

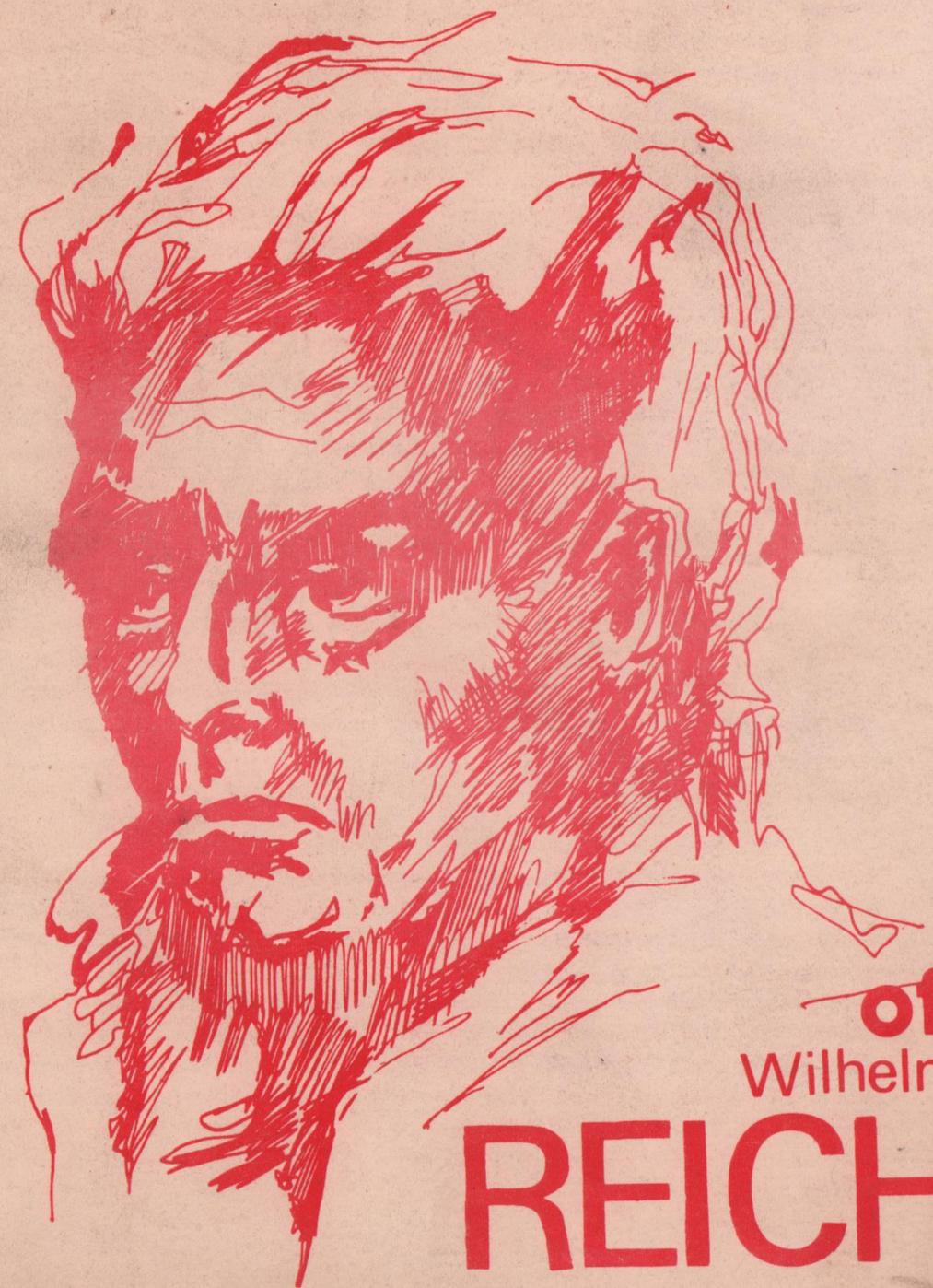
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Newsreel of Reich handcuffed on his way to contempt of court trial, 1956.

THE MARXISM and ANTI-MARXISM

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of
Wilhelm
REICH

by

Howard Press

Wilhelm Reich was one of the first to attempt a rapprochement between Marx and Freud, and the first to develop, as Reich wrote, "the objectively revolutionary character of psychoanalysis."¹ But although his work was influential and widely admired, not least by Freud himself, official psychoanalysis did not take to Reich's communism, and in 1934 he was expelled from the International Psychoanalytic Association. At the same time he incurred the suspicion of the official German communists as well, and his membership in the Party was terminated. Now he was on his own, and proceeded to form his own movement, "Sex-economy", later called "Orgonomy", based on the famous Orgasm Theory and on the principle of Orgastic Potency. Although he soon ceased to be a Marxist, and in crucial respects ceased also to be a Freudian, Reich remains one of the most influential of the so-called Freud-Marxists, and a great theorist of the Sexual Revolution and of Sexual Politics. Nevertheless, his Orgasm Theory is greatly flawed, and despite its genuine radical thrust, is essentially a bourgeois theory, and a late bourgeois theory, infected with many contradictions.

The essence of psychoanalysis, as Reich saw it, is the libido theory. "The basic structure of psychoanalytic theory is the theory of instincts. Of this, the most solidly founded part is the theory of the libido — the doctrine of the dynamics of the sexual instincts By the term 'libido' Freud understands the energy of the sexual instincts."² Accordingly, as a good Freudian, which Reich always considered himself to be, his own innovations notwithstanding, Reich holds fast to the libido theory, and develops its radical implications for social theory and practice, its great power, as Herbert Marcuse has shown, both of affirmation and negation.

But the libido theory is in contradiction with itself, and its explosive force, the force of "dammed-up libido", is at the same time deeply conservative. For

1. "Dialectical Materialism and Psychoanalysis," *Studies on the Left*, Vol. 6, no. 4 (July-August, 1966), p. 17. Paul A. Robinson gives an excellent account of Reich as a "Left Freudian" in his *The Freudian Left* (N.Y.: Harper Colophon Books, 1969).

