

## Overcoming Alienation - Erich Fromm

The chief outlines of Fromm's critique of contemporary society, and, by implication, of adult education, are drawn directly from Marxist thought, particularly Marx's outline of the way in which work in capitalist society has become objectified; that is, experienced by workers as separated from their creativity and identity. In 1961 Fromm published *Marx's Concept of Man*, a translation of Marx's *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, with an interpretive commentary added by Fromm himself. The first manuscript translated is "Alienated Labor", Marx's classic statement on the way in which capitalist economics means that "the individual worker sinks to the level of a commodity, and to a most miserable commodity" (Marx, 1961, p. 93). In this essay Marx describes the development of monopoly capitalism and the decline of the individual entrepreneur. In capitalist economies "the necessary result of competition is the accumulation of capital in a few hands" (ibid.). a development Marx viewed as "a restoration of monopoly in a more terrible form" (ibid.).

The injuries of monopoly capitalism surface repeatedly in Fromm's work. Even in widely popular books written for a mass audience such as *The Art of Loving* (1956b) he writes that under modern capitalism "we witness an ever-increasing process of centralization and concentration of capital" in which "the ownership of capital invested in these enterprises is more and more separated from the function of managing them" (p. 84). When the owners of capital can command labor to produce goods that increase the return on the owner's investment, then a hierarchy emerges in which "amassed things, that which is dead, are of superior value to labor, to human powers, to that which is alive" (ibid.). Work under such a system is physically exhausting, mentally debasing and creatively moribund. Most damningly, it is also spiritually demeaning. Since people work for someone else their labor becomes converted into someone else's property. The artifacts produced by people's labor have nothing of their own creativity or identity contained within them. In Marx's words "the object produced by labor, its product, now stands opposed to it as an *alien being*, as a *power independent of the producer*. The product of labor is labor which has been embodied in an object and turned into a physical thing; this product is an *objectification* of labor. The performance of work is at the same time its objectification" (Marx, 1961, p. 95).

Using Fromm's analysis as a starting point, it is quite possible to interpret adult learning processes through the lens of objectification. In mandatory continuing education, compulsory training and the required participation of employees in human resource development programs, it is easy to see how learning undertaken to satisfy external authorities ceases to become the adult learner's intellectual project. Very frequently the products and measures of learning – essays, test scores, papers, exams – take on physical forms and stand apart from the learner. The exam does not measure the adult's engagement in creative work as a means of broadening or confirming her identity. Instead, it exerts a coercive pressure requiring her to improve her performance according to criteria she had no hand in proposing and has little chance of affecting. Myles Horton, the renowned adult educational activist expresses his disdain for the demeaning way in which contemporary education "has got to be something that can be tested or controlled"

resulting in the learner “being handled like a machine with predictable results” (Horton, 2003, p. 225).

When labor is objectified something peculiar happens to the worker’s emotions. Workers feel more and more disconnected from their work which itself starts to be thought of as something separate from themselves, something outside their sphere of influence. In a famous quote from the ‘Alienated Labor’ manuscript Marx writes that “the more the worker expends himself in work, the more powerful becomes the world of objects which he creates in face of himself, the poorer he becomes in his inner life, and the less he belongs to himself” (Marx, 1961, p. 96). In devoting themselves to the production of objects, workers somehow find that their own identity has diminished as the power of the objects they produce has increased. Like the demented ventriloquist who sees his doll gain life and start to control him, so “the worker puts his life into the object, and his life then belongs no longer to himself but to the object (which) sets itself against him as an alien and hostile force” (ibid.). The tragedy of contemporary life is not just that workers are exploited and dominated by the owners of production, but also that they are overwhelmed by the world of objects itself which now becomes experienced “as an alien and hostile world” (ibid. p. 99).

It is because of their suspicion of how learning can become objectified and experienced by adults as irrelevant to their real needs and inner yearnings, that so many adult educators have stressed, and continue to insist on, the voluntary underpinnings of genuine adult education. From Lindeman (1926) to Horton (1990), a school of adult education has contended that adult education only happens when adults opt voluntarily for a program of learning they have helped design. This tradition regards mandatory adult education as an oxymoron. It focuses instead on how adult education can help learners develop skills and knowledge that will help them understand and change the communities in which they live. This learning happens through a collaborative analysis of adults’ experiences during which roles of teacher and learner interchange among participants. Adult educators who attempt to follow this tradition do their best to replicate the features of participatory democracy, with all participants actively involved in deciding aspects of what and how to learn.

The Marxist concepts of objectification, commodification and alienation surface again and again in Fromm’s work, constantly underpinning his own normative humanism. In commenting on Marx, Fromm argued that Marxism was less a political creed, more “a spiritual existentialism in secular language” (1961, p. 5). To Fromm, “Marx’s aim was that of the spiritual emancipation of man, of his liberation from the chains of economic determinism, of restituting him in his human wholeness, of enabling him to find unity and harmony with his fellow man and with nature” (ibid. p. 3). Fromm believed that Marx was not concerned primarily with equalizing income. His main interest was in stopping work from being an alienating experience. He quotes Marx’s comments in volume one of *Capital* that methods of production under capitalism “mutilate the laborer into a fragment of a man, degrade him to the level of an appendage of a machine, destroy every remnant of charm in his work and turn it into a hated toil” (Marx in Fromm, ibid. p. 52). So for Fromm, “Marx’s central criticism of capitalism is not the injustice in the

distribution of wealth; it is the perversion of labor into forced, alienated, meaningless labor” (ibid. p. 42).

In fact Fromm’s analysis of alienation deepened and broadened Marx’s initial exposition of the idea. Fromm contended that Marx underestimated the intensity and pervasiveness of alienation which had become “the fate of the vast majority of people, especially of the ever increasing segment of the population which manipulate symbols and men, rather than machines” (ibid. p. 56). In contemporary society people “worship things, the machines which produce things – and in this alienated world they feel as strangers and quite alone” (ibid. p. 57). In such works as *Escape from Freedom* (1941), *Man for Himself* (1947) and *The Sane Society* (1956a) Fromm illustrates the power of the concept of alienation, extending it from the world of work into the domains of politics, recreation and intimate relationships. Commodification has distorted even our language to the point that our “speech style indicates the prevailing high degree of alienation” (1976, p. 31) we feel. Fromm asks us to consider the colloquial phrase ‘I have a problem’ and the commodification this signifies. He writes that “by saying ‘*I have*’ a problem instead of ‘*I am troubled*’, subjective experience is eliminated; the *I* of experience is replaced by the *it* of possession ... I have transformed *myself* into ‘a problem’ and am now owned by my creation” (ibid.). This commodification of language further ensures that in all aspects of modern life “one experiences oneself as a commodity or, rather, simultaneously as the seller *and* the commodity to be sold” (ibid. p. 146).

