities dependence on nature, climate change shakes the security of the human sense of being at a basic level. Humanities dependence on nature bears an important analogy to the original absolute dependence of a baby in her/his union with the caretaker.⁴²

³⁹ Sally Weintrobe et al. 2013, 48.

⁴⁰ Sally Weintrobe et al. 2013, 49.

⁴¹ Sally Weintrobe et al. 2013, 49.

⁴² Sally Weintrobe et al. 2013, 50.

The bottom line is that recent psychoanalytic theory has shown that Freud's problematic of humans and nature can be reconfigured toward more harmonious orientations. Psychoanalysts are looking at ecological problems such as climate change as symptoms of a deeper anxiety based on our human development and our need for security. Therefore, present day psychoanalysts suggest that modern humans are suffering from an environmental neurosis, rooted in deep-seated annihilation anxiety resulting from our denial of our real dependence on nature.

Ecopsychology is a field that has recently gained traction on the issue of the relationship between the environment and psychological neuroses. Numerous psychological subfields, such as those identified above, look at the connection between human beings and the natural environment. However, ecopsychology embraces a more revolutionary paradigm. Quoting Smith here, "just as Freud believed that neuroses were the consequences of dismissing our deep-rooted sexual and aggressive instincts, ecopsychology believes that grief, despair and anxiety are the consequences of dismissing equally deep-rooted ecological instincts."⁴³ Indeed, ecopsychology's goal is to push the bounds of psychology further than clinical psychology has considered. Ecopsychology wants to broaden the field to look at ecological systems, it wants to take the entire planet into account.⁴⁴ Ecopsychologists point to affinities with evolutionary psychology – to the idea that our responses to the environment are hard-wired because of how we evolved as a species. Additionally, ecopsychologists tend to focus on the pathological aspects of the mind-nature relationship, i.e., its brokenness. This means, philosophically, that the field assumes an ideal ecological awareness or communion against which deficits can then be measured. And so, it often seems to rest on assuming as true what it is trying to prove, in circular fashion: being

⁴³ Smith Daniel B. 2010.

⁴⁴ (Quoting Patricia Hasbach from the article) Smith Daniel B. 2010.

mentally healthy requires being ecologically attuned but being ecologically attuned requires mentally healthy people.⁴⁵

Ecopsychology's evolution can be broken down into first- and second generations. The first generation traces its ideas back to Theodore Roszak's book *Voice of the Earth*, which argues for the deep relationship between Jungian psychology and the environment. The first generation held affinities with thinkers associated with deep ecology, including the idea of nature for nature's sake and specific interpretations valuing nature over the human dimension. Second generation eco-psychologists have criticized the first generation for being naive in their approach. Thomas Doherty notes that "a more simplistic, first-generation ecopsychology position simplifies the world," he said. "Either you're green or you're not. Either you're sane or you're not. It conflates mental health and/or lack of mental health with values and choices and the culture." Doherty's mission, on the other hand, is to spearhead a "second-generation ecopsychology" that leaves these binaries behind.⁴⁶ Doherty's vision of the second generation of ecopsychology is based on individual therapeutic practices as well as providing a more mainstream clinical position that includes the patient's relationship with the natural world.

Second generation eco-psychologists Buzzell and Chalquist, who integrate both clinical and theoretical orientations, recently argued that when researchers discuss EN, it would be essential to notice that "eco-fear" primarily describes this better. Buzzell and Chalquist explain "the first step in a successful treatment of eco-anxiety is realizing that a fearful response to a real condition isn't pathological at all. Eco-fear is completely normal and useful, even if profoundly disturbing."⁴⁷ Buzzell and Chalquist have pointed out that concerning environmental threats and

⁴⁵ ⁴⁵ Smith Daniel B. 2010.

⁴⁶ Smith Daniel B. 2010.

⁴⁷ Buzzell, L.; Chalquist, C 2019.

media representation, the lines between fear and anxiety quickly become blurred. The orientation of Doherty's second-generation vision within ecopsychology is its focus on technological tools, individualistic therapeutic approaches, and its focus on instrumentalizing mental health as a tool, along with a data driven approach that can be calculated and recorded in relation to individuals and the environment.

Moreover, radical ecopsychologist Andy Fisher points out that much of the second generation of ecopsychology has problematic affinities to clinical psychology, deploying individualized methods for treatment, and an ahistorical approach to diagnosis. Various second-generation ecopsychologists (Kahn and Hasbach) want to distance ecopsych from the radical perspective and instead would like to depoliticize ecopsych by bringing it closer to the orbit of clinical psychology. Second generation ecopsychologists differentiate themselves from radical strains by adopting similar attitudes of science and technology without talking about the capitalist society embedded in how we use these tools.⁴⁸ Fisher's response to second-generation ecopsychologists is timely and profound, stating:

By my way of thinking, a fully radical ecopsychology says that all psychology must be both ecologized and politicized because placing ontological barriers between any of the regions of psyche, nature, and society is false. That, ultimately, is what it means to turn the psyche inside out. Doing so gives us a very different image of the psyche and so implies a very different image of psychology.⁴⁹

Fisher, thereby, argues that second-generation (Doherty, Kahn, and Hasbach) scholars aligning with mainstream psychology wind up undermining the field's more authentic development.

Fisher suggests that ecopsychology is best thought of as an open project, in the sense of a large, multifaceted undertaking. As Fisher explains, "an open project makes room for a great number of

⁴⁸ Fisher Andy, 2013, 170-171.

⁴⁹ Fisher Andy, 2013, 170.

perspectives and interests and rules out the idea that ecopsychology will ever resemble a traditional discipline.”⁵⁰

If I were to summarize the strengths and weaknesses of these literatures as a guide to think about EN I would say—critically—clinical psychology and climate psychology omit historical and political dimensions in their analysis. The positivist, individual-oriented, ahistorical remedies to the effects of climate change are inadequate for addressing EN, because it misrecognizes the source of the phenomenon. EN is a fear of impending doom based on the crisis characterized as climate change produced by our social and political organization. Therefore, their piecemeal and hyper focused approach unintentionally reinforces the binary separation of human and more-than-human life. The point clinical and climate psychology present is the notion of changing a patient’s routine and lifestyle choices that show up as nature walks, being outdoors, and so on to alleviate the effects of EN. Much of the mainstream psychology literature provides only a superficial diagnosis, leading to solutions that risk individualizing both phenomenon of EN (i.e., locating it within individual brains or psyches) while de-politicizing the (therapeutic) response.

Moreover, environmental theology and environmental philosophy omit the political dimensions in their analysis. Environmental theology does not explain and lacks the political scope to demonstrate the power dynamics of a political dimension that maintain structural forces or agents to resist them. On the other hand, environmental philosophy is silent in the face of power inequalities created by societies in the way they relate to the natural environment. Therefore, both fields in literature restrict the collective and political consequences due to their individualized analysis.

⁵⁰ Fisher Andy 2002, 6.

Similarly, psychoanalysis and ecopsychology commit a sin of omitting important aspects of the political dimension. Psychoanalysis recognizes EN as a complex that includes—but only superficially—political elements. Their focus relies heavily on the structure of the mind as well as human development. The dominant strain of ecopsychology (i.e., second generation) wishes to emulate the clinical elements of clinical and environmental psychology, making it a positivist analysis of individual and apolitical approaches. At the same time, ecopsychology and psychoanalysis do not include an analysis of different cultural dynamics, i.e., completely ignoring global south perspectives. The positionality of both ecopsychology and psychoanalysis is one that focuses largely on affluent, global north populations and their symptoms.

Differently, environmental philosophy is sensitive to the inter-cultural narratives among indigenous, global south and global north positionality in their analysis. Environmental philosophy, psychoanalysis, and ecopsychology better explain (albeit by a limited positionality) the cultural dimension by recognizing that dominant Western culture fatalistically separates humanity from nature. Additionally, environmental philosophy and psychoanalysis have matured their respective orientations by considering the historical dimensions of the phenomenon. These fields now consider the agency of nature as a parallel force to human organization. Lastly, clinical psychology and environmental psychology have minimal contributions to comprehensively understand the phenomenon and its implications. In other words, their methodological tools may be wonderful for individual therapeutic approaches, but they lack a political treatment that embodies more collective and positional sensitivities.

Therefore, to fully understand the phenomenon of EN one must consider the complex manifold of its cultural, historical, and political dimensions. As I have demonstrated, some of the fields described above partially recognize aspects of these dimensions, but they are limited by the

nature of their research focus. None of these fields are primarily concerned with the systemic political issues that, I will argue, are revealed by EN. To make space for my argument, I need to discuss the broader political structures, and maneuvers, that inform my reconceptualization of EN.

The Political/Cultural Stakes of Eco-neurosis

EN is a cultural, social, and political problem, as much if not more so than it is a psychological problem. As much value as there is in other approaches that provide diagnostic language and aim at individual-level remedies, therapeutic practices, and measurable data driven reasons, none of them fully captures the collective nature of this problem. However, some theories have the necessary blueprints to build and illustrate the deeper cultural backdrop of the phenomenon. Immanuel Wallerstein's World-System (WS) mode of analysis lays an initial foundation for a reconceptualization of EN as a systemic political phenomenon. For Wallerstein,

A world system is a social system, one that has boundaries, structures, member groups, rules of legitimation, and coherence... It has the characteristics of an organism, in that it has a life-span over which its characteristics change in some respect and remain stable in others... Life within it is largely self-contained, and the dynamics of its development are largely internal.⁵¹

Jason W. Moore, in *Capitalism in the Web of Life*, uses the foundations of WS while at the same time coupling a mode of analysis to 'nature'. The imperative for Moore is a complete theoretical reworking and synthesis of Marxist, environmental, and feminist thought. As he puts it, "I think many of us understand intuitively – even if our analytical frames lag behind – that capitalism is more than an "economic" system and even more than a social system. Capitalism is a way of organizing nature."⁵² Moore's solution is a new form of conceptualizing and imagining capitalism and its interrelation to the more-than-human world. Moore clarifies that "The 'web of

⁵¹ Wallerstein Immanuel 1974, 347.

⁵² Ahsan Kamil 2019, Viewpoint Magazine.

life' is nature as a whole: nature with an emphatically lowercase n. This is nature as us, as inside us, as around us, it is nature as a flow of flows. Put simply, humans make environments and environments make humans – and human organization.”⁵³ In this sense, Moore asks us to consider capitalism as a world-ecology (WE), that is, joining the accumulation of capital, the pursuit of power, and the reproduction of the web of life.

Moore explains that Capitalism in the Web of life is about how the mosaic of relations that we call capitalism work through nature; and how nature works through that more limited zone, capitalism. This double movement is what Moore calls the “double internality.”⁵⁴ In this double internality, everything that humans do is already joined with extra-human nature and the web of life: nature as a whole that includes humans. The root of the contemporary crisis is that it is increasingly difficult to get nature and human nature to yield its gifts on the cheap. Moore believes this indicates that we may be experiencing not merely a transition from one phase of capitalism to another, but something more epochal: the breakdown of the strategies and relations that have sustained capital accumulation over the past five centuries.⁵⁵ Capitalism has survived not by destroying nature, but through stressing nature for free, or at an incredibly low cost. Capitalism does, of course, impose real and violent transformations on planetary life. these inversions of nature working for capitalism is interrelated not mechanical. Hence, the double internality.⁵⁶

Yet the theorized relationship between capital and nature needs an extra (psychoanalytic) relation. In what follows I aim to draw out that relation, building on Moore while pushing within his argument. Moore notes that “human activity not only produces biospheric change, but

⁵³ Ahsan Kamil 2019, Viewpoint Magazine.

⁵⁴ Moore Jason 2015, 1.

⁵⁵ Moore Jason 2015, 1.

⁵⁶ Moore Jason 2015, 13.

relations between humans are themselves produced through nature. This nature is not nature-as-resource but nature-as matrix. It is a nature that operates not only outside and inside our bodies but also through our bodies, including our embodied minds.”⁵⁷ Therein lies the point, and Moore provides the seed of furthering the argument. If our minds are a part of the web of life then symptoms such as EN are not just an individual mind phenomenon, but it is a part of a larger conflict, it is in addition a larger cultural-historico-political system that effects both human and more-than-human organizations.

I propose that we interpret EN through the lens of WST with its emphasis on both differential experiences based on power dynamics and a structural interconnectedness between these different parts. As Wallerstein puts it the world-system is a “multicultural territorial division of labor in which the production and exchanges of basic goods and raw materials is necessary for the everyday life of its inhabitants.”⁵⁸ Thus, this global division of labor refers to the forces of relations of production of the world economy as a whole. This, in turn, leads to the existence of two interdependent regions: core and periphery. EN should be seen in reference to a broader psycho-material political drama that as WS points out is characterized by differential experiences. If the core and periphery are a component of a power hierarchy that makes exploiter and exploited experience EN differently from each other, then these symptoms are a representation of this larger interrelated sickness.

Therefore, I am suggesting that what Wallerstein and Moore understand as the global political system is not separate from but interconnected with the human and more than human psyche.⁵⁹ On this reading, it makes sense to say that neurosis is not only located within

⁵⁷ Moore Jason 2015, 172.

⁵⁸ Wallerstein Immanuel 1974, 347.

individual minds, but that it is an interconnected, cultural-historical-political system. Within that collective political phenomenon exists a power relation of exploiter and the exploited, i.e., there are those who are the primary subjects of exploitation and then there are those who doing the exploiting both to human and non-human life. It is an interconnected systemic whole but there are differences that are still symptoms of a general sickness. For example, affluent (largely White) liberal eco-anxiety and global south eco-catastrophe are each an element of the broader system of neurosis.

In this section, I point out EN's symptoms and sources within this systemic interconnected viewpoint indebted to WST and WE. I will discuss four points that are seemingly unrelated to EN, but the relevance is revealed when you take a systemic approach to neurosis. By discussing the generational, North/South, indigenous differences, and the dominant viewpoint of Western thought I provide evidence of the value to a systemic approach of EN.⁶⁰ In doing so, I create space for a claim that EN is not merely the result of contemporary climate volatility, but rather the expression of a deeper, historico-political development.

According to an October 2020 poll by the APA “More than two-thirds of Americans (67%) are somewhat or extremely anxious about the impact of climate change on the planet, and more than half (55%*) are somewhat or extremely anxious about the impact of climate change on their own mental health.”⁶¹ Even more telling is their figures that cut across generations, younger adults are more likely to be concerned about climate change on mental health than older adults: “67% of Gen Zers (18-23 years) and 63% of millennials (24-39 years) are somewhat or

⁶⁰ Similarly, this new orientation shares parallel beliefs with Jason Moore's project of providing new language and vocabulary to the differences of today's times. For example, Jason Moore helped produce a World Ecology paradigm. World-ecology says that the relationality of nature implies a new method that grasps humanity-in-nature as a world-historical process. Moore Jason 2015, 3.

⁶¹ American Psychiatric Association 2020.

very concerned about the impact of climate change on their mental health compared to 42% of baby boomers (56-74 years) and 58% of Gen Xers (40-55 years).”⁶² The same is the case when looked at races/ethnicities and gender “The majority of adults of all races/ethnicities (Hispanic/Latino, white, Black, Native American, Asian, and other) are somewhat or extremely anxious about the impact of climate change on the planet and on mental health.”⁶³

Relatedly, the cognitive dissonance of citizens who increasingly recognize the impending climate problem but continue living as usual is encouraged by sources such as mainstream media, which responds to the problem of EN through individualistic and ahistorical accounts of environmental issues. Examples of media treatment based heavily on individual strategies for management, such as focusing on toxic expressions of resilience, i.e., the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties through individual volition by overly romanticizing exceptions to systemic harms. Examples of resilience include staying optimistic, fostering a stronger connection with nature (e.g., such as nature walks), regular exercise, and promoting sustainable lifestyles (e.g., responsible consumption, recycling, urban gardening, etc.).⁶⁴ These responses should be part of a more robust solution, but as it stands they reflect an individualized, patchwork mitigation strategy that is by no means a one size fits all solution and can even increase levels of anxiety in certain populations such as those in the global south who struggle already with food insecurity and poverty as a result of climactic shifts and environmental disasters.

Through the perspective of the global north that relies on a privileged positionality, EN mistakenly takes a uniform definition that ignores social, economic, and cultural realities that are

⁶² American Psychiatric Association 2020.

⁶³ American Psychiatric Association 2020.

⁶⁴ PsychologyToday.

incongruent with predominant Western logic. Eco-neurosis is not a simple or uniform phenomenon, but it can take different forms based on social position, north-south dynamics, and legacies of colonialism. Those who are powerless and vulnerable to climate change provide evidence of an unequal world that aggravates the frequency of EN.

Indeed, Global South populations find it hard to promote sustainable lifestyles and responsible consumption when they struggle to put food on the table or even have the free time to think about their consumption habits. For instance, populations in the global South and indigenous peoples are experiencing the brunt of a changing planet at a faster and more traumatic pace: pacific islands are beginning to disappear, typhoons are more frequent, and an overall lack of resources such as drinkable water, food, and housing is a recipe for extreme levels of eco-neurosis.⁶⁵ For example, certain countries such as Tuvalu, Kiribati and the Marshal Islands are already experiencing sea level rise where ocean flooding has washed saltwater onto agricultural lands and inundated sources of drinking water.⁶⁶ Other countries from the Global South like Bangladesh may be completely under water by 2071. “Nowshin a Berlin-based economist. originally from Bangladesh fears for her native country as global warming swells the oceans. ‘I was very upset, I was crying - I couldn’t deal with it – for me it was very emotional’”.⁶⁷ Indeed, eco-neurosis is exacerbated in this case not by impending doom, but damage already experienced and that will keep happening in the near future.

Indigenous populations around the world fare no better in this matter. In an open access journal of environmental research letters, researchers recognized that mental health impacts of climate change are amplified among indigenous and aboriginal populations. These are

⁶⁵ Asian Development Bank, 2019.

⁶⁶ Goulding, N. 2015, 191-202.

⁶⁷ Ateeqa Riaz 2021.

populations living in ecologically sensitive areas, those who rely closely on their environment for subsistence and livelihoods, and those experiencing ongoing systems of inequity, marginalization, and colonization.⁶⁸ Climate change and resulting environmental changes not only risk amplifying existing health challenges, but also potentially create new challenges, such as coping with ecological grief, and anxiety, solastalgia and the loss of beloved places.⁶⁹ As such climatic and resultant environmental changes were strongly linked to an altered sense of place or loss of place, resulting in negative consequences for livelihoods, cultural practices, and social networks. These place-sensitive outcomes were also linked to alterations in personal and collective identities intimately tied to the health of the environment, leading to negative mental health outcomes according to the collected data.⁷⁰

In this sense, the Western worldview manifested through capitalism is one of the main causes of EN rather than climate change. As I mentioned before, humans experience cognitive dissonance based on the compelling story of human autonomy and separateness from nature.⁷¹ Contemporary humanity suffers from maladies and discomfort rooted in our actual dependence on nature. In other words, the dominant epistemological understanding of Western thinking is obsessed with the idea of dominance over nature.⁷² For example, Anna Lehtonen notes that, “since the 1600’s, people started to understand the Earth as a giant reservoir, which secured energy and raw materials for human consumption. It was the beginning of a misunderstanding: people thought resources were limitless and inexhaustible, and thus began an alienation from the

⁶⁸ Middleton, Jacqueline et al. 2020, 2.

⁶⁹ Middleton, Jacqueline et al. 2020, Ibid.

⁷⁰ Middleton, Jacqueline et al. 2020, 9.

⁷¹ Valimaki J, and Lehtonen, J. 341-344. Authors translated the text from Finnish to English.

⁷² However, it is also true that nature is powerful and unpredictable, which means humanity depends on the fragile ecosystem of nature more than humans care to admit. Devall And Sessions 1985, 61.

web of life.”⁷³ Western intellectual and cultural history forms the foundation for this human-centered approach toward nature.

The dominant Western worldview contains four axioms about nature, according to psychologists Koger and Winter: 1. Nature is composed of inert, physical elements; 2. Which can and should be controlled; 3. By individual human beings seeking private economic gain; 4. Whose work results in progress (primarily economic development).⁷⁴ In most preindustrial cultures, nature is seen as a living, organic unity tied to the activities of human beings. The mechanical development of nature as an inert, physical elements has been called the “death of nature” by Carolyn Merchant. Three important ramifications resulted from this transformation: one, it freed humans from the worry of placating certain gods. Two, it lifted an irrational superstition that inspired certain rituals such as human sacrifices. And three, it liberated human energy to adjust the machine that is nature was now made up of discrete elements that operate according to laws, studied, manipulated, and controlled by human intervention. As a result, material goals superseded spiritual goals when the mechanical worldview displaced the spiritual one. Thus, the adoption of the basis of human nature turned into competitive self-interest; because people are inherently in competition against each other, they must enter market contracts to create a semblance of social order. As a result, progress, through property and economic wealth, is the fundamental feature of the Western worldview. The perception that human life is settled in a linear time marked by progress toward something better is mirrored by the Christian worldview that we are in a linear power order as well.⁷⁵

⁷³ Lehtonen, Anna & Salonen, Arto & Cantell, Hannele 2019.

⁷⁴ Koger M. Susan and Winter Nann Du Deborah 2004, 38.

⁷⁵ Koger M. Susan and Winter Nann Du Deborah 2004, 38-55.

In examining these four assumptions of the Western worldview toward nature uncovers a constructed idea taught as common sense, which delivers unreflected narratives in thinking and awareness of environmental issues that are deeply philosophical, psychological, and determine economic relations, but also holds the vital explanation to the source of maladaptive symptoms towards nature. In relation to EN the focus on a lifeless nature based on control, self-interest, and ahistorical progress has produced this psychological reaction transmuted as worry, fear and uncontrollability toward a problem produced by its worldview.

Western history forms the foundation for both the predominant view of nature in the Western world and the science of psychology (and science in general).⁷⁶ According to Koger and Winter, “In this new modern culture, belief that people are individuals, separate from each other and separate from nature, quickly spread and set the stage for both psychology and a quickly accelerated pace of ecological destruction from industrialization.”⁷⁷ True enough, the Western psychological perspective (broadly speaking) exists within definitions of eco-neurosis because the way it is conceived assumes separation from the natural world. The way experts have conceived EN, especially from the clinical psychology of the APA, paints an ahistorical and individualized phenomenon tailored to the preferences of individual patients. For example, an APA article titled *Addressing Climate Change Concerns in Practice* mentions that existing clinician skills such as cognitive behavioral therapists can use their knowledge of people’s thinking patterns – the tendency to over worry or catastrophize the significance of a problem – to

⁷⁶ I am not suggesting here that the Western world is the only form of culture that matters; non-industrialized and native cultures (North and South American) believe the natural world is a vital part of cultural and family life. Nature is seen as a living organism, seeing the natural world as alive, where people should live in kinship with it. However, indigenous, and non-industrialized cultures are quickly disappearing as capitalism spreads around the globe. My focus then is on the dominant paradigm (Western Capitalism) that replaces all other modes of relating with nature which does not bode well for our continued existence as human beings on the planet.

⁷⁷ Koger M. Susan and Winter Nann Du Deborah 2004, 34.

help people mitigate their responses to climate change.⁷⁸ Similarly, a first step clinicians take in assessing a persons affected by EN is described as “One of the basic environmental identity assessment measures is just two circles: one that says ‘nature,’ and one that says ‘myself,’” Doherty explains.⁷⁹ The patient decides the degree to which those circles overlap. For some, the circles may be separate; for others, they may overlap completely. Understanding how closely patients view the relationship between themselves and the environment will inform therapeutic approaches.⁸⁰ Instead, psychological approaches should integrate and consider the historical, political, and critical elements as an addition to their methods (I will discuss this in more depth later in this chapter).

EN is an unsettling reaction to the differentiated symptoms of a larger system. That reaction, as I understand it, is that the maladaptation’s within awareness express EN as a subject to an emotional warning of an unaware collective unease from a more-than-human world. Once again clinical approaches to EN focus on individual behavior to mitigate unhealthy coping mechanisms such as anxiety and despair. However, I want to talk about EN in ways that accomplish three goals: one, seeing EN as a historical and societal development, i.e., as something more than just a result of climate change. Second, EN is a dynamic trait that is inherited by the character development of a culture’s historical maladaptation. And lastly, EN only makes sense if we shift our orientation away from binary thinking, and instead encompass the internal connections not recognized by the hegemonic Western logic. The concept of a CEU emphasizes the interrelated elements among individual, cultural, and more-than-human sources of EN.

⁷⁸ Schreiber, M. 2021.

⁷⁹ (Quoting Doherty in the article) Schreiber, M. 2021.

⁸⁰ Schreiber, M. 2021.

Thus, because of a maladaptation within awareness, EN is the effect of an unhealthy separation of humanity from the more-than-human world.⁸¹ Therefore, an effective response to EN requires a reexamination of common awareness. Humans have all these ideas built into us that seem unquestioned and obvious, and our speech reflects them. For example, using the clinical therapeutic approaches to EN, somehow this is accepted as legitimate and effective because it is measurable and quantifiable. Human common awareness has been hijacked. That's why we feel like strangers in this world, and that separation feels utterly debilitating. Due to the dominant Western logic of thinking humans experience a divided awareness. But, when the basic assumptions are questioned, a new common awareness begins to reveal itself. It says that black implies white, self implies other, death implies life, sickness implies health. Overcoming estrangement from the two life worlds relies upon peoples (i.e., individual, and collective) awareness of their separation as a fundamental requirement of a project to relinquish insidious forms of estrangement. The evidence for my claim exists in the central phenomenon of focus: eco-neurosis. Fortunately, the sickness of EN implies the possibility of health. The problem of separation also points toward remedies. A healthier unity among society, the psyche, and the more-than-human is as possible as the separation itself. I am arguing for an immanent critique of the predominant Western perspective from marginalized Western orientations (e.g., Environmental Political Theory, Western Marxism, Neo-Freudian psychoanalysis).

The Road Ahead: Developing an Ecological Critical Theory of EN

This section presents the unique elements of my overarching approach for this dissertation. I begin by continuing to highlight crucial gaps in the scholarship on EN. I make the

⁸¹ EN defined this way is in opposition to what the APA defines EN as a direct correlation of climate change. Instead, this broadens the scope and sources of EN to a historico-political structure that mediates our awareness of ourselves, others, and more-than human life.

case for including within the larger literature a cultural, political, and historical interpretation for EN that so far is underdeveloped and limited in scope. Afterwards, I argue for a critical and historical account of neurosis more generally such as the one found within the work of Norman O. Brown. Then, I focus on Erich Fromm as the main interlocutor of this dissertation by introducing aspects of his theory that lead to my own contribution of a CEU. Lastly, I labor on the internal logic of my own methodology (i.e., dialectical theory) as to reflect on the major components of the theory and its relationship to re-conceptualizing EN.

My orientation distinguishes itself by identifying a dynamic relationship between the conscious and unconscious elements of humanity and more-than-humanity, and that the key problem of psychology is that of the specific kind of relatedness of the individual, society, and nature. What differentiates my approach from others in social and political science is the focus on repression as not (only) an interpersonal psychological phenomenon but a political/cultural phenomenon.

Neo-Freudian psychoanalyst Norman O. Brown echoes a pivotal starting point of my argument, demonstrating that "...the existence of a repressed unconscious, necessarily implies the second and even more significant paradox, the universal neurosis of Mankind."⁸² Indeed, this gateway of a repressed unconscious dispels the thought that neurosis is not just for those diagnosed as "neurotics," but the cultural water in which we are all swimming. Neurosis is a universal characteristic of humanity. Therefore, EN is a phenomenon of repression but the concept of EN can potentially function as a means of better interpreting dynamic relationships among human and more-than-human life.

⁸² Brown O. Norman 1959, 6.

Brown argues that neurosis is a universal phenomenon affecting everyone (if unevenly). As he puts it, “neurosis is not an occasional aberration; it is not just in other people; it is in us, and in us all the time.”⁸³ Hence, I apply this same logic, EN should be theoretically understood as another instance of psychic tension that presents itself as a phenomenon of repression due to shared reactions of cultural, historical, and political developments. Brown claims, “The repressed unconscious which produces neurosis is not an individual unconscious but a collective one... From this it follows that the theory of neurosis must embrace a theory of history; and conversely a theory of history must embrace a theory of neurosis.”⁸⁴ The implications for what Brown is claiming is that reconsidering EN as a dynamic collective process is integral to shift the consciousness of the way we understand the connection of human and more-than-human nature.

Erich Fromm provides a lens that situates both a descriptive analytic that helps understand the facets of EN while also pointing towards a prescriptive model that helps develop a more adequate response to human relatedness with the more-than-human. Namely his concepts of neurosis, relatedness, social character, and the social unconscious (I will interrogate and unpack these terms in the next coming chapters). For now, though I will labor on a couple of foundational concepts to introduce and provide some breadth of Erich Fromm’s theoretical anthology.

Fromm developed a critique of capitalism under the concept of alienation. According to Fromm, alienation is when humans cannot relate authentically and creatively to themselves, their labor, one another, and nature.⁸⁵ Nature in capitalist society and capitalists' subjects are subjects of exploitation. This exploitation of nature has developed the phenomena we now know today as

⁸³ Brown O. Norman 1959, 6.

⁸⁴ Brown O. Norman 1959, 13

⁸⁵ Fromm Erich 2013, 44.

climate change. This is because capitalist logic rests upon the thought of infinite growth at the expense of finite resources. I am drawing out Fromm's underlying implication in his writings that the unconscious dialectic of humanity and nature are deeply interrelated.

Then, it makes sense to say that more-than-human nature's reaction to our societal actions manifests as severe weather changes, loss of habitats, and environmental degradation, while simultaneously affecting human beings' mental health. Human mental health is affected because their unconscious drives are shaped by more-than-human events. Therefore, my argument will suggest that the development of capitalism and its narrative of separation concerning more-than-human nature is causing the degradation of our environment and simultaneously, we are developing psychological reactions identifiable as eco-neurosis. The point then is to develop the concept of eco-neurosis with the concept of a CEU.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter the concept of a collective ecological unconscious (CEU) is an attempt to confront the individualized and ahistorical iteration of what the mainstream literature understands EN as the source of climate change. However, a CEU says that more-than-human life while distinct from human society is not divided from it. That is, more-than-human life has unique qualities and procedures, however, more-than-human life as represented for human understanding is deeply interconnected with how the psyche relates to the world. As chapter two will demonstrate, humans may not relate with “nature” in the way that animals or plants do but, we are not separate from more-than-human processes. This is the point of a collective ecological unconscious.