Aspects of the present argument are discussed more fully in H. Press, "Marx, Freud, and the Pleasure Principle," *The Philosophical Forum*, Vol. II, no. 1 (New Series, Fall, 1969), pp. 38-49, and H. Press, "Marxism and Aesthetic Man," in G. Battcock, ed., *The New Art* (New York: Dutton, forthcoming). I am indebted in the writing of this paper to Ms. Barbara Fish, and to Messrs. Michael O'Brien, John Crawford, and Stephen Bloom, for helpful suggestions and criticisms.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

from Freud's earliest formulations to his late metaphysical speculations, the libido theory rests on the dark mechanics of "tension and discharge", the aim of the libido, as Freud writes, being to discharge accumulated tension, and "keep the quantity of excitation low."³ And this, as Freud writes, ultimately means death, total inanimation. Thus the instincts are not, as we might believe, "a factor impelling toward change and development," but "the precise contrary"; for "all the organic instincts are conservative, . . . and tend towards the restoration of an earlier state of things."⁴ Now this mechanism of discharge, which, as both Freud and Reich believed, is the mechanism of orgasm, is of course essentially a somatic mechanism, that is, essentially physiological; and indeed, it is far from clear how a psychical process can discharge tension in the sense required by Freud's hydraulic model. And yet the very heart of psychoanalysis is *dream-analysis*, that is, the analysis of symbols; and Freud insists on "the complete identity between the characteristic features of the dream-work and of those of the psychical activity which issues in psychoneurotic symptoms."⁵ Thus dream and neurosis, and as Reich is later to suggest, character formation generally, rest on symbolism, and not on the mechanism of tension and discharge.

Indeed there is in Freud's theory of the relation between *psyche* and *soma* a fundamental incoherence; and it is, in the Marxist sense, as we shall see, a fundamental ideological incoherence, a bourgeois trap. But Freud, despite his hydraulic mechanics, never abandons the specifically psychical, the "dream-world". It is of great interest, therefore that Reich's great psychoanalytic work, *Character Analysis* (1933), which is required reading in orthodox training institutes, makes not a single theoretical reference to dreams. (Reich was evidently practicing dream-analysis at this time, as his case-histories indicate, but it is no part of his theory.) Indeed, while carrying on the libido theory, Reich eventually rejects the unconscious. He disavows, not merely psychoanalysis, as analysis of the psyche, but psychology itself, and ends, as we shall see, in the crudest bourgeois materialism.⁶

3. S. Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (New York: Bantam Books, 1959), p. 96.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 69. See also, among many similar references, the important paper "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes", *Collected Papers*, Vol. IV (London: Hogarth Press, 1953), p. 63. "The nervous system is an apparatus having the function of abolishing stimuli which reach it, or of reducing excitation to the lowest possible level: an apparatus which would even, if this were feasible, maintain itself in an altogether unstimulated condition."

5. S. Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (New York: Basic Books, n.d.), p. 597.

6. The matter of *psyche* and *soma* is a complicated one in Freud. In one of his early papers, "The Justification for Detaching from Neurasthenia a Particular Syndrome: The Anxiety-Neurosis," *Collected Papers*, Vol. I, he writes that in anxiety-neurosis, one of the so-called "pure" neurosis, "somatic excitation," of a "sexual nature," is "accumulated," and that this excitation, which would

Now as we have seen, it is the essence of the organic process, according to Freud, to restore an earlier state of things — to enforce, not merely the *status quo*, but the *status quo ante*. And it is precisely this character of the organic process, this essentially somatic character, with its terminus in somatic discharge, that Reich, the revolutionary, fixes on. This he writes, among many similar references, of “the somatic core of the neurosis . . . which develops from the “dammed-up libido”, and which the “talking cure” interpretation of the unconscious, cannot touch.”⁷

But while the somatic process, according to Freud, is obdurately conservative, the psychical process, the source both of dreams and neurotic symptoms (and here, following what is no more than a hint in Freud, we must understand neurosis to be creative and adaptational, *expressive*, in a word, and not merely defensive) contains the future. For as Freud writes, although with some ambiguity: “By picturing our wishes as fulfilled, dreams are after all leading us into the future.”⁸

normally act as a “psychic stimulus,” a “psychical state of libidinous tension, . . . bringing with it the impulse to relieve this tension,” by means of “adequate activity,” i.e. (apparently) sexual orgasm, is “deflected from the psychical field,” and turns into anxiety (pp. 95 ff). It is essentially this account of neurosis that Reich takes over in his theory of “sex-economy,” especially the emphasis on “adequate activity.” A point which Reich seems to miss, however, is that a condition of this adequate activity of orgasm appears to be (p. 98) that the somatic sexual excitement be “assimilated psychically,” or alternately (p. 101), “psychically mastered.” This suggests a specifically psychic process which is in no straight-forward sense a process of *discharge*, and certainly not a process of *somatic* discharge, as in the male orgasm, which appears to be Freud's and Reich's prototype of the organic process.

7. W. Reich, *Character Analysis* (New York: Orgone Institute Press, 1949), p. 14.

8. S. Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, p. 62. It would seem that if the dream were a complete wish-fulfillment, it could not lead us anywhere. But actually the dream is after all, as Freud writes, only a *picture* of wish-fulfillment. It is this picture, this product of creative *imagination*, that leads us, hopefully, into a future of *actual* fulfillment. The problem lies in Freud's distinction, a dichotomous distinction, like so many others in Freud, between the “primary process,” which obtains satisfaction, that is, “discharge of excitation,” through hallucination, endophysically (already, it will be noted, we are out of the somatic sphere), and the “secondary process,” and inhibition of the former, and a “diversion of excitation,” which obtains satisfaction exophysically, through “voluntary movement” altering the external world. But this is impossible; for the “primary process,” as a characteristic of organic life, is *in the service of* the “secondary process,” and its development in human life, as foresight and imagination, has the effect of enhancing the secondary process, increasing its power and scope (although, paradoxically, as we shall later speculate, it owes its efflorescence to a certain inhibition of voluntary movement in infancy.) It is therefore nothing less than astonishing that Freud writes: “Nothing prevents us

Why does Reich, who found psychoanalysis objectively revolutionary, embrace its somatic theory, which is conservative, and reject the psychical theory, which is radical? It is because in the dialectics of bourgeois society, the enforced conservatism of the *soma*, like all conservatisms, periodically explodes, (as in the so-called Reichian orgasm), while the *psyche*, the dream, isolated from the *soma*, is seemingly ineffectual. But these explosions of the *soma*, isolated in their turn from the dream, are finally ineffectual also, and not merely ineffectual but reactionary; and thus, as Reich well knew, the Revolution fails. (Thus, “All power to the Imagination,” as the French students proclaimed in the May uprising of 1968. For imagination is the practical unity of *psyche* and *soma*, theory and practice. It is, as Marx wrote, revolutionary *praxis*, theory gripping the masses!)