As a counter to alienation, Fromm (1965) proposed a version of socialism that he called humanistic or communitarian socialism. This kind of socialism did not stress the equalization of income or distribution of profits. Its emphasis was on the creation of a workplace in which workers controlled the pace and form of production. Instead of being separated from each other and denied the opportunity to exercise their own creative energies, workers in a truly socialist system experience work as an associative and creative activity. Fromm traces this version of socialism to what he claims are the humanistic underpinnings of Marx’s version of socialism. He writes that “the principle goal of socialism for Marx is the recognition and realization of man’s true needs, which will be possible only when production serves man and capital ceases to create and exploit the false needs of man” (1961, p. 59). To Fromm socialism is more about human creativity than economic arrangements. It is “a form of production and an organization of society in which man can overcome alienation from his product, from his work, from his fellow man, from himself and from nature” (ibid.). A socialist society is one in which people feel connected to each other, able to discover and exercise their own creative impulses, and aware of their relationship to the natural environment. In such a society a person will be able to “return to himself and grasp the world with his own powers thus becoming one with the world” (ibid.).

In many ways, Fromm anticipates Habermas’ later articulation of socialism as a system enabling people to have the freest conversation possible about how they wish to live. In an interview Habermas declares that “socialism is only useful if it serves as the idea of the epitome of the necessary conditions for emancipated forms of life, about which the participants themselves would have to reach understanding” (Habermas, 1994, p. 113).

Similarly, Fromm stresses the participatory and democratic aspects of socialism as a system in which people participate in a continuous conversation about their aspirations and how these might be realized given limited resources. It is not an enormous stretch to see in Fromm's vision of communitarian socialism a larger sketch of the processes that would be observable in adult education classrooms striving to realize some principles of participatory democracy. In such classrooms the object would be to make adult education serve the true needs of learners instead of satisfying their false needs. False needs will be those that uncritically mimic the aspirations of the dominant culture such as learning to compete more effectively against other learners, learning skills that allow people to acquire more and more possessions they do not really need, or learning how to adapt one's thinking and behavior to prevailing mores and cultural patterns. In seeking to overcome the individual adult's alienation from learning and from her fellow learners, an adult classroom would emphasize cooperative ways of working. It would regard the individual pursuit of truth, beauty and knowledge as the exception to the collaborative rule. Adult education as communitarian socialism would be dialogic, an attempt to create a continuous conversation among learners about the direction of learning in which all voices would be heard equally.

Fromm was careful to distinguish communitarian socialism from state socialism which "leaves the worker in bondage" (1956a, p. 285). He was stinging in his criticism of rigidly totalitarian states that declared themselves to be socialist but that actually perverted ideals of socialism. Such perversions prevented those in the non-communist world from giving any consideration to the links between democracy and socialism. To Fromm "socialism is incompatible with a bureaucratic, thing-centered, consumption-oriented social system, that is incompatible with the materialism and cerebralization that characterize the Soviet, like the capitalist, system" (1976, p. 157). An important purpose of socialism was "the elimination of the secret rule of those who, though few in number, wield great economic power without any responsibility to those whose fate depends in their decisions" (1941, p. 299). Such an arbitrary and unjust exercise of power was as characteristic of totalitarian state socialism as it was of capitalism. What Fromm believed in was "a rational economic system serving the purposes of the people" (ibid.). which would "replace manipulation of men by active co-operation" (ibid. p. 300).

Some of his strongest statements concerning the need for socialism appeared in the post-McCarthy era at the height of the cold war. In a text published a year after the Cuban missile crisis, he refers to the socialist ideal as "the most important authentic spiritual movement in the Western world" (1962, p. 142). In *The Sane Society* (1956a) he calls socialism "one of the most significant, idealistic and moral movements of our age" (1956a, p. 247) arguing that where overcoming alienation is concerned "the only constructive solution is that of Socialism, which aims at a fundamental reorganization of our economic and social system ... creating a social order in which human solidarity, reason and production are furthered rather than hobbled" (ibid. p. 277). A socialist workplace is one "in which every working person would be an active and responsible participant, where work would be attractive and meaningful, where capital would not employ labor, but labor would employ capital" (ibid. p. 283). In Fromm's analysis learning at the workplace is clearly contiguous with learning to replace the production of

goods that satisfy the false needs of people and create wealth for a small minority, with a process whereby production enhances the person's sense that she is creating something both useful and beautiful.

### **The Social Character of Capitalism**

Although Fromm clearly viewed Marx (along with Freud) as central to the critical tradition, he identified "important questions which were not dealt with adequately in Marxist theory" (1965, p. 233). One of the most important of these was "why is it that a society succeeds in gaining the allegiance of most of its members, even when they suffer under the system and even if their reason tells them that their allegiance is harmful to them?" (ibid.). Fromm's answer to this question lay in the concept of the social character, a central element of *The Sane Society*. Social character is "the nucleus of the character structure which is shared by most members of the same culture" (1956a, p. 78). Seen from the twenty first century, with its emphasis on fragmented identities, virtual realities and cultural diversity, social character is one of the weakest elements in Fromm's thought. Indeed, Fromm's whole emphasis on inherent human needs "like the striving for happiness, harmony love and freedom" (ibid. p. 81) appears faintly comic to contemporary sensibilities. Few adult educators today would state confidently, as Fromm did, that "there are certain factor's in man's nature which are fixed and unchangeable" (1941, p. 37) such as "the necessity to avoid isolation and moral aloneness" (ibid.), the need to cooperate with others (p. 35) and "the drive for freedom inherent in human nature" (ibid. p. xiv).

In stressing how human drives prompted people to resist ideological domination and take an active role in shaping their experiences and culture, however, Fromm does sound a more contemporary note. A human being "is not a blank sheet of paper on which culture writes its text" (1956a, p. 81) but someone with agency, who can stand against ideological manipulation. In fact Fromm's ideas on the development of social character are perhaps best understood as describing a process of ideological formation through which people learn habits and dispositions that support the existing system,. Fromm himself sometimes speaks of the concept this way. In a passage analyzing how social character ensures ideological domination he writes that "it is the social character's function to mold and channel human energy within a given society for the purpose of the continued functioning of that society" (ibid. p. 79).