The collective ecological unconscious is a ubiquitous phenomenon. This is a result of a process of separation that allows for the possibility of awareness to CEU's existence. First, there is the separation of both worlds (i.e., human and more-than-human). Then the tension recognized

as maladaptive symptoms of that separation identified as EN. Consequently, that tension allows for the possibility of awareness into the CEU. By having a greater increase in awareness of the CEU the greater the possibility of both individual and collective healing to take place. Separation of both worlds from one psyche demonstrates the double-edged directionality that awareness can move. One direction is the sickness of EN, the other is the remedy toward transformative visions. The following model demonstrates this historical process that eventually points to a moment of apparent tension (i.e., capitalism) as it unfolds in discovering a CEU.

Further, the culmination of my ecological critical theory is ontologically motivated by the same methodological force that guided both Brown and Fromm's scholarship, i.e., dialectical thinking. This methodological move is significant because it is what internally motivates a reconceptualization of EN and the concept of a CEU. Dialectics as a worldview and a methodology understands society not as a fixed object, but as a dynamic entity that unfolds over time as an ever-evolving processual experience. In relation to EN this ever-evolving experience as an emotional reaction is shaped by the historical development of cultural forces. A dialectical approach also means understanding EN through a myriad of relationships unfolding simultaneously over time shaping societal and ecological experiences. Therefore, history is a vivified spectrum of paradoxical elements, one of those important elements that has been overlooked throughout the early literature is that history exhibits a dialectic not previously recognized, the dialectic of eco-neurosis. Thus, explaining the dialectical method is crucial to understand my motivations for the turn I make in my argument on EN.

Dialectics provides a language to discuss the transition of how concepts develop into what they are. It does this in two ways: one, it is flexible in its conceptual logic, meaning it considers the multifaceted changes of a concept as history unfolds; two, it is inherently dynamic

in examining concepts. What does this all mean? First, what is meant by flexibility is clearly captured in a lecture by Theodor Adorno:

The dialectic is indeed a method which refers to the process of thinking, but it also differs from other methods insofar as it constantly strives not to stand still, constantly corrects itself in the presence of the things themselves. We could define dialectic as a kind of thinking which does not content itself merely with the order of concepts but, rather, undertakes to correct the conceptual order by reference to the being of the objects themselves.⁸⁶

Indeed, the key to its dynamism lies in the awareness of its own unfolding as an orientation.

Similarly, EN as a phenomenon is an emotional reaction and the intensity varies depending on mood, environment, events, and so on. The dialectic self-corrects itself because its core elements consider internal relations of concepts to constant historical changes. Thus, dialectical thinking is sensitive enough to illustrate the dynamic process involved in the continuity and discontinuity of concepts such as EN as it adapts to circumstances.

Secondly, the dynamic component in the dialectic is preserved by its own unfolding, that is, dialectical thinking vivifies the use of concepts, or more clearly, Adorno demonstrates the essential characteristic of dialectical thought that concepts are alive to change. "The concepts themselves are filled with such inner life, unfold so intensively and dynamically, that although they seem entirely abstract, they nonetheless reassume all the colour and fullness of life within themselves and thus in this remarkable way also begin in sparkle."⁸⁷ The critical life of the dialectic is precisely to resolve concepts that are presented as lifeless, fixed objects. An example of a lifeless object is the APA's conceptualization of EN as an individual anxiety caused by climate change. Instead, vivifying EN is recognizing that the answer is not just individual it is collective, and a part of a deeper relation hidden from plain sight: the separation caused by the

⁸⁶ Adorno, Theodor W. 2017, Lecture 1.

⁸⁷ Adorno, Theodor W. 2017, Lecture 6.

dominant Western mode of thinking. Thus, as Adorno explains "it only overcomes what has become rigid and ossified by allowing it to move by virtue of its own power, of the life that has been precipitated in the things and concepts which confront us in an alienated form."⁸⁸ Dialectic articulated and interpreted in this sense should strive to be open in its understanding.⁸⁹ Indeed, this dissertation adopts the value that dialectical thinking is open. That is, dialectics is a method, framework, and a main subject of this dissertation, is supported by flexibility and dynamic elements. So, dialectics provides a language to discuss the transition of how concepts develop into what they appear. This is the task of this section that points toward a reintegration of more-than-human/society relations.

The dialectic intellectual tradition traces its roots of political history both in marginalized Western thought such as Marx, Hegel, Heraclitus, Plotinus, and lesser-known influences of Eastern mysticism. If there is a goal to dialectics it is not what is understood as "the end of history" (i.e., an end goal based on steady progress) in an orthodox Marxist sense. Rather, the goal of a more comprehensive dialectic is the focus on process and change instead of end results. As Bertell Ollman states "... Dialectics is a way of thinking that brings into focus the full range of changes and interactions that occur in the world."⁹⁰ It is the process of interactions in change that dialectic shines. Within the scope of this strand of thinking dialectical thinking opens into a world of dynamic connections; that is, upon inspection of apparent contradictions relationships exist that systematically develop a larger image of reality. That image, however, is subject to

⁸⁸ Adorno, Theodor W. 2017, Lecture 6.

⁸⁹ The Frankfurt School of Critical Theory central voices were Horkheimer and Adorno they argued against Cartesian and Kantian philosophy, they attempted to rejoin all dichotomies e.g., like those between consciousness and being, theory and practice, fact and value, through the use of their own unique dialectical method. Subtly different from Marx mind you, their dialectics amounted to neither metaphysical principles nor a historical praxis; instead, it was not intended as a methodological tool. Even though it became exactly that, dialectics became a function for overcoming categorical fixities and oppositions. This was in direct relation to Horkheimer and Adorno's criticism of traditional Marxism, which created a separation between the material productive base and the ideological superstructure.

⁹⁰ Ollman Bertell 1993, 10.

change based on the context in which one is investigating, and simultaneously, based on the conditions of one's society. The dialectical method also contains an important element that cannot be omitted. The moment of praxis, which Ollman suggests is "where, based on whatever clarification has been reached, one consciously acts in the world, changing it and testing it and deepening one's understanding of it all at the same time."⁹¹ Dialectics is in a sense, not just a methodology, but also a subject of its own investigation. In other words, a worldview in which one can judge not just empirically, but also normatively the organizational make-up of societies and more than human nature.

For this purpose, by including Erich Fromm in reconsidering EN to a theory of history the focus now moves to the dynamic elements consistent within the new framework. Throughout human and more-than-human history, there have been transitions of adaptations that have taken place. By which I mean such an adaptation to patterns that transforms the whole character structure of individuals and societies in latent ways; the abrupt change is repressed since it would be overwhelming to express it or even be aware of it. Though not manifest, the dynamic adaptation creates new neurosis, which may set up a vague defiance, directed against no one but rather toward life in general.⁹² A society made up of individuals may adapt themselves to certain external conditions (e.g., climate change) this kind of adaptation creates something new in them, it arouses new forms of neurosis (e.g., eco-neurosis). Fromm's observation of this phenomenon led him to believe that "Every neurosis is an example of this dynamic adaptation; it is essentially an adaptation to such external conditions as are in themselves irrational and, generally speaking, unfavorable to the growth and development of the human."⁹³ However, I am also claiming the

⁹¹ Ollman Bertell 2003, 150.

⁹² Fromm Erich 1941, 14.

⁹³ Fromm Erich 1941, 14.

opposite (i.e., favorable growth and development) exists. In other words, this form of repressed transformation is a dynamic factor that may change a person's neurosis as "healthy" or "unhealthy" forms depending on the social and environmental factors around them.

In short, I argue that understanding EN requires a recognition that environmental problems are deeply rooted in unconscious forces (and vice versa) constituted by the pervading logic of the dominant culture in society.⁹⁴ While Valimaki, Lehtonen, Pikhala, and Weintrobe focus on denial, helplessness, and anxiety as coping defenses at the level of the individual psyche in the face of climate change, I argue a more radical Frommian approach is needed. For example, Fromm uses psychoanalysis for social critique, not the depiction of individualized psychological symptoms (although it may include that). However, as we see, Brown and Fromm use it for a theory of history and as an indicator of political/ethical changes in society. Fromm's development of the theory of a collective character structure⁹⁵ of society is an excellent example of interrogating psychological and emotional reactions to political/economic developments that may have at one point or another subjected members of society to slavery, but they react to it by lowering their intellectual and moral qualities; they may be subject to a culture of mutual distrust and hostility, but they react to this by becoming weak, sterile, isolated and disaffected and in being subjected to these experiences humanity develops unhealthy neurotic symptoms.⁹⁶ The point is to recognize these patterns so that new forms of healthier neurotic patterns can emerge.

Therefore, in arguing for a Frommian orientation I am demonstrating that the APA misrecognizes the source of EN. That is, the APA's ahistorical and individualized orientation

⁹⁴ Susan M. Koger and Deborah Du Nann Winter 2004, 63.

⁹⁵ Fromm defines Character as the (relatively permanent) form in which human energy is canalized in the process of assimilation and socialization. This canalization of psychic energy has a very significant biological function. The character system can be considered the human substitute for the instinctive apparatus of nature (Fromm Erich 1947, 67).

⁹⁶ Fromm Erich 1947, 32.

configures EN as a mental health problem of a generalized anxiety. To some extent this is true, but EN is more importantly a historical, and political problem, or set of problems. As Fromm explains, “Man’s nature, his passions, and anxieties are a cultural product; as a matter of fact, man himself is the most important creation and achievement of the continuous human effort, the record of which we call history.”⁹⁷ The difference of the APA (as crucial as they are in their respect) should not detract from an overall diagnosis or critique that sees EN as a general phenomenon affecting all of humanity (albeit in different ways).

I believe there is an affinity here with Environmental Political Theory’s (EPT) task to move nature at the center of investigation and simultaneously discuss the psychical and socioeconomic forces that mediate the tension of humanity through nature. Fromm’s later works are rooted in understanding humanity’s effort to establish meaningful relations with the natural world. The purpose here is to further the revival of his works and extend it into the EPT literature, creating an overarching framework that provides explanatory power and determines a normative goal for better ecological relations of humans through nature. Therefore, revisiting Fromm’s works offers this dissertation a theoretical foundation for a comprehensive and normative theory of human/more-than-human relations that contains psychical, political, economic, and ethical elements, which is lacking in the prominent literature on eco-neurosis.

The Frommian framework is complicit in the binary opposition between “civilization” and “nature.” However, his own theory provides suggestions for a more ecological language, as well. I am suggesting a necessary push of Fromm’s theory to make his implicit connections explicit. I will accomplish this by invoking radical ecological scholars such as Jason Moore, Andy Fisher, Murray Bookchin, Ryan Gunderson, and others to “ecologize” Fromm’s theory.

⁹⁷ Fromm Erich 1941, 11.

Ecologizing Fromm's theory will demonstrate the political/sociological importance of adapting ideas such as relatedness, biophilia, and the social unconscious to the understanding of nature as a co-production of human development rather than something separate.

This section accomplished three prescriptive elements to my main argument in this dissertation. One was Norman O. Brown's historical development of neurosis that I apply to the reorientation of EN as something more than just a product of climate change. Then, I introduce the main interlocutor of the argument Dr. Erich Fromm's concept of dynamic adaptation that is inherited by the character development of a person's neurosis based on environmental and social factors. Lastly, I represent the internal logic of both my and Fromm's orientation that demonstrates the new reinterpretation of EN one of internal relations through individual, political, and more than human nature. The main takeaway of my argument is that capitalism and its narrative of separation is causing the degradation of our environment, which includes the human psyche and is impacting the (more than human) collective unconscious. As a result, human beings develop psychological reactions referred to as eco-neurosis, which are misunderstood by the fields in which it is studied. I will address these deficiencies by interrogate EN through the conceptual lens of a CEU.

CHAPTER 1

Toward A Frommian Ecological Theory: A Critique of Eco-Neurosis

The central argument of this dissertation is that it is necessary to reframe the growing problem of neurosis, and more specifically, eco-neurosis (EN). Clinical approaches to EN focus primarily on changing individual behavior to mitigate symptoms such as anxiety and despair. However, EN is limitedly understood from within this model as an issue of individual minds; instead, it is more than just minds it's in addition a systemic reaction to a social order that appropriates human and more-than-human life at too high a cost. That cost contains receipts in the form of social and individual maladies. For example, in the social realm we are witnessing more of a lack of cohesion and community and members of society experience a sense of deep separation within their own social groups. The individual member demonstrates heightened states of isolation, helplessness, anxiety, frustration and separation from oneself, community, and more-than-human life. So, yes EN is happening in individual minds, and simultaneously collectively at a structural level.

The other aspect of my argument builds on an axiom of classical psychoanalysis: Sigmund Freud asserts that modern society bases itself on the removal (repression) of the individual libido and the sublimating organization of the collective libido.⁹⁸ In other words, as long as the process of reproducing society remains on the mobilization of physical energies, in the industrial age, the expression of bodily desire was to be repressed in order to invest energies in labor and survival. Repression played a fundamental role in the generation of neurosis. For example, EN as I

⁹⁸ Freud Sigmund 2010, 105.

recognize it is a set of uncomfortable emotional reactions that are part of a broader conflict driven by a confluence of social and more than human forces. I have identified the field where these forces intimately connect i.e., the struggle of the psyche. The psychic struggle – unfulfilled wishes, conflicting thoughts and ideas, fears, fantasies and dreams, and an overall inability to make sense of one’s inner life/relationship to the external world – is the product of a repressed form of life.⁹⁹ A repressed form of life – taking Freud seriously – is the very condition that developed highly evolved social organization, i.e., society. There is of course a caveat: while repression provides the safety and security of society, the individual suffers neurotic symptoms as a result. Neurosis is the result of repression, and repression of desires/wishes also creates an unconscious repository of unfulfilled longings. More specifically, as I will develop in this chapter the source of separation is global capitalism in contemporary life.¹⁰⁰ Thus, I identify EN as two simultaneous processes: one, it is a felt separation of humanity from more-than-human life, and two, it is an unhealthy adaptation resulting from the current organization of material/social life with the more-than-human world.¹⁰¹

The starting point for my analysis is the identification of dynamic relations through human psychology and more-than-human life.¹⁰² More specifically, the dynamic force I refer to is dialectics. Dialectics works both as a methodology and as a worldview. As a methodology

⁹⁹ Norman O. Brown gestures at my point here when he states in *Life Against Death* (Wesleyan University Press, 1959) “Neurosis is an essential consequence of civilization or culture.”

¹⁰⁰ Oliver James’ *The Selfish Capitalist* (Vermillion, 2008) convincingly posited a correlation between rising rates of mental neurosis and the neoliberal model of capitalism. Mark Fisher in *Capitalism Realism* (Zero Books, 2009) also notes that “The mental health plague in capitalist societies would suggest that, instead of being the only social system that works, capitalism is inherently dysfunctional, and that the cost of it appearing to work is very high.”

¹⁰¹ EN defined this way is in opposition to what the APA defines EN as a direct correlation of climate change. Instead, this broadens the scope and sources of EN to a historico-political structure that mediates our awareness of ourselves, others, and more-than human life.

¹⁰² Fromm muses that to be “Alive” is a dynamic, not a static, concept. Existence and the unfolding of the specific powers of an organism are the same. The aim of human life, therefore, is to be understood as the unfolding of their powers according to the laws of their nature.

Dialectical thought contains two distinguishing features: one, it assumes the nature of reality to act as an unfolding processual experience. two, it provides a way to communicate the contextual evolution of concepts as they change over time. Relatedly, the logic of dialectical thinking viewing the world and concepts as an unfolding of dynamic connections provides an intimate focus on change itself. By researching and investigating the qualities of change in concepts, society, and environment, one begins to develop a robust ability to judge not just empirical facts, but also normative claims and behaviors of concepts, society. Dialectics is in a sense, not just a methodology, but also a subject of its own investigation.

If we take dialectics seriously, the phenomenon interrogated in this dissertation (EN) is an ever-evolving experience: a set of emotional reactions and states shaped by the historical development of cultural forces. What are those historical developments? According to Marx, the key to societal evolution exists within the previous stages of its development. In the same way that our present provides the key to understanding the past, the future, as well, provides the keys to understanding the present. The quality of class in human society is the indicator of that historical development. The transparent class character of society demonstrates the maladies of our human emotional reactions. As in, what Ollman notes, “We shouldn’t be surprised, therefore, that insisting that the capitalist state, whatever its democratic pretensions, is a dictatorship of the capitalist class...”¹⁰³ and in that sense eco-neurosis is a byproduct of capitalist ideology doomism; as the famous Zizek or Jameson saying goes “it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism.”

Further, taking a dialectical approach expands the meaning of EN as a manifold of relationships that shape social and ecological interactions. For example, EN as I recognize it is a

¹⁰³ Ollman Bertell 2003, 153.

set of uncomfortable emotional reactions that are part of a broader conflict driven by a confluence of social and more than human forces. I have identified the field where these forces intimately connect i.e., the psyche. The psychic struggle – unfulfilled wishes, conflicting thoughts and ideas, fears, fantasies and dreams, and an overall inability to make sense of one's inner life/relationship to the external world – is the product of a repressed form of life.¹⁰⁴ A repressed form of life – taking Freud seriously – is the very condition that developed highly evolved social organization, i.e., society. There is of course a caveat: while repression enables the safety and security of society, the individual suffers neurotic symptoms as a result. Neurosis is the result of repression, and repression of desires/ wishes also creates an unconscious repository of unfulfilled longings. However, members of society manage ways to relieve those mental externalities, Freud identified three measures: powerful deflections, which cause us to make light of our misery; substitute satisfactions, which diminish it, and intoxicating substances, which make us insensitive to it.¹⁰⁵

The story of classical psychoanalysis (repression causes neurosis) has two drawbacks. First, I am claiming – partly inspired by Fromm – that the unconscious is not located in individual psyches but is a transindividual collective experience (I develop this idea further in Chapter 2).¹⁰⁶ The unconscious interpreted through a transindividual collective experience includes an ecological element. In other words, contemporary humanity must reject our Cartesian abstraction that says human society is separate from the more-than-human and recognize that more-than-human life has unique qualities and procedures that are deeply interconnected with

¹⁰⁴ Norman O. Brown gestures at my point here when he states in *Life Against Death* (Wesleyan University Press, 1959) “Neurosis is an essential consequence of civilization or culture.”

¹⁰⁵ Freud Sigmund 2010, 41.

¹⁰⁶ Jung Carl & Campbell Joseph 1976, 59-62; Jason Reads *the Politics of Transindividuality* (Brill, 2016): *Transindividuality* is understood as the mutual constitution of individuality and collectivity, and as such it intersects with politics and economics, I am also adding here more-than-human life.

how the collective psyche – including humans – relates to the world. Secondly, neurosis has changed because repression has changed; repression is no longer the underlying force causing neurosis. Contemporary human politics emerged from our need to repress for the sake of control and security. Over time, that need for control gained a life of its own, such that life is transformed today as global capitalism. Capitalism uses civilizational repression to reproduce profits as an unequal exchange. Humans are no longer political agents; now we are objects, expendable utilities for the reproduction of global capitalism in the same way Westerners treated “nature” during colonization.

However, the multiplication of natural events such as climate change, and Covid-19 have enabled irreversible dynamics co-produced by our politics currently fashioned as global capitalism. For example, according to the American Psychiatric Association (APA), more than two-thirds of members of American society suffer from EN. A reason EN may appear as an overwhelming reaction to more than two-thirds of members in American society are as follow: the tools of political repression to maintain conformity and control of its members are thawing. Humans may not relate with “nature” in the way that animals or plants do but we are not separate from more-than-human processes. Psychological reactions are an indicator that something is wrong with the way our collective psyche relates to the world. It is important to recognize that these other elements make sense only if we take seriously the dialectic of eco-neurosis, but to understand the dialectic of EN it is vital to track the historical significance of neurosis.

In this first chapter, I will distinguish and add further detail on four crucial concepts from Fromm’s theoretical repertoire to sharpen a politically informed critique of EN, namely: 1. Neurosis, 2. Relatedness, 3. Social character, and 4. Social unconscious. These four concepts will demonstrate a strong relevance to the main topic of this dissertation — the political reframing of

EN — by showing that its substance is not just individual therapeutic difficulties but a systemic illness and a symptom of ecological degradation. This is crucial to develop an ecological framework on Fromm's thought in chapter two based on the reinterpretation of EN as more than just a social development but instead, a development in the web of life.

The Psychological is Political

Typically, psychology defines neuroses as individual psychological problems, limited to the suffering psyche that enters clinic/analytical encounter for the sake of therapeutic relief. For example, the American Psychological Association (APA) defines neurosis as “any one of a variety of mental disorders characterized by significant anxiety or other distressing emotional symptoms, such as persistent and irrational fears, obsessive thoughts, compulsive acts, dissociative states, and somatic and depressive reactions.”¹⁰⁷ The sources of neurosis are numerous; according to clinical psychologists common causes of neurosis include emotional instability, an effect to the nervous system such as a coma and epilepsy, unpleasant experiences, and a conflict between two psychic events. The observable effects of neurosis can include sweating, body tremors and panic attacks. Other forms appear as profound sadness such as losing interest in activities that once provided pleasure, and repeated intrusive thoughts that cause distress. The way clinical psychology treat neurosis is usually through individual therapy and/or psychoactive drugs.¹⁰⁸

However, the APA omits a crucial tenet in the understanding of neurosis: namely, all forms of neurosis are properly understood, political phenomena. Psychology and politics do not signify two separate categories: psychology cannot justly be separated from politics. Instead,

¹⁰⁷ The APA no longer uses neurosis as a diagnosis, and neuroses are now diagnosed as depressive or anxiety disorders; American Psychological Association (APA).

¹⁰⁸ American Psychological Association and ecoAmerica 2017.

psychology and politics are symbols of experience. This simply means that the study of the experience of others is based on inferences made from one's own experience of another to the other. In other words, the task of social phenomenology is to relate my experience of the other's behavior to the other's experience of my behavior.¹⁰⁹ More specific still, what I am investigating is the relation between behavior and experience. To discuss this in a systematic and cogent manner I will borrow an axiomatic principle from R.D. Laing: behavior is a function of experience; and both experience and behavior are always in relation to someone or something other than self.¹¹⁰

R.D. Laing and the Anti-psychiatry movement of the 60's promoted similar conclusion to my own inter-related argument of politics and psychology. Therefore, my argument differs from the APA by acknowledging that EN is a product of psychological disturbances, but those disturbances are a product of political causes. In this case, eco-neurosis as politics refers to the interexperience of people's attitudes, opinions, beliefs, perspectives. In other words, mental health influences society and political norms and rules and as much as political norms and rules impact mental health. For example, if we take R.D Laing's perspective seriously, the diagnostic language Laing employed is readily familiar to every psychiatrist and psychoanalyst who works with patients suffering from mental disturbances. Laing used terms such as psychotic, schizoid, schizophrenic, paranoid – all standard nomenclature with which therapists are familiar.¹¹¹ However, Laing determines that none of these terms are written in stone. In fact, they are constantly changing and undergo revision in every new edition of The Diagnostic and Statistical

¹⁰⁹ Laing R. D. 1960, 17.

¹¹⁰ Laing R. D. 1969, 25.

¹¹¹ Laing R. D. 1960, 14.

Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM). In other words, the field of mental health as “governed” by documents such as the DSM — is a deeply political process.¹¹²

A critical point of Laing’s social phenomenology of experience claims that psychological premises do not derive solely from science, instead psychology, as Laing suggests, is the logos of experience; psychology is the structure of the evidence. Even facts become fictions without agreed upon ways of seeing “the facts.”¹¹³ You see the best analogy to understand the phenomenology of experience is a mirror reflecting one’s image. Meaning, we do not experience each other, or anything directly, but I experience you as experiencing yourself as experienced by me. Science promotes a facile method of understanding people and life in general as separate objects that can be studied like any other object. Laing’s methodology argues that the study of experience of others is based on inferences, that is the intellectual tool humans can use to ascertain the source of unobservable phenomena. Meaning the systematic logic of social phenomenology concerns itself with relations between things, more specifically with *interexperience*. Through interexperience a constant dialectical relationship that requires processual reflection of interactions can be translated into categories and organized into systematic uses for understanding. Experience may be invisible to others. But experience is not “subjective” rather than “objective,” not “inner” rather than “outer,” and so on.¹¹⁴ These outer and inner categories refer to the distinction between behavior and experience; however, this is a reification that is inaccurate. More accurately, these are distinctions between different modalities of experience. If researchers remember that the split in our experience is useful for the sake of

¹¹² Laing R. D. 1960, 19.

¹¹³ Laing R. D. 1969, 17.

¹¹⁴ Laing R.D. 1967, 20.

study, and not what takes place in reality, we can speak of experience as something closer to objective fact.

Therefore, theoretical concepts should be flexible in their categorization to clearly reflect an awareness to the constant unfolding in the modality of experience, simultaneously recognizing the further the degree of abstraction for clarity's sake does not mean that reality erases sharp distinctions in characteristics that lack resolution in systemic thinking.¹¹⁵ In other words, when studying ideas, one should always be aware that ideas are alive and moving in the same way people operate. Studying ideas as objects frozen in time will not help uncover the solutions for people or life. Indeed, experience and action occur in conjunction to an environmental field of reciprocal influence and interaction, this is both social and ecological. Therefore, ecological interactions changed by established social orders channel human psychological dispositions, this is achieved through concepts, symbols, language that can either result in health or sickness. In this case, eco-neurosis is a representative sickness of contemporary capitalism interacting with ecological life.

However, R.D. Laing's critical orientation to psychology and psychoanalysis has one noticeable limitation: For Laing there is no such thing as mental illness, or psychopathology.¹¹⁶ In fact, Laing never formulated an overarching theory of psychopathology to replace the edifice that psychiatry and psychoanalysis built. His focus was on schizoid phenomena and schizophrenia, not as specific diagnostic categories, but as a metaphor for varieties of mental anguish that compromise our ability to develop satisfying relationships with others. Meaning, Laing was ambivalent on the topic of mental health and even avoided using the term. For the sake of my argument, the use of assessing a problem needs more precise language to identify

¹¹⁵ Laing R.D. 1967, 22-24.

¹¹⁶ Laing R.D. 1960, 30.

solutions. In this sense, Laing is an unsatisfactory source to unpack and define concepts of neurosis, let alone EN. For this reason, Erich Fromm provides a theory of psychopathology and further expands on psychoanalytic scholarship, specifically on the ideas of mental health and neurosis.

Neurosis: Tracing Fromm's Roots of Psychic Pathology

Fromm posited that many psychiatrists and psychologists refuse to entertain the idea that society itself may be lacking in sanity. They hold that mental health problems in a society are reducible to the number of mentally troubled individuals, rather than a problem within the culture itself.¹¹⁷ Fromm notes that “they postulate that each society is normal inasmuch as it functions, and that pathology can be defined only in terms of the individual’s lack of adjustment to the ways of life in his society.”¹¹⁸ By way of example, the psychological etymology of neurosis defines the term as a change in the nerve cells of the brain resulting in symptoms of stress, but not radical loss of touch with reality (i.e. psychosis).¹¹⁹ In contradistinction, Fromm’s orientation focuses on the intersubjective experience of neurosis. Fromm emphasized that neurosis is an adaptation to external conditions that are irrational, unadjusted, and unfavorable to an individual in favor of the demands of society.¹²⁰ In other words, neurosis is a result of ‘abnormal’ behavior or wishes judged by the standards of society.

However, to understand the criteria of normal and abnormal depends on what a society values and rewards. Fromm defines the term normal in two ways: from the standpoint of a

¹¹⁷ Fromm Erich 1955, 6.

¹¹⁸ Fromm Erich 1955, 12.

¹¹⁹ Online Etymology Dictionary.

¹²⁰ Unadjusted to Fromm is society's perception that denotes an individual's lack of social functioning; this is an effect of neurotic symptoms. This means the neurotic person can be characterized as someone who was not ready to surrender completely in the battle for themselves. The attempt to save themselves was not successful in expressing themselves to the social efficiency of society.

functioning society, one can call a person normal if they can fulfill the social role a person takes in that given society, which means being able to work in the fashion required by established social norms. Secondly, from the standpoint of the individual, one can look upon normalcy as the optimum of growth and happiness.¹²¹ If the structure of a given society were such that it offered the optimum possibility for individual happiness, both definitions would apply. However, Fromm recognized that this is not the case in most societies. Normality, rather, is defined by how smoothly an individual can adapt to the demands of their given society.

However, there is a problem with the current iteration of normality in modern societies of the Global North. Adapting to the demands of modern society has adverse effects, more specifically the concentration of alienated members of society. As Fromm suggests, every instance of neurosis is an outcome of alienation. This diagnosis is characterized by what society rewards (e.g., consumerism, selfishness, individuality, instrumentality) which becomes the dominant passion of its members.¹²² The isolated and separated person is the consequence of a neurotic society. It is no wonder that neurosis (by extension EN) and alienation contain similar symptoms, The APA lists the affective symptoms of neurosis as follows: feeling nervous, restless, or tense; have a sense of impending danger, panic, or doom; having an increased heart rate; hyperventilation; sweating, trembling, feelings of weakness; trouble concentrating or thinking.¹²³ By the same token, Fromm defined an alienated person a person who feels weak, frightened, nervous, and inhibited because they do not experience themselves as the subject and originator of their own acts and experiences.¹²⁴ It is no coincidence that these two conditions work in tandem in social/political life to create apathy and a form of fatalism that leads to

¹²¹ Fromm Erich 1941, 137.

¹²² Fromm Erich 1962, 56.

¹²³ American Psychological Association and ecoAmerica 2017.

¹²⁴ Fromm Erich 1962, 52.

helplessness. The social/political alleviation is found in forms of idolization of authority figures, and in political, religious, and cultural life.¹²⁵

Fromm's 1955 work *The Sane Society* sought to demonstrate how neurosis becomes normalized at a social level in organized society. Fromm coined the term "the pathology of normalcy" to explain how mass neurosis develops as a socially accepted and rewarded pattern of behavior interpreted as a social virtue. As Fromm reports:

"What is deceptive about the state of mind of the member of a society is the 'consensual validation' of their concepts. it is naively assumed that the fact that the majority of people share certain ideas or feelings proves the validity of these ideas and feelings... the fact that millions of people share the same vices does not make these vices virtues, the fact that they share so many errors does not make the errors to be truths, and the fact that millions of people share the same form of mental pathology does not make these people sane."¹²⁶

This collective form of gaslighting demonstrates that the people who aren't explicitly suffering from neurosis (people pretending everything is okay) are the unwell sufferers of the symptom. Fromm is arguing that society provides the opiate to satiate and numb the deeper sickness that society itself produces. Fromm is saying that modern society is insane and that people behaving normally are unconscious to the sickness, whereas those manifesting symptoms and reactions such as forms of expressed neurosis are profoundly aware of a problem, because they at least are honest that a problem exists. The main function of global capitalist society is to conceal socially patterned neurosis through socially accepted "truths."¹²⁷ Hence the current condition of global capitalist culture is a condition of separation, of being asleep, of being unconscious, of being out of one's mind; this is the condition of the normal member in

¹²⁵ Think of the cult of Personality of Donald Trump's presidency and the January 6th insurrection.