Now the libido is indeed, as Reich emphasizes, the energy of the body. This is a premise, and a materialist premise, indispensable for the theory of man. But it is the energy of the human body, and as such, is not merely somatic, but ideational, and it is as ideational that, as Reich says, it is “molded by society,” for better or worse.⁹ It is somatic, and *at the same time* ideational. It is for this reason that we dream. For the dream, arising from the body, is the body thinking, the body imaging. It is the *résumé* of the *psyche*; the Royal Road, as Freud wrote, to the unconscious. And from the perspective of social change, it is not merely ideational, but, in the broad sense, ideological. It is, as Freud writes, the *wish* of the body.

Thus repression, psychological and political — and here Reich assumes, correctly, a functional identity, constituting the repressive social whole — is not a simple physical phenomenon, blocking adequate discharge, and damming up the libido, but a symbolic system, a system of ideas. And it affects the body, and

from assuming that there was a primitive state of the psychical apparatus in which wishing ended in hallucination”. (*Ibid.*, p. 100). For of course such an organism could not possibly survive.

Now imagination, phantasy, which leads us into the future, is, as we have said, the practical human unity of *psyche* and *soma*; and it is part of the basic dynamic of conservatism to split *psyche* and *soma*, and to isolate the dream from the real material forces, the bodily forces, making for revolutionary change, i.e. to isolate *psyche* and *soma* from each other. And this, of course, is part of the violence done to children; since for the infant, as S. Isaacs writes, “there is no dichotomy of body and mind, but a single undifferentiated experience” and one which “does not stop at the mere picture.” (“The Nature and Function of Phantasy,” in M. Klein, P. Heiman, S. Isaacs, J. Rivier, *Developments in Psychoanalysis* [London: Hogarth Press, 1952], pp. 67-127.)

9. See W. Reich, *Reich Speaks of Freud* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1967), p. 23, “The libido is the energy which is molded by society. . . . The child brings with it a certain amount of energy. The world gets hold of it and molds it. So you have sociology and biology, both, in one organism.” Indeed, Reich recognizes that “without a psychic inhibition, sexual energy can never become misdirected.” (*The Function of the Orgasm*, p. 71.)

molds the libido, through rules and internalized rules, because the body, as it were, the *psychic* body, is a symbolic system.¹⁰ And this, of course, is the main premise of Reich's own Character Analysis, although it is a suppressed premise, overlaid by the somatic viewpoint, the theory of "libido economy," of "the somatic core of the neurosis." For it is the *meaning* of the "character armour," the repressed postures of the body — the stiff neck, the haughty manner — that Reich analyzes, as Freud at the beginning of his career analyzed hysterical paralysis. "The character resistance [which the analysis must dissolve] expresses itself not in the content of the material, but in the formal aspects of the general behavior, the manner of talking, of the gait, facial expression and typical attitudes such as smiling, deriding, haughtiness, over-correctness, the *manner* of the politeness or of the aggression."¹¹

Now the presupposition of dream analysis, and of all analysis of the unconscious, all psychoanalysis, is that this symbolic body — the body thinking, imaging, desiring — is a *social* body, and not merely from the outside, as it were, molded by the world, but from the inside, molding the world. It is *intrinsically* social, not merely by "conditioning," social in its innermost functioning.

To be sure, the dream arising from the body, arises from *my* body, as implicated in all the circumstances of my life. But more fundamentally, as Freud discovered, it arises from my *human* body, the body of my species, implicated in all the circumstances of human life; implicated, in brief, in *culture*, and in the *history* of culture. Thus psychoanalysis gives us a picture, not merely of the childhood of the individual, but of "a phylogenetic childhood — a picture of the development of the human race, of which the individual's development is in fact an abbreviated recapitulation influenced by the chance circumstances of life."¹² The dream, as Jung was later to write, is a collective dream, and the unconscious underlying the particular formations of the ego, is a collective unconscious.

10. "Psychic body": Thus Aristotle writes of the "living or ensouled body," of which the *psyche* is the formal principle, and as Reich says, the "energy-functioning principle," which functions in man, Aristotle says, as "deliberate imagination." Thus, "we can wholly dismiss as unnecessary the question whether the soul and the body are one." Aristotle, *De Anima*, 412b.

11. W. Reich, *Character Analysis*, p. 47. Reich here calls the unconscious material, the unconscious phantasies, etc., the "content of the neurosis, and the character armour, the "set" of the body, the "form." Thus he claims to restore healthy libido economy by analyzing this form, and thus releasing the dammed-up energy. But of course form is here *determined* by content, and can only be analyzed from the point of view of content; from the point of view, that is to say, of meaning.

12. S. Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, p. 548. As Jung writes: "The symbols of the self arise in the depths of the body and they express its materiality. The symbol is thus a *living body, corpus et anima* . . . The more archaic and 'deeper', that is the more *physiological* the symbol is, the more collective and universal, the more 'material' it is." Quoted in Philip Freund, *Myths of Creation* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1965), p. 92.

(Thus the Surrealists, revolutionary priests of the unconscious, were the first "Freudo-Marxists," for it was their insight that each man's dreams embody the totality and its future.)

It is not, indeed, as Marx insisted, consciousness that distinguishes man from the animals, but culture, which is to say, in a sense, the unconscious; for culture, as I shall argue, arises from a body which dreams, a body which phantasizes. And the body which dreams, as we have seen, the symbolic body, is a social body, and it is only as symbolic that it is social. (The somatic process as such cannot give us society, good or bad.) That is to say, in a sense which we will specify, only the human body is intrinsically *communicatory*.