Under capitalism social character takes on a particular formation. In his view "modern capital needs men who cooperate smoothly and in large numbers; who want to consume more and more; and whose tastes are standardized and can be easily influenced and anticipated (1956b, p. 85). As capitalism developed it required that each person "be molded into a person who was eager to spend most of his energy for the purpose of work, who acquired discipline, particularly orderliness and punctuality, to a degree unknown in most other cultures" (1956a, p. 80). This process of character formation had to be all enveloping so that people were not aware of any kind of manipulation. Hence, "the necessity for work, for punctuality and orderliness had to be transformed into an inner

*drive* for these aims ... society had to produce a social character in which these strivings were inherent” (ibid.). In this analysis Fromm sounds distinctly Foucaultian. In capitalism workers discipline themselves to behave in ways that support the existing social and economic order. But this disposition is not something of which people are consciously aware. Foucault would say that the external gaze that ensures that people are punctual, driven and assiduously following the rules has been successfully ‘interiorized’; that is, it is now experienced as a constituent element of the personality.

Contemporary capitalism has some important ‘characterological features’ to use Fromm’s phrase. First, the market requires people who are malleable in the extreme to serve as consumers of its products. The more malleable consumers are, the better they are suited to capitalism. Ideally, global capitalism is best served by large populations that equate living with consuming, that gain their identities from the purchase of certain branded products and that shy away from buying anything too idiosyncratic. The greater the standardization of taste and consumption patterns across national boundaries, the more effectively production can be streamlined and commodities marketed. Thus, contemporary capitalism produces people “who want to consume more and more, and whose tastes are standardized and can be easily influenced and anticipated” (ibid. p. 110). Such people like nothing better than to buy the latest computer game, and watch the latest film adaptation of a graphic novel, wearing similarly branded clothes and shoes, all the while knowing that across the world numerous others are simultaneously engaged in the same activity.

Ideological standardization is the second ‘characterological feature’ of capitalism; “just as modern mass production methods require the standardization of commodities, so the social process requires standardization of man, and this standardization is called ‘equality’” (Fromm, 1956b, p. 16). People’s malleability as consumers is matched by their ideological malleability. The standardization of consumer taste extends into the social and political domain leading to a standardization of social behavior and political opinion. People are produced who are “willing to be commanded, to do what is expected, to fit into the social machine without friction” (Fromm, 1956a, p. 110). Such individuals crave conformity, to feel part of a mass that feels the same impulses and thinks the same thoughts in synchronization. They “are governed by the fear of the anonymous authority of conformity” (ibid. p. 102). This is the basic thesis of *Escape from Freedom* (1941) Fromm’s attempt to explain the rise of fascist and totalitarian regimes.

Identifying and combating these two characterological features are important purposes for adult education. Fromm posed a clear choice for the future – “between robotism (of both the capitalist and communist variety) or Humanistic, Communitarian Socialism” (1956a, p. 363). Communitarian socialism would be based on sharing work, sharing experience, and sharing profits. Adult education could provide an opportunity for people to experience an analog of this system. If enough people participated in adult education that was a non-competitive sharing of common experience it could provide a template for creating wider social realignments that realized this cooperative impulse.

## **The Alienating Character of Capitalism**

Fromm views the distinguishing character of capitalism as the elevation, to practically the exclusion of all else, of the economic domain of life. Its leitmotif is the use of people as if they were economic objects; “the owner of capital uses other men for the purpose of his own profit...a living human being, ceases to be an end in himself, and becomes the means for the economic interests of another man, or himself, or of an impersonal giant, the economic machine” (1956a, p. 93). A necessary corollary of assessing human worth in economic terms is the elevation of materialistic values over human values of compassion, skill or creativity. Thus “in the capitalistic hierarchy of values, capital stands higher than labor, amassed things higher than the manifestations of life...things are higher than man” (ibid. p. 95). Humanity is diminished as qualities such as a person’s energy, skill, personality and creativity become objectified – assets to be sold on the market of interpersonal relations. Under capitalism “the market decides the value of these human qualities” with the result that “relations between human beings ... assume the character of relations between things” (1941, p. 140). Each person “sells himself and feels himself to be a commodity” (ibid.).

In describing how the laws of the market corrupt personal relations Fromm anticipates Habermas’ ideas on the colonization of the lifeworld, a theme that has produced some provocative critiques of contemporary adult education (Welton, 1995; Newman, 1999). Fromm writes that in the USA today “our whole culture is based on the appetite for buying, on the idea of a mutually favorable exchange” (1956b, p. 3). Human communication and interpersonal feelings are distorted by the application of a cost-benefit analysis way of thinking to our relationships. The logic of the exchange economy pervades all aspects of life and “in all social and personal relations the laws of the market are the rule” (1941, p. 139). This is because “in capitalistic society exchanging has become an end in itself” (1956a, p. 146), a metaphor for how we conceive of the living of a well-conceived life. Thus “the whole process of living is experienced analogously to the profitable investment of capital, my life and my person being the capital which is invested” (ibid. p. 148). Everyday life reflects this as people talk of how they have ‘invested’ themselves in their marriages, children and friendships.

Clearly, then, the most personal relationships are subject to this drive for exchange and Fromm is pessimistic in his view of the possibility for love and friendship. A relationship between two people is typically “one between two machines, who use each other...everybody is to everybody else a commodity” (ibid. p. 139). Hence “one speaks of human relations and one means the most in-human relations, those between alienated automatons” (ibid. p. 182). This true even when talking of those who claim to be in love. In Fromm’s view people “fall in love when they feel they have found the best object available on the market, considering the limitations of their own exchange value” (1956b, p. 3). When love is conceived as an exchange then true intimacy – “union under the condition of preserving one’s integrity” (p. 20) – is impossible. This is because “automatons cannot love” (p. 87). The best they can hope for is that “they can exchange their personality packages and hope for a fair bargain” (ibid.).