¹²⁶ Fromm Erich 1955, 14-15.

¹²⁷ In alliance to Fromm's ideas R.D. Laing notes that "What we call 'normal' is a product of repression, denial, splitting, projection, introjection, and other forms of destructive action on experience. It is radically estranged from the structure of being... The 'normally' alienated person, by reason of the fact that he acts more less like everyone else, is taken to be sane."

contemporary society. The recent development of EN is another variation of a collective form of gaslighting, and the manifestation of EN is a call for help. Then understanding EN is integral for an analysis of how social separation bleeds through ecological dynamics.

Every society provides a patterned system in which specific solutions are predominant to avoid manifestations of neurosis. The point of view that Fromm takes is not only a “biological” or a “sociological” one if that means separating these two aspects. It is, as Fromm mentions, “one transcending such dichotomy by the assumption that the main passions and drives in man result from the total existence of man, that they are definite and ascertainable, some of them conducive to health and happiness, others to sickness and unhappiness.”¹²⁸ For example, just as the child is born with all human potentialities such as care, responsibility, respect, and knowledge which develop under favorable political and cultural conditions, so humanity, in the process of history, develops into what it potentially is. The deviant who strays from the predominant social pattern is just as much in search of an answer as their more well-adjusted counterpart.

Neurosis, however, is an incessant malaise within contemporary society. It is important here to compare the origins of neurosis in psychoanalytic literature among Freud and Fromm. Freud’s original psychoanalytic description of neurosis argued that neurosis is an instance where the ego’s effort to deal with unfulfilled wishes, desires and emotions fail. The result of a failed desire by the ego turns into maladaptive conditions such as repression that reject from the ego painful or disagreeable ideas, memories, feelings, or impulses in the mind. An example of Freud’s form of repression exists in an individual’s inability to remember forms of abuse as a child in adulthood, even as this leads to anxiety and difficulty in forming relationships as an

¹²⁸ Fromm Erich 1955, 14.

adult.¹²⁹ If humanity does not overcome their infantile strivings and develop a mature genital orientation, they are torn between the desires of the child within themselves and the satisfactions available to them as a grown-up person. The neurotic symptom represents an unstable compromise between infantile and grown-up needs.

Neurosis, for Freud, reflects a basic and unalterable contradiction between humans and their society; for Freud humanity is driven by two biologically rooted impulses: the craving for sexual pleasure, and the basic aggression among each other. Contrary to Freud, Fromm sees the development of neurosis much differently. Infusing the spirit of Laing, Fromm assumes that the key problem in psychology is not a frustration among instinctual needs, but instead that of the relationship of experience, and on the assumption that the relationship between humanity and society is not a static, but a dynamic process. therefore, Fromm's logic determines that neurosis is a social/cultural product.¹³⁰ Thus, neurosis must be defined in terms of the adjustment of society to the needs of humanity, of its role in furthering or hindering the development of neurosis. As Fromm notes "Whether or not the individual is healthy, is primarily not an individual matter, but depends on the structure of his society."¹³¹ The development of neurosis described by Fromm is part of the explanation to eco-neurosis. EN as a set of felt experiences is in general a cultural phenomenon induced not by our instinct for sexual satisfaction but by our individuated, unsatisfying relationship with society and with the more-than-human world.

On the other hand, to further Fromm's notion of neurosis one must look elsewhere into the ideas of Karl Marx and his concept of alienation as well as consciousness. Marx, of course, never developed a systematic theory of psychopathology, but alienation was the closest concept

¹²⁹ Freud Sigmund 2010, 75.

¹³⁰ Fromm Erich 1941, 11.

¹³¹ Fromm Erich 1955, 72.

to Freud's description of psychic discomfort. The essence of the concept is that the world (nature, things, others, and man himself) has become alien to humanity.¹³² In the *Economic-Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* Marx proceeded from the phenomenon of religious alienation to that of the alienation of labor. The reasoning is that the workers in capitalism become poorer, the more wealth they produce and the more their production increases in power and extent. The worker is related to the product of their labor as to an alien object.¹³³ Marx is by no means only concerned with the alienation of humanities from their product nor only with the alienation of work. Marx is concerned with human alienation from life, from themselves, and from his fellowman. This idea is expressed by Marx's statement: "Thus alienated labor turns the species of life of man, and also nature as his mental species-property, into an alien being and into a means for his individual existence."¹³⁴ Alienation then for human beings is the sickness of humanity in general. It is not a new sickness since it begins with the division of labor when civilization transcends primitive society and yet it is a sickness from which everybody suffers.

Alienation as idol worship traces its roots to the thought of the Old Testament prophets, more specifically in their concept of "idolatry." "The idol represents his own life-forces in an alienated form."¹³⁵ Idolatrous people bow down to the work of their own hands. Fromm recognized that modern humanity in industrial society, has changed the form and intensity of idolatry, and therefore of alienation. Humanity has become the object of blind economic forces which rule their life.

Tracing Fromm's sense of neurosis we come to three understandings: neurosis is an awareness labeled as an abnormality by the structural appendages of society. The certified and

¹³² Fromm Erich 1962, 44.

¹³³ Fromm Erich 1962, 45.

¹³⁴ Marx Karl 1844, 101.

¹³⁵ Fromm Erich 1962, 58.

approved truths of members within society reinforce the reproduction of accepted behaviors and ideas and exclude those behaviors or desires that do not fit. As Fromm suggests, the definition of normal changes depends on whether a society is functional or dysfunctional. Alienation is integral in identifying dysfunctional societies and therefore, neurotic members. However, alienation is also alienation from the more-than-human world, and hence neurosis is always eco-neurosis. How do we know this? The conflict of relatedness and separation, known by Fromm as the paradoxical human situation, influences the outcome of mental states in human beings. I claim that this dialectical process is not an exclusively human situation; it is the dynamic movement in the *web of life*.¹³⁶ Meaning the pressure and conflict of relatedness and separation by both human and more-than-human life results in a regressive dialectic known as eco-neurosis.

Relatedness: The Fundamental Motive for Human Existence

Nested in Fromm's existential anthropology is the concept of relatedness; relatedness is the source and engine of how humans individually and socially develop into healthy or sick selves. Relatedness is the channeling process of assimilation and socialization.¹³⁷ Fromm proposes a conception of what it means to be human in which relatedness is at the heart of a non-optional primary need stemming from the very conditions of human existence. Fromm discards Freud's mechanistic materialism by replacing it with what Fromm calls a "sociobiological and historical" concept, or in other words a dynamic materialism based on the energetic forces of social relations.¹³⁸

¹³⁶ Quoting Jason Moore, *The Web of life* (2015): This is nature as us, as inside us, as around us. It is nature as a flow of flows. Put simply, humans make environments and environments make humans – and human organization.

¹³⁷ Fromm Erich 1947, 67.

¹³⁸ Fromm Erich, 1973, 27.

All passions and strivings of humanity are an attempt to find an answer to their existence, or as Fromm mentions, they are an attempt to avoid insanity.¹³⁹ Fromm's sense of mental health and its relationship to society stems from the unique mode of relatedness. Mental health is another arena of this modality, and steadiness is achieved if humanity develops fully following its psychological need to avoid isolation and cooperate with its fellow humans. Mental illness consists of the failure of such development. For example, humanity experiences material needs such as hunger, thirst, need for sleep, sex, and shelter. Nevertheless, as Fromm recognized, the complete satisfaction of these material conditions is not a sufficient condition for sanity and mental health. Humanity's survival also depends on existential passions based on their species being. This is where normative humanism is central for developing productive judgment. Judgement to Fromm is a practice of self-efficacy that involves learning through mistakes; it is through the struggle of becoming human that one perfects their abilities and capacities for joy and understanding rooted in human psychological needs.

Humans are alone and yet related at the same time. Fromm recognizes the paradox in relatedness by explaining: "He is alone inasmuch as he is a unique entity, not identical with anyone else, and aware of his self as a separate entity... and yet he cannot bear to be alone, to be unrelated to his fellow men. His happiness depends on the solidarity he feels with his fellow men, with past and future generations."¹⁴⁰ Indeed, relatedness is one of the most prevalent guiding indicators of human social organization. Total independence, as Fromm exclaims, is of the most challenging achievements. Independence is not achieved simply by not obeying mother, father, state, and the like; independence is only possible if, and according to the degree to which,

¹³⁹ Fromm Erich 1955, 29.

¹⁴⁰ Fromm Erich 1947, 52.

a man actively grasps the world, is related to it, and thus becomes one with it.¹⁴¹ Therefore, there is no independence and no freedom unless humanity arrives at the stage of complete inner activity, meaning mindful awareness of one's thoughts and emotions integrated with one's reason.

Human existence, however, does not exist in a world of self-contained monads producing no effect on each other. On the contrary, human existence is based on the dynamic interaction of interdependence. Human beings are both acted upon, changed for good or ill, by interacting and depending on their own species. While one human share the core of human qualities with all members of its species, they are always an individual, a unique entity, different from everybody else. Each of us is the other to the others. Nevertheless, they can affirm their human potential only by realizing their individuality. As Fromm states, "the duty to be alive is the same as the duty to become oneself, to develop into the individual one potentially is."¹⁴² Fromm argues that humanity's historical birth is primarily a negative act, occurring when the species is thrown out of an original oneness with nature.¹⁴³ After this birth, every step humanity makes is uncertain.

Fromm enumerates five psychological needs imperative for human existence. Those five needs are as follows: belonging, transcendence, rootedness, sense of identity; and a frame of orientation. The psychological need for belonging means to unite with other living beings, to be

¹⁴¹ Fromm Erich 1966, 76-77.

¹⁴² Fromm Erich 1941, 29.

¹⁴³ Paradoxically, humanity's psychology contains an existential problem: the contradiction of our birth. Alternatively, as Fromm poetically puts it, "life became aware of itself." Moreover, with that realization, humanity experienced psychological discomforts that disrupt the harmony of instinctual animal existence. Fromm explains that Humanity "is part of nature, subject to [its] physical laws and unable to change them... [They] are set apart while being a part; [They] are homeless yet chained to the home [they] share with all creatures." What is humanity to do with this knowledge? Fortunately, there is a fundamental necessity for humanity to salvage what has now been lost. This necessity is to find ever-new solutions for the contradictions in its existence, find new forms of unity with his fellow humans and within themselves, and of course, with humanity's fountain of existence: nature. Why is this necessity so powerful? Fromm states, "it is the source of all psychic forces which motivate [humanity], of all [their] passions, affects and anxieties."

related to them.¹⁴⁴ The need for transcendence is a drive of humanity to transcend the role of the animal, plant, or inorganic matter. Driven by the urge to transcend the creature's role, the accidentalness and passivity of its existence, humanity transforms into a “creator.”¹⁴⁵ Creation also presupposes the alternative of destruction, and destruction is as miraculous as creation. Both creation and destruction are examples of humanity transcending the passive state of nature. The need for rootedness suggests that without a deep sense of familiarity, humanity could not bear the isolation and helplessness of this position. Humans would go insane.¹⁴⁶ A sense of identity stems from a similar condition to rootedness. However, a sense of identity bases itself on the sake of being accepted in a community, which paradoxically also provides a sense of one's "I" that drives humanity to do anything to acquire this sense.¹⁴⁷ Lastly, the need for a frame of orientation exists on two levels; the first is a need for a belief system, regardless of whether it is true or false. On the second level is the need to be in touch with reality by reason, to grasp the world objectively. Hence, any satisfying system of orientation contains intellectual elements but also elements of feeling and sensing, which express themselves to an object of devotion.¹⁴⁸ All these psychological needs depend on many environmental factors, not least of which is how human society is organized and how that organization determines the human relationships within it.

There are various adaptive ways to satisfy the need for relatedness, but not all are created equal. The symbiotic unions of submission (masochistic) and domination (sadistic) are two ways to relate and find unity with the world. However, in dialectical fashion, an opposite exchange takes place for individuals who adapt to this path: relinquishing their freedom and independence.

¹⁴⁴ Fromm Erich 1955, 30.

¹⁴⁵ Fromm Erich 1955, 36-37.

¹⁴⁶ I tackle the need for rootedness in the relatedness section due to its implication of a dichotomous relationship between humanity and nature. I will examine deeper by showing a limitation of Fromm's thought.

¹⁴⁷ Fromm Erich 1955, 63.

¹⁴⁸ Fromm Erich 1955, 65.

Submission and domination are addictive symbiotic relationships. That is, no amount is ever enough to achieve our need for contentment. Fromm recognized that only one form of adaptation toward relatedness is satisfactory: individuation, or the transformative union with someone, something, and with nature, retains the separateness and the integrity of oneself. As Fromm describes,

Mature love is union under the condition of preserving one's integrity, one individuality. 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. In love the paradox occurs that two beings become one and yet remain two.¹⁴⁹

Love enables individuation by both allowing for, and yet overcoming, separation in a new and healthy form of unity. Fromm explains that "If every step in the direction of separation and individuation were matched by corresponding growth of the self, the development of the child would be harmonious."¹⁵⁰ This process has two simultaneous elements: one, the growth of self strength through the attitude of growth and integration; and two, the acceptance and recognition of growing aloneness. These two processes must exist to develop a spontaneous relationship to humanity and nature, a relationship that connects the individual with the world without eliminating their sense of individuality.¹⁵¹ Fromm further elaborates this point by stating that "If every step in the direction of separation and individuation were matched by corresponding growth of the self, the development of the child would be harmonious."¹⁵² As Fromm warns, this

¹⁴⁹ Fromm Erich 1956, 19.

¹⁵⁰ Fromm Erich 1956, 29.

¹⁵¹ Fromm Erich 1956, 30.

¹⁵² Fromm Erich 1956, *ibid.*

process does not occur automatically; the growth of the self stagnates for several individual and social reasons.¹⁵³

Fromm claims that, phylogenetically, the history of humanity can be characterized as a process of growing, a productive form of relatedness, that of individuation and the conditions of increased and decreased levels are inferred and observed by the values and truths society produces. This perspective makes humanity a “freak of nature.”¹⁵⁴ Humans are the most helpless of all animals at birth. Their adaptation to nature is based on the process of learning, not on instinctual determination.¹⁵⁵ Meaning, human existence begins when the lack of fixation of action by instincts exceeds a certain point; when the adaptation to nature loses its coercive character, when the way to act is no longer fixed by hereditary given mechanisms. To Fromm, this is a freedom from instinctual determination of human actions. This concept of freedom from nature’s instinctual drives relies on something like an idea of a suprabiological development, or what Murray Bookchin would consider in his social ecology, “second nature.”¹⁵⁶ Humanity’s biological weakness is the condition of human culture.

To recapitulate, relatedness demonstrates the human need to seek collective identity. The specific need for progressive relatedness arises from the experience of separation that the species has gone through historically. A current example of this is a maladaptive result manifesting as EN. EN’s form of relatedness is configured as acts of violence toward the more-than-human, but by hurting what is seemingly external to human beings, humans are also hurting themselves. EN is a symptom of a human social sickness. EN is a reaction to an alienated neurosis characterized

¹⁵³ Due to political and economic forms of alienation (repression) that stymie and regress our growth and development.

¹⁵⁴ Fromm Erich 1941, 56.

¹⁵⁵ Fromm Erich 1941, 31.

¹⁵⁶ Bookchin Murray 1991.

by a lack of full autonomy or agency; this is an inability to achieve individuation. EN is maladaptive because it separates us from our total sense of sensuousness that is repressed by our current social organization dressed as global capitalism. As Fromm suspected, the source of modern neurosis is alienation. Fromm's solution is finding more ways to relate to our humanness and reason and by extension to sense connection to the flourishing of life. The conflict of relatedness and separation, known by Fromm as the paradoxical human situation, influences the outcome of mental states in human beings. I claim that this paradoxical process is not an exclusively human situation; it is the dynamic movement in the *web of life*. Meaning relatedness is a characteristic of all life on planet Earth. The pressure and conflict of relatedness and separation by both human and more-than-human life converge at a psychic reaction known as eco-neurosis.

I will come back to the concept of relatedness in chapter 2 when I develop the idea that EN is the product of a sado-masochistic relationship to the more-than-human world. What I can say here is that EN is maladaptive because it alienates and separates us from our full sense of realizations due to the lack of activity, it instead manifests as a passivity that appears as resignation, depression, and helplessness. Passivity expresses certain modes of relatedness that cause worry, fear, uncontrollability, exploitation, and suffering that determines less independence and freedom.

Social Character: The Intermediary of the Base and the Superstructure

If relatedness is a broader longing in the species to belong and to feel connected to the world, social character is an acquired orientation to the world that develops in the process of meeting needs for material subsistence and existential meaning in a person's society. Social character regulates one's actions, thoughts, and ideas. Fromm defines the social character as "the

nucleus of the character structure which is shared by most members of the same culture, in contradistinction to the individual character in which people belonging to the same culture differ from each other.”¹⁵⁷ To be clear, this does not mean that social character is simply the sum of character traits found in most people in each society. Instead, each society is structured and operates in certain ways which are necessitated by several objective conditions. These conditions include raw materials, technology, techniques, climate, size of the population, and political and geographical factors, cultural traditions and influences on which society is exposed.¹⁵⁸

Indeed, while these social structures do change in the course of history, they are relatively fixed at any given historical moment. Members of any given society must behave in certain ways to be able to function in the sense required by the specific social structures. As Fromm notes “It is the function of the social character to shape the energies of the members of society in such a way that their behavior is not a matter of conscious decision as to whether or not to follow the social pattern, but one of wanting to act as they have to act and at the same time finding gratification in acting according to the requirements of the culture.”¹⁵⁹ In other words, it is the function of the social character to mold and channel human energy in a given society for the purpose of the reproduction of that society.

Fromm’s dynamic concept of character explains important attributes of how a person acts and how they relate to the world around them. Social character provides the function of permitting an individual to act consistently and it is also the basis as I have stated for one’s adjustment to society. Fromm determines that the root of social character formation is in styles of parenting. As Fromm notes, “the character of the child is molded by the character of its parents

¹⁵⁷ Fromm Erich 1962, 78.

¹⁵⁸ Fromm Erich 1962, 78.

¹⁵⁹ Fromm Erich 1962, 79.

in response to whom it develops.”¹⁶⁰ However, the unique addition here is “the parent and their methods of child training in turn are determined by the social structure of their culture.”¹⁶¹

Recognizing that the average family is the “psychic agency” of society, and by adjusting themselves to their family the child acquires the character which later makes them adjusted to the tasks they must perform in social life.

Fromm recognized that individuals in any given society differ in their personal characters, but only if we focus on the minute differences on everyone’s upbringing and sets of environmental combinations; phylogenetically, specific character formations are determined by the impact of life experience, both by the individual and the culture. Therefore, an environment is never the same for two people, for the difference in constitution makes them experience a similar environment in a more or less different way. Yet, as Fromm states, “if we disregard minute differences, we can form certain types of character structures which are roughly representative for various groups of individuals. Such types are the receptive, the exploitative, the hoarding, the marketing, and the productive character orientations.”¹⁶² Fromm breaks down these character orientations into two categories: nonproductive and productive orientations. I will briefly discuss both categories in this section.

The nonproductive orientations are composed of the receptive, exploitative, hoarding and marketing. The unifying factor of a nonproductive orientation is the embracing of an alienated sense of self over insanity. The patterned trait of a receptive orientation is a person who feels complete by external sources, whether it is products, affection, love, knowledge, or pleasure. As Fromm describes, “it is difficult for them to say ‘no’, and they are easily caught between

¹⁶⁰ Fromm Erich 1947, 68.

¹⁶¹ Fromm Erich 1947, 68.

¹⁶² Fromm Erich 1962, 77.

conflicting loyalties and promises. Since they cannot say ‘no’ they love to say, ‘yes’ to everything and everybody, and the resulting paralysis of their critical abilities makes them increasingly dependent on others.”¹⁶³ They are always in search of a “magic helper” to solve their problems. This is an orientation that constantly feels dependent on any kind of support. They feel lost when alone because they feel that they cannot do anything without help.

The exploitative orientation is like the receptive in that the reason to their completion lies in external sources. The difference between the two is that the exploitative orientation does not expect to receive things from others, but to take them away from others by force or cunning. This pattern extends to all spheres of activity. Fromm illustrates this by saying “they use and exploit anybody and anything from whom or from which they can squeeze something... everyone is an object of exploitation and is judged according to his usefulness.”¹⁶⁴ Indeed, this orientation is associated by suspicion, cynicism, envy, and jealousy. They are only satisfied when they can take away from others.

The hoarding orientation takes a sharp distinction from the receptive and exploitative orientations. This orientation makes people have little faith in anything new they might get from the outside world; their security is based on hoarding and saving. As Fromm illustrates, “their sentimentality makes the past appear as golden; they hold on to it and indulge in the memories of bygone feelings and experiences.”¹⁶⁵ The highest values for the hoarder are order and security. In their relations with others intimacy is a threat; either remoteness or possession of a person means security.¹⁶⁶ The hoarder tends to be suspicious and evokes a particular sense of justice which in effect says: “mine is mine and yours is yours.”

¹⁶³ Fromm Erich 1947, 71.

¹⁶⁴ Fromm Erich 1947, 73.

¹⁶⁵ Fromm Erich 1947, 73.

¹⁶⁶ Fromm Erich 1947, 75.

According to Fromm the marketing orientation developed as a dominant orientation in the modern era. The logic of the market, its concept of value, the emphasis on exchange value rather than on use, has led to a similar reflection about people. As Fromm muses, “Since modern man experiences himself both as the seller and as the commodity to be sold on the market, his self-esteem depends on conditions beyond his control. If he is ‘successful’ he is valuable; if he is not, he is worthless.”¹⁶⁷ Herein lies the point, one’s value is not constituted by the human qualities one possesses but instead by one’s success on a competitive market with ever-changing conditions. Therefore, helplessness, insecurity, and inferiority feelings are the result, once again there is a strong case of alienation in this orientation.

The conditions of the marketing orientation necessarily color all human relationships. When the self is neglected, the relationship between people becomes superficial, because they are related to each other as commodities. Fromm states that “thus his feeling of identity becomes as shaky as his self-esteem; it is constituted by the total of roles one can play: ‘I am as you desire me.’”¹⁶⁸ Indeed, there is a deep sense of loneliness of humanity rooted in this orientation. This form of human character structure is categorized as nonproductive, but Fromm also recognized that it is such a unique form of relatedness that it should have a category of its own, but its lack of development and production of human qualities keeps it associated to a nonproductive category.

On the other hand, the productive character constitutes a human’s ability to use their powers and realizes the potentialities inherent in them. Guided by reason, productiveness here means that humans experience themselves as the embodiment of their powers and as the agents of their life and not one who is alienated from themselves. But what is power to Fromm? Here

¹⁶⁷ Fromm Erich 1947, 79.

¹⁶⁸ Fromm Erich 1947, 80.

Fromm means something specific and not the perversion of how we understand the concept superficially that is, power as domination over someone or something. No, Fromm means here a power of capacity. Fromm explains “the ability of man to make productive use of his powers is his potency... with his power of reason he can penetrate the surface of phenomena and understand their essence. With his power of love, he can break through the wall which separates one person from another. With his power of imagination he can visualize things not yet existing; he can plan and thus begin to create.”¹⁶⁹ The productive orientation relates to the world in two ways: one, *reproductively* this is done by perceiving reality in the same fashion as a film makes a literal record of things photographed. And two, *generatively* by enlivening and re-creating this new material through the spontaneous activity of one’s own mental and emotional powers.¹⁷⁰

Indeed, to productively exist one must learn the paradoxical cycle of one’s existence the process of birth and death in oneself. Fromm notes, “all that is between these two poles is a process of giving birth to one’s potentialities, of bringing to life all that is potentially given in the two cells. But, while physical growth proceeds by itself, if only the proper conditions are given, the process of birth of the mental plane, in contrast, does not occur automatically.”¹⁷¹ Fromm is pointing out here the tragedy of human existence as one where the development of the self is never complete even under the best conditions. “Man, always dies before he is fully born.”¹⁷²

Fromm’s concept of the social character was not entirely new; it was derived from Freud’s discovery of character. Until Freud, character traits were synonymous with behavior traits. From that standpoint character is defined as “the pattern of behavior characteristic for a

¹⁶⁹ Fromm Erich 1947, 95.

¹⁷⁰ Fromm Erich 1947, 95.

¹⁷¹ Fromm Erich 1947, 97-98.

¹⁷² Fromm Erich 1947, 98.

given individual”¹⁷³ However, Freud developed a theory of character as a system of strivings that underlie, but are not identical with, behavior. As Fromm says, “Freud recognized the dynamic quality of character traits, and that the character structure of a person represents a particular form in which energy is canalized in the process of living.” This thought is central to Freud’s idea of unconscious forces that the way a person acts, feels, and thinks is to a large extent determined by their character and is not just the result of rational responses to realistic situations. Freud accounted for the nature of character by combining it with his libido theory. This meant that different character traits are “sublimations,” or “reaction formations” against the various forms of sexual drives.¹⁷⁴

Freud’s theory had been formulated without having considered the influence of the development of history, that is the mode of production on the formation of character. Fromm expanded on Freud’s concept of character by rejecting Freud’s basis of libidinal drives/instincts. This meant that the impact of social reality was not mediated by sexual instincts. Rather, the economic structures directly molded human energy and passion in ways that produces the traits required for the continuation of the given social order.¹⁷⁵ A good example is encapsulated by the concept of “Thanatos” Freud (and Marcuse) believed that Thanatos has a biological origin. Fromm through empirical research in a Mexican village discovered that it is not Thanatos but “necrophilia” not as an origin of biological instincts but psychological that is one molded by environmental factors.

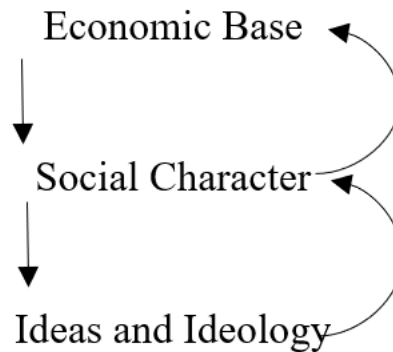
Fromm, synthesizing both Freud’s and Marx’s theory of history, developed his theory of social character. However, he did not just fill the gaps in Freud’s theory. Fromm noticed gaps in

¹⁷³ Leland E. Hinsie and Jacob Shatzky 1940.

¹⁷⁴ Fromm Erich 1962, 74.

¹⁷⁵ Rickert John 1986, 360.

Marx as well. Using Marx's base/superstructure paradigm, Fromm demonstrates the missing element in Marx's historical materialism, which translates that from the economic base, the ideological superstructure beltway connection between both concepts is that of the social character. As Fromm surmises, "the ideas, once created, also influence the social character and, indirectly, the social, economic structure."¹⁷⁶ Fromm emphasizes here that the social character is the intermediary between the socio-economic structure and the ideas and ideals prevalent in society. Noting "It is the intermediary in both directions, from the economic basis to the ideas and from the ideas to the economic base."¹⁷⁷ Fromm provides a visual scheme of the full process:



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It is precisely because any given social order can appeal to ideas that transcend the necessities of this order that they become so potent and appealing to the human heart. Nevertheless, why a specific idea gains ascendance and popularity is to be understood in historical terms. Fromm recognizes that Marx missed an essential transition in the process of historical development, noting "it is not only the economic basis which creates a certain social character which, in turn creates certain ideas. The ideas, once created, also influence the social character and indirectly, the economic structure."¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁶ Fromm Erich 1962, 86.

¹⁷⁷ Fromm Erich 1962, 87.

¹⁷⁸ Fromm Erich 1962, 87.

¹⁷⁹ Fromm Erich 1962, 87.

I would like to pause here and mention that Marx in the *German Ideology* affirms that the production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men, then language of real life. Or as he states more succinctly “Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life.”¹⁸⁰ It is true that consciousness is determined by the active life-processes of the existence of humans. There is also a kind of dualism here that reifies the messiness of consciousness itself, which is a realm connected to labor, but also contains its own laws and dynamics. Thus, this dissertation expands upon the realm of consciousness through a dialectic of the mind one that infuses dialectics of class with the dialectics of psychoanalysis.

Taking the social character seriously, adapting it to the contemporary moment one can see that the material and social conditions of global capitalism elicit a psycho-biological reaction. In other words, global capitalism provokes a particular defective social pattern. Fromm recognizes that several capitalistic values such as competitiveness and aggressiveness are rewarded and incentivized. Capitalism and markets have no morality beyond their own vacuous self-justification. Markets don’t care about equality; they abstractly assume and reify it. Markets do not care whether stereotypical gender roles are perpetuated or not, their concern is profit. If a certain kind of entertainment is perceived as profitable, that is what will be produced, marketed, and sold. Capitalism reinforces the ideology of infinite growth, which produces externalities such as climate change, but also psychological externalities that are now categorized as EN. Highly manipulative advertising overwhelms the capacity of many individuals in consumer capitalist societies, and thus either renders individual members who do not benefit at the top

¹⁸⁰ Marx Karl 1845, 154.

mentally sick, or paralyzed and helpless. So much so, that collectively the sickness seeps into an unconscious dimension.

The Social Unconscious: The Area of Repression Most Common in Society

To further understand the psycho-biological reaction of the social character on individual members in society, then it is important to discuss Fromm's concept of the social unconscious. Fromm's concept of the social unconscious is nothing less than the representation of the whole capacity of human experience. Fromm muses, "it always represents the whole man, with all his potentialities for darkness and light; it always contains the basis for the different answers which man is capable of giving to the question which existence poses."¹⁸¹ Indeed, the social unconscious is the reservoir of human existence that is, humanity in any society has all its potentialities within itself. As Fromm says, "he is the archaic man, the beast of prey, the cannibal, the idolater, and he is the being with a capacity for reason, for love, for justice."¹⁸² The content of the social unconscious is both the good and the bad, the rational and the irrational, it is all the things possible in human experience.

Indeed, attaining these radical potentialities that lay dormant, as Fromm recognized, is an arduous and rare occurrence, but the capacity for its potential realization exists in the grasp of every human being. Fromm points to this by explaining that "...it constitutes the emancipation of man from the socially conditioned alienation from himself and humankind."¹⁸³ This inherently means that the social and individual unconscious in a society and person are related to each other and in constant interaction. What matters is not so much the content of what is repressed, but the state of mind and the degree of awareness in the individual. This implies the understanding of

¹⁸¹ Fromm Erich 1962, 128.

¹⁸² Fromm Erich 1962, 128.