It is indeed true that animals, which have the bodies of their species, and a social life of sorts, communicate, sexually, aggressively, defensively, affectionately. But although it *signifies*, the animal body, not yet human, does not *symbolize*. It is not, as we have said, a symbolic body, it is not imaginative. For this animal communication springs from animal *consciousness*, and the demands of conscious animal life; whereas the definitively human communication, as in dreams, hysterical symptoms, and deep literary productions, springs from the *unconscious*. Thus only in the human animal do the demands of animal life, which man shares with all of earth's creatures, eventuate in *culture*. (Automatic writing and other Surrealist tactics, are a deliberate attempt at this communication unmediated by the conscious ego.)

Thus the origin of culture, which as man's great adaptive organ, meets these life demands in consummately practical ways, in agriculture and industry, is in every culture bound up with that consummately impractical production, a great *myth*, a fantastic *story*. And it is precisely this, story-telling, that defines the human animal, and the body of the human animal, normally and abnormally. Thus the dreams of sleep, the unconscious phantasies expressed, as Freud wrote, in "the psychopathology of everyday life," the swellings and fevers of hysteria, the symptomatology of psychoanalytic medicine — are *stories*, imaginative communications. What makes the human body human, in short, is that it *tells a story*, normally or abnormally.¹³

13. Thus Freud's early therapy for hysteria was the "cathartic method," that is, eliciting from the patient a certain *story*, which need not be a *true* story; and indeed, Freud himself writes that his case histories on hysteria "read like short stories." See S. Freud and J. Breur, *Studies on Hysteria*, (New York: Avon, 1966), p. 201. And thus, *op. cit.*, Breur writes of his patient's "imaginative products" (p. 64), and "poetic productions" (p. 66), while Freud asks his patient to "tell me more animal stories" (p. 110).

That these stories are *symptoms*, pathological, springing from morbidity, may be a defect in our medical philosophy; or it may be of the human essence, making the mythical Philoctetes, of the Wound and the Bow, Everyman. Or it may be a phenomenon of alienation, of Alienated Man, which will disappear in future society, as the forms of hysteria known to Freud have disappeared in our Post-Freudian society. Thus Philoctetes, who tells the story of his sufferings, is

Thus culture is at the same time an *expression* of man, which is to say, broadly, *aesthetic* culture, and as Marx taught, his means of life, practical culture. Man is the animal who lives through culture, by producing objects. (Thus man *grows* his food, whereas other animals eat what is at hand.) Man produces culture, and produces his life through culture, and he produces his life in society, cooperatively. Hence language, symbolism, in which, as Marx writes, a man "exists also for other men," and for this reason exists for himself as well. "Language, like consciousness, only arises, from the need, the necessity, of intercourse with other men."¹⁴

Now this cooperation, this cultural activity, this specifically human way of life, according to Marx, is "a step conditioned by [man's] physical organization."¹⁵

That is to say, man produces culture, material, aesthetic, and intellectual culture, because he is an animal of a certain kind, morphologically, and in consequence psychologically. It is a certain kind of animal body that dreams and phantasizes. Thus man is a featherless biped, a naked ape; and at birth, as Freud wrote, "polymorphously perverse," deriving pleasure from all his organs. "It may well be that nothing of considerable importance can occur in the organism without contributing some component to the excitation of the sexual instinct."¹⁶ Thus man is naturally the most erotic of creatures. And this hypereroticism, we shall see, far from being antagonistic to culture, as Freud supposes, is the origin of culture. The origin of culture, that is to say, is to be found in the libidinal organization of the growing infant, in infantile sexuality. Indeed, as Geza Roheim writes: "the origin of culture and the process of

in exile, as each of us, since the dissolution of the primitive commune, (itself partly mythical) is in exile from the whole, from the human essence, which can only be realized as a whole, integrally, *in the whole*, in a reconstituted society. (Thus dissident writers in Russia are known as "internal exiles.") This exile is the primal wound, and the productions of this wounded psyche, the magical bow, bear its mark, the mark of morbidity. But the wound can be healed, as the wound of Philoctetes, reunited with his comrades, is healed by Asclepius, the hero of medicine, and brother to Prometheus, who defied the gods, and gave culture to mankind. See Edmund Wilson, *The Wound and the Bow* (N.Y.: Oxford, 1965), pp. 223 ff.

14. K. Marx and F. Engels, *The German Ideology* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964), p. 42. See *Ibid.*, p. 39. "Life involves before everything else eating and drinking, a habitation, clothing and many other things. The first historical act is thus the production of the means to satisfy these needs, the production of material life itself."

15. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

16. S. Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (New York: Basic Books, 1962), p. 71. See Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), Norman O. Brown, *Life Against Death: The Psychoanalytic Meaning of History* (New York: Random House, 1959).

growing up are really the same."¹⁷

Now if the organism is ruled by the principle of tension and discharge, the "pleasure principle" in Freud's standard formulation, culture is impossible, for the energies of culture-building would simply be dissipated. This Freud will easily admit. Culture depends on repression, and the process of growing up is the process of submitting to this repression. The hypereroticism of childhood does indeed make a contribution to culture, but only by way of reaction-formation, which transforms our vices into virtues.¹⁸ "It is impossible to ignore the extent to which civilization is built up on renunciation of instinctual gratifications, the degree to which the existence of civilization presupposes the non-gratification (suppression, repression or something else?) or powerful instinctual urgencies."¹⁹

For Reich the problem is more difficult. For Reich is a Freudo-Marxist, a "Left Freudian," who believes in the possibility of a non-repressive culture, a culture in which the instincts are freely gratified; who believes, in short, in "the unity of culture and nature."²⁰ Indeed, Reich says: "I want to have it quite clear that *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* was written specifically in response to one of my lectures in Freud's home. I was the one who was 'unbehänglich in der Kultur'."²¹

Now the paper Reich gave in Freud's home was on "The Prophylaxis of the Neuroses, the liberating of the dammed-up libido, for which Reich recommends the establishment of orgasmic potency, or as Freud earlier wrote, "adequate action". And Freud's comment, according to Reich, was "*Die Kultur geht vor*": "Culture goes before."²² But what culture goes before, according to

17. G. Roheim, *Psychoanalysis and Anthropology* (New York: International Universities Press, 1968), p. 451. Thus, as Roheim writes (p. 403), "The sexual pattern of infants includes the three most important patterns of adult sexual behavior, tumescence of the organ, rhythmic pelvic thrusts, and the intense neuromuscular reaction known as orgasm. These patterns must therefore be present in the infant at birth." Roheim therefore concludes that in humans the "Germa" is in advance of the "Soma" (p. 402). But the infant who exhibits this sexual behavior cannot reproduce. The eroticism is not in advance of the *Soma*, as reproductive capacity, but is *of the Soma*, of the body as a whole, and does not allow of Roheim's distinction. (I am indebted for this point to Mr. Michael O'Brien.)