Another sign of an alienated life is an inability to engage wholly and authentically with a work of art. Fromm contends that when people in the contemporary era view a work of art, or piece of entertainment, their first response is to ask 'is it worth the money we spent?' When people make major decisions in work, relationships, politics and recreation they apply a cost benefit analysis viewing "the concept of life as an enterprise which should show a profit" (1956a, p. 150). From this perspective a life well-lived is one showing a balance of happiness and fulfillment firmly in the black column. This turns the individual into a person concerned primarily with selling a personality, something Fromm viewed as the triumph of the marketing orientation in social life. To someone exhibiting a marketing orientation "his body, his mind and his soul are his capital, and his task in life is to invest it favorably, to make a profit of himself. Human qualities like friendliness, courtesy, kindness, are transformed into commodities, into assets of the 'personality package' conducive to a higher price on the personality market" (1956a, p. 142). Certainly, reviewing the prospectuses of some proprietary adult education centers it is striking how many course titles invite adults to learn how to sell their personalities more effectively, whether that be through flirting, networking or learning how to navigate organizational cultures.

As the metaphor of the market comes to pervade and dominate our worldview Fromm believes that we feel that control of our lives has slipped out of our hands. After all the market is a vast and inaccessible phenomenon, the intersection of millions of individual decisions made by strangers in places of which we know nothing. It is beset by seemingly unpredictable and uncontrollable crises that come out of nowhere – booms and busts, depressions, recessions and expansions. The indicator of the society's economic health – the stock market – becomes fetishized, viewed as a capricious being controlled by the whims of magical forces inaccessible to our influence. In this situation the individual becomes "an instrument in the hands of overwhelmingly strong forces outside of himself" (1941, p. 141), deeply affected by a sense of powerlessness.

When the market becomes the lens through which we view life then the value of existence becomes determined by a series of calculations. Fromm believed that capitalism caused people to think of the world around them, and each other, as composed of standardized, abstract qualities. Under capitalism there is "an almost exclusive reference to the abstract qualities of things and people, and ... a neglect of relating oneself to their concreteness and uniqueness" (1956a, p. 114). The individual is "experienced as the embodiment of a quantitative exchange value" (ibid. p. 116), something whose value can be assessed and tabulated. Not surprisingly, perhaps, bureaucrats in business, government and labor unions feel free to "manipulate people as though they were figures, or things" (ibid. p. 126). In Fromm's view this cultural veneration of abstraction and quantification prepared the ground for moral outrages such as genocide. The Holocaust became viewed by its Nazi perpetrators as an abstract exercise in engineering in which the central logistical problem was how best to arrange the extermination of large numbers of objects that possessed no concrete, unique existence for them. This horror was made possible by the fact that "we live in figures and abstractions; since nothing is concrete, nothing is real. Everything is possible, factually and morally" (ibid. p. 120).

### **Dimensions of Alienation in Adult Life**

Fromm relied heavily on Marx's idea of commodity fetishism to explain how alienation is experienced in contemporary society. Given McLaren and West's analysis of the Marxophobia rampant in American life is ironic that the Frankfurt school theorist whose work exhibited the widest popular appeal draws so consistently and explicitly on Marxist ideas and language. In terms drawn straight from Marx's manuscript on the subject Fromm defines alienation as "a mode of experience in which the person experiences himself as an alien....estranged from himself. He does not experience himself as the center of his world, as the creator of his own acts" (ibid. p. 120). The roots of this sense of alienation lie in the nature of modern work, which requires that people pour their energy into making products which then assume an existence apart from them. In the contemporary workplace the worker finds that "his life forces have flown into a thing" (ibid. p. 121) which becomes "something apart from himself, over and against him" (ibid. p. 122).

At the dawn of the twenty first century the concept of virtual reality is sometimes invoked to describe how many people experience the world. If this concept has any validity then Fromm's analysis of alienation appears remarkably prescient. Alienation is a distancing of people from the world of feelings and sensuality so that they feel dominated by lifeless objects: "we are surrounded by things of whose nature and origin we know nothing....we live in a world of things, and our only connection with them is that we know how to manipulate or consume them" (1956a, p. 134). As an example, consider his description of travel as something experienced at one remove through the technological intermediary of the video-camera. The purpose of travel for many seems to be the production of a video tape to view when they return home. The traveler "does not see anything at all, except through the intermediary of the camera" so that digitalized video records "are the substitute for the experience"(1956a, p. 136). Anyone who depends on computers to navigate through their work or life knows the feeling of the miserable dependence on experts Fromm describes whenever the system shuts down; "the individual feels helplessly caught in a chaotic mass of data and with pathetic patience waits until the specialists have found out what to do and where to go" (1941, p. 276).

Fromm's extension of commodity fetishism into an analysis of rampant consumerism is still accurate half a century after it appeared. A major purpose of life under capitalism is to consume the commodities we produce yet the experience of compulsive consumption is itself alienating. In the contemporary era we experience "an ever increasing need for more things, for more consumption....but our craving for consumption has lost all connection with the real needs of man" (1956a, p. 134). We develop what Fromm calls the receptive orientation in which we desire "to have something new all the time, to live with a continuously open mouth as it were" (ibid. p. 136). Creativity, artistic expression and personal fulfillment are equated with consuming more and more things. Fromm become positively lyrical in his description of how commodity fetishism becomes converted into the consumer ethic; "the world is one great object for our appetite, a big apple, a big bottle, a big breast; we are the sucklers, the eternally expectant ones, the hopeful ones – and the eternally disappointed ones" (ibid. p. 166).

Education (including adult education) is, of course, no exception to the process of commodification. The education system “generally tries to train people to *have* knowledge as a possession, by and large commensurate with the amount of property or social prestige they are likely to have in later life” (1976, p. 48). Educational institutions “give each student a certain amount of cultural property” (p. 43) or a “luxury-knowledge package” (p. 49) with “the size of each package being in accord with the person’s probable social prestige” (p. 49). Knowledge becomes equated with content, with “fixed clusters of thought, or whole theories” (p. 37) that students store. In this system teachers are reduced to “bureaucratic dispensers of knowledge” (1968, p. 120). This commodified content, transmitted bureaucratically, is alienated from learners’ lives and experiences; “the students and the content of the lectures remain strangers to each other, except that each student has become the owner of a collection of statements made by somebody else” (1976, p. 37).