¹⁸³ Fromm Erich 1962, 129.

social dynamics and the critical appraisal of one's own society from the standpoint of shared human values. This is telling by Fromm's articulation of personal experience to the social unconscious, stating:

Only if one has experienced the dimension of the unconscious in one's personal life can one fully appreciate how it is possible that social life is determined by ideologies which are neither truths nor lies or, to put it differently, which are both truths and lies – truths in the sense that people believe them sincerely, and lies in the sense that they are rationalizations which have the function of hiding the real motivations of social and political actions.¹⁸⁴

The root of this idea is coupled with how Fromm demonstrates the workings of repression from the molding effects of social structures to individual people. In Fromm's own words "the average individual does not permit himself to be aware of thoughts or feelings which are incompatible with the patterns of his culture, and hence he is forced to repress them. Formally speaking, then, what is unconscious and what is conscious depends on the structure of society and on the patterns of feeling and thought it produces."¹⁸⁵ However, to become aware of one's unconscious means to get in touch with one's full humanity and to do away with barriers which society erects within each person, and consequently, between each person to their fellow people.

For any experience to come into social awareness, it must be comprehensible according to the categories of conscious thought. This system of categories functions like a socially conditioned filter, according to Fromm, thus he believes this filter contains three elements: language, logic, and social taboo. Language functions socially for the understanding and intercourse of people. However, language also, as Fromm says, "contains an attitude of life, it is a frozen expression of experiencing life in a certain way."¹⁸⁶ By demonstrating this, Fromm is

¹⁸⁴ Fromm Erich 1962, 132.

¹⁸⁵ Fromm Erich 1962, 128.

¹⁸⁶ Fromm Erich 1962, 118.

making the explicit connection that consciousness and its principle of repression are more than just individual; it is social. Language by its words, grammar, syntax, and zeitgeist determine which experiences trigger our awareness.¹⁸⁷

The second element is logic which directs the thinking of people in any given culture. Logic is such an afterthought that most people in each culture assume that the rules which determine proper thinking are natural and universal ones; "that what is illogical in one cultural system is illogical in any other because it conflicts with 'natural' logic."¹⁸⁸ An example of this is the rules of Aristotelian formal logic and the paradoxical logic of dialectic thought. Formal logic is based on the law of identity ($A = A$), the law of contradiction (A is not non- A), and the law of the excluded middle (A cannot be A and non- A , neither A nor non- A). In contradistinction, dialectical logic assumes that A and non- A do not exclude each other, that is, the beginning is the end, and the end is the beginning. A unity of opposites is assumed as related concepts, not separate from one another.

However, the most crucial element of the social unconscious is that of social taboos, which declares specific ideas and feelings to be improper, forbidden, dangerous and prevent them from reaching the level of consciousness.¹⁸⁹ An illustrative example Fromm provides is that of the modern "organizational man" or an insurance agent in more contemporary imagery. They might feel that their life makes little sense, do not feel free to do as they wish, that they are

¹⁸⁷ In comparison Jacques Lacan, employs language through a psychoanalytic lens (i.e., structural linguistics). However, Lacan believes that "the unconscious is structured in the most radical way like a language" (Lacan, 1977, 234). what Lacan understood as the relationship between language and the unconscious was that there is a symbolic order par excellence of human language. This means that each element of the system is distinguished only by its opposition to other elements in the same system. Thus, the symbolic order is "other" that what the individual is conscious of, hence it is unconscious in its functioning, i.e., the unconscious that Lacan identifies as the "Other". While Lacan's interpretation of the Unconscious is a closed symbolic system; Fromm's demonstrably disagrees, i.e., the unconscious always represents the totality of the cosmos, also of humanity with all its potentialities. Therefore, language is just one instance of the dynamism of life, and it is also an interpersonal experience for communication.

¹⁸⁸ Fromm Erich 1962, 119.

¹⁸⁹ Fromm Erich 1962, 121.

chasing an illusion of happiness that may never come true. In more relevant depictions, the average American worker struggles with an added element: insecurity and precarity of job station and conditions. The upheaval of the great depression and World War II has faded, unions used to be robust and powerful, pensions were a staple of professional work, most jobs had the ability for promotion, regulation has been supplanted by privatization. Businesses and corporations have farmed out many of the tasks they once did permanently in-house to small firms and to individual contractors on short-term contracts without benefits.¹⁹⁰ The new taboo is a tacit acceptance and apathy for public life, community and civic engagement is replaced by an ideology of choice as fundamentally private.

More profound still, recognizing an essential layer of the social unconscious resulting from social taboo provides such adequate repressive power in society: resistance. Of course, there are other factors to consider, such as mental rigidity, lack of proper orientation, hopelessness, lack of any possible way to change realistic conditions; however, resistance is correlative to this phenomenon. What makes resistance so crucial? Fromm, through psychoanalytic practice, recognized that:

"Resistance is an attempt to protect oneself from fright which is comparable to the fright caused by even a small earthquake – nothing is secure, everything is shaky, I don't know who I am nor where I am. In fact, this experience feels like a small dose of insanity which for the moment, even though it may last only for seconds, feels more than uncomfortable."¹⁹¹

Paying special attention to the word fright is key since unconscious fear is the primary motivator of resistance. Resistance, in this case, is a rejection of one's feelings and observations. Thus, the repression of human awareness is an integral feature of society. In other words, society weaponizes the use of fear, which in individuals develops as a conditioned form of repression via

¹⁹⁰ Sennett Richard 2000, 22.

¹⁹¹ Fromm Erich 1962, 96.

resistance; that is, societal rules (i.e., fictions, myths, etc.) are so powerful that we begin to internalize resistance as a behavior and reject our awareness for the sake of the accepted narratives of society.

So, we have recognized that the main reason behind social taboos and resistance is fear. Nevertheless, where does fear reside? Fromm mentions that "the most powerful motive for repression" is "the fear of isolation and ostracism."¹⁹² Humans must be related to others to keep insanity at bay. Therefore, for this reason, individuals must accept the rejection of feelings and observations which the group claims do not exist and simultaneously accept as truth whatever the majority says is true. As Fromm explains, "the herd is so vitally important for the individual that their views, beliefs, feelings, constitute reality for him, more so than what he senses, and his reason tell him."¹⁹³ With the reinforced ethos of globalized capitalism citizen trust in institutions and government has eroded over time.

What does the social unconscious tell us about EN, well the way our social structures influence what we repress says a lot in accordance with Fromm's view. For example, climate change is a challenge to capitalism's status quo. Yet, our institutions, media, and government demonstrate their unwillingness to make substantive changes in society to deal with these existential dangers of climate change. The truth of the matter is capitalism acts as a fantastical structure based on infinite growth on a finite planet. This is the crux of decay in a stagnant society, as Fromm states, "Decaying societies and classes are usually those which hold most fiercely to their fictions since they have nothing to gain by the truth."¹⁹⁴ If a society has no change to make any use of its insights because there is a perceived feeling of no hope for a

¹⁹² Fromm Erich 1962, 126.

¹⁹³ Fromm Erich 1962, 126.

¹⁹⁴ Fromm Erich 1962, 130.

change for the better, the chances are that everybody in such a society would stick to the fictions even if they are aware of the challenges and costs of maintaining these fictions. Declining societies lack imagination and initiative for structural changes because they cannot see beyond the present moment. EN of course, is a simultaneous social and individual psychological reaction warning our existence of societal developments that are causing harm to planetary processes.

Limitations: The Insufficiencies in Fromm's Theory

Erich Fromm's theory is thoughtful and provocative, and the uniqueness of Fromm's philosophical anthropology of psychological adaptations provides a powerful evolutionary story of human history. Fromm elucidates the various historical transitions of humanity by their adaptations of the social psyche. Additionally, applying Fromm's theoretical orientation does not only provide a descriptive analytic of human development, but it also proposes a normative theory that can tackle human and more-than-human relations that contain a manifold of elements which is currently lacking in the eco-neurosis literature. In including Fromm's concepts and theoretical lens this dissertation reconsiders the sources of EN embedded in a theory of history as a dynamic process of biocultural considerations.

However, there are limitations in the assumptions of his theory. It is no secret that Fromm's humanism is nuanced and precise; for example in *Man for Himself* Fromm distinguishes his form of humanism by stating "humanistic ethics is anthropocentric; not, of course in the sense that man is the center of the universe but in the sense that his value judgements, like all other judgements and even perceptions, are rooted in the peculiarities of his existence and are meaningful only with reference to it; man, indeed is the 'measure of all things.'"¹⁹⁵ Fromm believed there was nothing higher than the dignity of humanity, and while I

¹⁹⁵ Fromm Erich 1947, 23.

generally agree with the first part of this statement that the judgements and perceptions of humanity are crucial in determining human orientation toward the world, the latter part of the statement arrives at a blinding hubris of human exceptionality that does not necessarily follow from the initial premise. Fromm's applied suspicion of idolatry in his theory is suspended the moment the focus shifts toward humanity's tiered relationship with more-than-human life. For example, Fromm's position on animal development is hierarchically distinguished by development in terms of freedom vs instincts. Logically arriving at the conclusion that human adaptation to nature is based on the process of learning by choosing their own action instead of passive instinctual determination.¹⁹⁶ Now, this is as we know an over-generalization, which contemporary science has demonstrated exceptions to Fromm's rule. There exist various examples of animal species defying instinctual determination categorized in Fromm's criteria. Cases demonstrate that dogs can detect diseases such as cancer and diabetes and warn humans of impending heart attacks and strokes. Elephants, whales, hippopotamuses, giraffes, and alligators use low-frequency sounds to communicate over long distances, often miles. And bats, dolphins, whales, frogs, and various rodents use high-frequency sounds to find food, communicate with others, and navigate.¹⁹⁷

Moreover, Fromm's work demonstrates further evidence that perpetuates a fault in his anthropocentric sentiment when applying his normative humanist approach. Another example of Fromm's clear limitation of his anthropocentrism is poignantly reflected in this passage, declaring:

The universal in humanity's unconsciousness also represents the plant in him, the animal in him, the spirit in him; it represents his past, down to the dawn of human

¹⁹⁶ Fromm Erich 1941, 31.

¹⁹⁷ Bekoff 2011.

existence, and it represents his future up to the day when man will have become fully human, and when nature will be humanized as man will be ‘naturalized’.¹⁹⁸

In this sense, Fromm’s attempt at representing nature is mediated through this idea of being “fully human.” It’s a clear expression that Fromm’s framing is anthropocentric in level of importance with our relationship to nature. However, there are crumbs here that display Fromm’s attempt at transcending his own theoretical limitations. Within this same quote the meaning that humanity contains the potential to sense the “oneness with all life”¹⁹⁹ is buried deep in his bias but, it can easily be extrapolated if careful. I am arguing that Fromm’s radical interpretation of is an experience of solidarity with all of life, not just humanity.

On the contrary, having an anthropogenic position does not entail a hierarchy of the human domain over more-than-human life. Fromm without realizing commits a fallacy of reification: he fatally presents an idolized duality positioning humanity above natural process. An example of a fatal duality of humanity over nature is presented here “The original harmony between man and nature is broken. God proclaims war between man and woman, and war between nature and man. Man has become separate from nature; he has taken the first step toward becoming human by becoming an ‘individual.’”²⁰⁰ This is considered the first moment of Freedom for Fromm. However, this is not always the case. For example, there are alpinist climbers who claim that free soloing the walls of alpine mountains is the epitome of freedom, and they attach that element of the constant change of the environment to their relationship with themselves. Climbers recognize that being completely in the present moment as one is scaling giant walls manifests a flow state that is like instinctual movement.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁸ Excerpt from *Beyond the Chains of Illusions* via Gunderson Ryan 2014, 197. This is an important passage that I will bring up again for segments of my argument.

¹⁹⁹ Gunderson Ryan 2014 197.

²⁰⁰ Fromm Erich 1941, 33.

²⁰¹ The Alpinist 2021.

Further, take Fromm's explanation of humanity's birth as a prime example of his sin of comfort expressing the duality and hierarchy of humanity's superiority over a caricature of nature by stating:

The fact that man's birth is primarily a negative act, that of being thrown out of the original oneness with nature, that he cannot return to where he came from, implies that the process of birth is by no means an easy one. Each step into his new human existence is frightening. It always means to give up a secure state, which was relatively known, for one which is new, which one has not yet mastered... We are never free from two conflicting tendencies: one to emerge from the womb, from the animal form of existence into a more human existence, from bondage to freedom; another to return to the womb, to nature, to certainty and security.²⁰²

Focusing on the original oneness or unity with nature at face value may appear innocuous, however if we look at more-than-human processes and events there are elements in nature that are anarchic, cacophonous, and insecure. Take a natural phenomenon example like the life of an acorn: the linear deterministic view would say inside a small acorn is the potential of a strong and large oak tree. This orientation focuses on a fixed end goal, which mirrors Fromm's naturalist orientation toward nature, however from a more dialectical orientation to more-than-human processes what may be "brought forth" is not necessarily developed; an acorn may become food for an animal or wither away on a street somewhere, rather than develop into what is potentially constituted to become an oak tree. In other words, the spectrum of more-than-human life reflects the very elements of human existence a dialectical dynamism of discordant harmonies. The same applies to the focus on the metaphor of the womb linked to animals, bondage, and security. This is a mistake of anthropocentric proportions, not to mention an implicit form of sexism, that weakens Fromm's narrative of human development. The fatalistic

²⁰² Fromm Erich 1955, 27.

position that equates animal instincts to bondage and certainty is making a fatalistic fallacy of unnecessary reification in its comparison of humanity and nature.

Order and chaos within more-than-human processes are deeply linked. The result is unexpected relationships. Patterns are never quite regular; they never seem to exactly repeat. In this sense, Fromm's attempt at representing more-than-human life is mediated through this idea of being "fully human." It's a clear expression that Fromm's framing is anthropocentric in level of importance to our relationship with more-than-human life. However, there are crumbs here that display Fromm's attempt at transcending his own theoretical limitations. Within this same quote the meaning that humanity contains the potential to sense the "oneness with all life," which can be carefully extrapolated to mean there is, at least, implicitly an understanding in Fromm's thought that there is an inherent connection that all species are the product of a long inter-related evolutionary life process.²⁰³ I am going to determine later that Fromm's radical interpretation of humanism is an experience of solidarity with life. Further, noting that his form of humanism is not necessarily a fatalistic traditional humanism that is strictly anthropocentric.

Secondly, Fromm recognizes that humanity is the product of natural evolution. At the same time, he chooses to describe nature with "neutral" and "passive" features. Fromm nests nature as a byproduct of a cultural historical event based on Western Hebrew symbolism. He called it, in *You Shall Be as Gods*, "the biblical concept of the messianic time" that is the origin story of human relationship with nature begins with the "fall." Equating nature's characteristics as "paradise" asserting that humanity acquired self-awareness of themselves and others in the development of separating from nature. Fromm muses, "This awareness split him from his fellow man and from nature and made him a stranger in the world."²⁰⁴ Further contending that

²⁰³ Gunderson Ryan 2014, 197.

²⁰⁴ Fromm Erich 1966, 121.

“the ‘fall’ is not a metaphysical-individual, but a historical event.”²⁰⁵ The contradictory relationship of humanity with more-than-human life lies in the messianic story that cements a fatalistic duality in the narrative.

A point that accentuates the duality of humanity and nature is stated here: “the idea of man’s new harmony with nature in the messianic time signifies not only the end of the struggle of man against nature, but also that nature will not withhold itself from man it will become the all-loving, nurturing mother. Nature within man will cease to be crippled, and nature outside of man will cease to be sterile.”²⁰⁶ I noticed, Fromm, reinforces implicit narrative explanations of Western modernity. Fromm’s thinking and writing falls victim to the allure of Modernity and Western management of knowledge; that is the Western notion of time contributed to the distinction between both nature and culture, and modernity and tradition. This creates an illusion of “modern man” that built its sense of superiority and pride in the process of cutting its umbilical cord with more-than-human life.²⁰⁷ Fromm, reinforced, albeit unevenly, the colonial position of nature as inert and fixed in relation to humanity.

Fromm’s ideas contain a fatal flaw, which is an unquestioned acceptance of Western progress and modernity as a necessary development of human history. This is at best naïve and at worst ignorant. That fatal flaw follows him all throughout his promoted narrative in the development of the human species. Fromm believes the unique development of human “reason” is what distinguishes humanity from the rest of nature. Fromm states “Man’s pride has been justified. By virtue of his reason, he has built a material world the reality of which surpasses even the dreams and vision of fairy tales and utopias.”²⁰⁸ Further stating, “while becoming the

²⁰⁵Fromm Erich 1966, 122.

²⁰⁶Fromm Erich 1966, 127.

²⁰⁷ This is a similar orientation to that of Walter D. Mignolo *the Darker side of Western Modernity* 2011.

²⁰⁸ Fromm Erich 1947, 15.

master of nature, he has become the slave of the machine which his own hands built.”²⁰⁹ Clearly, Fromm’s sentiment is fine with domination of nature, his concern is more human, humans are losing their way by idolizing the machines that helped conquer nature, than it is for the balance of the web of life. The ideas of the Enlightenment deeply influence Fromm’s humanism.

The focus of Fromm’s limitation is on the use of reason in its influence and relationship with more-than-human life. Fromm notes that “... the history of man in general (and of individuals, too) show, that there are two ways of overcoming separateness and achieving union. The one you will find in all primitive religions, and it is a way to return to nature, to make man again into a pre-human animal, as it were, and to eliminate that in man which is specifically human: his reason, his awareness.”²¹⁰ Indeed, the second way of overcoming separateness for Fromm explains his unique definition of reason. He makes a slight contrast between reason and intelligence; by intelligence, Fromm means, the ability to manipulate concepts for the purpose of achieving practical ends. Intelligence belongs in the realm of facilitation and manipulation of ideas and the external world. On the other hand, reason aims at understanding; it tried to find out what is behind the surface, to recognize the source, the essence of the reality which surrounds us. As Fromm ponders, “reason requires relatedness and a sense of self.”²¹¹ From a more ecological orientation this is a wonderful realization.

However, Fromm’s tradition lands us at his proper solution for overcoming separateness, locating that source in the period between 1500 BC and 500 BC where humanity found oneness not by regressing, but by developing his power of reason, as Fromm mentions, “by becoming fully human he lived a new harmony with himself, with his fellow men, and even with

²⁰⁹ Fromm Erich 1947, 15.

²¹⁰ Fromm Erich 1994, 75.

²¹¹ Fromm Erich 1955, 170.

nature.”²¹² this was what Fromm named prophetic messianism. Prophetic messianism is the essence of religious and spiritual thought of the Western tradition. This is explicitly expressed in his secular and humanist conception of God. Expressed vividly here: “The idea of the One God expresses a new answer for the solution of the dichotomies of human existence; man can find oneness with the world, not by regressing to the prehuman state, but by the full development of his specifically human qualities: love and reason. The worship of God is first the negation of idolatry.”²¹³ Indeed, the oneness and development of love and reason may lead to the negation of certain idolatries. However, there is still a major form of idolatry Fromm did not dispel; that idolatry is configured as human reason as a Western humanist justification for the purpose of human development at the cost of robbing more-than-human life its own equal importance.

Since Fromm’s final writings, capitalism has proliferated and transformed humanity in ways that Fromm did not foresee. Fromm’s most significant fear during his lifetime was the extinction of humanity by nuclear annihilation by way of the two superpowers of the day, the United States, and the Soviet Union. However, the setting of 21st-century humanity is different in its circumstance, but the source is the same: stagnation due to separation. This separation is constituted today as an advanced form of capitalism, now known as neoliberal capitalism, that is positioning us once again on the precipice of annihilation. What Fromm is missing is the ecological language of our new circumstance of climate crisis. 21st-century contemporary life is fraught with impending planetary crisis and decline. Climate change is our new addition to the nuclear problem, and it is directly correlated to globalized capitalist activity, and yet, it also endangers “business as usual” (i.e., infinite growth, consumption, and a materialistic ethos) in contemporary life. Mark Fisher’s work in *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* aids in

²¹² Fromm Erich 1994, 76.

²¹³ Fromm Erich 1966, 61.

articulating this depressing picture of 21st-century life by demonstrating that capitalism naturally opposes any semblance of sustainability and keeps reinforcing itself at the ideological level in society no matter the crisis.

Therefore, capitalism depends on the tacit acceptance of a fantastical structure: as Fisher notes, “a presupposition that resources are infinite, that the earth itself is merely a husk which capital can at a certain point slough off like a used skin, and that the market can solve any problem.”²¹⁴ It is this same fantastical structure that imposes and stresses real violent transformation on planetary life, one of which is a trail of mental disturbances within collective human psychology. In this contemporary age of climate volatility, capitalism’s transformation of nature has not only developed negative environmental impacts but, as Fromm suggested, a maladaptation to a social structure is a symptom of a collective problem that implies a need for solutions.

Ecologizing Fromm: A Prolegomena for an Expanded Ecological Framework

By demonstrating Erich Fromm’s importance and theoretical catalogue I focused on the value and originality of four of his specific concepts: neurosis, relatedness, social character, and the social unconscious. In doing this, I am building the groundwork for a narrative to critique the mainstream literature on EN. The overarching theme of all the concepts is the dialectical interconnected element among individual psychological phenomena and structural social forces. Specifically, there are two elements in Fromm’s theory that analytically shines in his work: one, is the Marxian blend of two seemingly separate domains – the material conditions and ideological superstructure – by mediating their interaction through character formation. The second, is the most important, it provides a lens that reconceptualizes neurosis not as a

²¹⁴ Fisher Mark 2009, 18.

discomfort and irrationality of individual minds, but rather, a social maladaptation to external condition that favors the demands imposed by global capitalism.

My project is indebted to Fromm, but it also expands and modifies certain aspects of Fromm's theory. Now that I have laid out the four concepts in Fromm's work that are vital to understanding EN there is one remaining task: To use Fromm's framework to reconfigure the problem of EN by repurposing the concepts of Fromm identified in this chapter as an integral component for an ecological alternative: those being neurosis as eco-neurosis (EN), relatedness, social character, and expanding on the social unconscious as an collective ecological unconscious (CEU) to shape and support an ecological framework that describes both the anthropogenic agency and structures of human activity in relation to more-than-human processes, or as an aggregate, in the web of life.

For example, applying Fromm's ideas to EN I noticed an untapped potential explanation in the use of the idea of humanity's existential problem of relatedness and separation. Yet, I go further than Fromm in arguing that the paradox of relatedness and separation is by no means only a human experience; it is also an instance of ecological activity. The push and pull dynamic of relation and separation is a planetary force that interacts with all life not just an exclusively human event. The mechanism of the psyche (i.e., unconscious) is the portal that communicates through and between macro and micro-organizations in the web of life. Macro-scale manifestation is constituted by human individual action, social structures, and ecological activity. On the other end, micro scale phenomena denote flora, microbiomes, and single-cell organisms. I consider the interactive adaptations of both macro and micro-organizations as biocultural

processes,²¹⁵ based on the body of work on biocultural theory, in simple terms this just means that the combination of biological and cultural factors affects human experience and behavior.

EN is a biocultural process. EN is thus the byproduct of a collective intensified pressure from the push and pull of relation and separation at the level of human experience. However, that pressure is also compounded respectively at the micro- and macro- level within the web of life. Therefore, EN is a particular co-produced symptom of smaller and larger interpenetrative relational organizations in the co-production of the web of life. I will further expand on this planetary dynamic pattern in chapter two. But for now, I will survey and highlight the vital elements of my ecological framework that I am developing in the next chapter.

The component parts of my ecological framework include radical ecopsychology, world-ecology, and decolonial politics.²¹⁶ For starters, ecopsychology makes two important arguments that follows the spirit of my framework: one, in a therapeutic-recollective sense, it is about mending the split between psyche and nature through recalling the mind's deep rootedness in earthly relations. Second, in a critical sense, it is about addressing the social sources of violence done to both human and more-than-human nature, identifying the historical, cultural, political, and economic roots of our ecopsychological crisis. These two arguments are dialectically related, each providing ground for the other.²¹⁷

²¹⁵ Human behavior is not just the product of culture, and it is not just the product of biology, either. Human behavior and human culture emerge from a complex interaction between genetic dispositions and environmental circumstances. Those environmental circumstances range from physical aspects of the biosphere to imaginary cultural constructs.

²¹⁶ Here the ideas of Andy Fisher are crucial for the kind of dialectical ecological project I am developing; Especially the dialectical ideas of Jason W. Moore; By praxis, I mean a dialectic between theory and practice, as well as freely chosen creative activity aimed at raising critical consciousness and reorganizing society. The form of praxis I have in mind maintains a focus on interiority or subjectivity, expressing in similar fashion, to Andy Fisher's view, that an eco-unconscious should be a framework of human development to foster psychological, ecological, and political literacy.

²¹⁷ Fisher Andy 2013, 167.

Similarly, world-ecology elaborates on the earthly relations among human and more-than-human life as an entangled historical relation. A historical twofold relation based on the production of life as procreation personified as human labor and of fresh life proliferation. Or as Moore describes it “This twofold relation – Web of Life’s dialectical heart – insists that class society, and capitalism specifically, is a metabolism of ‘reciprocal codetermination’ through which human social relations, from the body to the biosphere, are interpenetrated with the totality of the web of life.”²¹⁸ this is Moore’s reorientation of metabolic organizations not as “rift” but as “shift.” The specificity of human social relations is foregrounded through this metabolic shift with and within webs of life, one in which human work is itself a “natural force.”²¹⁹

Lastly, decolonial studies is integral to an ecological framework, although I make sure to carefully distinguish non-indigenous from indigenous decolonization. My framework is rooted in a non-indigenous perspective due to the orientation of my work and my own identity.²²⁰ Albeit, in solidarity with decolonial thought, ecological expansion of historically abstract separate domains – i.e., nature and society – is very much allied to the relentless analytic effort to understand, in order to overcome, the logic of coloniality underneath the rhetoric of modernity, the structure of management of control that emerged out of the transformation of the economy in the Atlantic, that took place both in the internal history of Europe and in between Europe and its colonies.²²¹ The framework I offer is deeply allied to this decolonial project, meaning that the felt separation of more-than-human life, psyche, and society is inherent in contemporary capitalist

²¹⁸ Moore Jason 2022, 154.

²¹⁹ The dialectical implication of this method is straightforward. Just as human work involves a dialectical transformation—in acting “upon external nature... [she] changes it, and so simultaneously changes [her] own nature.”

²²⁰ While I am originally of Global South origins, most of the indigenous population of Cuba was exterminated by Spanish rule, and extraordinarily little indigenous knowledge was saved because of it.

²²¹ Mignolo Walter 2011, 10.

civilization, which survives to this day only through continuous processes of disconnection and colonization.

CHAPTER 2

Toward an Ecological Understanding: Sado-Masochistic Maladaptation & The Collective Ecological Unconscious (CEU)

Psychologists, academics, and journalists are shifting their understanding that mental health disease is not a perfectly curated formula of diagnosis, medication, management, and elimination. This medical model has a long-established grip on public understanding. Daniel Carr, an assistant professor at the institute for Society and Genetics at U.C.L.A. mentions that “Medicalization shifts the terms in which we try to figure out what caused a problem, and what can be done to fix it. Often, it puts the focus on the individual as a biological body, at the expense of factoring in systemic and infrastructural conditions.”²²² Indeed, I am following Carr’s sentiments that the medicalization model reifies the problem of mental disease, instead I wish to aid in furthering the loosened grip of the medical model, which can benefit from the works of Erich Fromm’s social psychology.

Chapter one analyzed and interrogated the mainstream presentation of neurosis, and eco-neurosis (EN) in particular. To recapitulate, neuroses are often defined as individual psychological problems, limited to the suffering psyche that enters clinic/analytical encounter for the sake of therapeutic relief. I problematized this clinical psychological assumption by invoking the ideas of Erich Fromm. The main claims of Fromm’s theoretical analysis demonstrate that neurosis/eco-neurosis cannot be solely solved through individual therapeutic practices or through prescriptions for changing individual thoughts and behavioral patterns. There is a larger political and civilizational phenomenon that the APA and clinical psychologists often ignore or omit in

²²² Carr Danielle, New York Times Opinion, 2022.

their diagnosis. Fromm's vital move is to insist that neurosis is as much a political problem as it is an individual problem. I argue that eco-neurosis is very much the same kind of phenomenon: a political problem masked by individualizing and medicalizing discourses of treatment.

By concentrating on four concepts in Fromm's theoretical catalog – neurosis, relatedness, social character, and social unconscious – I argued that clinical psychology would gain explanatory power if it expanded, re-identified, re-interpreted, and reconstructed the origins of psychological pathologies, such as EN. Based on Frommian logic, I explain EN as a sadomasochistic maladaptation of the human species' current orientation with more-than-human life. In other words, EN is maladaptive because it alienates and separates us from our natural sense of relatedness with our total selves – including more-than-human processes – due to the lack of activity; EN is expressing itself as a sadomasochism due to its properties of passivity that appears as resignation, depression, and helplessness, or what is superficially observed as pathologies of the individual mind.

However, to further develop a framework that explains EN as a political and collective problem in the 21st century, I must expand and push Fromm's theory into ecological territory far beyond the scope of his investigation. We need an ecologically relational ontology to update the accounts of Fromm's normative humanist project to a level that reaches the web of life. To develop an adequate account of EN that Fromm was not fully positioned to provide, I need to make some ecologically updated claims: a. Fromm's critique of capitalism is dated, and does not include an account of capitalism's relationship to more-than-human life; b. the paradox of relatedness and separation requires an ecological update, rather than its narrowly humanist interpretation in Fromm; c. the development of a sado-masochistic maladaptation is a socialized

pattern based on a destructive ecological orientation; and d. the psyche is not an exclusively human affair, rather the psyche exists as a collective ecological unconscious (CEU).

The implications of this chapter will demonstrate that maintaining the basic premises of Fromm's thought is sound theory for an ecological dimension. By including critical orientations such as world-ecology and radical eco-psychology in reshaping EN through two important concepts: one, sado-masochistic character; and two, a collective ecological unconscious (CEU) a unique and crucial interpretation surfaces that tackles multiple dimensions – i.e., psychological, political, historical, economic, moral – of a psychological reflex (EN) that is an effect of a much more systemic understanding.

An Update of Frommian Theory: The Limitations of a Psycho-Social Explanation

Fromm's critique of capitalism reaches a 20th century ceiling. In that description the qualitative factor of capital especially in the United States (US) rests on the principle of mass production and mass consumption. As Fromm muses "Everybody is coaxed into buying as much as he can, and before he has saved enough to pay for his purchases. The need for more consumption is strongly stimulated by advertising and all other methods of psychological pressure."²²³ Indeed, in the late 50's to the 80's individual consumer capitalism was at its zenith. The American middle class was booming, and increased numbers of people had the money to buy cheap commodities at will. In the 20th century capitalism needed individual members who wanted to consume endlessly, and whose tastes were standardized and easily influenced.²²⁴ Additionally, the 20th century capitalist ethos rested upon two important elements: quantification and abstraction. Raw materials, machinery, labor costs, and the product were abstracted into money symbols. As Fromm deciphered "All economic occurrences have to be strictly

²²³ Fromm Erich, 1955, 109.