18. See S. Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, p. 105. "The multifarious perverse sexual disposition of childhood can accordingly be regarded as the source of a number of our virtues, in so far as through reaction-formation it stimulates their development."

19. S. Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, p. 63.

20. W. Reich, *The Sexual Revolution*, (New York: Noonday Press, 1962), p. 269.

21. W. Reich, *Reich Speaks of Freud*, p. 44. See also *The Function of the Orgasm*, pp. 165-168.

22. *Reich Speaks of Freud*, p. 45.

Freud, is surely not orgasmic potency, quantitatively or qualitatively. The instinctual repression which Freud thinks essential to culture is surely not, in the sense of the physiological mechanism of tension and discharge, this physiological reflex, as Freud writes, *orgasmic-repression*. It is, of course, nothing less than the repression of the total eroticism of the infant, *infantile sexuality*; the repression, as Freud writes, not of "genitality," but of "pregenitality."²³

And here is the fateful point where Reich breaks decisively with Freud. For the novelty of Reich's psychology was not so much the theory of orgasm, which as we have seen is taken over directly from Freud's early theories of anxiety-neurosis, as the strict differentiation of genital from pregenital sexuality; that is to say, the repudiation of *infantile sexuality*, which was Freud's great discovery. "This differentiation of pregenital from genital pleasure was the point of departure for the independent development of sex-economy."²⁴ Now it is said to be by the very principle of tension and discharge that is the principle of genitality. "Definite release from the sexual tension requires *genital sexual gratification*; pregenitality cannot provide orgasm."²⁵ Thus no culture, repressive or otherwise, can be erected on genitality as such, the genitality which *discharges* the libido, the sexual energy. And yet there is culture. It is therefore in the pregenital formations that we must find the roots of culture.

What had earned Freud almost universal opprobrium, of course, was not so much his account of adult sexuality as his attribution of a sexual life to babies. This was the great heresy. Not only is the child the sexual being, according to Freud, but a totally sexual being, and it is only by a process of painful inhibition over many years that we arrive at "normality." Naturally, natively, therefore — this being the radical conclusion which Freud's enemies were quick to sense — the sexual energy, the libido, is of the whole body, not merely the genitals, and sexual gratification is of the whole body.

Through a misguided sexual radicalism — and as we may suspect, and as Freud

23. Freud makes this distinction in his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, pp. 63-72, where he does, to be sure, write that the normal development issues in "the primacy of the genitals." (p. 65) but the tendency of his thought is better indicated in a note added to the text in 1930 (fifteen years after the original publication.) He is speaking (p. 71) of "the varying development of the individual sources of sexual excitation." "An inevitable consequence of these considerations is that we must regard each individual as possessing an oral eroticism, an anal eroticism, a urethral eroticism, etc., and the existence of mental complexes corresponding to these implies no judgement of abnormality or neurosis."

24. W. Reich, *The Function of the Orgasm* (New York: Noonday, 1961), p. 61. Without this differentiation, Reich continues, "no sentence of my theory holds water. Its correct investigation leads automatically step by step, over the path which I had inevitable to take, if I did not want to sacrifice my work." Earlier (p. 60), he writes of "the fundamental difference between genital and pregenital sexuality."

25. W. Reich, *Character Analysis*, p. 14.

sensed, a certain anxiety about pregenitality — Reich took this theory and reduced it to the orgasm theory, the theory of genital primacy. It is ironic, therefore, that Reich, politically the most radical of Freud's followers, and a committed Marxist as early as 1923, should have thrown overboard the most radical aspect of Freud's thought. For what threatens the established order, as Herbert Marcuse and Norman O. Brown have argued, is not genital sexuality, which is always going on anyway, but the *sexual individual*, the pervasively erotic, and hence irrepressible, man or woman. This is the total eroticism of the infant, which is so threatening to society, and which society resolutely suppresses.²⁶

What threatens the established order, to repeat, is not genital sexuality *per se*, but, as Freud wrote, Eros, of which genitality is normally one function. Genitality, that is, is normally or abnormally a function of the whole organism. It follows that the sexual orgasm, which became the keystone of Reich's theory and therapy — the aim of Reichian analysis being to "make orgasm possible," to restore "orgasmic potency" — is a function not of the genital *per se*, but of the whole organism.

Now orgasmic impotence, which Reich was the first to diagnose, is a real and pervasive disease, and Reich's contribution in this regard is of immense importance. But since it is the suppression of the total eroticism of the organism that cripples the genital function in both men and women, and makes for orgasmic impotence, the cure of orgasmic impotence must be a restoration, not of "genitality", but of this total eroticism.

The radical import of the orgasm theory is that sexual intercourse, genital union, may proceed to climax for both partners, even to a "satisfying" climax, and still be pathological. What Reich fails to bring out, however, largely because he has taken from Freud the most conservative of Freud's theories, the "tension-discharge" model of instinctual gratification, is that this pathology is not of either sex partner individually, but of their mutual sexual intercourse.