Fromm also extended Marx’s idea of commodity fetishism (the worship of things to the extent that they are imbued with magical qualities and powers) into the realm of political discourse, observing that “the fetishism of words is as dangerous in the realm of political ideology as it is in that of religious ideology” (1962, p. 159). Fromm feels that today words have become a substitute for concrete political action, so that making a speech is considered a significant act of social change. Yet language as a substitute for political intervention is illusory, allowing politicians to seem to be doing something when actually doing nothing. Words don’t change the world, deeds do; “the idea which remains a word only changes words” (1962, p. 177). A media and politically literate adult must be helped to see that “words have meaning only in the total context of deed and character; unless there is unity among these factors words serve to deceive – others and oneself; instead of revealing, they have the function of hiding” (1962, p. 159). In terms echoing Orwell’s (1946) analysis of the perversions of political language, Fromm argues that a task of adult education must be to make adults aware of double speak, of when an utterance means exactly the opposite of what it purports to mean, as in “calling Franco and other dictators ‘representatives of the free world’” (1962, p.160).

Fromm’s analysis of political alienation looks back to J.S. Mill’s ideas on the tyranny of the majority and forward to the contemporary perversion of political discourse by television advertising. Fromm argues that we are alienated politically when our political participation is reduced to our being forced to choose between candidates we had no hand in selecting and who represent mammoth parties financed by giant, yet often invisible, corporate interests. Voters are blanketed by political commercials that dull the capacity for critical thought. Not surprisingly “this situation gives the average citizen a deep sense of powerlessness in political matters” (1956a, p. 191) with the result that “political intelligence is reduced more and more” (ibid.). Given the current widespread cynicism regarding politics, and the widespread dismissal of political commercials as propaganda, this may seem an overly pessimistic conclusion to draw. However, it is salutary to reflect on Fromm’s warnings of the effects that the “increasing power of monopolistic capital” (1941, p. 141) have on the political process. Writing before the influence of corporate lobbyists and political action committees had become the accepted currency of

politics, Fromm decried the fact that “an enormous though secret power over the whole society is exercised by a small group, on the decisions of which depends the fate of a large part of society” (ibid. p. 141).

In this part of his work Fromm is outlining a political literacy project for adult education. Any socially responsible adult education program must include as part of its curriculum some offerings that show how those with the most capital attempt to purchase the greatest access to opinion-making organizations. Such a program would show that free speech is often bought speech, that getting one’s ideas or opinions into the public sphere depends on having the capital to buy media outlets that can disseminate these ideas. Such a program would show how media must always be thought of as big businesses and how news divisions of major media outlets are heavily influenced by the interests of corporate sponsors. It would highlight the need networks feel to present news in an entertaining way so as to keep the maximum audience tuned in, thereby ensuring the charging of higher rates for commercials. In particular, Fromm’s emphasis on how an unrepresentative minority exerts disproportionate influence over political affairs clearly anticipates Newman’s (1994) call to name the enemy. If, as Fromm says, “an enormous though secret power over the whole society is exercised by a small group”, and if this group can exert control over political discourse out of all proportion to their size in the society, then a crucial adult educational task becomes to conduct appropriate research and inquiry to name the members of this group. In Newman’s (1994) words “we need to ask: who are the people, what are the organizations promoting the reorganization of capitalism? Where do they operate? Can we name them and *do they have an address?*” (p. 149).

Alienated politics is most tragically evident in the practice of democracy, for many people the most hopeful grand narrative of the twenty first century. Fromm rejects the rhetoric of democracy as liberation from tyranny, arguing instead that the democratic process has transmogrified into the tyranny of the majority. In our age of conformity “the democratic method has more and more assumed the meaning that a majority decision is necessarily right, and morally superior to that of the minority, and hence has the moral right to impose *its* will on the minority” (1956a, p. 340). He cited with scorn the advertising slogan that ‘Ten Million Americans Can’t Be Wrong’ as evidence of how the epistemic distortion of equating validity with majority opinion had spread through society. “Nothing is further from the truth” (1941, p. 14) he argued, than to believe that agreement and consensus represent a higher epistemological authority. To Fromm “consensual validation as such has no bearing whatsoever on reason or mental health” (ibid. p. 15). In fact it often represented a deliberate suppression of critical thought through the exclusion of divergent opinions.

It is interesting to remember these words when we find ourselves practicing the difficult and contradictory process of trying to democratize adult education classrooms. Adult educators committed to democratic process can easily find themselves turning instinctively to the principle of majority vote when working with a group of adults to decide collectively what and how to learn. Yet, as Fromm points out, the majority opinion in an adult classroom may stand firmly against anything that disturbs the

familiarity of teacher authority, didactic transmission of information, and curriculum being decided by omniscient strangers in far off places. Shor (1996) and Cale's (2001) studies illustrate how a majority of adults will usually choose not to rock the boat by challenging conventional thinking on race, class or gender, or by opting to explore political dynamics outside, and especially inside, the adult classroom. Cale's study of a writing class for adults shows how an apparent act of resistance – asking adults to take a measure of control in choosing what to learn – can end up reproducing dominant ideology. His students chose to avoid contentious racial issues and to stay close to home with familiar topics.

Here is one of the unresolvable tensions of critical practice: can adult educators respect the agendas adults bring to a democratic negotiation of curriculum whilst contradictorily challenging these agendas by offering (and sometimes insisting on) radically different, politically contentious options for study? Fromm argues that adult educators must insist on paying attention to alternative, minority viewpoints. Otherwise the process of automaton conformity – of people choosing to think and do what they suppose everyone else thinks and does – runs rampant. Deliberately suppressing alternative perspectives because these have not been endorsed by majority opinion is one of the chief indicators that automaton conformity is in place and unchallenged.

### **Automaton Conformity**

In Fromm's view alienation as a pervasive mode of existence is most evident in the phenomenon of automaton conformity. This idea is explained most fully in *Escape from Freedom* though its presence is felt in all Fromm's other writing. Automaton conformity describes the process of social manipulation that results in the adult striving to be exactly the same as he or she imagines the majority to be. When we succumb to such conformity we become "cogs in the bureaucratic machine, with our thoughts, feelings, and tastes manipulated by the government industry and the mass communications that they control" (Fromm, 1976, p. 12). The flight into automaton conformity was one of the two possible responses Fromm identified to the fear of freedom (the other being to seek refuge in submission to fascist and totalitarian leaders).

In *Escape from Freedom* (titled *The Fear of Freedom* in England) Fromm argued that the decline of traditional mores and the growth of secularism had made people more and more aware of the fact that they were free to choose how to think and live. This recognition was a source of terror rather than pleasure to most people. The central thesis of *Escape from Freedom* is that "the process of growing human freedom....means growing isolation, insecurity, and thereby growing doubt concerning one's own role in the universe, the meaning of one's life, and with all that a growing feeling of one's own powerlessness and insignificance as an individual" (1941, p. 51). Faced with the void of freedom people turned to two avenues of escape – "submission to a leader, as has happened in fascist countries, and the compulsive conforming as is prevalent in our own democracy" (p. 155).