²²⁴ Fromm Erich, 1955, 110.

quantifiable, and only the balance sheets, the exact comparison of economic processes quantified in figures, tell the manager whether and to what degree he is engaged in a profitable, that is to say, meaningful business activity.”²²⁵ This transformation of the concrete into the abstract developed far beyond the balance sheet, it also created abstractions of humans themselves. It was from this analysis that Fromm developed a critique of capitalism under the concept of *alienation*. According to Fromm, alienation is when humans cannot relate authentically and creatively to themselves, their labor, one another, and nature.²²⁶

An illustrative example that Fromm provides is that of the "organizational man" or an insurance agent in more realistic imagery. The organizational man might feel that their life makes little sense; they do not feel free to do as they wish, or they feel that they are chasing an illusion of happiness that may never come true. Consequently, Fromm's symptomatic description of alienation uncovered a profound psychological development among social members engaged in capitalist society. That psychological development demonstrates a chasm in the relationship between work and purpose. The 20th century development of separation already showed, for those like Fromm, psychological disturbances hidden amongst the balance sheets. Albeit the psychological development of separation demonstrates a change in the character of humans who engage in capitalism, a change that damages healthy psychological developments and stunts human flourishing and positive freedom.²²⁷

Yet, while Fromm's psycho-social critique of capitalism is nuanced and rich in description it also contains two important problems: one, Fromm's 20th century interpretation of capitalism is dated in its conception. And two, Fromm's relational ontology still carries a dualism

²²⁵ Fromm Erich, 1955, 111.

²²⁶ Friedman, Lawrence, and Anke Schreiber, 2013,44.

²²⁷ This is the philosophical understanding of a "Freedom to" as opposed to a "Freedom from."

of nature/culture that needs revision. Fromm's dated conception of capitalism needs a contemporary update. While Fromm's anticipation of Capitalism's alienating qualities is spot on, the conclusions and later developments are much more overwhelming than even he could anticipate. A more relevant depiction of 21st century globalized capitalism is identified by the thoughts of William I. Robinson, who argues that the the main features of 21st century global capitalism is *globalization*, *financialization*, and *digitalization*.²²⁸

At a structural dimension, Robinson specifies that as capital went global, a transnational capitalist class (TCC) emerged, forged out of the leading sectors among national capitalist classes, and consisting of the owners and managers of giant transnational corporations and financial conglomerates that now drive the global economy.²²⁹ In addition, financialization began in the late 20th century, as national financial systems merged into an increasingly integrated global financial system, transnational finance capital emerged as the hegemonic fraction of capital on a world scale. It accrued enormous social power, including the ability to dictate through global financial markets to states and to other circuits of accumulation, to regulate the circuits of capital worldwide, in a reversal of the historical relationship in which finance serves as an adjunct to industrial capital.²³⁰ At the same time, since 2008 the new wave of digitalization and the rise of digital platforms have facilitated a very rapid transnationalization of digital-based services. This includes communications, informatics, digital and platform technology, e-commerce, financial services, professional and technical work. This shift worldwide has involved the increasing dominance of intangible capital.²³¹ digitalization like electricity spreads throughout all branches of the economy and society and becomes built into everything. Those

²²⁸ Robinson I. William 2022, 23.

²²⁹ Robinson I. William 2022, 11.

²³⁰ Robinson I. William 2022, 18.

²³¹ Robinson I. William 2022, 43.

who control the development and application of digital technologies acquire newfound social power and political influence. The rise of the digital economy involves a fusion of Silicon Valley, Wall Street, and the Pentagon.²³²

Relatedly, at a more existential dimension, the average American worker struggles with an added element: insecurity and precarity of job station and conditions. The upheaval of the great depression and World War II has faded, unions used to be robust and powerful, pensions were a staple of professional work, most jobs had the ability for promotion. The globalization and precaritization of labor have changed these conditions. Businesses and corporations have farmed out many of the tasks they once did permanently in-house to small firms and to individual contractors on short-term contracts without benefits.²³³ As a result, The new ethos of global capitalism leans into a tacit apathy for public life, and an ideology of private choice over collective responsibility.

These current events and proliferation of capitalism demonstrate the global capitalist system is *structure in motion*, constantly evolving in an open-ended way that involves as much the pulse of cycles, patterns, and regularities as contingency and agency.²³⁴ Fromm's critique of capitalism as alienation provides great insight but it is also frozen in time. Thus, we need a critique of capitalism that reflects the current instance of the global capitalist matrix. This is a time of great upheaval, momentous changes, and uncertain outcomes. The moment reflects the famous adage of Antonio Gramsci "The old world is dying, and the new world struggles to be born, now is the time of monsters."²³⁵ Indeed, it is a time of monsters but, the new world is by no means guaranteed. The monsters in its current manifestation are global capitalist forces and the

²³² Robinson I. William 2022, 46.

²³³ Sennett Richard 1998, 22.

²³⁴ I invoke here the same words used by Robinson in his 2014 book *Global Capitalism and the Crisis of Humanity*.

²³⁵ Gramsci Antonio 1930.

balance of all life on the planet is its prey. What we need to recognize is that global capitalism can no longer be seen as an external force separated neatly from the bedrock of which it reproduces itself in the web of life – this is something that Fromm’s thought suffers.

An Update of Frommian Theory: The Popular Anthropocene Debate

Simultaneously, biogeological questions as a development of history were not present in Fromm’s writing. The closest environmental approach for Fromm exists is in his later writings where he briefly mentions patterns of environmental degradation caused by the modern way of life. Fast forward to the current day and climate change is discussed with the same level of seriousness as nuclear catastrophe, and yet human organizations truly do little to course correct. Unfortunately, Fromm’s psycho-social explanations of capitalism lacks in explaining the biogeological elements of global capitalism world-making.

The contemporary discussion on the origins of climate change took place in the 1980’s shortly after Fromm’s passing. Fromm never got a chance to analyze and understand the biogeological lexicon of the Anthropocene. Consequently, it would not be until the beginning of the 21st century that Nobel laureate Paul Crutzen popularized the term “Anthropocene” in reference to the current geological period of the planet.²³⁶ The Anthropocene deduces that the Earth has entered a new geological period, a period which is said to be characterized by a humanity that has now developed into a telluric force, and which is now capable of modifying the planet’s climate on its own. In the Anthropocene, a new geological period driven by human activity is surmised by the scientific community.²³⁷

As a result of these findings the idea of a “Popular Anthropocene” began to develop among human and social science perspectives that alludes to “a way of thinking about the origins

²³⁶ Crutzen J. Paul 2006, 13.

²³⁷ San Roman Alvaro & Molinero-Gerbeau 2023, 3.

and evolutions of modern ecological crisis.”²³⁸ This orientation does not discuss the physical, tangible effects that human activity has on the planet, but rather asks about the causes of climate change. On this idea it is appropriate to discuss two well-differentiated perspectives of the Anthropocene. One is made up of those who support the anthropogenic framework, sustaining the concept, but discussing its conformation, and the other position is described as the “critical block,” its orientation is to dismantle the claims of the Anthropocene to construct alternative theories that better reflect the global ecological reality. Through my own deduction of Fromm’s work, I would gather that he would identify with the later orientation, although with caveats.²³⁹ It is essential to mention that the Anthropocene discusses a wide range of positions, indicating a rich complexity in its proposed framework. One of the most pertinent points of contention between the two sides is the consideration of humanity as a biological entity and geological agent; questions tend to revolve around who is responsible for the Anthropocene.

The “Popular Anthropocene” position assumes an abstract universalism that considers humanity as a single entity, an actor whose actions have led to the current environmental crisis. Some advocates for global environmental justice are placing greater responsibility on industrialized societies than those of the Global South and current generations, as they are responsible for the material reality that future generations will experience.²⁴⁰ However, this is one of the two orientations of the two blocks in a discussion that exists in the field of the “Popular Anthropocene.” The other block is labeled “critical” by world-ecologists Alvaro San Roman and Yoan Molinero-Gerbeau.

²³⁸ Moore W. Jason 2016.

²³⁹ San Roman Alvaro & Molinero-Gerbeau 2023, 4.

²⁴⁰ Eckersley 2007.

My project accepts that the critical position of the Capitalocene worldview is a compelling answer to biogeological questions for two reasons: one, the Anthropocene explanation does not challenge the naturalized inequalities, separations, and violence inscribed in the societal strategic relations of power and production.²⁴¹ Useful here are the words of Jason Moore, he argues that “The Capitalocene thesis is an argument about turning points and patterns. It challenges the imperialist mythology of Man and Nature inscribed in that most sacred phrase, Anthropogenic climate change. Its alternative is capitalogenic climate change: shorthand for the emergence of capitalism as a planetary force.”²⁴² The Capitalocene argument is allergic of reinforcing dualisms. This method flows from a commitment in identifying and informing the class politics that pinpoint capitalism’s strategic vulnerabilities. The Capitalocene worldview highlights the three most pressing issues of capitalogenic planetary change. First, as Moore mentions, it situates the origins of the planetary crisis within early labor/landscape revolution. Second, it identifies and interprets the patterns of recurrence, evolution, and crisis in the history of capitalism. Third, it recognizes the novel problems of the present moment by noticing capitalism’s cumulative cyclical patterns.²⁴³

It is in this spirit that Fromm’s psycho-social explanation deserves an expansion to include the idea that more-than-human life matters. It is of vital importance to realize that a critique of capitalism, which Fromm centers on the concept of alienation, is also a division that further alienates humans from the Earth itself. Therefore, a critique of capitalism must include the biogeological events, not as a backdrop, but as a leading role in the web of life. Taking the Capitalocene seriously, means that more-than-human processes react to capitalist activities as

²⁴¹ Moore W. Jason 2015, 170.

²⁴² Moore W. Jason 2022, 128.

²⁴³ Moore W. Jason 2022, 128.

material manifestations such as severe weather changes, loss of habitat, environmental degradations *and* impacts on the psyche of members of the human species, because we too are also a species of the Earth. Human mental health is affected because unconscious drives are shaped by more-than-human processes. As Moore helpfully notes “human activity not only produces biospheric change, but relations between humans are themselves produced through nature. This nature is not nature-as-resource but nature-as matrix. It is a nature that operates not only outside and inside our bodies but also through our bodies, including our embodied minds.”²⁴⁴ Therein lies the point: if our embodied minds are a part of more-than-human life then we also need to come to terms with the idea that symptoms of psychological distress are not only located within individual minds but are a part of a larger historical system that affects the web of life. Taking the Capitalocene worldview seriously means that we look at mental health disorders such as EN within a relational — and political — matrix.

Ecologizing Fromm's Relational Ontology: An Expansion of Ecological Proportions

Relatedly, Fromm's relational ontology presented as normative humanism fails to identify and reach the web of life. To develop an adequate account of human and more-than-human effects that take place in the psyche it is imperative to ecologize the paradox of relatedness and separation in Fromm's theory. To recapitulate from chapter one, Fromm's sense of mental health and its relationship to society stems from the unique push and pull of relatedness and separation. According to Fromm, the conflict of relatedness and separation influences the outcome of mental states in human beings.²⁴⁵ Specifically, Fromm posits an original separation between humans and nature. Humans are a part of nature and yet transcend it because we are evolutionarily the zenith of natural development because we use reason and awareness to overcome our instinctual drives.

²⁴⁴ Moore Jason 2015, 172.

²⁴⁵ Fromm Erich 1947, 50.

I claim that this dialectical process is not an exclusively human situation, it is the dynamic movement in the *web of life*.²⁴⁶ The pressure and conflict of relatedness and separation by both human and more-than-human life results in a regressive dialectic known as eco-neurosis (EN).

As I demonstrated in chapter one, Erich Fromm defined neurosis as an adaptation to external conditions that are irrational, unadjusted, and unfavorable to an individual but favorable to the demands of society.²⁴⁷ Fromm roots his understanding of neurosis in a philosophical anthropology or story of human nature and its evolution, including the related development of culture as a form of nature. As Fromm suggests, human evolution is tied up with the paradoxical problem of a struggle among regression and progression. At a human dimension this appears as humanity being the only animal who not only uses instrumental intelligence – i.e., manipulation of objects to satisfy needs – but also displays self-awareness, i.e. the capacity to use their thinking to understand the external world.²⁴⁸ According to Fromm, humanity is aware of themselves as a being separate from nature and from others; they are aware of their powerlessness, of their ignorance; aware of their end: death.²⁴⁹ Humanity is at once a part of nature, subject to the physical laws and unable to change them, and yet they transcend nature. They are set apart while being a part; homeless yet chained to the home they share with all creatures.

Yet, in the same breath, Fromm commits a reification of his own dialectical orientation; he over-commits to a rooted duality rather than inner relations comprising wholes, traversed by

²⁴⁶ Quoting Jason Moore, the Web of life: This is nature as us, as inside us, as around us. It is nature as a flow of flows. Put simply, humans make environments and environments make humans – and human organization.

²⁴⁷ Unadjusted to Fromm is society's perception that denotes an individual's lack of social functioning; this is an effect of neurotic symptoms. This means the neurotic person can be characterized as someone who was not ready to surrender completely in the battle for themselves. The attempt to save themselves was not successful in expressing themselves to the social efficiency of society.

²⁴⁸ Fromm Erich 1973, 225.

²⁴⁹ Fromm Erich 1973, 225.

other relations and in process with other wholes. Simply put, Fromm faithfully promotes, on the one hand, the dynamism of human experience, and on the other he views the history of organic life as passive, static, and independent to whatever exist outside of human concern.²⁵⁰ A perfect example is the dialectical struggle among relatedness and separation only applied to humanity; yet somehow, this struggle does not affect or relate to the processes of more-than-human life. Case in point, this is Fromm's description of nature in relation to human evolution: "Man is the only animal who does not feel at home in nature, who can feel evicted from paradise, the only animal for whom his own existence is a problem that he must solve and from which he cannot escape. He cannot go back to the prehuman state of harmony with nature, and he does not know where he will arrive if he goes forward."²⁵¹ Indeed, while this follows the logic of human existential struggle between relatedness and separation, and the various efforts for overcoming them, it does not apply, for Fromm, to the processes of more-than-human events.

Nevertheless, I go further than Fromm in arguing that the paradox of relatedness and separation is by no means only a human experience; it is also an instance of ecological activity. The push and pull dynamic of relation and separation is a planetary force that interacts with all life, i.e., it is not an exclusively human event. I am claiming that this dialectical process is a dynamic ecological movement in the web of life. Meaning the pressure and conflict of relatedness and separation by both human and more-than-human life results in a transitory state of instability. The temporary instability caused by relatedness and separation in both human and more-than-human life eventually metastasizes into forms of connection. These attempts for stability do not always constitute a straight line of improvement. New patterns for equilibrium may create adequate ways of coping with the suspense of instability, but relative stability does

²⁵⁰ Fromm Erich 1941, 33.

²⁵¹ Fromm Erich 1973, 225.

not imply that the dichotomy disappears; it is merely dormant and reappears the moment a new change transpires in the web of life. If this reads as philosophical abstraction let me present the example, the late Joel Kovel provided, of ecosystems as a paradox of relatedness and separation.

Kovel explains that:

The notion of an ecosystem is a molecular concept within ecology: it is the place where ecological relations take place and are manifested. Ecosystems consists of differentiable elements, or aggregations of elements, whether non-living, living and non-human, or human, in an identifiable pattern of relationships. Since ecology's central notion is the interrelatedness of all things within nature, the ecosystem is not unitary; it is rather connected both internally and externally with other ecosystems; indeed, from this aspect, nature may be regarded as the integral of all ecosystems.²⁵²

Indeed, ecosystems present in full display the paradoxical orientation of more-than-human elements. Interrelatedness is a central element shared both within and without by human and non-human entities. Consider again, trying to define what makes a certain arrangement of features on the forward surface of a human head, a "face," a whole different from the sum of its parts and yet judgements of this kind happen organically.²⁵³

So, it is within the dialectical of organisms that characteristics of forms appear, change, and evolve. The late Kovel suggests that ecosystems are locations of form, and their internal and external relations constitute the unfolding of what is called evolution. Kovel states "in this respect, life appears as self-replicating form, and human being as a life-form capable of consciously transforming ecosystems. How we do this depends upon our values, our ethical systems, and our relation with the society into which we are inserted."²⁵⁴ In other words, more-than-human nature is constantly present in human organization. In the web of life there are co-constituting processes, which determine a regressive or progressive coupling. An example of a

²⁵² Kovel Joel 2011, 10.

²⁵³ Kovel Joel 2011, 10.

²⁵⁴ Kovel Joel 2011, 10.

regressive coupling is clearly identified by eco-neurosis (EN), this is now where I turn the attention, focusing on the content of the regression development.

Instead of seeing EN as a site of displaced imagination, we need to recognize the source is in the development of society itself. Borrowing the words of Andy Fisher, “it reflects a withdrawal of reality into the head of the modern Western individual from the ‘external’ social and ecological world.”²⁵⁵ Yes, this symptom of a felt separation in the web of life is *historical*.²⁵⁶ The history of these identified set of maladaptation reflects an experience in the bifurcation of reality that has plagued modern psychology. Dividing psychic reality from hard or external reality, modern psychology elaborates various theories to connect the two orders together. Psychic reality therefore lacks a public dimension, while external reality, the sum of existing material objects and conditions, is conceived to be utterly devoid of internal properties.²⁵⁷

The root of the duality in modern psychology derives in the historical development of how the West understands “nature.” The phenomenon of “nature” in the West existed in contradistinction to “culture.” Nature was conceived as something outside the human subject. A useful interpretation is situated by decolonial scholar Walter Mignolo. Mignolo’s keen observation that colonialism was introduced into the domain of knowledge and subjectivity by Sir Francis Bacon makes a vital point for my argument. Mignolo states:

Sir Francis Bacon published his *Novum Organum* (1620), in which he proposed a reorganization of knowledge and clearly stated that ‘nature’ was ‘there’ to be dominated by Man. During this period, before the Industrial Revolution, Western Christians asserted their control over knowledge about nature by disqualifying all

²⁵⁵ Fisher Andy 2002, 9.

²⁵⁶ To Borrow the words of Jason Moore: in other words, historical materialism is historical. And by historical, Marx and Engels underline, they mean “the actual empirical existence of men in their world-historical, instead of local, being.” (Marx & Engels 2010: 49). Capitalism’s uniqueness is found in the historical geography of endless accumulation.

²⁵⁷ Fisher Andy 2002, 9.

coexisting and equally valid concepts of knowledge and by ignoring concepts that contradicted their own understanding of nature.²⁵⁸

Indeed, once ‘nature’ from a Western epistemological viewpoint became an established concept, the next step was the colonial wrapping of ‘nature’ as ‘natural resource’ in a complex system of Western cosmology, structured theologically and secularly; it also manufactured an epistemological system that legitimized its uses of ‘nature’ to generate massive quantities of ‘produce,’ appearing as the mercantilization of food and life.²⁵⁹

Moreover, contemporary Western civilization built their sense of superiority and their pride in the process of cutting the umbilical cord with more-than-human life by slapping it with the category of ‘nature.’ In so doing, nature becomes a way of othering what is not civilized. Here the words of world-ecologist Jason Moore provide illustration of this process, by repurposing Sohn-Rethel’s concept of *real abstraction*, Moore states:

In *Web of Life* and subsequent texts, I extended real abstraction beyond the circulation of value. Sohn-Rethel’s critique of commodity fetishism suggests a way to understand capitalism’s *civilizational fetishism*. Civilization and Savagery emerged as ruling abstractions through financialized imperialist projects—the Iberians are a prime example—committed to planetary management and the expansion of commodity frontiers.²⁶⁰

In that way, the civilizing project of the West toward their other (i.e., human and more-than-human) goes by many names. As Moore suggests for the Spanish it was Cristianización; for the French, *la mission civilisatrice*; for the British, the White Man’s Burden; for the Americans, Manifest Destiny, and after 1949, Modernization.²⁶¹ Each of these civilizing projects were violently achieved and legitimized, with the stroke of the pen, by redefining what is not civilized as savage, irrational, lazy, warmongering, animalistic; and by similar action ways of life outside

²⁵⁸ Mignolo D. Walter 2011, 11.

²⁵⁹ Mignolo D. Walter 2011, 13.

²⁶⁰ Moore W. Jason 2022, 160.

²⁶¹ Moore W. Jason 2022, 161.

“the West” were relocated into the cosmological domain of “nature.”²⁶² In this sense, the heuristic of Moore’s reconceptualized use of real abstractions links capital’s geo-economic logic with capitalism’s logic of domination, and demonstrates how extra-economic domination and force is central to the accumulation of capital and the devastation of planetary life by robbing labor/energy for the reproduction of global capitalism.

What does this have to do with psychology, mental health and EN? Everything. The colonial project of global capitalism is highly prominent, and the experts who determine the accepted knowledge and practice of psychology are not insulated from its influence. Historically and currently, in the field of psychology, ecological problems are effectively dichotomized into individual and environmental problems, and any relation between the two is repressed. As a result, psychology itself plays, as an institution with establishment biases, by maintaining oppressive social relations, such as the individualism that creates the ideological dividing line among psyche, society, and more-than-human life. Two consequences of this historical assumption of psychology are that one, it ties itself with global capitalism and endorses an individualistic ethos that withdraws psyche from the world of nature and society and installs in its place a fictitious self-contained individual.²⁶³ The second, stems from the self-contained individual fiction, meaning individualism legitimates the creation of empty selves who consume the earth and whose suffering is abstracted from its social origins. Consequently, the natural world is perceived as brute, deanimate matter available for exploitation and dispossession.²⁶⁴

What I can keep of Fromm’s relational ontology is highlighted by the problems in the field of psychology. It is true that Fromm elevates and distinguishes a specialness of humanity

²⁶² As Moore suggests “Nature is not merely a mythical domain and an ideological claim; it is a concrete class-ideological project. Nature is everything that bourgeoisies don’t want to pay for.”

²⁶³ Fisher Andy 2013, 170.

²⁶⁴ Fisher Andy 2013, 170.

separate from more-than-human life: “This birth of man may have lasted for hundreds of thousands of years, but what matters is that a new species arose, transcending nature, that life became aware of itself.”²⁶⁵ However, the basic image Fromm described of human nature that differentiates his relational psychology from mainstream psychology is that of a continual state of becoming, emerging, or unfolding. Humanity as a species realizes its potential when it transcends or grows beyond its current mode of being. Fromm’s relational psychology rejects one important feature of traditional psychology in globalized capitalism: individualism is a dialectical moment in the process of growing individuation.²⁶⁶ We know this because Fromm’s dialectical sensitivity supports and amplifies the unfolding feedback loop among the individual and its social relations; simultaneously, recognizing that current social relations destroy, impoverish, attenuate, and exterminate genuine human experience in contemporary life.

Harkening on Fromm’s shortcomings is an important step in building off the source material of a dialectical orientation that characterizes a living, breathing theoretical tradition. Fromm’s importance conceptual tools will presently help to develop and understand the status and crisis in which civilization finds itself in. I will now move toward a new and improved Fromm championed by two integral concepts to my own theoretical analysis. A sadomasochist maladaptation and a collective ecological unconscious (CEU).

An Authoritarian Character of Biocultural Implications: A Sado-Masochistic Maladaptation

In chapter one, I noted that Fromm defined the social character as the regulating force of one’s actions, thoughts, and ideas. Defining social character as “the nucleus of the character structure which is shared by most members of the same culture, in contradistinction to the individual character in which people belonging to the same culture differ from each

²⁶⁵ Fromm Erich 1955, 23.

²⁶⁶ Meaning an integration of individual self-growth fostered by society, and our growing uniqueness from others.

other.”²⁶⁷ Members of any given society must behave in certain ways to be able to function in the sense required by the specific social structures. In other words, it is the function of the social character to mold and channel human energy in each society for the purpose of the reproduction of that society.

Fromm positions us to describe that we are living in an age of a neurotically split persons, an age of bland numbness, an era pervaded by a sense of loss or longing for something we cannot name, a feeling of being off-center, of missing something. One possible answer for this off-center neurosis is the Western epistemological hubris of an obsession with the Ego.²⁶⁸ Fisher (via Kovel) distinguishes that “‘Egoic being, and capital are internally related: each emerges from its pre-cursor and implies and generates the other across the history of capitalism.’”²⁶⁹ Indeed by an “Egoic being” Kovel implies an alienated mode of existence marked by a certain restless emptiness and ruthless calculating that flowered under capitalism but that is a potential in humans predating the modern capitalist era.²⁷⁰ The relation to our felt sense of aloneness, and separation is profoundly linked with an overinflation of the ego and a Western sense of superiority over ecological life. I am arguing that the tether that inextricably links our ecological crisis with our social neurosis exists in what Fromm identified as ‘social character.’ Such a society as ours is a threat to personhood in general, both human and more-than-human.

Fromm emphasizes that the social character is the intermediary between the socio-economic structure and the ideas and ideals prevalent in society. Noting “It is the intermediary in both directions, from the economic basis to the ideas and from the ideas to the economic

²⁶⁷ Fromm Erich 1962, 78.

²⁶⁸ Mignolo notes that “Secularism displaced God as the guarantor of knowledge, placing man and reason in God’s stead, and centralized Ego. Ego-politics then displaced theo-politics to maintain the epistemic and political control of the colonial matrix.”

²⁶⁹ Kovel Joel 1999, 7.

²⁷⁰ Fisher Andy 2019, 147.

base.”²⁷¹ What Fromm failed to understand is that more-than human energy is also attached to what gets molded and channeled in globalized capitalist society for its own reproduction. As a result, I am claiming an added dimension to character, a sociobiological element.²⁷² The purpose of a sociobiological element demonstrates that the political development of nature as a separate category from human social order is no accident. The sociobiological character operates through capitalogenic climate change that reinforces the separation and violent abstraction of society and nature. The current sociobiological character molds ideas, feelings, and thoughts of our felt separation from nature, e.g., eco-neurosis, to the way we manipulate and violate nature as a lifeless husk of material for the reproduction of society. Our current sociobiological character is currently adapted as a non-productive sado-masochistic orientation toward all of life.

However, to get to the sociobiological non-productive character of our relationship with more-than-human life; I must survey Fromm’s genealogical development of a sado-masochistic character. Sado-masochism is a combination of two unique character traits. One is sadism and the other is masochism. Sadism, in an orthodox psychoanalytic sense, is a blending of eros – desire – and the death instinct, directed outside oneself.²⁷³ Masochism is the reflective opposite of sadism it is a blend of eros and the death instinct, directed towards oneself. This is a sexual phenomenon as a partial drive of the libido that explains sadistic sexual strivings as being unconsciously motivated.

In contradistinction to instinctual drives, Fromm proposes that the core of sadism is the passion to have absolute and unrestricted control over a living being. The person who has

²⁷¹ Fromm Erich 1962, 87.

²⁷² I am taking the social character and expanding its scope. Meaning, eco-social character also influences human character orientation to the more-than-human world. This sado-masochistic orientation toward the non-human also influences our economic activity with it.

²⁷³ Freud’s two instincts – Eros and Death – are fundamental hypotheses as to the general character of the repressed forces inherent in human nature. Through repressed and unrecognized, these are the energies which create human culture, and to recognize their existence is to interpret human culture; Fromm Erich 1973, 288.

complete control over another living being makes this being into this thing, his property, while they become the other being's overlord. Complete control over another human being means crippling them, choking them, thwarting them.²⁷⁴ Fromm's logic of social character demonstrates that sadism is one of the answers of relating, and as such, an answer to the paradox of human existence, the conflict of relatedness and separation.

Sadism is an experience of absolute control over another being, of omnipotence that creates an illusion of transcending the limitations of human existence. It's a regressive dialectic to find an equilibrium to the overwhelming emotion of human existence. A word of caution here since Fromm recognizes that sadistic character traits should not be understood if one isolates them from the whole character structure. Or as Fromm states "They are part of a syndrome that must be understood as a whole. For the sadistic character everything living is to be controllable; living beings become things."²⁷⁵ Indeed, the entity that has embraced sadism wants to be the master of life. A related trait of the sadists' control for life is a stimulated attraction by the helpless. For the sadistic character there is only one admirable quality and that is power over a victim. They seek out this power as a dependence over what they wish to control.

However, this is an expressed insecurity toward life itself, since the sadist is unconsciously afraid of losing what it wants to control most, life. As Fromm muses "Life frightens him precisely because it is by its very nature unpredictable and uncertain."²⁷⁶ The fear of the sadist is everything that is not certain and predictable. For this reason, a sadist is afraid of the capacities of life. One final, but important element of sadism is the submissiveness and cowardice of the sadist. It may appear as a disagreement that the sadist is submissive, but as

²⁷⁴ Fromm Erich 1973, 289.

²⁷⁵ Fromm Erich 1973, 291.

²⁷⁶ Fromm Erich 1973, 291.

Fromm explains “He is sadistic because he feels impotent, unalive, and powerless. He tries to compensate for this lack by having power over others.” This is a necessity of this regressive character because the root of sadism is impotence.

On the other end of sadism is masochism. This is the passive expression of this regressive relation. The masochist escapes from the unbearable feeling of isolation and separateness by making themselves part of another person who directs them, guides them, and protects them. They are solely dependent on the guiding force of another’s wishes and desires.²⁷⁷ The power of the one to whom one submits is inflated, they are everything, the masochist is not of importance, except because they are part of who they worship. Fromm describes the masochist as “the person renounces his integrity, makes himself the instrument of somebody or something outside of himself; he need not solve the problem of living by productive activity.”²⁷⁸ The masochistic character does not have to make decisions, does not take any risks; they are never alone, but they are not independent.

Relatedly, the need to submit exists in both the masochist and sadist character orientation. Masochism and sadism, which are linked together, appear as opposites in their behavior, but they are two different aspects of one fundamental source already mentioned: a sense of impotence.²⁷⁹ Both the sadist and the masochist need another person to complete them. On the one hand, the sadist makes another person an extension of themselves; and on the other, the masochist makes themselves the extension of another. Both character orientations seek a symbiotic relationship because neither has a balance in themselves.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁷ Fromm Erich 1956, 18.

²⁷⁸ Fromm Erich 1956, 19.

²⁷⁹ Fromm Erich 1973, 292.

²⁸⁰ Fromm Erich 1973, 292.