Reich, of course, cannot help but be aware of this, and his extensive social writings presuppose it. But it is not part of, nor is it reconcilable with, the orgasm theory proper, according to which orgasmic potency "is the capacity for the complete discharge," through frictional movements, of "all dammed-up sexual excitation."²⁷

To distinguish between "orgasmically satisfying" coitus and "onanistic coitus"

26. Reich suggests that Freud was unconsciously afraid of the orgasm theory, while Freud is reported to have advised Reich to return to personal analysis and work through his pregenital anxiety. Perhaps an indication of the depths of this anxiety is Reich's later theory that hunger, which is of course the root of pregenitality, is not an instinct, since "unlike sexuality, it is not the expression of an excess in energy but, on the contrary, of a sinking of the energy level in the organism." I am indebted for this citation to Mr. Stephen Bloom. (*Character Analysis*, p. 305.)

27. W. Reich, *The Function of the Orgasm*, p. 79.

was one of Reich's primary aims. A root defect of his "orgasm formula" is that it really gives us no way to make this distinction. Thus the critical import of the theory, the attack on loveless sexuality — "onanistic coitus with an unloved object"²⁸ — is blunted.

Love, in the broadest sense, is of the essence here. For without love, or desire, which in any form is a form of love, there is no arousal, and no "discharge," however strenuous the friction. (In this sense love is essential even to "onanistic coitus.") And desire is not of the genital *per se* — as Reich recognizes in his theory of the "vegetative streaming," the vegetative basis of orgasm, its basis in the involuntary nervous system — but of the deep inner hollows of the body, the "organic interior," as Freud perceived, from which, as the folk expression has it, "love comes down." ("It makes my love come down.")²⁹ And without desire, which may go unsatisfied even though the tension has been discharged, there is no revolutionary drive to make possible *erotic* sexual relationships; that is, to make *love* objects possible. (Thus the dialectical role of the Sexual Revolution in bourgeois society is to increase, not satisfaction, but *dissatisfaction*.)

Orgastic potency, in a word, is interpersonal, and depends on definite socio-economic conditions, notably, full equality of the sexes, and freedom from wage-labor. As Reich writes, it presupposes a "capacity for surrender," surrender to the partner and to the total experience, a capacity which competition, for jobs and sex partners, does not promote. And hence, as we may

28. *Ibid.*, p. 81.

29. For Reich's later theory of "vegetative energy," elaborated in "vegetotherapy," see his *Function of the Orgasm*, pp. 261 ff., pp. 269 ff., *et passim*. This vegetative streaming, the action of "abdominal" energies, is clearly a different matter from the "orgasm reflex". Similarly, Freud writes, in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, p. 74, that the sexual "apparatus" may be "set in motion," "from the organic interior by ways which we have still to explore." A little later, (p. 81) he writes that "sexual excitation arises from the stimulation of erotogenic zones, when the central apparatus has been previously charged." How the central apparatus is charged he does not say. Indeed, (p. 75) Freud admits that "Everything relating to the problem of pleasure and unpleasure touches upon one of the sorest spots of present-day psychology." For he cannot understand how sexual arousal, which produces the tension that must be discharged in orgasm, can be pleasureable. "I must insist that a feeling of tension necessarily involves unpleasure." Thus he cannot understand the pleasure of "fore-pleasure," the "lingering over the preparatory acts of the sexual process" (p. 77), as distinguished from "end-pleasure," the pleasure in orgasm. Now it is fore-pleasure precisely, as Freud writes, that is the contribution of infantile sexuality to mature sexual life. But for the infant, fore-pleasure, primarily oral pleasure — and as Freud writes in a curious parenthesis, the source of "the affectionate current in adult sexuality" (p. 73) — is end-pleasure. That is to say, there is gratification *without* discharge, without the "discharge of the sexual substances." (p. 79) Thus the theory of infantile sexuality is left strangely hanging. And likewise, as Freud recognizes (p. 80), the theory of female sexuality.

suppose, it presupposes "considerable ability to identify oneself with one's partner," this being the basis of the orgastic surrender, this giving up of the role-infected ego. "Men to whom surrender means being 'feminine' are always orgastically disturbed."³⁰ (The same is true of women.)

But despite his pregnant insights, Reich remains under the sway of the Freudian model of tension and discharge. Thus, in later developments of his theory, Reich takes as his model for the sexual process, and life process generally, a bladder, like "the urinary bladder," filled to bursting, whose expansion is pleasure and whose contraction is anxiety.³¹ (Earlier, *contraction* is said to be pleasurable, the "orgasm reflex" being the discharge of tension through "involuntary muscular contractions of the body.") Here the orgasm formula, tension-discharge, is said to comprise the "basic antithesis of vegetative life," the "fundamental biologic function."³²

Now this model of the bladder, self-contained, isolated, strained to bursting from internal and external pressures, striving desperately to discharge the tension (how? where?), is the ultimate bourgeois reduction of organic life. For the fundamental biological function, as we know, is not, after all, the accumulation and discharge of tension, which on the best interpretation, is only a subsidiary process, but, as Marx wrote, *metabolism*, the nutritive process, a ceaseless exchange with nature, which in the human organism takes the social form — the one form, we may say — of labor and of love.³³ Through labor and love we produce ourselves and other men and women.

Of course Reich did not fail to note this all-important principle, distant though it is from the orgasm principle. Thus he writes: "Work and sexuality derive from the same biological energy."³⁴ But the differentiation between pregenital and genital, which as he says is the cornerstone of sex-economy, puts it effectively out of his reach.

This fundamental contradiction cannot fail to infect Reich's very influential book, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, first published in 1933. Here Reich shows how the "pleasure anxiety" which is at the root of orgastic impotence becomes a historical force; how fascism, and other authoritarian movements, "originate from ungratified orgastic yearnings," which because they cannot be satisfied directly and naturally, turn into sadism and authority-craving.³⁵ This

30. W. Reich, *The Function of the Orgasm*, p. 82.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 245 ff.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 255.

33. See, for example, K. Marx, *Capital* (New York: International Publishers, 1967), pp. 183-4. "The labour-process... is the necessary condition for effecting exchange of matter between man and Nature." Also *The German Ideology*, p. 41: "the production of life, both one's own in labour and of fresh life in procreation." Of course, "men produce other men" not only in sexual intercourse but also in the mutual exchange of daily social intercourse.

34. W. Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1970), p. 293.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 192.

explains how the masses, who have an objective interest in the victory of socialist democracy ("work-democracy," as Reich says), acquire a "subjective," i.e., "ideological," interest in reaction, a stake in their own oppression. This is the "irrationality" of the masses which has so bedeviled radical thinkers and organizers.