Of these two avenues it is automaton conformity that is the most subtle and intriguing, and ultimately the most alienating. The individual attempts to escape the burden of freedom “by transforming himself into a small cog in the machine, well fed, and well clothed ... yet not a free man but an automaton” (p. xii). By doing this people escape the anxiety produced by the awareness of their freedom; “if I am like everybody else, if I have no feelings or thoughts which make me different ... I am saved; saved from the frightening experience of aloneness” (1956b, p. 13). The subtlety of automaton conformity is that the pressure to conform is applied internally, not externally, an example of disciplinary power in action; “people want to conform to a much higher degree than they are forced to conform, at least in the Western democracies” (ibid.). The authority one is submitting to by conforming is anonymous – the authority of imagined common sense, public opinion, conventional wisdom. Fromm sounds a distinctively Foucaultian note in his observation that “in anonymous authority both command and commander have become invisible” (1941, p. 190) with the power of public opinion obscured by social habit and political ideology. In this perspective information about the correct ways to think and act is inscribed in the cultural DNA.

Fromm’s description of automaton conformity also echoes Gramsci’s writing on hegemony. The power of anonymous authority comes from its all pervasive, yet invisible, nature. Like fish unaware of the water in which they live, citizens swim unsuspectingly in the ocean of anonymous authority. We are surrounded by an “atmosphere of subtle suggestion which actually pervades our whole social life...one never suspects that there is any order which one is expected to follow” (p. 190). Under the enveloping influence of anonymous authority “the individual ceases to be himself; he adopts entirely the kind of personality offered to him by cultural patterns and he ... becomes exactly as all others are and as they expect him to be” (p. 208-209). Any anxiety people might feel about this kind of existence concerns whether or not they are sufficiently assiduous in pursuing and realizing the pattern of conformity. The automaton conformist’s credo can be summarized thus; “I must conform, not be different, not ‘stick out’; I must be ready and willing to change according to the changes in the pattern; I must not ask whether I am right or wrong, but whether I am adjusted, whether I am not ‘peculiar’, not different” (1956a, p. 153).

Automaton conformity has crucial consequences, according to Fromm. One is the spread of pseudo phenomena. Anticipating Baudrillard’s (1983) concept of hyper reality, and his contention that viewing representations of experience has replaced the direct experience of the sensuous world, Fromm argued that when people’s opinions and reasons mimic dominant ideology we have pseudo thinking (1941, p. 217), pseudo reasoning (p. 215) and the evolution of a pseudo self (p. 290). Connected to the emergence of pseudo thought is the stamping out of original ideas and self-directed learning. Although freedom of thought, speech and action are cornerstones of American ideology, Fromm believed that automaton conformity had worked to erase these elements from the culture. In his view “original decision is a comparatively rare phenomenon in a society which supposedly makes individual decision the cornerstone of its existence” (1941, p. 225). We venerate the ideal of a society full of staunchly rugged individuals defending the right to think, say and do whatever they wish, but the reality is that “we

have become automatons who live under the illusion of being self-willing individuals....everybody and everything has become instrumentalised” (p. 279).

This decline in originality of thought and decision inevitably worked to kill individual conscience and with it the possibility of morally-inspired revolution. In *The Sane Society* (1956a) Fromm posed the rhetorical question “how can conscience develop when the principle of life is conformity?” (p. 173). To him “conscience by its very nature is non-conforming” because its distinctive feature is that it allows a person “to say no, when everybody else says yes” (ibid.). When people are consumed by the need to conform they cannot hear the voice of conscience, much less act on it. The pressure to conform is raised to almost irresistible levels in times of war when the expression of opposition to military action (as, for example, in the unilateral invasions of Vietnam or Iraq) can be stigmatized in the early stages of war as unpatriotic. In this atmosphere advocates of war strive to define dissent as either irrational or evil. This kind of unthinking agreement with calls to patriotism is much easier to ensure when we think of ourselves as things or commodities. After all, conscience has no place in the life of inert objects. Through automaton conformity we cede the responsibility for developing conscience, and for conscientious objection, to the judges of normality (echoes of Foucault again) that are everywhere. When the power of individual conscience is neutralized then what is considered “normal” thought becomes the responsibility of specialists in psychoanalysis, psychiatry and psychology who “tell you what the ‘normal’ person is, and, correspondingly, what is wrong with you; they devise the methods to help you adjust, be happy, be normal” (p. 168).

Automaton conformity inevitably results in a suppression of critical thinking. As we strive to conform to anonymous authority, and as we feel increasingly powerless in the face of the massive structures (corporations, political parties, labor unions) and forces (advertising, political propaganda) confronting us, we lose the capacity to think critically. In Fromm’s view “these methods of dulling the capacity for critical thinking are more dangerous to our democracy than many of the open attacks against it” (1941, p. 150). We are unable to see the big picture, to realize that we are part of a system that operates deliberately to diminish our agency and suppress our ability to ask critical questions. It was clear to Fromm that a most effective “way of paralyzing the ability to think critically is the destruction of any kind of structuralized picture of the world” (ibid. p. 276). Life becomes seen as “composed of many little pieces, each separate from the other and lacking any sense as a whole” (p. 277).

In this analysis a crucial role is suggested for adult education, that of teaching a structuralized worldview. Fromm is here offering us a clear purpose for adult education, one that fits firmly within the tradition of adult education as a field of practice focused on helping adults learn democracy. A structuralized view of the world is one that emphasizes how individual decisions are framed by much broader social structures and economic forces. It requires a familiarity with history, political economy and sociology. Fromm argued that the development of such a structuralized view was really only possible with adult learners. In his way of thinking adults not only had a greater interest in developing such a perspective, but they also possessed the intellectual capability to do

this in a way that was not possible for them in adolescence. An interpretation of Fromm's call to develop a structuralized picture of the world is something that Fromm's contemporary, C. W. Mills attempted to provide. Like Fromm, Mills had written a popular text on Marxism (Mills, 1962) and like him he had thought deeply about the social purpose of adult education. In a slim pamphlet published by the Center for the Study of Liberal Education for Adults (Mills 1954) Mills anticipates his own argument in *The Sociological Imagination* (1959) that a structuralized view of the world emerges when adults learn "to turn personal troubles and concerns into social issues and rationally open problems" (1954, p. 12). If adults start to see situations in their private lives as concrete manifestations of broader social and political contradictions, they will see that changing their individual lives is impossible without political action. Hence, "to the extent that the adult college is effective, it is going to be political; its students are going to try to influence decisions of power" (p. 16).