The close connection between sadism and masochism means that there is also a combined character development among both non-productive character orientations. These two poles are ideal types and due to that one or the other aspect will be more dominant in a particular person. Relatedly, Fromm considers the combined character of a sado-masochistic character as the “authoritarian character” this translates the psychological component of the character structure into terms of a political nature.²⁸¹ Members of society whose political attitudes are described as authoritarian usually exhibit traits of the sadomasochistic character, meaning control of those below and submission to those above.²⁸²

The sadomasochistic character structure is constituted by specific elements influenced by Freud’s anal character and Fromm’s mode of relatedness: the hoarding character. Freud believed that the anal character manifested itself in a syndrome of character traits: stubbornness, orderliness, and parsimony.²⁸³ Freud’s assumption was that the syndrome was rooted in the “anal libido” that has its source in erogenous zone.²⁸⁴ The character traits of this syndrome were explained as reaction formations or sublimations of the aim of this anal libido.²⁸⁵

However, Fromm’s substitution for the libido theory had arrived at the hypothesis that the various traits of the syndrome are manifestations of the distance-keeping, controlling, rejecting, and hoarding mode of relatedness. Fromm partly gives Freud credit, and states “In the latter case, the anal interest has to be understood as another, but symbolic expression of the anal character,

²⁸¹ Fromm Erich 1973, *ibid.*

²⁸² Fromm Erich 1973, 293.

²⁸³ Fromm Erich 1973, 293.

²⁸⁴ Brown O. Norman 1959, 190.

²⁸⁵ Brown notes that “the symbolic equation the anal libido product acquires the significance of being his own child or creation, which he may use either to obtain narcissistic pleasure in play, or to obtain love from another, or to assert independence from another... sublimations are thus symbols. The category of property is not simply transferred from feces to money; on the contrary, money is feces, because the anal erotism continues in the unconscious.”

not as its cause.”²⁸⁶ Instead it is fitting for Fromm to implement his own character framework in representing the constitutive elements of the sadomasochist as a closer depiction of the hoarding character. Noting that the hoarding orientation is orderly with things, thoughts, and feelings, but the orderliness is sterile and rigid. In this way they control the environment; by irrational punctuality they control time; by compulsive cleanliness they undo the contact they had with the world which considered dirty and hostile.²⁸⁷

The sadomasochistic character cannot understand the self-replenishing function of all living substances, and that activity and the use of living powers increases the strength of living members while stagnation weakens them; to the sadomasochistic character, death and destruction have more reality than life and growth. As Fromm strikingly notes, “the act of creation is a miracle of which he hears, but in which he does not believe.”²⁸⁸ The sadomasochist has only one way to feel safe in their relatedness to the world: by possessing and controlling it, since they are incapable of relating themselves by love and sensitivity to life.

The sadomasochistic character is the feature not the bug of a historical colonial epistemology in globalized capitalism. The principles of this authoritarian orientation: control of environment; control of time; and control of life are no coincidences. Decolonial scholars remind us that the dominant epistemological understanding of coloniality in Western thinking is infatuated with the idea of domination and control. Remember, the dominant Western worldview contains four axioms about nature, according to psychologists Koger and Winter: 1. Nature is composed of inert, physical elements; 2. Which can and should be controlled; 3. By individual human beings seeking private economic gain; 4. Whose work results in progress (primarily

²⁸⁶ Fromm Erich 1973, 293.

²⁸⁷ Fromm Erich 1973, 293.

²⁸⁸ Fromm Erich 1973, 294.

economic development).²⁸⁹ Additionally, the eighteenth century European discovery of “deep time” was able to imagine the age of the universe in a dimension that surpasses the calculus achieved until then by other societies.²⁹⁰ “Deep time” subjected more-than-human processes to “time’s arrow, or linear time, and to time’s cycles... this is another way of saying that the rhythm of the cosmos that told the oyster when to open and shut their mouths also provided human beings around the planet with a pattern they could use to survive and organize their life.”²⁹¹ More specifically, this idea of European time had to be imposed on other societies to organize global capitalism.

Interpreting EN through this biocultural maladaptation demonstrates that the historical development of nature as a separate category from human social order is no accident.²⁹² The biocultural orientation operates through the guise of an separated being which molds the ideas, feelings, and thoughts of our felt separation from nature, e.g., eco-neurosis, to the way we manipulate and violate nature as a lifeless husk of material for the reproduction of society. Our current biocultural character is currently adapting as a non-productive sado-masochistic orientation toward all of life.

These feelings matter because the way we feel and act through our character affects our unconscious, the way we collectively navigate the world and our existence within it indicates the survival of our planetary ecosystem. A biocultural character molds and channels human and more-than-human energy in society and the planet for the purposes of established structural forces i.e., global capitalism. It is evident then that EN is a reaction/symptom of the maladaptive

²⁸⁹ Koger M. Susan and Winter Nann Du Deborah 2004, 38.

²⁹⁰ Walter Mignolo refers to this term as “to overcome Nature by action.” This new conception of time was a confirmation of the superiority of Western knowledge over the rest of the planet and other societies.

²⁹¹ Mignolo Walter 2011, 171.

²⁹² I am taking the social character and expanding its scope. Meaning, a biocultural character also influences human character orientation to the more-than-human world. This sado-masochistic orientation toward the non-human also influences our economic activity with it.

survival mechanisms of a global capitalist order on human and more-than-human life. Meaning, the development of a felt separation (i.e., made up category of nature as a ruling abstraction) from the more-than-human world and the ideological rejection of the web of life has been a historical development of nonproductive orientations such as sado-masochism. The structural forces that feed a particular social character such as a sado-masochism reveals the sickness of a related but deeply estranged social dynamic, as a result stagnation takes place which reveals pathological reactions to nonproductive forms of orienting an individual by larger social structures that mold general sado-masochistic tendencies.

Psychopathologies such as EN are fundamentally a problem of organisms which are crippled, cramped, or blocked in their process of unfolding their experience, this pertains to both human or more-than-human life, and of course affects them simultaneously. Andy Fisher notes that “the most essential feature of pathology is that it involves a frustrating of the life process.”²⁹³ Indeed, the frustrating source of pathologies that in effect appear as forms of neurosis like EN is a repression of life itself. Repression of this kind is the chronic destructive, block, or reversing of our world-bound energies or intentions; the contracting of ourselves against our own internally directed expansion into the world.²⁹⁴ Humanity has adapted to learn and intercept our intentions until it is an established habit, falling out of explicit awareness. Our urges and emotions persist latently in a cramped or dammed-up form, which colors our perceptions as they relentlessly push in the background. These perceptions are felt as reactions of pain, as an aura of frustration, agitation, dissatisfaction, fear, lack, incompleteness, anxiety, most notably eco-neurosis which permeates our world. Thus, our non-productive sado-masochistic character hardened by our

²⁹³ Fisher Andy 2002, 80.

²⁹⁴ Fisher Andy 2002, 80.

global capitalogenic order suppresses an integral component of our connection with the planet; our unconscious world-relations to a more-than-human embodiment of ourselves.

A Collective Ecological Unconscious (CEU): The Hidden Dialectical Activity of the Earth

The connective tissue from a biocultural character to the unconscious is repression. As I stated before, repression in this sense is a chronic destructive, block, or reversing of our world-bound energies. Therefore, the heart of a biocultural character is rooted in a collective ecological unconscious (CEU). The task here is to repurpose the humanist understanding of the unconscious and move towards a planetary, or ecological one. To erase the abstract barriers reinforced in Fromm's work I am dissecting the concept of the unconscious in the same way I did for the social character.

Before the advent of Freudian psychoanalysis, the concept of the unconscious did not have a systemic explanation. Indeed, the conversation of the unconscious was left to the poets and religious prophets. However, with Freud's development of psychoanalysis the discovery that there is a paradox that there are in human being purposes of which they know nothing, involuntary purposes, or unconscious ideas took root.²⁹⁵ Freudian psychoanalysis developed the science of the unconscious in mental life. In other words, that is the dynamic relation between the unconscious and conscious life is one of conflict. Therefore, Freud's understanding of the unconscious ran through repression. The unconscious is "the dynamically unconscious repressed."²⁹⁶ Repression is the key; the word is chosen to indicate a structure based on psychic struggle. The evidence for a repressed unconscious entails the conclusion that it is a phenomenon present in all human beings. As Brown exclaims "the psychopathological phenomena of everyday life, although trivial from a practical point of view, are theoretically important because

²⁹⁵ Brown O. Norman 1959, 4.

²⁹⁶ Brown O. Norman 1959, 5.

they show the intrusion of unconscious intentions into our everyday and supposedly normal behavior.”²⁹⁷ Likewise, Marcuse demonstrates that “The unconscious retains the objective of the defeated pleasure principle. Turned back by the external reality or even unable to reach it, the full force of the pleasure principle not only survives in the unconscious but also affects in manifold ways the very reality which has superseded the pleasure principle. The *return of the repressed* makes up the tabooed and subterranean history of civilization.”²⁹⁸ Consequently, all neurotic symptoms derive from a universally repressed unconscious and the exploration of this history reveals not just the secret of the individual, but also that of society. Freud’s individual psychology is in its very essence, as Marcuse realized, a social psychology.

Moreover, the social, or collective dimension of the unconscious crystallized in the collective unconscious of Carl Jung. Jung recognized that instincts have a universal element. Consequently, Jung marries the instinctual drives to his theoretical development of the archetypes. Jung muses that “Consequently, they form very close analogies to the archetypes, so close in fact, that there is good reason for supposing that the archetypes are the unconscious images of the instincts themselves, in other words, that they are patterns of instinctual behavior.”²⁹⁹ Archetypes, defined by Jung, are endless repetitions engraved in experiences into our psychic constitution, not in the form of images filled with content, but as forms without content, representing the possibility of a certain type of perception and action. The example Jung uses is as follows: “When a situation occurs which corresponds to a given archetype, that archetype becomes activated and a compulsiveness appears, which like an instinctual drive, gains its way against all reason and will, or else produces a conflict of pathological dimensions, that is to

²⁹⁷ Brown O. Norman 1959, 5.

²⁹⁸ Marcuse Herbert 1956, 16.

²⁹⁹ Jung G. Carl 1971, 61.

say, a neurosis.”³⁰⁰ The assertion, for Jung, is that our imagination, perception, and thinking are influenced by inborn and universally present formal elements.

Nevertheless, traditional Freudian psychoanalysis understood the phenomenon of the unconscious through the changes of the instincts to be the same as the changes of the mental apparatus in society.³⁰¹ Erich Fromm deviates from this doctrine of psychoanalytic theory. In Fromm’s theory characterology supplants instincts. Therefore, the unconscious is molded by the harnessed pattern of a social character. The social unconscious, to Fromm, is nothing less than the representation of the whole capacity of human experience. It quite literally is the representation of the whole human species, with all its potential for destruction and creation. This is a collective unconscious that posits the basis for the different answers which humanity can give to the paradoxical conflict of relatedness and separation.³⁰² The social unconscious is the reservoir of human existence that is, humanity in any society has all its potentialities within itself. Put simply, the social unconscious is the reservoir of human existence, that is, humanity in any society is psychologically equipped with all its potential capacity of energy inside itself. This means that the social and individual psyche are both married to one another and in constant interaction. The task for Fromm is to become aware of one’s unconscious is an activity to touch one’s full humanity and to temporarily do away with barriers which society erects within each person, and consequently, between each person to their fellow persons. What matters is not so much the content of what is repressed, but the state of mind and the degree of awareness in the individual.

³⁰⁰ Jung G. Carl 1971, 67.

³⁰¹ Marcuse Herbert 1956, 11.

³⁰² Fromm Erich 1962, 128.

Fromm's work clearly demonstrates an anthropocentric limitation toward the unconscious. One of his most important passages referred in *Beyond the Chains of Illusions* simultaneously shows his anthropocentric flaw and an implicit ecological realization; that impasse is located here:

The universal in humanity's unconsciousness also represents the plant in him, the animal in him, the spirit in him; it represents his past, down to the dawn of human existence, and it represents his future up to the day when man will have become fully human, and when nature will be humanized as man will be 'naturalized'.³⁰³

In this sense, Fromm's attempt at representing nature is mediated through this idea of being 'fully human.' It is a clear expression that Fromm's framing is anthropocentric in level of importance with our relationship to nature. However, there are crumbs here that display Fromm's attempt at transcending his own theoretical limitations. Within this same quote the meaning that humanity contains the potential to sense the "oneness with all life" is buried deep in his bias but, it can easily be extrapolated if careful.³⁰⁴ I am arguing that Fromm's radical interpretation is an experience of solidarity with all of life, not just humanity. The mechanism of the psyche (i.e., unconscious) is the portal that communicates through and between macro and micro-organizations in the web of life. Macro-scale manifestation is constituted by human individual action, social structures, and ecological activity. On the other end, micro scale phenomena denote flora, microbiomes, and single-cell organisms. I consider the interactive adaptations of both macro and micro-organizations as biocultural processes, based on the body of work on biocultural theory, in simple terms this just means that the combination of biological and cultural factors affects human experience and behavior.³⁰⁵ This dynamic is what I call a collective

³⁰³ Excerpt from *Beyond the Chains of Illusions* via Gunderson Ryan 2014, 197.

³⁰⁴ Gunderson Ryan 2014, 197.

³⁰⁵ Human behavior is not just the product of culture, and it is not just the product of biology, either. Human behavior and human culture emerge from a complex interaction between genetic dispositions and environmental

ecological unconscious (CEU). Before I begin to unpack the contents of a CEU, I must first interrogate the similarity to a concept written much earlier than mine, namely Roszak's ecological unconscious.

Theodore Roszak, a cultural theorist, and early eco-psychologist attempted a formulation like what I wish to develop in a CEU. Roszak coined the term "ecological unconscious."³⁰⁶ The ecological unconscious is rooted in Jung's collective unconscious. Roszak locates the most influential elements of Jung in the archaic prehuman experience: "man's basic animal nature... is the most dangerous of all the archetypes."³⁰⁷ This is the material that coalesces into the Jungian archetype of the shadow; a constellation of unruly animal vitality. Keeping in mind that Jung's collective unconscious took an incorporeal and strictly cultural form. In other words, Jung considered the unconscious to be a repository of human artifacts such as art, culture, symbols, myths and stories above the primitive instincts of human evolution. This is different to Fromm since Roszak marries both the psyche and material reality with the mediating factor of the social character. Social character acts as the binding bridge between material conditions and cultural artifacts.

Closely related, Roszak did to Jung what I am doing to Fromm, he ecologized the unconscious; Roszak notes that "It might then be regarded as a repository of an evolutionary record that ties the psyche to the full sweep of cosmic history. Mind, far from being a belated and aberrant development in a universe of dead matter, connects with that universe as the latest emergent stage on its unfolding frontier."³⁰⁸ What Roszak proposed in his unique theory is that

circumstances. Those environmental circumstances range from physical aspects of the biosphere to imaginary cultural constructs.

³⁰⁶ Roszak Theodore 1992, 304.

³⁰⁷ Roszak Theodore 1992, 302.

³⁰⁸ Roszak Theodore 1992, 303.

the collective unconscious, at its deepest level, shelters the compacted ecological intelligence of the human species, the source from which culture finally unfolds as the self-conscious reflection of nature's own steadily emergent mind likeness. Roszak clearly demonstrates that the life-creating and life enhancing potentiality of our planet grants access to the human species through the door of the psyche.

The point of connection between Roszak and myself is that one cannot speak of an unconscious without recognizing the life-creating and life enhancing ecological pattern of the planet, which exists in a collective ecological unconscious (CEU). However, Roszak's belief that the ecological unconscious is a "repository of the living record of cosmic evolution, [to] which we need open access" is not dialectical.³⁰⁹ Rather, the CEU as I define it is in context a flow of energetic relations. Life, all of life is the locus of a countervailing tendency toward form and the sustenance of form is in a struggle against separation. Hence what exists also defines itself in relation to separation. Just as Kovel determines "An adequate vision of nature must therefore include the presence of self-organizing potentials."³¹⁰ Notwithstanding, that this is not an argument for "vitalism," since self-organizing potential do not signify the presence of life everywhere in nature. They do signify, however, the potential toward life somewhere in nature, and as it must also be, consciousness at a further stage of realization. This means, humans may not relate with the web of life in the way that animals or plants do, but we are not separate from the flow of energetic relations or struggle that determine the tendency toward form and the sustenance of form.

As I stated in my first chapter, the paradox of relatedness and separation is the ontological foundation of the web of life. The push and pull dynamic of relation and separation is

³⁰⁹ Roszak Theodore 1992, 320.

³¹⁰ Kovel Joel 2011, 10.

a planetary force that interacts with all life, not just an exclusively human event. The mechanism of the CEU is the portal that communicates through and between macro and micro-organizations in the web of life. Individual human action, social structures, and ecological activity constitute macro-scale manifestation. Conversely, micro-scale phenomena denote flora, microbiomes, and single-cell organisms. I consider the interactive adaptations of both macro and micro-organizations as biocultural processes.³¹¹ The Earth communicates through energetic relations to the human species by the channel of the CEU. This is the point of a CEU. A CEU is ubiquitous and much older than human society. For example, indigenous societies did not have distinctions for a separate domain known as nature since those categories were unrecognizable and unthinkable. To what Andy Fisher refers to as “the society of nature” it was simply an undifferentiated whole where a socialized natural world is one in which more-than-human beings are perceived as persons or kin.³¹² The term cosmologies are essential here since epistemological differences exist/ed from non-Western societies; more importantly, while not all societies developed evenly and simultaneously, some perceived nature as one integrated understanding.

However, the separation that has allowed for the possibility of its naming and separation where the familiar words of Nature, Society, and Culture all assumed their present-day meanings appeared in the century or so after 1550.³¹³ This was a violent period of separation, an era characterized by – in the words of Moore — “brutal colonization in Ireland and the Americas, murderous witch hunts and the violent regulation of female bodies, the first great boom of the

³¹¹ Human behavior is not just the product of culture, and it is not just the product of biology, either. Human behavior and human culture emerge from a complex interaction between genetic dispositions and environmental circumstances. Those environmental circumstances range from physical aspects of the biosphere to imaginary cultural constructs.

³¹² “the society of nature,” as developed among ecological anthropologists (Descola & Pa’lsson, 1996). This notion refers to the lack of a Society/Nature divide in those cultures studied by anthropologists in which the entire natural world is experienced as a social field.

³¹³ Moore W. Jason 2018, 188.

African slave trade, the neocolonial subordination of Poland, interminable warfare, the continental-scale reorganization of Andean life and work, rapid deforestation from Brazil to the Baltic, and the vigorous spread of sugar plantations across the Western Hemisphere.”³¹⁴ It was no coincidence that the concept of Civil Society emerged with capitalism to draw a symbolic dividing line between the reality of European property-owning classes and that of the rest of the world.

Presently, globalized capitalism generates dangerous abstractions that promote the cheapening of what capitalism refuses not to pay back. These abstractions created an imaginary of one life world separated into two distinct dimensions (i.e., human and more-than-human). Then that tension produced a maladaptive psychological effect identified as neurosis and its variations such as EN. Consequently, that tension allows for the possibility of awareness into the CEU. By having a greater increase in awareness of the CEU the greater the possibility of both individual and collective healing to take place. Separation of both worlds from one psyche demonstrates the double-edged directionality that awareness can move. One direction is the sickness of EN, the other is the remedy toward transformative visions. The following model demonstrates this historical process that eventually points to a moment of apparent tension (i.e., capitalogenic effects) as it unfolds in discovering a CEU.

³¹⁴ Moore W. Jason 2018, 189.

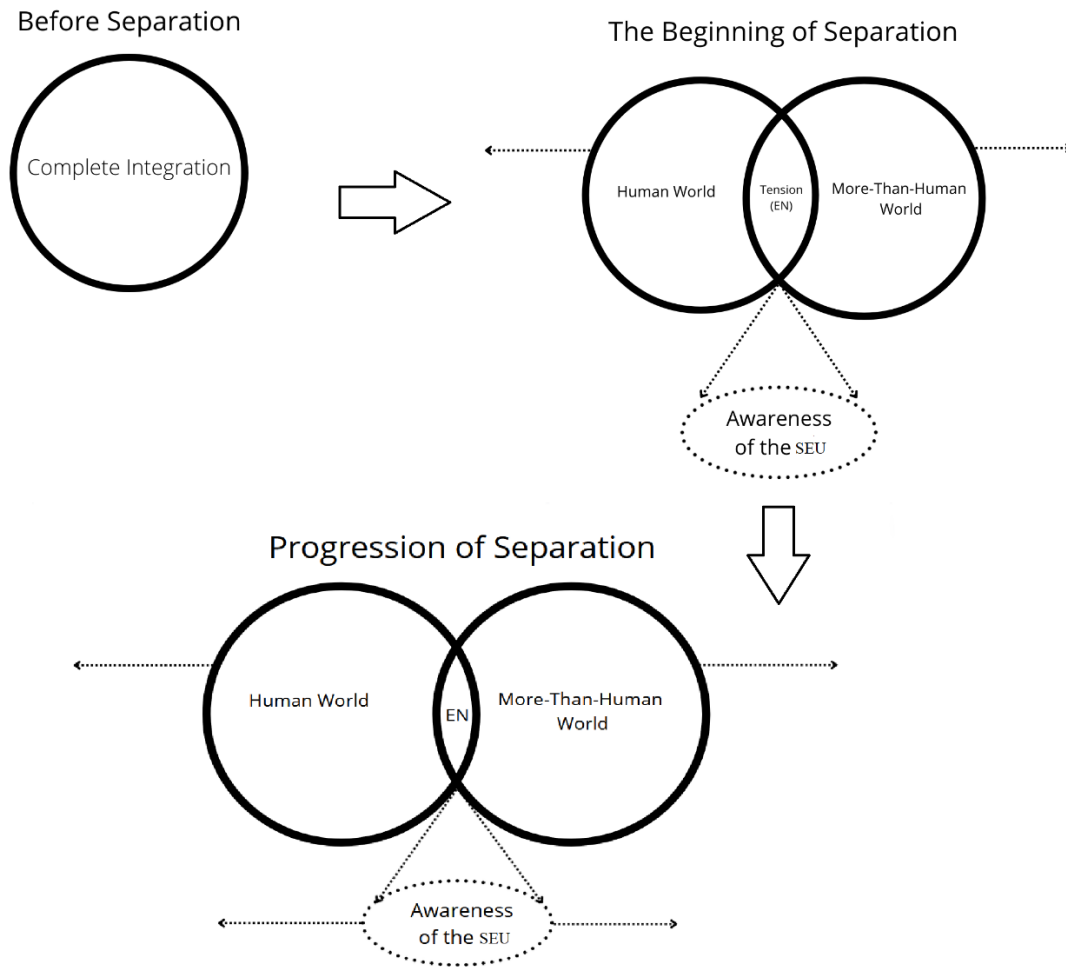


Figure 1: Separation of Human and More-Than-Human World and the Resulting Awareness of the Collective Ecological Unconscious. Separation Also leads to Tension as Eco-neurosis.

Now, humanity deprived by the machinations of globalized capitalism is waking up but frustrated and helpless on what to do for the planet; these actions have painful *reactions*.³¹⁵ Those reactions are agonizing to maintain, as the psychoanalytic saying goes, repression hurts; that pain is called neurosis. In this case, the current expression of pain is EN. EN is thus the byproduct of a collective intensified pressure from the push and pull of relation and separation at the level of

³¹⁵ This is following the logic of Fromm's theory that adaptations that run counter to human flourishing have pathological effects.

human experience. For humanity the structural (i.e., capitalogenic) effort to deliberately intercept our bodily intentions comes forth and remains jammed within the sphere of the body, so that there is a jam instead of a flow. Overtime, sectors of human life learn to intercept our intentions until it becomes habit, falling out of explicit awareness, that has been a political development.³¹⁶ Our planetary intentions persist only in a cramped or dammed fashion. They are felt as an experiential ground of pain, as an aura of frustration, agitation, passivity, and incompleteness, which permeates our planet.

A collective ecological unconscious (CEU) is an artifact of repression of life itself; it is symbol of repression in the web of life. What is shutoff in experience from the CEU are the world-relations that are interrupted, unexpressed, not mirrored, unconsummated, or concealed. Repression of this fashion, the blocking of our original intentions toward the web of life, also interrupts our healing intentions. If proper healing is not allowed to take place, then the hurt transforms itself into resentment and hatred. The incomplete anger festers, grows corrosive or hostile, it then gets channeled as an unconscious habit. The further we repress and deny the web of life, the further a CEU is unwarily channeled into all the crimes and acts of violence humans commit against – including more-than-human life – themselves.³¹⁷

Eventually, these strong emotions that have no space to heal transmogrify into a biocultural maladaptive character: Sado-masochism. A sado-masochistic orientation is used and manipulated by global capitalist apparatuses to endlessly reproduce itself, at the expense of all life. The categorical principle of capitalogenic activity in the web of life is to separate humanity as much as possible from the sources of generative living. At a human level this, of course, means that global capitalism structures day-to-day human life including family, work, and

³¹⁶ Fisher Andy 2002, 80.

³¹⁷ Fisher Andy 2002, 81.

relation to the natural world as a sado-masochistic orientation. Translated ecologically a sado-masochistic relation values social standing to dead things (commodities) and deny it to living things (humans and more-than-human life). As Fisher explains (via Ray Rodgers), “A world in which living things die to make a dead thing grow.”³¹⁸ Invoking here a world-ecology approach, capitalism is a ceaselessly expanding ecology of capital, power, and nature that develops entirely through the web of life, destructively circulating money through more-than-human life, and steadily remaking environments around the planet as it relentlessly pursues and exhausts new commodity spaces.³¹⁹

It is important to recognize, as Andy Fisher does, that an experiential conceptualization of what I associate to a repressed CEU differs significantly from a traditional psychoanalytic conception. Meaning, a CEU as a container for unwanted psychic contents.³²⁰ This fashioned conception is that it unintelligibly splits human experience and makes the CEU a separate domain of the mind within the mind. Instead, an experiential approach depicts a CEU as an intrinsic aspect of biocultural existence. In other words, in the mode of our world-entangled character vibrations. This means that there is an intense psycho-somatic experience to a CEU. In agreement with Fisher, a CEU is deeply associated with the life process, which our character vibrations are always the touchstone.³²¹

Mending the Separation: Offering Praxis for A New Sense of Hope

This chapter includes the thoughts of Erich Fromm, Jason Moore, and Andy Fisher in reconsidering EN through two important concepts: one, a maladaptive sado-masochistic character; two, a collective ecological unconscious. Throughout human and more-than-human

³¹⁸ Fisher Andy 2002, 84.

³¹⁹ Fisher Andy 2019, 148.

³²⁰ Fisher Andy 2002, 81.

³²¹ Fisher Andy 2002, 82.

history, there have been transitions of adaptations that have taken place. By which I mean such an adaptation to patterns that transforms the whole character structure of individuals and societies in latent ways; the abrupt change is repressed since it would be overwhelming to express it or even be aware of it. Though not manifest, the dynamic adaptation creates new neurosis, which may set up a vague defiance, directed against no one but rather toward life in general.³²² A society made up of individuals may adapt themselves to certain external conditions (e.g., climate change) this kind of adaptation creates something new in them, it arouses new forms of neurosis (e.g., eco-neurosis). Fromm's observation of this phenomenon led him to believe that "Every neurosis is an example of this dynamic adaptation; it is essentially an adaptation to such external conditions as are in themselves irrational and, generally speaking, unfavorable to the growth and development of the human."³²³ Further, I also argued that understanding EN requires a recognition that environmental problems are deeply rooted in CEU forces (and vice versa) constituted by the pervading logic of global capitalism.

Lastly, my final chapter will discuss methods and blueprints to mend the long-established separation causing harm to both human and more-than-human life, favorable growth and development can exist. In other words, this form of repressed transformation is a dynamic factor that may change a person's neurosis as "healthy" or "unhealthy" forms by changing the social and ecological factors around them. In chapter three, I deal with some critical sentiments: ways in which to suspend the stranglehold of our current illusion of a static, unchangeable reality and realize that reality is fungible, gooey, and manifold. In other words, intentional tactics for a profound shift and elevation in consciousness or what Fromm believes to be the affective experience of seeing, paraphrasing Fromm, and making the

³²² Fromm Erich 1941, 14.

³²³ Fromm Erich 1941, 14.

unconscious conscious out of the illusion of a concrete and unchangeable world. That is, demonstrating the possibility of a path that infused a sobering appeal for a renewed sense of hope in the ashes of a dying "reality."

CHAPTER 3

Mending the Separation – The Courage to Hope, Even If the Hour is Late

This chapter moves from reinterpreting eco-neurosis (EN) as a diagnosis of political development fashioned as a maladaptive sado-masochistic character and how that has changed the collective ecological unconscious (CEU). The abrupt change to the CEU is a transformation of repression to separation both in human and more-than-human life. The connecting thread among humans, more-than-human and EN is the psychic function deeply rooted in the CEU that is stressed and stretched by capitalogenic activity. Now, I move to collective and individual blueprints to mend the long-established separation causing harm to both human and more-than-human life. Favorable growth and development can exist within the CEU. In other words, this form of repressed transformation is a dynamic factor that may change a person's neurosis as "healthy" or "unhealthy" forms by changing the social and ecological factors around them.

The focus of this third chapter centers on timeless and present ways in which to move beyond – even temporary relief – from the stranglehold of our current illusion of a static, unchanging appearance and realize that reality is fungible, and manifold. In other words, intentional tactics for a profound shift and elevation in consciousness and in human action or, what Fromm believed, as making the unconscious conscious out of an illusion that paralyzes the flourishing of all life. I begin by embarking for a renewed sense of hope in a hopeless present day. Indeed, to mend the separation experienced as EN, contemporary humanity needs to shift its values of hope and possibility, beyond what our sick society is capable of offering.

In what follows, I will examine Fromm's method of solving the separation throughout his collection of works: I do this by focusing on his ethos of revolutionary hope; then to the juxtaposition of the "being" as opposed to the "having" mode of experience; afterward, I focus on the ethical orientation of biophilia, then I enumerate his humanistic activity-oriented alternative. Secondly, I provide an updated Frommian prescription in mending the separation in two dimensions: dimension one is a structural dimension that demonstrates changes to the current psycho-social order to reinvigorate an ethos for a flourishing of all life. The second dimension is agential and based on the experiential proximity of what a person can do immediately in the present. Both approaches work best when applied in tandem if we want to mend the separation experienced as EN; also, recognizing that moving beyond the logic and mentality of global capitalism is integral for healing individual/collective mental health and maintaining a planetary balance within the web of life.

Separation expressed as EN is the form of sublimation against psychological reactions from social conditions that function as an outlet from the constant overwhelming pressure from the pervasive culture of globalized capitalism and its effects. Fromm's perspective is soberly aware of the impacts of modern society in the West. Fromm posits, "We living people who want to live are becoming powerless, although we are, seemingly, omnipotent humans. We believe that we control, yet we are being controlled – not by a tyrant, but by things, by circumstances. We have become humans without will or aim."³²⁴ The new ethos of the 20th and now 21st century is separation, or as Fromm suggests "alienation." Capitalism is producing a new kind of inhumanity, a kind of indifference toward the world, toward life.