Thus, "the structure of 'fascism' is only the organized political expression of the average man's character."³⁶ It is an expression of his "biopathic nature," which has developed through "several thousand years of patriarchy." "The patriarchal family is the authoritarian state in miniature."³⁷

Now the patriarchal family, to be sure, is sexually repressive; repressive, above all, of the sex lives of women and children. (Thus Reich writes that "Sexually awakened women, affirmed and recognized as such, would mean the complete collapse of the authoritarian ideology.")³⁸ But as Reich knows perfectly well, the patriarchal family, before it is sexually repressive, is an *economic* unit, a productive unit. It is the mainstay of the system of private property, of the private appropriation of social wealth. The "economism" of the social process, which despite his Marxism, Reich tends to dismiss in this regard, is decisive.

And this, after all, is the meaning, psychologically and sociologically, of so-called pregenitality. Pregenitality is the economic function, the nutritive function. (Thus we find Reich, in a flash of insight, referring to "abdominal man," as the suppressed natural man.)³⁹ Pregenitality is therefore the crux of the revolution.

The distinction which Reich makes the keystone of his life's work, the distinction between genitality and pregenitality, is the keystone of the bourgeois system, theoretically and practically. In negating this distinction, Freud, the consummate bourgeois, brought the wrath of the bourgeois world down on his head. It is with equal irony, and fateful consistency, that Reich, the wildest of analysts, should have become in his declining years (as his wife informs us in her harrowing biography)⁴⁰ a crackpot physicist, an American jingoist, and an ardent fan of the United States Air Force.

Thus Reich remains, despite his radicalism, essentially within the sphere of bourgeois psychology, the sphere of Freud's own "sex-economy." And this, as we have seen, is in the root sense anti-economic, for the organism lives, maintains itself, functions economically, not through the accumulation and discharge of tension, of whatever nature, but through a ceaseless exchange with nature, a flow of matter and energy, in which tension and discharge, in any admissible sense, is only a certain rhythm. (Thus Reich later hits upon *respiration*, and not orgasm, as the key organic function; for respiration is the

most prominent aspect of this metabolic exchange.⁴¹ And thus Marx himself writes of man "inhaling and exhaling all the powers of nature.")⁴²

Indeed, the truth of this sex-economy is not the truth of the organism, but of the late bourgeois system of production, and the consummate expression of the root contradiction in this system of production. For the bourgeois social relations, being privatistic, egoistic, do indeed leave the productive forces, the energies of the human organism, dammed-up inside, and do not allow of the communal culture-building which alone can gratify the human Eros. Impeded in their flow — the ceaseless flow of libido between ego and object⁴³ — these energies find their sole outlet in loveless coitus, the coitus of hypercathexed, detached genitals, and accordingly, through real or phantasized violence. For split off from so-called pregenitality, genitality becomes egoistic and sado-masochistic, and can only function through the mechanism of tension and discharge, the "orgasm reflex." Now this hypercathexis of the genital, this splitting off of genitality from the totality of Eros, makes orgasmic potency impossible. It is the root perversion of Eros, and the Strange Love characteristic of our times. And it is the root contradiction in Reich's orgasm theory. Hence his late fascination with the Air Force.

Now it is, as I have said, in the pregenital formations that we must find the roots of culture, and first and most important of these is orality, which of course is the basis of economics. This alone would be enough to give us culture — material culture, at any rate, agriculture and industry — if we were not reminded that animals also must eat; and indeed, as Marx was fond of noting, animals also build.

What is it then that distinguishes the species-behavior of man, which comprises culture, from that of other animals, who forage for food, and may build nests, dams, and so forth? "A spider conducts operations that resemble those of a weaver, and a bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of her cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality. At the end of every labor-process, we get a result that already existed in the imagination of the laborer at its commencement."⁴⁴

Indeed, the root of culture, as we have said, is the body imaging, the body phantasizing. And the first phantasy, as we might expect, is an oral phantasy. As Geza Roheim writes: "The gap between the moment in which hunger arises and the moment when the need is satisfied is bridged over by hallucinatory

41. See W. Reich, *The Function of the Orgasm*, p. 275. "It had become clear that the inhibition of respiration was the physiological mechanism of the suppression and repression of emotion, and consequently the basic mechanism of the neurosis in general." (Emphasis in the original.)

42. K. Marx, *Early Writings* (New York: McGraw-Hill), p. 206.

43. See S. Freud, "On Narcissism: An Introduction," *Collected Papers*, IV (London: Hogarth Press, 1953), pp. 30-59.

44. K. Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, P. 178.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 111.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 105.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 349.

40. Ilse Ollendorff Reich, *Wilhelm Reich: A Personal Biography* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1969).

wish-fulfillment, by the image of the nipple."⁴⁵

This image of the nipple is the primal unity of Id and Ego, of the erotic impulse and the nutritive impulse, the Pleasure Principle and the Reality Principle. For as Roheim writes, "The child obtains both pleasure and nourishment at the mother's breast."⁴⁶ The two instincts which Freud postulates, Id instinct and Ego instinct, are satisfied in a single activity, in orality, pregenitality.⁴⁷ Thus "the material used in the formation of civilization is the libido."⁴⁸ And this image of the nipple, or more broadly, this archetypal image of gratification, is the root not only of material culture, but of intellectual and aesthetic culture as well, of Truth and Beauty.⁴⁹

But why does the infant fantasize? Roheim speaks of "an active brain in a sheltered situation."⁵⁰ This is not sufficient. The answer does not lie with the brain, in the first instance, but as we have seen, with the infant's body, the hypererotic body that floods the helpless infant's nascent ego with sensations, and thus enforces, through primal anxiety,⁵¹ a turning from inner stimuli to outer, an absorption in outer sense, in shapes and colors, in primitive aesthetic perception. It is this, and not "psychic mastery," as Freud supposed, that "binds" the inner stimulation, helping make the eroticism of the body an ego-function, and thus, dialectically, preparing the infant not only for aesthetic function, but for practical action.