Fromm and Mills both emphasized the necessity of adults understanding how the particular circumstances of their lives were produced by the intersection of political decisions, social and economic trends, and the workings of capital. Divorce, unemployment, unhappiness and isolation must be interpreted not as the capricious workings of a cruel fate, but as the result of decisions made by the (often secret) few in positions of enormous power. Factories close and jobs are lost not because the economy somehow catches a cold. These things happen because companies relocate to other states or countries where non-unionized labor is cheap and plentiful, or because governing boards decide to merge with other boards, or because by 'downsizing' or 'rightsizing' a company's stockholder dividends are likely to be higher. Even the most private and traumatic tearings in the fabric of personal relationships such as divorce, should be understood as social and political phenomena. The restlessness and unfulfilled desires that lay behind a divorce were manifestations of the receptive orientation that predisposed people to want more and more with no prospect of achieving anything more than temporary satisfaction – the eternally expectant ones forever doomed to be the eternally disappointed ones, as Fromm put it. Alternatively, divorce, unhappiness and isolation were the result of people needing to leave their home communities in search of work that would provide them with the financial means to satisfy their appetite for the commodities they felt were necessary to create the good life.

Teaching a structuralized view of the world moves adults away from magical consciousness (in Freire's terms) to an awareness of how ideology, culture and economics intersect to shape individual lives. In Fromm's opinion possessing such an awareness is the necessary precursor to people deciding that alienating social arrangements could be reshaped by individual and collective will. So helping people develop a structuralized view of the world is one way Fromm believes adult education can lay the foundations for social action. Without learning this view there is little chance that people can recognize, let alone oppose, "the consensus of stupidity" (1962, p. 182) that will most likely ensure environmental self-destruction. The task of adult education is to break the chains of illusion that bind people to an individualized view of life and to develop in them the capacity for reason; "the capacity to recognize the unreality of most

of the ideas that man holds, and to penetrate to the reality veiled by the layers and layers of deception and ideologies” (1962, p. 179).

### **Adult Learning as Democratic Participation**

Earlier I argued that Fromm’s vision of a humanistic, communitarian socialism could serve as an analog for the conduct of the adult education classroom. If “human activity is paralyzed in the capitalist system” (1976, p. 99) then the goal of socialism must be “to restore full humanity by restoring activity in all spheres of life” (ibid.). Politically this meant the creation of a participatory democracy that would liberate people from the commodified, ‘having’ mode of existence. Fromm proposed a network of face-to-face groups that would coalesce into town-meeting sized assemblies of not more than 500 people. This network of assemblies would constitute a lower house to monitor and advise the elected legislature on a day-to-day basis.

Within these small face-to-face groups adults were enjoined to behave in ways appropriate to participatory democracy. In his outline for these processes Fromm focuses quite concretely on the conditions and dispositions for dialogic learning. In participatory adult learning groups members exhibit a disposition to help others learn because they regard their peers’ learning as crucial to their own individual development. They strive to understand what others are saying and to “help the other to clarify his thought rather than to force him to defend formulations about which he may have his own doubts” (1968, p. 115). Adults in these groups are in a ‘being’ mode of learning and strive for a loss of ego; “they respond spontaneously and productively; they forget about themselves, about the knowledge, the positions they have. Their egos do not stand in their own way ... they carefully respond to the other person and that person’s ideas. They give birth to new ideas because they are not holding on to anything” (1976, p. 42).

Although he does not reference Lindeman, Fromm is here reprising some of Lindeman’s sentiments regarding the nature and function of adult discussion groups in a democratic society (Lindeman, 1935; Lindeman and Smith, 1951) and then adding a more psychological sheen by focusing on the loss of ego. To a social psychologist like Fromm slaying the individual ego and opposing capitalist commodification are two sides of the same coin. When adult learners in discussion groups are disposed to help others learn they also help the other “to transcend his or her egocentricity” (1976, p. 42). In furthering the loss of ego “the conversation ceases to be an exchange of commodities (information, knowledge, status) and becomes a dialogue in which it does not matter any more who is right” (ibid.). As the model of conversation as a combative posturing recedes, so “the duelists begin to dance together ... with joy” (ibid.).

But Fromm argues that adult learning groups as analogs of participatory democracy are not just talking shops. They also impose two responsibilities on their participants. First, members of such groups must strive to ensure that they have access to all pertinent information. If organizational procedures or political constraints block this access then adults need to become activists who seek out the relevant information they need to make good decisions, and who insist on its dissemination. Second, participants must all play an active role in decision making. Participatory democracy is hard work. It does not allow

you to sit back and let others do your thinking, talking and deciding for you. What is most likely to galvanize people into active involvement in decision making is a conviction that what they decide actually matters.

Fromm believed that “the knowledge that one’s decision has an effect” (1976, p. 179) is crucial to the functioning of participatory democracy and the missing element in many superficially democratic formats. What is true for democratic experiments in the wider society is just as true for the adult classroom. A basic indication that a degree of democracy is in place is that the opinions adults express have some impact on the situation in which they find themselves. This does not mean that the will of the majority must, by definition, prevail. Indeed, the minority’s perspective may be the more valid one (as would be the case in an insistence that dominant ideology obfuscates the extent of repressive power). But where hard fought decisions emerge from true dialogue, the originators of those decisions need to know that they will have some effect. Otherwise, why bother?

At National Louis University in Chicago, where participants in the doctoral program in adult education constitute themselves as a governance assembly to discuss and generate curricular, evaluative and programmatic options, knowing that one’s words count is indeed significant. As described in Avila et al (2000) and Baptiste and Brookfield (1998), no matter what format the students’ deliberations take, participants expend a great deal of energy on talking over their concerns, and take the trouble to propose different protocols to guide their conversation, only because they believe that whatever they decide will be considered seriously by the power holders (the faculty) and stands a good chance of being implemented.

### **Radical Love and Adult Pedagogy**

Although Fromm mentions adult education only occasionally in his work, we can interpret many of his ideas as offering some guidelines for its practice. When it comes to the work of teaching Fromm has much to say in his small, but immensely popular, book *The Art of Loving* (1956b). In this disquisition on the practice of love, Fromm explains the difficulties of creating loving relationships in terms of the constraining and contradictory social arrangements flowing from capitalism. In commenting on how the struggle for intimacy is made harder by capitalism’s influence, he writes that “to analyze the nature of love is to discover its general absence today and to criticize the social conditions which are responsible for this absence” (p. 133).