³²⁴ Fromm E., 1994, 26.

Fromm on the Revolution of Hope

As Fromm would remind us, hope is a decisive element in any attempt to bring about social change in the direction of greater aliveness, awareness, and reason.³²⁵ However, the nature of hope is misunderstood, especially in modern society, it is confused with the attitude plaguing contemporary humanity's psyche. The zeitgeist of hope in modern times is one of desires and wishes, particularly toward consumable things. For example, there exists a whole movement based on the law of attraction fashioned by books such as "The Secret" to manifest your heart's content if you only respond in a manner of forced positivity.³²⁶ Fromm suggests this is not hope; this is a form of non-hope, especially when it holds the quality of passiveness and "waiting for" until hope becomes, in fact, a cover for resignation.

Hope that is based on active participation is as Fromm states "paradoxical."³²⁷ Fromm defines hope to mean "to be ready at every moment for that which is not yet born, and yet not become desperate if there is no birth in our lifetime."³²⁸ Indeed, Fromm suggests that those whose hope is weak settle down for comfort or violence. On the other hand, those whose hope is strong, see and cherish all signs of new life and are ready every moment to help the birth of that which is ready to be born.³²⁹

Fromm's version of hope is an active state of being. Fromm specifically means activity toward life and growth and not activity in the sense of being busy by working or distracting yourself from your thoughts. Hope is an intrinsic element of the structure of life, of the dynamic of man's spirit.³³⁰ Indeed, aspects of hope are intricately linked to the idea of *faith*. Fromm

³²⁵ Fromm E., 1968, 6.

³²⁶ Byrne D., 2006.

³²⁷ Fromm E. 1968, 9.

³²⁸ Fromm E. 1968, 9.

³²⁹ Fromm E., Ibid.

³³⁰ Fromm E. 1968, 13.

defines faith as “the conviction about the not yet proven, the knowledge of the real possibility, the awareness of pregnancy.”³³¹ Faith, like hope, is not prediction of the future; it is the vision of the present in a state of potentiality. Faith, also like hope, is paradoxical, in that it is the certainty of uncertainty. In other words, Faith in the faculty of humanity of reason paired with imagination. Hope is the mood that accompanies faith. Faith could not exist without the mood of hope.³³²

There is another element linked to Fromm’s approach to hope. That is *Fortitude*, or courage. Fortitude is the capacity to resist the temptation to compromise hope and faith by transforming them into empty optimism or into irrational faith.³³³ The person who expresses courage requires a kind of fearlessness. The fearless person is not afraid of threats, not even of death.³³⁴ The best form of fearlessness is integral for a vision of overcoming separation; it lies in the person who has overcome greed and who does not cling to idols and hence has nothing to lose. Fromm notes “He can let go of idols, irrational desires, and fantasies, because he is in full touch with reality, inside and outside himself.”³³⁵ Indeed, this form of stoic activity of an “enlightened” person. These characteristics linked to hope are by their nature moving in the direction of transcending aspects of separation, transcending the status quo that reproduces separation individually and socially.

If these principles linked to hope appear to have tones of religiosity, that is because it does indeed, it contains roots of the Rabbinical and Talmudic influence. Fromm’s Jewish background and studies seeped into his own theoretical approach. Fromm believed “prophetic

³³¹ Fromm E. 1968, 14.

³³² Fromm E., 1968, 15.

³³³ Fromm E. 1968, 15.

³³⁴ Fromm E. 1968, *ibid.*

³³⁵ Fromm E. 1968, 16.

language is always the language of alternatives, of choice, and of freedom; it is never that of determinism for better or worse.”³³⁶ The emphasis on the prophetic interpretation found its expression in revolutionary and “heretical” sects; one can think of liberation theology here. Outside of the church the original Marxist socialism was the most significant expression of the messianic vision according to Fromm.³³⁷ Fromm recognizes, however, that certain Marxist sects made a mockery and corrupted the revolutionary and liberatory meaning.

However, Fromm is no fool. Hope has an element of disappointment. Many people, as Fromm suggests, react to the disappointment of their hopes by adjusting to the average optimism which hopes for the best without bothering to recognize that not even the good but perhaps, indeed, the worst can occur. They present the picture of a peculiar kind of resigned optimism which we see in so many members of Western contemporary society.³³⁸ So, what is required for Fromm’s kind of hope? It primarily requires a psycho-spiritual renewal. If individuals regain confidence in themselves, and if people contact each other in spontaneous and genuine group life, new forms of psycho-spiritual practices will emerge and grow which might be unified in a social system. Fromm emphasizes that the most important factor “is the awakening of compassion, love, the sense of justice and truth in response to the political, social and cultural situation of present-day industrial society, and the actions motivated by this awakening.”³³⁹ Indeed, the conditions for such an awakening is that humanity comes to life again and organizes society for the flourishing of life instead of instrumental separation.

³³⁶ Fromm E. 1968, 18.

³³⁷ Fromm E. 1968, 19.

³³⁸ Fromm E. 1968, 21.

³³⁹ Fromm E. 1968, 145.

The “Being” Over the “Having” Mode

In this section I will start with two important concepts in Fromm’s repertoire of thought. The being and the having mode. Both modes transform potential energy that shapes the collective psychology of societies and their individual members. The having mode is deeply accepted and rewarded in American, and indeed most of Earth’s societies today. The nature of the having mode of existence follows from the essence of private property and the obsession with ownership. In the having mode all that matters is the acquisition of property and unlimited right to keep what one has acquired.³⁴⁰ The having mode excludes others; it transforms everything and everyone into something dead and subject to another’s power. Speaking of having something constantly rests upon the illusion of a permanent and indestructible substance.³⁴¹ Fromm, further notes that in the having mode, there is no live relationship between oneself and what one supposedly “has”. The object and the subject have both become things. Additionally, there is also a reverse relationship: “it has me, because my sense of identity, i.e., of sanity, rests upon my having it.”³⁴²

The having mode of existence does not establish itself by an actual, productive process between subject and object; it makes things of both categories and reinforces a chronic form of separation. Society, through the family as its psychosocial agent, must solve a conundrum: how to break a person’s will without being aware of it? Nevertheless, Fromm recognizes that a complicated process of indoctrination, rewards, punishments, and fitting ideology solves this task so well that most people believe they are following their own will and are unaware that their will itself is strongly suggested and manipulated against its growth.³⁴³ The having mode of existence,

³⁴⁰ Fromm E. 1976, 77.

³⁴¹ Fromm E. 1976, 77.

³⁴² Fromm E. 1976, *ibid.*

³⁴³ Fromm E. 1976, 78.

the attitude centered on property and profit, necessarily produces the desire for power.³⁴⁴ The collective will of members in capitalist societies, need to reorient power to resist the established paradigm from controlling other living human beings and more-than-human life. To redirect control over private property, we need to use power to protect it from those who would use it against their own member race, because their yearning for greed can never have enough; the desire to have private property produces the wish to use violence to rob others in overt or covert ways.³⁴⁵ In the having mode, happiness appears as superiority over others, the power to subjugate, and in one's capacity to conquer, rob, kill.³⁴⁶ The having mode which celebrates and reinforces the rationalization of control as the status quo, intentionally and unintentionally, produces violent forms of separation in and outside of modern society.

Most members of capitalist society know more about the having mode than the mode of being, this is by design. The having orientation is by far the most frequently experienced mode in our current cultural soup. Having refers to the "thingification" of subjects and objects as lifeless and dead. Being refers to experience, and human experience is not easily describable.³⁴⁷ However, in the process of intercourse, which is mutual alive relatedness can one and the other overcome the barrier of separation. This is a lost art that is sorely lacking in our contemporary moment. The mode of being contains its prerequisites in independence, freedom, and the presence of critical reason.³⁴⁸ Its fundamental characteristic is that of intentional activity, more specifically inner activity. Or as Fromm explains "To be active means to give expression to one's faculties, talents, to the wealth of human gifts with which – thought in varying degrees – every

³⁴⁴ Power here refers to the actualization of energy whether for emancipatory or oppressive ends.

³⁴⁵ Fromm E. 1976, 81.

³⁴⁶ Fromm E. 1976, 81.

³⁴⁷ Fromm E. 1976, 87.

³⁴⁸ Fromm E. 1976, 88.

human being is endowed.”³⁴⁹ Indeed, intentional activity means to renew oneself, to grow, to flow out, to love, to transcend the prison of separation.

Relatedly, only to the extent that humans decrease the mode of having can the mode of being emerge. Being requires giving up one’s egocentricity and selfishness. Attempting to do this simple activity is difficult. Fromm recognizes that attempts to do so arouses intense anxiety and feels like giving up security and comforts, like being thrown into the ocean when one does not know how to swim.³⁵⁰ What holds most members of society back is the illusion that they cannot walk by themselves, that they would collapse if they were not supported by the things they have.

In contemporary society the having mode of existing is assumed to be rooted in human nature and, hence, unchangeable. In reality, this is little more than an expression of the wish to prove the value of our social arrangements. The truth is human beings have an inherent and deeply rooted desire for being.³⁵¹ The need to give and to share and the willingness to make sacrifices for others are still in existence today. Certain valued professions such as nurses, physicians, monks, and teachers exemplify the essence of the being mode even in our social organization that caters to the having mode.

Moreover, younger generations are another great example Fromm uses, he notes a pattern that they cannot stand the luxury of selfishness that surrounds them in their affluent families. Against the expectations of elders, who think their children have everything they would want, they rebel against the deadness and isolation of their lives. As Fromm notes “For the fact is, they do not have everything they wish, and they wish for what they do not have.”³⁵² The human desire to experience union with others is rooted in the specific conditions of existence that characterize

³⁴⁹ Fromm E. 1976, 88.

³⁵⁰ Fromm E. 1976, 89.

³⁵¹ Fromm E. 1976, 102.

³⁵² Fromm E. 1976, 103.

the human species and is one of the strongest motivators of human behavior. Fromm iterates that the combination of minimal instinctive determination and maximal development of the capacity for reason, human beings have lost our original oneness with nature. And thus, new forms of unity with ourselves is needed such as the ties to mother, an idol, one's tribe, nation, class, religion, fraternity, professional associations.³⁵³

Human experience is plastic and flexible and is full of exceptions. Exceptions are opening for imagining new forms of changing oneself and society. Indeed, for the modern Western member it is hard to experience enjoyment separate from having. However, it does not mean that this is always a necessary condition. Fromm suggests that the human spirit can change to a predominant being mode of existence if these conditions exist: 1. We are suffering and are aware that we are. 2. We recognize the origin of our ill-being. 3. We recognize that there is a way of overcoming our ill-being. 4. We accept that to overcome our ill-being we must follow certain norms for living and change our present practice of life.³⁵⁴ Additionally, many psychologists and psychoanalysts seem to think that, by itself, insight of a form of separation has a curative effect. Indeed, sometimes that may be the case for a cure. However, Fromm believes anything long lasting cannot be cured by persons who suffer from a general ill-being and for whom a change in spirit is necessary.³⁵⁵ For example, one can analyze the dependency of individuals all they want, but all the insights gained will accomplish nothing while they stay in the same practical situation they were living in before arriving at these insights.

Simultaneously, from individual changes in human spirit, there must also exist fundamental structural social changes. New social forms that will be the basis of being will not

³⁵³ Fromm E. 1976, 105.

³⁵⁴ Fromm E. 1976, 168.

³⁵⁵ Fromm E. 1976, 170.

arise without many designs, models, studies, and experiments that begin to bridge the gap between what is necessary and what is possible. This will amount to large-scale, long-run planning and to short-term proposals for first steps. The problem is the will and the human spirit of those who work on them, but the importance of a vision and what can be done in a concrete way breeds encouragement and enthusiasm instead of fear and isolation.³⁵⁶ The important values of a new society is based on a model that requires the opposite of separation; meaning a deep solidarity for all of humanity – in conjunction with the more-than-human – and a being oriented individual.³⁵⁷

Truly, the function of the new society is to encourage the emergence of a new benevolent model and lifestyle. The being oriented person would exhibit various important qualities, I will just mention here the most relevant and critical traits: 1. Willingness to give up all forms of having, to be. 2. Security, sense of identity, and confidence based on faith in what one is, on one's need for relatedness, interest, love, solidarity with the world around one, instead of on one's desire to have, to possess, to control the world, and thus be a slave of property. 3. Acceptance of the fact that nobody and nothing outside oneself gives meaning to life, but that this radical independence and no-thingness can become the condition for the fullest activity devoted to caring and sharing. 4. Being fully present where one is. 5. Love and respect for life in all its manifestations, in the knowledge that not things, power, all that is dead, but life and everything that pertains to its growth is sacred. 6. Sensing one's oneness with all life, hence giving up the aim of conquering nature, subduing it, exploiting it, raping it, destroying it, but trying, rather, to understand and cooperate with nature. And 7. Happiness in the process of ever-

³⁵⁶ Fromm E. 1976, 175-176.

³⁵⁷ Fromm E. 1976, 176.

growing aliveness, whatever the furthest point is that fate permits one to reach, for living as fully as one can is too satisfactory that the concern for what one might or might not attain has little chance to develop.³⁵⁸

Biophilia: A Love of Life as An Ethical Imperative

Another important concept of Fromm's orientation is *biophilia* which compliments the being mode. Biophilia in its elementary understanding is the love for life in contrast to the love for death. Biophilia is not constituted by a single trait, but represents a total orientation, an entire way of being.³⁵⁹ Biophilia is the ethical character orientation of the being mode. It is manifested in a person's bodily processes, in their emotions, in their thoughts, and gestures. The most elementary form of this orientation is expressed in the tendency of all living organisms to live. Fromm notes that the biophilious orientation is a characteristic of all living substances, he states that, "we observe this tendency to live in all living substances around us; in the grass that breaks through the stones to get light and to live; in the animal that will fight to the last in order to escape death; in man who will do almost anything to preserve his life."³⁶⁰

Inasmuch as biophilia is a tendency to preserve life and to fight against death, it also represents another aspect of the drive toward life. The second aspect is a more positive connotation: living substances also have the tendency to integrate and to unite; they tend to fuse with different and opposite entities and grow in a structural way. Fromm shows that unification and integrated growth are characteristic of all life processes, not only as far as cells are concerned, but also regarding feeling and thinking.³⁶¹ The full expression of biophilia is found in the orientation of being itself. For example, the person who fully loves life is attracted by the

³⁵⁸ Fromm E. 1976, 171-172.

³⁵⁹ Fromm E. 1964. 45.

³⁶⁰ Fromm E. 1964, 45.

³⁶¹ Fromm E. 1964, 46.

process of life and growth in all spheres. The preference is toward construction rather than to retain or control. There is a tendency for wonder, and they prefer to see something new to the security of finding confirmation of the old. They love the adventure of living over certainty. Their approach to life is functional rather than mechanical. They wish to mold and influence by love, reason not by force, by cutting things apart or by the bureaucratic manner of administering people as if they were things.³⁶²

I mentioned earlier that biophilia is the ethical orientation of being, and to that extent Fromm recognizes that a biophilic ethic has its own principle of “good” and “evil”. As Fromm notes “good is all that serves life; evil is all that serves death. Good is reverence for life, all that enhances life, growth, unfolding.”³⁶³ The conscience of the biophilious person is not one of forcing oneself to refrain from evil and to do good. It is different from Freud’s idea of the superego, which is a strict supervisor, employing sadism against oneself for the sake of virtue. In fact, it is quite the opposite: the biophilious conscience is motivated by its attraction to life and joy; moral effort consists in strengthening the life-loving side of oneself.

The biophilious orientation is a response to its organic opposite that of the necrophilous direction. Necrophilia constitutes a fundamental orientation; it is the one answer to life which is in complete opposition to life; it is the most morbid and the most dangerous among the orientations.³⁶⁴ Necrophilia is the best example of a true perversion for Fromm: “while being alive, not life but death is loved; not growth but destruction. It is closely tied to the having mode of being most of all. The necrophilous orientation for Fromm is a malignant phenomenon. So

³⁶² Fromm E. 1964, 47.

³⁶³ Fromm E. 1964, 47.

³⁶⁴ Fromm E. 1964, 45.

much so, that necrophilia represents a distorted psychological orientation, and it is not a part of normal biology.³⁶⁵

The contradiction between biophilia and necrophilia is not what Freud traditionally understood as two biologically inherent instincts, relatively constant and always in conflict with each other. No, instead it is one between the primary and most fundamental tendency of life – to preserve in life – and its contradiction, which comes into being when humanity fails in this goal.³⁶⁶ Biophilia constitutes the primary potential for humanity; necrophilia is a secondary potential. The primary potential develops if the appropriate conditions for life are present. If the proper conditions are not present, there is increased prevalence of necrophilous tendencies that can emerge and dominate members of society. What are the conditions that foster either orientation? To that question Fromm only had a limited answer, one based on his own psychoanalytic observations in groups and his own inferences.³⁶⁷

However, Fromm determines that the most important condition for the development of the love of life in infancy is to be with people who love life. Love of life is just as contagious as love of death. It communicates itself without words, explanations, and without preaching. It is expressed in gestures more than ideas, in the tone of someone's voice more than in words. In practice it looks like warm, affectionate contact with others, freedom, and absence of threat; teaching by example of the principles conducive to inner harmony and strength; guidance in the art of living; stimulating influence of and response to others; a way of life that is genuinely interesting and worldly.³⁶⁸

³⁶⁵ Fromm E. 1964, 50.

³⁶⁶ Fromm E. 1964, 50.

³⁶⁷ Fromm E. 1964, 51.

³⁶⁸ Fromm E. 1964, 51.

Further, the social conditions for a biophilious life begin with a situation of abundance over artificial scarcity, both economically and psychologically. It is fostered with a form of social security in the sense that the basic material conditions for a dignified life are not threatened, also a sense of justice in the sense that nobody can be an end for the purpose of another, and lastly, freedom in the sense that there must be freedom “to”; freedom to create and construct, to wonder to venture. In a sense, each human being has the possibility to be an active and responsible member of society through their own volition.³⁶⁹

Unfortunately, 20th and now 21st century society is based not on the love of life, but on the love of things. We are reaching a society closer to a technocratic dystopia like the cinematic depictions of the film *Elysium* (2013) than one based on growth and the respect of all life. Our main social aim is to produce profits, and in the process of this separation humans transform themselves into commodities of this larger system in the pursuit of profit. People and all of life are treated as numbers. People have more of a relationship with technological tools like our handheld devices than the care for living beings. As Fromm explains, “Indeed, the bureaucratic-industrial civilization which has been victorious in Europe and north America has created a new type of man; he can be described as the organization man, as the automaton man, and as homo consumens.”³⁷⁰ People who live in such a social system become indifferent to life and even attracted to death. They are not aware of this. These are features that cater toward a necrophilous orientation.

³⁶⁹ Fromm E. 1964, 52.

³⁷⁰ Fromm E. 1964, 57.

The Humanistic Vision: A Participatory Alternative

As scary as our current reality may be, the importance of establishing a biophilic ethic and a mode of being based on growth and creativity is important to fight off the narrative of doom and gloom. Now that the qualities of being and the biophilic ethic have been fleshed out, I can now turn to Fromm's importance of changing current destructive social forms into more benevolent forms. The humanistic vision of a participatory alternative begins with individual awareness. As Fromm states "to be aware means to wake up to something that one has felt or sensed without thinking it, and yet that one feels one has always known."³⁷¹ Indeed, this activity is an inner process that has a vitalizing and energizing effect, precisely because it is an active experience. Moreover, becoming aware is not enough. The awareness itself must refer to the system as a whole, and not to isolated and fractioned features. It is vital to become aware of structures that produce symptoms of separation and neurosis; to be aware that nothing is achieved if one fights isolated symptoms, but, rather, that one must change the political and economic systems in which the illness is rooted.³⁷²

Therefore, it is necessary to channel a raised awareness that the system dehumanizes members, and that human beings are no longer in the driver seat of technology and rationality, but instead ruled by our material and intellectual tools. Eventually, Fromm says, people must become aware that this system functions only with their consent and help, and that if they want to change it, it can be changed if democratic processes exist.³⁷³

Moreover, it is also not enough for people to become aware of the systemic problems. They must see alternatives for adequate actions. A potential alternative, according to Fromm, lies

³⁷¹ Fromm E. 1994, 54.

³⁷² Fromm E. 1994, 55.

³⁷³ Fromm E. 1994, 55.

in the field of social organization of a radical humanist economy.³⁷⁴ A radical humanist economy enumerates various measures such as decentralization, self-management, individual responsible activity in all fields; this means a rejection of expropriation of property, but control of its administration guided by the principles of the optimum value for human development.³⁷⁵ These measures are attainable through legislation and constitutional amendments in the case of the United States (US), as an example.

Further, a radical humanist economy would demand that each member of a large industrial or other organization plays an active role in the life of the organization; that each member is fully informed and participates in decision-making, starting at the level of the individual's own work process, health and safety measures, and eventually participating in decision-making at higher, general policy levels of enterprises.³⁷⁶ Essentially, Fromm is advocating for worker owned cooperatives recognizing that industry and economic activity is a social institution in whose life and manner of functioning every member becomes active and interested. One suggestion that Fromm mentions is that hundreds of thousands of face-to-face groups be created, to constitute themselves as permanent bodies of deliberation and decision-making regarding basic problems in the field of economics, foreign policy, health, education, and the means to well-being.³⁷⁷

Relatedly, Fromm calls for a multi-step approach based on using the state but also education of best practices that gradually hold as a good habit. One effective example that Fromm mentions is sane consumption.³⁷⁸ Fromm explains that “citizens can demonstrate the

³⁷⁴ Fromm E. 1994, 56.

³⁷⁵ Fromm E. 1994, 56.

³⁷⁶ Fromm E. 1976, 181.

³⁷⁷ Fromm E. 1976, 182.

³⁷⁸ Fromm E. 1976, 178.

power of the consumer by building a militant consumer movement that will use the threat of ‘consumer strikes’ as a weapon.”³⁷⁹ The great advantage of consumer strikes is that they do not require government action, they are difficult to stop and combat, and that there would be no need to wait for the accord of 51 percent of the population to bring enforcement by government measures. Indeed, a 20 percent minority could be effective in inducing change. The extremist conservative right in the US is effectively employing these tactics, for nefarious and Necrophilic purposes.

Government functions must not be delegated to states either, but to counties and districts where people can still know and judge each other and hence actively participate in the administration of their own community affairs. This also means eradicating the use of bureaucratic management. The bureaucratic spirit is incompatible with the spirit of active participation by individual members.³⁸⁰ A non-bureaucratic administration is possible provided we consider the potential spontaneity of response in the administrator and do not make a fetish of economizing.

The success of establishing a society of being depends on many other measures. Fromm notes, that in offering suggestions he makes no claim to originality and is elated that all suggestions he touches upon are based on many other humanist writers. With that said, here are the suggestions Fromm highlights for a being oriented society: 1. All brainwashing methods in industrial and political advertising be prohibited. 2. The gap between the rich and the poor nations must be closed. 3. Many of the evils of present-day capitalist societies would disappear with the introduction of a universal basic income. 4. Women must be liberated from patriarchal

³⁷⁹ Fromm E. 1976, 179.

³⁸⁰ Fromm E. 1976, 187.

domination. 5. A cultural council, charged with the task of advising the government, the politicians, and the citizens on all matters in which knowledge is necessary, should be established. 6. A system of effective dissemination of information must also be established. And 7. Scientific research must be separated from application in industry and defense.³⁸¹

Considering the power of corporations, the apathy and powerlessness of large swath of Western society, the increase of depression, anxiety and loneliness, the inadequacy of political leaders in many countries, the threat of ongoing ecological devastation, and now neurosis that derive from said ecological catastrophe, the question must be asked: is there a chance to develop a being society? One vital sign of a possible shift exists in the increasing dissatisfaction with our present social world, especially among our younger generations and those of the Global South. They sense their depression; they are conscious of it, in spite of all kinds of efforts to repress it. They feel the unhappiness of their isolation and the emptiness of their lives. Many people feel all this very clearly and consciously; others feel it less clearly but are fully aware of it when someone else puts it into words.³⁸²

This section demonstrated the Frommian possibility of hope and imagination, even if there are no guarantees for a better world. Fromm's diagnosis is sober and self-aware of the various structural impediments for a better world. Simultaneously, Fromm recognizes the impetus for an increase in imagination and for what is possible in a social order that desires acquiescence and passivity. In the next section, I will further develop Fromm's formula for an

³⁸¹ Fromm E. 1976, 187 – 196.

³⁸² The United States Surgeon General i.e., Vivek Murphy notes that, "People began to tell me they felt isolated, invisible, and insignificant. Even when they couldn't put their finger on the word "lonely," repeatedly, people of all ages and socioeconomic backgrounds, from every corner of the country, would tell me, "I have to shoulder all of life's burdens by myself," or "if I disappear tomorrow, no one will even notice." ("Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation," n.d.)

increased imagination: both for a structural and agential potentiality and possibility of how to engage in a globalized society with so many problems.

The Psycho-social Order: A Structural Dimension

This section provides a more contemporary and updated ethos of a Frommian prescription to mend the deep chasm that has developed up to the present moment. If the present order of things appeared bleak when Fromm detected the problem of modern capitalism and the tools it used to maintain itself. Well, things have devolved into further murkier territory. The purpose of this next section is to discuss the two most important dimensions: The structural and agential. I will be demonstrating possible prescriptions for the current psycho-social order to reinvigorate an ethos for a flourishing of all life in a biophilic direction. I will be discussing the structural and agential dimensions separately, but they are deeply interrelated and are to be understood as two sides to the same coin. It is imperative that we recognized the source of the problem today in the year 2023 and promote a blueprint beyond the logic and mentality of global capitalism. The planet hangs in the balance of the choices humans make from here on out. The web of life should serve life, not as it currently stands serving the vapid habit of a system in the pursuit of profit at all costs.

Franco ‘Bifo’ Berardi notes in his work *The Third Unconscious* that the current configuration of the social regime has led to a new psychopathological regime. That regime, Bifo explains, is characterized as the age of panic, depression and, ultimately psychosis.³⁸³ Indeed, the diagnostic psychopathology of global capitalism is marked by anxiety, attention disorders and panic. Bifo points out that a conversation of measuring economic growth does not equate to social satisfaction. Hence the psycho-social order of anxiety and neurosis. On the contrary, and

³⁸³ Berardi Franco 2021, IX.

in agreement with Fromm, social satisfaction depends on the distribution of wealth and in the balance of cultural expectations and availability of physical and symbolic goods.³⁸⁴

The contemporary neoliberal model of global capitalism expects perpetual infinite expansion of profits. However, this logic produces social externalities presented as stark inequalities. Additionally, the more inequality rises, the more the economy is doomed to stagnate. Under these conditions, the only way to achieve growth is to financially plunder the declining resources of society and to destroy the wealth that was built in the past as in the dismissal of infrastructures, the dismantling of public education, public health, and public transportation. Among Global North countries the damning example is the United States.³⁸⁵ Moreover, the further advancement of technology has rendered a contemporary contradiction: while technology has advanced and enhanced the productivity of work, the improvement has provoked an impoverishment of workers. The effect of technology demonstrates that a possible solution would be a reduction of work time without reduction of wages. However, as Berardi strikingly points out this is unthinkable in the neoliberal model. In fact, the opposite is true, wages go down, economic demand languishes, inflation takes place, and depression looms on the horizon.³⁸⁶

Consequently, all these externalities have social-psychological-ecological repercussions. Or to invoke Fromm, *reactions* not just in social worries, but in the web of life. One such recent example is the manifestations of 2020 and 2021. Bifo names this contemporary moment “The American insurrection during the Covid lockdowns.”³⁸⁷ The American uprising was sparked by

³⁸⁴ Berardi Franco 2021, 136.

³⁸⁵ Berardi Franco 2021, 137.

³⁸⁶ Berardi Franco 2021, 137.

³⁸⁷ Berardi Franco 2021, 145.

the public execution of George Floyd. Millions of Americans took to the streets shouting and claiming that “Our mental balance is in danger. If we do not react to intolerable acts of violence and humiliation like the atrocious public execution, we are going to enter a tunnel of eternal depression; we will be swamped by a suicidal wave.”³⁸⁸ The stakes of this reaction were political but also psychological. The response to this moment is, as Berardi advocates, permanent insurrection as the only way to breathe, the only way to avoid a deep psychological neurosis in the coming years. The only way to escape the deep chasm of established separation is social autonomy, economic egalitarianism, and a common act of rebellion.³⁸⁹ A contemporary blueprint to overcome separation may look something like deploying the force of techno-cultural sabotage, and a frugal egalitarian culture. Not, as Berardi notes, useless goods to ingest, but more time to enjoy with our friends, our loved ones: i.e., frugality.³⁹⁰

Further, one specific structural externality I aim to focus on is also ecological degradation caused by global capitalism. Nancy Fraser in *Cannibal Capitalism* succinctly recognizes the multi-faceted ecological crisis. An epochal crisis: a crisis of ecology, but also one of economy, society, politics, public health, and another, that I am pointing out, mental health. Meaning, a general crisis whose effects metastasize everywhere.³⁹¹ Fraser gathers that the result is a crisis of hegemony. Therefore, ecopolitics no longer is the exclusive zone of stand-alone environmental movements, climate change now appears as a pressing matter on which every political actor must take a stand.

What is a possible course of action? Well, Fraser believes that safeguarding the fragility of our biosphere and planet requires building a counterhegemonic movement. As Fraser states,

³⁸⁸ Berardi Franco 2021, 146.

³⁸⁹ Berardi Franco 2021, 148.

³⁹⁰ Berardi Franco 2021, 149.

³⁹¹ Fraser Nancy 2022, 77.

“What is needed in other words, is to resolve the present cacophony of opinion into an ecopolitical common sense that can orient a broadly shared project of transformation.”³⁹² The clothes for a counterhegemonic movement is anti-capitalist, which Fraser believes should become the central organizing motif of a new common sense. The finer details of this new form of thinking are based on what Fraser consider trans-environmental justice.³⁹³ These groups target the entwinements of ecological damage with one or more axes of domination meaning gender, race, ethnicity, and nationality to name a few. To this point, an anti-capitalist counterhegemony should overcome capitalism’s tendency to institute a zero-sum game, which takes away from more-than-human life, public power, and social reproduction that gives to production.