One important component in the struggle for loving relationships under capitalism is the work of teachers. The best teachers of adults exhibit ‘being authority’ and are “highly developed individuals who demonstrate by what they are ... what human beings can be” (1976, p. 45). Fromm contends that teachers in the being mode are “bearers of significant spiritual qualities” (1956b, p. 117) but laments the fact that “we are losing that teaching which is the most important one for human development: the teaching which can only be given by the simple presence of a mature, loving person” (ibid.). A teaching based on presence, in other words a loving pedagogy, is relational. For an adult educator such a pedagogy calls for overcoming a narcissistic preoccupation with one’s own judgments

and interpretations. Doing this ensures that one can give full attention to the learner's individual characteristics and experience. This giving of attention precipitates a giving of many other things – joy, understanding, interest, knowledge, humor and sadness (p. 24) – that are returned with interest to the teacher. In the act of giving teachers experience “the highest expression of potency” (p. 23) and the benefits of mutuality whereby “the teacher is taught by his students” (p. 25).

A loving pedagogy is a social rather than an individual process, but the social arrangements that make love possible are hard to find under capitalism. To Fromm “the principle underlying capitalistic society and the principle of love are incompatible” (p. 131). This is because the exchange economy dynamic stands in straight opposition to the overcoming of narcissism and self-absorption. Under the exchange economy we view a loving relationship as “a mutually favorable exchange” (p. 3), with love as something existing outside our core, a commodity we trade with others for a fair return. Love under capitalism is governed by the ethic of fairness, “the particular ethical contribution of capitalist society” (p. 129). Where love is concerned “‘I give you as much as you give me’ ... is the prevalent ethical norm in capitalist society” (p. 129). A loving adult educator constrained by this ethic doles out parcels of love to those who offer love to the teacher, with the size of each parcel being determined by the amount of love directed by the learner toward the teacher. A loving society, and by implication a loving practice of adult education, is premised on an opposition to this tit for tat approach and attempts to escape the constraints imposed on teaching-learning relationships by the capitalist dynamic of exchange. Truly loving adult education is “the practice of a human power, which can be practiced only in freedom” (p. 22).

In Fromm's view learning to teach adults in a loving way is something that requires discipline, concentration and, above all else, practice. Underlying the practice of any art – including adult education – is an unequivocal belief in its importance. To the practitioner, the practice of a loving adult pedagogy should be one of the most important learning projects in life. Fromm wrote that “a condition of learning something is a supreme concern with the mastery of the art” (p. 110). The neophyte practitioner should feel that “there must be nothing else in the world more important than the art” (p. 5). Adult educators who teach in this loving way begin by making a vocational commitment to a calling, in the manner described by Collins (1991) and Palmer (2000), and then apply objectivity and faith to all they do.

Objectivity is a concept much derided by contemporary critical theorists who claim that no adult educational practice can escape its situatedness or avoid political implications. In fact, when Fromm talks about objectivity he is really talking about a mix of intersubjectivity (the empathic ability to see a situation from the viewpoint of the learner at its center) and bracketing (the attempt, never completely successful, to recognize and hold at bay one's own preconceptions, prejudices and projections where certain adult learners are concerned). Objectivity entails “the overcoming of one's narcissism” (Fromm, 1956b, p. 118) and grants the adult educator the faculty “to see people and things as they are, objectively, and to be able to separate this objective picture from a picture which is formed by one's desires and fears” (ibid.). Striving to be objective

inevitably leads to humility in adult educators regarding both their own capacities and the potential of their learners. Thus, in teaching adults “humility and objectivity are indivisible” (p. 120).

From humility springs faith, in particular a faith in the potential of people to build “a social order governed by the principles of equality, justice and love” (p. 125). The more experience adult educators have of their learners, and the longer they practice their craft, the greater the faith they develop in the importance of their work. Faith can also be thought of as a kind of critically informed insight regarding the complex dynamics of adult education practice. The more we struggle to overcome our narcissism and see our learners the way they really are, the more we are able to recognize which of our many impulses, instincts and institutions are well grounded and should be taken seriously. This is faith produced by an intentional engagement in critical reflection. To Fromm such reflection leads to “a conviction rooted in one’s own experience of thought or feeling” (p. 121) and “confidence in one’s power of thought, observation and judgment” (p. 123).

Developing faith in the validity of our convictions and practices as adult educators is not, however, only a matter of critical analysis. It also calls forth courage. Faith “requires courage, the ability to take a risk, the readiness even to accept pain and disappointment” (p. 126). Risk, pain and disappointment are endemic to critical practice. Partly this is because pursuing the tasks of critical practice - getting people to challenge ideology, contest hegemony, unmask power, and so on - represent adult education at its most unpredictable. Critical adult educators need great creativity and experimental flexibility as they seek to circumvent dominant practices and expectations. It takes a degree of nerve for an adult teacher to depart from tried and trusted pedagogic formats when adult learners bristle at being asked to take responsibility for their learning and regard deviation from a didactic norm as irresponsible, unprofessional conduct. Adult teachers have to call on their courage in the face of learners’ conservatism and in the face of skepticism or hostility to critical practice voiced by colleagues, supervisors and the wider society.

In a commodified society, and similarly commodified adult education system, any new or troubling ideas and practices will necessarily produce resistance. In Fromm’s view this is because the majority of adult learners are ‘having’ type individuals who settle comfortably into commodified patterns of learning and education. Predictably these adults “feel rather disturbed by new thoughts or ideas about a subject, because the new puts into question the fixed sum of information they have” (1976, p. 38). After all, to adults used to possessing ‘luxury-knowledge packages’ any “ideas that cannot easily be pinned down (or penned down) are frightening” (ibid.). In response to such resistance a critical adult educator must have the courage “to stick to one’s convictions even though they are unpopular” (1956a, p. 127). To do what is right, to follow one’s vocation (Collins, 1991) requires “the courage to judge certain values as of ultimate concern – and to take the jump and stake everything on these values” (Fromm, 1956b, p. 126). In staking everything on helping adults overcome the alienation inherent in capitalist society, and in urging the practice of radical love as an organizing principle for adult pedagogy, Fromm’s work reaches out to us from across the millennial divide.