According to Fraser, Anti-capitalist life should install the nurturing of people, the safeguarding of more-than-human life, and democratic self-rule as society’s highest priorities, which trump efficiency and growth.³⁹⁴ Another important change is recognizing and working toward redrawing institutional boundaries. Additionally, changing the character makeup of and making the boundaries softer and more porous. Anti-capitalist society should engage in ‘redomaining’ meaning a redrawing of boundaries that demarcate societal arenas and deciding what to include within them.³⁹⁵ The aspect of redomaining focuses power to members of society and amongst those members decisions are made on which matters will be addressed and in which political arena.

Moreover, there is another process intricately important for anti-capitalism in the 21st century. Fraser calls it “pay as you go” that is this form of society must undertake to replenish,

³⁹² Fraser Nancy 2022, 77.

³⁹³ Fraser Nancy 2022, 110.

³⁹⁴ Fraser Nancy 2022, 152.

³⁹⁵ Fraser Nancy 2022, 153.

repair, or replace all the wealth it uses up in production and reproduction.³⁹⁶ One of the first things society must do is replenish work that produces use values (including care work that sustains people), in addition to work that produces commodities. Second, it must replace all the wealth it takes from “the outside” and marginalized peoples and societies as well as from more-than-human life. Further, an anti-capitalist society must democratize control over social surplus. Keeping in mind that surplus must be allocated democratically, via a collective decision-making on what to do with existing excess capacities and resources. Society then, must deinstitutionalize the growth imperative hardwired in more common capitalist society.³⁹⁷

The last significant blueprint of an anti-capitalist society for the 21st century is the role of markets. Fraser notes that “no markets at the top, no markets at the bottom, but possibly some markets in-between.”³⁹⁸ What Fraser means by the “top” is the allocation of social surplus. This means no private person, firm, or state can own it or have the right to dispose of it unilaterally. Surplus must be allocated via collective processes of decision making and planning done democratically. Market mechanisms should play no role in social surplus decisions. Same logic applies for the “bottom,” this encompasses shelter, clothing, food, education, health care, transportation, communication, energy, leisure, clean water, and breathable air.³⁹⁹ Interestingly enough, Fraser indicates that the use of a universal basic income (UBI) presents drawbacks since it treats basic needs as commodities, and she argues that society should treat needs for subsistence as publicly shared goods instead of commodities purchased through markets.

On the other hand, the markets may have a space to exist in anti-capitalist society. The “in-between” can be a space where markets co-exist along with cooperatives, commons, self-

³⁹⁶ Fraser Nancy 2022, 153.

³⁹⁷ Fraser Nancy 2022, 154.

³⁹⁸ Fraser Nancy 2022, 156.

³⁹⁹ Fraser Nancy 2022, 156.

organized associations, and self-managed projects.⁴⁰⁰ Once the top and bottom are socialized and decommodified, the function and role of markets in the middle would be transformed. An anti-capitalist, postcapitalist society — or what has traditionally been known as socialism — is a chance to demonstrate its relevance to a broad range of current concerns beyond traditional labor movements.⁴⁰¹

The point of Fraser’s conception of a 21st century socialism is not unfounded. This is not the socio-political satire of Thomas More’s “Utopia.” Fortunately, there are existing political movements who embody the values Fraser champions beyond capitalism. I am referencing here the ideas of Raj Patel and Jason W. Moore when they say that there are sharper tools for understanding our relation in the web of life, for example the international peasant movement La Via Campesina.⁴⁰² Many of its members understand the practices of agroecology and “an end to all forms of violence against women” but also the need for stability – access to credit, grain, storage, energy, and extension services, ways of bridging the city and the country. Another example is the Idle No More protests in Canada and the protests at Standing Rock in North Dakota, which are committed to decolonization and confronting the coloniality of power.⁴⁰³

The importance of elevating these movements is to demonstrate that communities are not just victims of capitalist separation, but they are also members of resistance and alternatives developing complex and systemic responses both with human and more-than-human collectives. Or as Moore muses “If we are made by capitalism’s ecology, we can be remade only as we in turn practice new ways of producing and caring for one another, a praxis of redoing, rethinking,

⁴⁰⁰ Fraser Nancy 2022, 156.

⁴⁰¹ Fraser Nancy 2022, 157.

⁴⁰² Patel Raj, Moore W. Jason 2017, 205.

⁴⁰³ Patel Raj, Moore W. Jason 2017, 206.

reliving our most basic relations.”⁴⁰⁴ Fraser, Patel, and Moore, are aware and demand changes to the current sickness of separation fashioned as global capitalism, and/or the Capitalocene.

For example, Patel and Moore promote a *reparation ecology*. They claim that using the concept of reparation as a way of remembering how capitalism’s ecology has made the world along with our capacity to think and act and of learning to interact with the web of life differently.⁴⁰⁵ The outline for their program is based and includes recognition, reparation, redistribution, reimagination, and recreation. First, the recognition they call for is institutional and systemic. This means recognizing that capitalism’s binary code works, not just as description but as a normative program for ordering and cheapening humans and more-than-human life.⁴⁰⁶

Secondly, reparations are an integral component of this program. Albeit Patel and Moore note that reparation is neither easy nor ever final. It is also important to keep in mind that states are not the only bodies culpable for damage and subsequent reparation. Corporations owe debts too. Additionally, understanding the full range of damage caused by global capitalism and on whom and what that damage is afflicted, requires not just money but the imagining of nonmonetary redistribution.⁴⁰⁷

Moore and Patel’s reparation ecology seeks more than just monetary compensation for generational injustice in the web of life. For example, they point out that in the case of patriarchy, the redistribution of domestic work is a central part of what they imagine, they also hope that such redistribution would include energy to warm and cool homes and food in a diet cleaved from its capitalist imperatives, with both governed by regimes of participatory democratic commons. To do that, you need places where humans can connect with more-than-

⁴⁰⁴ Patel Raj, Moore W. Jason 2017, 206.

⁴⁰⁵ Patel Raj, Moore W. Jason 2017, 207.

⁴⁰⁶ Patel Raj, Moore W. Jason 2017, 208.

⁴⁰⁷ Patel Raj, Moore W. Jason 2017, 209.

human life, zones of engagement where humans can daily renew their relationships with the web of life.⁴⁰⁸

This of course points to an acknowledgement of reimagination not just with the way we organize society but also with the web of life and our relationship to both domains that are intricately connected. To create more biophilious connections in the 21st century decolonizing the mind and spaces is imperative for this ethical character to flourish. In agreement with Moore and Patel they mention that there is a danger of this becoming the sort of enterprise that demands too much time on the therapist's couch. And as I have already mentioned in chapters past this is not to disparage the important psychological and psychoanalytic work that emerges from an engagement with the phenomenon of climate change (such as EN), but to recognize that it also belongs on shop floors, and in farms, offices, and classrooms. To reimagine our sense of self and organization is a personal and collective act of liberation.⁴⁰⁹ I believe that reparation ecology lends itself to a biophilious character ethic, that says rather than seeing work as drudgery, this reimagination offers joy, growth, and the love for life. A biophilious ethic informed by reparation ecology portrays an image of working and living spaces to be filled with equitable chances, equitable in the sense for regeneration and applicable for moments such as today, moments of deep imbalance and pervasive mental sickness.

What It Means to Be Alive: An Agential Perspective on Mending the Separation

Shifting gears now, I see no better way to set the tone of the agential perspective than to mention a bedfellow in the world of ideas to Fromm — Cornel West. Both Fromm and West come from a prophetic tradition that embraces hope in the face of catastrophe and speaks to the

⁴⁰⁸ Patel Raj, Moore W. Jason 2017, 210.

⁴⁰⁹ Patel Raj, Moore W. Jason 2017, 211.

experiential philosophy of being human in the web of life. On May 9th, 2011, a conversation happened late at Princeton University in Cornel West's office. This conversation was with Penn State University's philosophy professor Eduardo Mendieta. For this point in this chapter, this conversation approximates the heart of the agential orientation. The paradox is that human agency must navigate within a structure that stagnates and punishes liberatory tradition in cruel and messy ways, and yet salvage and engender thought and spaces that push against the same oppressive structures that impose on them.

In that respect, the words of Cornel West are refreshing and timely, especially in the age of globalized capitalism and a sense of dread and lack of enthusiasm for better days. West's orientation points to Fromm's work of hope in the 21st century; West models an intellectual cosmopolitanism that has become extremely rare in our days of fragmented and factious politics. I begin with West's idea of humanity; noting that the origin derives from the Latin word "humando," which means burial.⁴¹⁰ It is tied to humility to be on the earth, and yet tied to the earth by recognizing that no matter how smart, rich, and mighty humans become, there are forces beyond our control. One of those forces is the existential fact of death. It is the most fundamental humble fact of existence.

So, what sets of practice we, as agents of structures out of our control – climate change, global capitalism, etc. – can do to circumvent and channel traditions and practices not championed by current modalities of being influenced by the set order of our day? West details that humanity must cultivate maturity, which begins with the formation of attention.⁴¹¹ How is that achieved? It means humans must wrestle with what it means to be human; developing a set

⁴¹⁰ Mendieta E. 2017, 140.

⁴¹¹ Mendieta E. 2017, 141.

of practices that has to do with mustering the courage to think critically about us, society, and the world. More specifically, Brother West notes that it is a mustering of courage to empathize, the courage to love, the courage to have compassion with others and other forms of life, especially the animals, plants, organisms, the widow and the orphan, and the fatherless and motherless, and poor and working peoples, and gays and lesbians, and so on.⁴¹² And of course, the courage to hope.

West considers these practices a kind of focus on *funk*. The funk is wrestling with the wounds, the scars, the bruises, and the creative responses to wounds, scars, and bruises.⁴¹³ Many of them are because of structures and institutions. Others by themselves are tied to our existential condition in terms of the losses of loved ones, in terms of diseases, in terms of betrayals of friends, and so on; all of these are wounds, scars, and bruises.

Intuitively, we wrestle with funk to express belonging and connection. We can only feel belonging if we dare to share our most authentic selves with people. Emotions expert and grounded theory researcher Brene Brown points out that “We can never truly belong if we are betraying ourselves, our ideals, or our values in the process.”⁴¹⁴ Parallel to Fromm and West, Brown understands that connection and belonging is not a passive experience but an active one. Belonging is a practice that requires us to be vulnerable, get uncomfortable, and learn how to be present with people without sacrificing who we are.

While Brene Brown’s ambitions and goals do not lend themselves to an anti-capitalist solution, I believe it is socialist in spirit and paramount for the importance of building connections among agents for an anti-capitalist future. If there is socialism in the 21st century or

⁴¹² Mendieta E. 2017, 141.

⁴¹³ Mendieta E. 2017, 142.

⁴¹⁴ Brown Brene 2021, 159.

beyond, it must contain and teach the principles and experiences of building connections. Just like participatory democratic norms and structures should be put in place, so should the need for building and fostering relationships that cultivate authenticity and vulnerability. I believe the way that Brown defines *connection* as “the energy that exists between people when they feel seen, heard, and valued; when they can give and receive without judgement and when they derive sustenance and strength from relationships.”⁴¹⁵ Is the primary organic expression of an anti-capitalist and counter-hegemonic society, that also lends itself toward our relationship with the more-than-human in the web of life.

Brown arrives at an explanation of the connection wired into human neurobiology. She claims that the evidence that connection is neurobiological is through its negative iteration, *disconnection*. Disconnection, like separation, as I have accounted for in this project, is equated with social rejection, exclusion, and isolation. These feelings share the same similar neural pathways with feelings of physical pain.⁴¹⁶ Current neuroscience research shows that the pain and feelings of disconnection are often as real as physical pain, and just as healing physical pain requires describing it, talking about it, and often getting professional help, we need to do the same with emotional pain.

The interesting aspect of understanding the ecosystem of neurobiology within humans is that it is also a parallel portal to our Western practice of our abstracted understanding of nature; yet nonetheless real existing nature as in the more-than-human.⁴¹⁷ One important segment of the more-than-human that connects with our neural links are psychedelic substances. Psychedelics

⁴¹⁵ Brown Brene 2021, 169.

⁴¹⁶ Brown Brene 2021, 171.

⁴¹⁷ While there is research in neurobiology that is guilty of colonial/anti-ecological logics, the research on psychedelic research is guided by a sense of openness and transformative conclusions due to the application of psychedelic culture and the enthusiastic researchers.

have the capacity to provide a novel state of consciousness with the power to change one's perspective on things, not just during the experience, but long after the molecule has left our bodies. Notorious for popularizing psychedelic research, Michael Pollan states, there is a molecular connection with psilocybin, LSD, and 5-MeO-DMT noticing that all three molecules are tryptamines. Pollan notes that tryptamine is a type of organic compound distinguished by the presence of two linked rings, one of them with six atoms and the other with five.⁴¹⁸ Living nature is abundant in tryptamine, which show up in plants, fungi, and animals, where they typically act as signaling molecules between cells. Human beings are no different, the most famous tryptamine in the human body is the neurotransmitter *serotonin*. Pollan suggest it is not a coincidence that this molecule has a strong family resemblance with the psychedelic tryptamines.⁴¹⁹

Now, if we apply the dialectical orientation that permeates throughout this project and add Moore's world-ecology approach to the web of life, then psychedelic tryptamines functions similarly to Moore's interpretation of the web of life as a *double internality*. The double internality says nature is us, as inside us, as around us. It is nature as a flow of flows. In this double internality, everything that humans do is already joined with extra-human nature and the web of life: nature as a whole that includes humans.⁴²⁰ The story of tryptamines in the web of life may appear small and elusive; but slight differences at this fundamental level can have large implications for larger organizational structures.

Therefore, we can infer that even through neuroscientific observations from scientists the conceptual distinction of "nature" out there and "society" in here, flattens. Further evidence

⁴¹⁸ Pollan Michael 2018, 291.

⁴¹⁹ Pollan Michael 2018, 292.

⁴²⁰ Moore W. Jason 2015, 1-5.

exists with the case example of Carhart-Harris who is a PhD studying psychedelic substances.⁴²¹ In 2009, Carhart-Harris received approval to study the effects of psilocybin on the brain. What was discovered in the experiment was that psilocybin reduces brain activity, with the falloff concentrated in one brain network: *the default mode network*. The default mode network forms a critical and centrally located hub of brain activity that links part of the cerebral cortex to deeper structures in memory and emotions.⁴²² In a nutshell the default mode network plays a large role in the creation of mental constructs or projections, the most important is the construct of what we call the self, or ego.⁴²³ In dialectical fashion neuroscientists recognized that the achievement of the self also comes with demonstrable drawbacks and potential disorders.

However, perhaps the most striking discovery of Carhart-Harris's experiment was that steepest drops in default mode network activity correlated with his volunteers' subjective experience of "ego dissolution."⁴²⁴ Some of the example's experiences provided were quoted as "I existed only as an idea or concept," another recalled "I didn't know where I ended, and my surroundings began." It appears that when activity in the default network falls off precipitously, the ego temporarily vanishes, and the usual boundaries we experience between self and world, subject and object, all melt away.⁴²⁵ My inference here is that this neuroscientific explanation is laying bare elements of reality. In other words, frameworks that embrace paradoxes and processes such as dialectics and world-ecology are describing objective processes of nature itself. Neuroscience and more traditionally psychoanalysis claim and observe that our sense of identity and individuality hinges on a mental construction; a kind of illusion.⁴²⁶ I would like to

⁴²¹ Pollan Michael 2018, 299.

⁴²² Pollan Michael 2018, 301.

⁴²³ Pollan Michael 2018, 301.

⁴²⁴ Pollan Michael 2018, 304.

⁴²⁵ Pollan Michael 2018, 305.

⁴²⁶ Pollan Michael 2018, 305.

focus on this notion of mental construction due to the dangerous weaponization of suggestive thought in capitalist society. Our sense of separateness, I infer, is due to the organizing principle of mental constructions. Take for example, the idea of “Man and Nature” the organizing mental construction is fashioned to what Moore calls “ruling abstractions,” a practical way of reorganizing human and other webs of life. The ethos of the mental illusion of civilized individuals coheres with an ethos of domination – the promethean Man over Nature. Moore states that “out of such bourgeois naturalism modern racism and sexism emerged.”⁴²⁷

At any rate, Pollan suggests that the psychedelic experience of “non-duality” survives the disappearance of the self, that it is not so indispensable. The subjective experience of “non-duality” helps, as Pollan notes, “explain that the insight it sponsors are felt to be objectively true – revealed truths rather than plain old insights. It could be that to judge an insight as merely subjective, one person’s opinion, you must first have a sense of subjectivity. Which is precisely what the person on psychedelics has lost.”⁴²⁸ This by no means, necessitates the use of psychedelics to reach an objective insight. Other methods exist such as sustained levels of meditation, breathing techniques such as Holotropic breath work, sensory deprivation, fasting, prayer, overwhelming experiences of awe, extreme sports, near-death experiences, and so on.

Admittedly, there are two important takeaways of the “non-duality” insight induced by psychedelic substances. One, is that studies on psychedelics through neurobiology have confirmed, and infused life into the theory of psychoanalysis. In much the same way Freud conceived of the ego keeping the anarchic forces of the unconscious in check; David Nutt, a neuroscientist, has claimed to have found the neural correlate for repression.⁴²⁹ Informed by

⁴²⁷ Moore W. Jason 2021, 7.

⁴²⁸ Pollan Michael 2018, 305-306.

⁴²⁹ Pollan Michael 2018, 307.

Nutt's findings, Carhart-Harris hypothesized that when the mental activities are let off the leash under the influence of psychedelics, the disinhibitions explain why substance that is unavailable to us during waking consciousness now floats to the surface of our awareness; this includes emotions, memories, and long-buried childhood traumas, as well as anxiety, depression and discomforts. The discomforts that we have grown accustomed to are exposed from behind the mental curtain during psychedelic experiences, which result in revelatory acknowledgements.⁴³⁰

Secondly, the temporary rewiring of the human brain may affect how we experience abstractions. The forming of novel connections could manifest in mental experience as a new idea, a fresh perspective, a creative insight, or the ascribing of new meanings to familiar things. The exposure to “non-duality” allows a thousand mental states to bloom where many of them are bizarre and senseless, but there are experiences of them revelatory, imaginative, potentially transformative.⁴³¹ This is what I would like to focus on, the potential for transformative mindsets. Earlier, I mentioned the framework of Patel and Moore's reparation ecology, in which they claim to demand reimagination of what is possible. I believe one way to achieve a reimagined relationship with the self, more-than-human life, and the web of life is to induce non-dualistic insight toward transformative experiences. Of course, one cannot achieve this solely through a psychedelic medium or even the other mentioned methods. These experiences are just tools that if used appropriately can achieve transformative ends.

Relatedly, just as scientists and psychotherapists are discovering the powerful healing effects of psychedelics such as psilocybin and LSD to treat addiction, depression, and the

⁴³⁰ Pollan Michael 2018, 307.

⁴³¹ Pollan Michael 2018, 318.

acceptance of death in human life.⁴³² There is also the issue of how to create more concrete and permanent purpose out of the ephemeral but powerful experiences under psychedelics. It is imperative to me that integration and debriefing of the experience itself is critical for transformative practices. As Pollan notes, “Integration is essential to making sense of the experience, whether in or out of the medical context. Or else it remains just a drug experience.”⁴³³ Thinking of how to create socially acceptable and legitimate spaces for this requires two things: imagination, and political will. It’s my inference that based on the various but similar orientations I have discussed throughout this chapter a blueprint already exists where belonging and connection can flourish; especially using tools such as psychedelics for the uninitiated and those seeking answers.

I believe that in the same way psychotherapists identify a diagnosis of ailment for the mind; Those who engage in the social sciences and humanities must diagnose that the ailment of separation of the current iteration in the web of life is capitalogenic activity. As agents what we need to do is use all the tools at hand (such as psychedelics and various other methods) to achieve a consensus of the malady and simultaneously, engage in integrative framework’s which we already have a rich tradition, especially among the more Left radical orientation such as a Frommian approach, for a reimagination of relationships with ourselves, more-than-human life, and our current organizational structures.

The current symptoms of separation are observed in various kinds of psychological separations manifesting as pathological illness and discomforts. The phenomenon of interest of this dissertation is EN as the case example of a new formation of psychological illness related to

⁴³² Pollan discusses various psychotherapeutic trials and treatments at NYU, UCLA, Johns Hopkins, University of New Mexico among others that treated addiction such as smoking, alcoholism, etc. and even depression among individuals.

⁴³³ Pollan Michael 2018, 402.

the development of climate catastrophe. To reiterate, this project is informed by and promotes a Frommian spirit of radical reformism for a 21st century moment. Reimagining the idea of reform needs to apply to the web of life through a simultaneous multi-prong process both from a structural and agential dynamic. One way of doing this as I have already discussed is through a radical reform of our organizational relationship in the web of life to move beyond the global capitalogenic system. We can do this through a radical democratization of our existing political systems aimed at comprehensive popular social control over and within all aspects of society and our relationship with the more-than-human.

We have the conceptual and spiritual tools to overcome the separation. Specifically in Fromm's sobering revolutionary hope, the aspect of being over the having mode, and the ethical orientation of biophilia are key to integrating transformative mindsets and systems based on a life oriented toward being, cooperation, sharing, loving, respect, and true knowledge of our social and ecological relations in the web of life. Even the more-than-human (e.g., plants and mushrooms) provide a canvas to engage and practice what we materially are constrained over through a dynamic engagement of altered states of consciousness that can provide inspiration and allure toward radical reforms. The interesting thing about these plant properties is the ability to show individuals no matter how politically engaged, that social structures and even ideas are fungible and flexible. It is this spirit of openness that can be the bedrock for creative processes that are biophilic in nature. All these aspirations are just that, a kind of hope for a future of connection that may never come, there is no guarantee of steering the metaphorical ship in the right direction. However, the point of this chapter is to point a way and shine a light in the darkness, even if there is no guarantee that people will follow, but one must always hold out hope and grace, that life especially human life, will find a way to exist cooperatively and

complimentary to the rest of the planet, because the alternative is unnecessary suffering and rash destruction of the precious elements of all living beings.

CONCLUSION

Throughout studying research on eco-neurosis (EN), and privileged to present at various conferences, precisely one on climate emotions and anxiety at UC Riverside in the spring of 2023. My dissertation has transformed into a robust imminent critique of the multi-disciplinary topic of climate anxiety or, as I am calling it, eco-neurosis since it is much more than anxiety. We risk reifying a much larger phenomenon if we only focus on anxiety. That phenomenon is separation manifesting as psychological reactions. I do not wish for this research to only be about Global North topics, but a discussion and an opening of the various psychological effects climate change causes throughout the Earth. I know that at critical junctures, I focus strictly on the United States, solely due to my immediate environment and the cultural soup I inhabit.

The aim of my research and what I hope I have accomplished is to expand the analysis of a widespread phenomenon of climate emotions. To provide a radical orientation not just on the diagnosis but also on how we can move forward, whether it is practical individual approaches to deal with the discomforts now or more grand strategy approaches like the linkage of capitalism and climate change as the primary catalyst for EN. Thus, I claimed in this research that EN is a byproduct of historical civilization development, primarily through a capitalogenic web of life. In effect, it demonstrates that our inner world is as fragile as the external environment humans take for granted. I stated in the introduction that climate change is not only altering our normal situation but also leaving a lasting impact on the psyche. Now that I have concluded, I wish to alter that statement. It is not that climate change is altering social life; it is the culmination and result of the expropriation, accumulation, and

dispossession of all life through global capitalism's various apparatuses. Climate change is another biospheric reaction of the ecological unconscious that humans must recognize as a pressure valve for course correction.

The introduction previews the various unfolding steps of the dissertation and the importance of setting the stage and discussing the phenomenon in question. The introduction explored and explained EN: its constitutive elements, its causes, its effects in an unequal world, its relevance and prognosis, and its treatments based on a myriad of therapeutic frameworks. I provide a critique that shows what is missing from most approaches to EN. Drawing upon the tradition of critical theory, I attempt to fill the gaps that other fields have not adequately addressed. I did this by leaning upon the theoretical oeuvre of Erich Fromm, and I linked and teased EN to a concept that I call a collective ecological unconscious (CEU).

I began the introduction with an overview and literature review of the most crucial field, discussing the related terms I named for this project EN. I explored clinical psychology, environmental theology, environmental philosophy, psychoanalysis, and the two prominent veins of ecopsychology (i.e., second-generation and radical). I compared the various approaches based on my categorical cultural, historical, and political dimensions. Afterward, I claimed that EN is a cultural, social, and political problem as much as a psychological one. To achieve that goal, I previewed the framework I would be developing that is centrally focused on the orientation of Erich Fromm but also influenced and guided by the thoughts of Norman O. Brown, Immanuel Wallerstein, and Jason Moore. Lastly, I interrogated the Western assumptions of society and nature as the leading ideological cause of EN rather than climate change.

Lastly, I made a case that EN is an unsettling reaction to the differentiated symptoms of a more extensive system. As I understand it, that reaction is that the maladaptations within awareness express EN as a subject to an emotional warning of an unaware collective unease from a more-than-human world. More specifically, the source of the maladaptation is a felt sense of separation from all life. I also invite the reader to expand their orientation of EN by shifting their view away from a binary logic and instead encompass the internal connections not recognized by the pervasive hegemonic Western logic and take seriously the dialectical orientation I am presenting.

Chapter one extends the argument that individual members in the West, but precisely American society, are demonstrating heightened states of isolation, helplessness, anxiety, frustration, and separation from themselves, the community, and the more-than-human. Simultaneously, at a collective level, these maladaptations caused by separation are causing structural reactions. To answer the separation problem, I dove into the psychoanalytic tradition of Sigmund Freud, building Freud's theory of repression. I make the case that repression plays a fundamental role in the generation of neurosis and separation. Therefore, the field where these forces meet is the psyche. As I mentioned, the psychic struggle is the product of a repressed form of life. Of course, the side effect is neurosis. Neurosis, as I developed in chapter one, is the source of separation as global capitalism in contemporary life. In so doing, I identified EN as two simultaneous processes: one, it is a felt separation of humanity from more-than-human life; two, it is an unhealthy adaptation resulting from the current organization of material/social life in conjunction with the more-than-human world.

Further, I focused on four crucial concepts in Frommian theory: Neurosis, relatedness, social character, and the social unconscious. By investigating and reviewing these four crucial

concepts, I demonstrated a strong relevance for the political reframing of EN as a systemic illness and a symptom of capitalism's separation. The importance of developing Fromm's interpretation links to the efforts and relevance of chapter two.

Chapter Two expands on the established premises of the previous chapter by furthering the development of EN as a political and collective problem. Thus, I expanded the boundaries of Fromm's theoretical concepts into ecological territory beyond the scope Fromm investigated. I proposed an ecological relation ontology to update the accounts of Fromm's vision to a level that reached the web of life as a framework. Therefore, I amended and updated aspects of Frommian theory to say: a. Fromm's critique of capitalism is dated and does not include an account of capitalism's relationship to more-than-human life; b. the paradox of relatedness and separation requires an ecological update rather than its narrowly humanist interpretation in Fromm; c. the development of a sadomasochistic maladaptation is a socialized pattern based on a destructive ecological orientation; and d. the psyche is not an exclusively human affair, instead the psyche exists as a collective ecological unconscious (CEU). By reinforcing specific Frommian ideas with critical orientations such as world-ecology and radical eco-psychology in reshaping the meaning of EN using a sadomasochistic maladaptation and a CEU, this chapter demonstrated that maintaining the basic premises of Fromm's thought is a sound theory for an ecological orientation. Moreover, a unique and crucial interpretation surfaced from the chemistry of various thoughts that tackled multiple dimensions – i.e., psychological, political, historical, economic, and moral – of a psychological reflex (EN), a byproduct of a systemic separation known today as capitalism.

Chapter three centered on a programmatic solution-oriented perspective to mend the separation I have focused on for the past two chapters. I inferred that the connecting thread

among humans, more-than-human, and EN is the psychic function deeply rooted in the CEU stressed and stretched by capitalogenic activity. However, the main point was to detail a simultaneous collective and individual blueprint to mend the long-established separation causing harm to human and more-than-human life.

Therefore, I examined Fromm's methods of solving the separation throughout his collection of works. I highlighted his ethos of revolutionary hope, then the "being" and "having" modes, a biophilic orientation toward life, and his humanistic activity-oriented alternative. Afterward, I promoted an updated Frommian prescription in two dimensions: structural and agential. I acknowledged that moving beyond global capitalism's current logic and mentality is integral for healing individual/collective mental health and maintaining a planetary balance within the web of life.

I gather that the Earth may not speak like humans, intelligibly understand the external world like us, or experience the world in ways we do; it sure, however, provides signposts and signals that the fragility of organizational life is out of sorts. In the same way, we can use experiential methodologies and frameworks to construct parameters for better living forms. Such that Freud could identify and discover through his flawed but practical psychoanalytic approach to shine a light on the unconscious. We can do the same thing by identifying the patterns and signals of the Earth as an expansion of the unconscious, not in the mind, but an external psyche encompassed by the biosphere. Whether one can debate the ontological source and whether the Earth is alive is something I am still open-minded about and willing to keep furthering my research to arrive at a more confident and decisive answer than the one I have today. What I am sure of, however, is that for practical reasons taking up the mantle that the Earth needs us as much as we need it. It is not something to be debated; it is an authentic

and material reality that if the Earth is uninhabitable for humans to exist, the conscious creature that can ponder its existence might never again reflect on its purpose for life.

I believe this dissertation accomplished and focused on using Erich Fromm's work to help explore the rise of EN, its timeliness, and its importance for the rest of the 21st century. However, I see future recommendations as I try to make this research more comprehensive in its detail. For example, I need to embed some of my claims within the contemporary scholarship in political theory. I need to include more secondary literature in Fromm's work. As such, I need to engage with how Fromm's work has been reread today to vitiate some of the criticisms that have been leveled at his scholarship in today's conditions of normative crisis. For example, I recognize that many of the ideas put forward by post-structuralist scholarships would challenge Fromm's thoughts from a different angle than my critique of his work.

I am also keenly aware that Frommian scholarship is in the middle of what is being called a "Frommian Renaissance," where many justifications and debates have been carried out meticulously and thoughtfully. I aim to be a part of this critical academic development. Thus, I need to better reference these ideas for readers less familiar with Fromm's scholarship. With this in mind, I have already thought about potential directions I can go; I aim to engage more with work by authors such as Kieran Durkin (Erich Fromm's Critical Theory – early chapters), Rainer Funk's thoughts, Terry Joseph, Michael Thompson, Joan Braune, Daniel Davis, Daniel Burston, Laura Schleifer, James Block, Jeremiah Morelock, Aliya Amarshi, Lina Nasr, Lauren Langman, and Neal Harris as potential references to further the discussion of this dissertation. I think this would further strengthen my argument with the further

justification of Fromm's philosophical and social-theoretical commitments through a turn to contemporary literature, such as I have outlined above.

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