Indeed, we know that during its waking periods the infant is given over to intense visual activity, and that while nursing at the breast, according to R. A. Spitz, "He stares unwaveringly, . . . at the mother's face."⁵² Thus the oral cavity

45. G. Roheim, *Psychoanalysis and Anthropology* (New York: International Universities Press, 1968), p. 418.

46. G. Roheim, *The Origin and Function of Culture* (New York: Nervous and Mental Diseases Monographs, 1943), p. 418. Roheim remarks (p. 416): "I have always believed that Australians [with whom he lived as an anthropologist] are more primitive (i.e., more genital and less oral, less retarded) psychologically than other human groups." These tribesmen, more "advanced," "mature," than we are, live at a cultural level of extreme poverty.

47. See S. Freud, *The Ego and the Id* (New York: Norton, 1960).

48. G. Roheim, *The Origin and Function of Culture*, p. 81.

49. From the point of view of the woman, Reich ponders the question, "Why does the nipple erect?" "I wanted to understand *what* erects the nipple, what stretches out. That's when I discovered the orgone energy, the bio-energy, the life-energy." (*Reich Speaks of Freud*, p. 55.) This erotogenicity of the nipple, in suckling the child, and in sexual love, points to the unity of the nutritive impulse and the genital impulse, not only in receiving nourishment, but also in giving nourishment.

50. G. Roheim, *Psychoanalysis and Anthropology*, p. 418.

51. See R. A. Spitz, "Anxiety in Infancy: A Study of its Manifestations in the First Year of Life," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, XXXI (1950).

52. R. A. Spitz, "The Primal Cavity: A Contribution to the Genesis of Perception and Its Role for Psychoanalytic Theory," *The Psycho-Analytic Study of the Child*, X (1955), p. 218.

is the union of inner and outer perception, of Id and Ego, and "Mouth and eye, . . . almost from birth [are] a perceptory unit."⁵³ "The primal cavity . . . becomes the cavernous home of the dreams."⁵⁴

Thus the infant fantasizes, we may speculate, because it powerfully cathects the image, and consequently the after-image. And this image-cathexis, which is a type of object-cathexis, is gratifying — tension-reducing, if you will — without there being any *discharge*. It is gratifying, perhaps, in the way that the image in art is gratifying. And it is gratifying, as it were, for all time, in individual phantasy, and as Freud writes, in "mass phantasy." For these "impressions of our early childhood . . . crave reproduction for their own sake."⁵⁵

And so it is with beauty. We crave it "for its own sake." But this does not mean, as Freud supposes, that beauty is a "useless thing."⁵⁶ For beauty, phantasy, imagination — these images of sensuous gratification — are even in infancy, images, as Marx wrote, of *species-life*. "Like the id, to which it remains committed," Herbert Marcuse writes, "imagination preserves the 'memory' of the subhistorical past when the life of the individual was the life of the genus."⁵⁷ "Imagination envisions the reconciliation of the individual with the whole, of desire with realization, of happiness with reason."⁵⁸

And it is for this, of course, that Marx's architect builds.

Thus, the image of the nursing child, according to Spitz, is not precisely an image of the breast, but of the mother's *face*; or rather, two perceptions fuse, the oral perception of the breast, and of the flow of milk, and the visual perception of the mother's face. "For the infant still does not distinguish inside from outside, what he sees with his eyes from what he feels with his mouth."⁵⁹

And this would make the perception, and the phantasy which it gives rise to, a fusion not only of Id and Ego, but of Self and Other. It would make the primitive image of gratification, in its very inception, a *social* image, a *communicatory* image; and the most positive kind of social, communicatory image, an image of the Others as source of nourishment. And indeed, according to B. D. Lewin, of the Self as nourishment for the Other. For the infant's phantasy, a wholly innocent phantasy, in keeping with the real symbiosis of mother and child, is not only to eat, but to be eaten! Its formula according to Lewin, is "To eat, to be eaten, to go to sleep."⁶⁰

This, indeed, would be the deepest root of "group psychology," the

53. R. Fliess, M.D., *Erogenicity and Libido* (New York: International Universities Press, 1956), p. 56.

54. Spitz, *op. cit.*, p. 238.

55. S. Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, p. 546.

56. S. Freud, *op. cit.*, p. 546.

57. H. Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, p. 142.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 143.

59. R. A. Spitz, *op. cit.*, p. 226.

60. B. D. Lewin, "Sleep, the Mouth, and the Dream Screen," *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, XV (1946), p. 226.

Massenpsychologie treated by both Freud and Reich,⁶¹ and the real meaning of "the totemic community of brothers," which Freud concluded was the consequence of the devouring of the primal father. For the brothers are united — the brothers and sisters, since the totem clan typically includes both men and women — in feasting on the animal which is their ancestor and common substance, their progenetrix and their flesh (their *female* ancestor, since totemic peoples, Freud writes, are ignorant of paternity), and which can be killed and eaten only by all in common. "Kinship [which as Freud reminds us, "has nothing to do with the family"] therefore signifies having part in a general substance. It is natural then that it is based not only upon the fact that we are part of the substance of our mother who has borne us, and whose milk nourished us, but also that the food eaten later through which the body is renewed can acquire and strengthen kinship."⁶²

It is also the source of the incest taboo. For the incest taboo is a suppression of genitality in the infant, with its tendency toward the mechanism of discharge, and as Freud writes, toward exclusiveness — in short, its anti-erotic tendency (Eros being the great builder and combiner)⁶³ — in favor of orality, pregenitality. It is orality, then, pregenitality (for the anal function, in union with the oral, is only a complementary function, nutritive, gastrointestinal), that is the "binding power" of human community, the communal, and indeed, communistic power. For in totemism, as Freud writes, "Primitive men formed what might be called a magic production and consumption club."⁶⁴

In the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, Freud distinguishes between two components in the infant's taking nourishment, the "sexual activity," sucking, and the "nutritive activity," also sucking. The basis for the distinction seems to be that the sexual activity later becomes *detached* from the nutritive, as for example, thumb-sucking, from which the child derives no nourishment. But thumb-sucking is of course a *substitute-gratification*, a substitute, perhaps, for insufficient gratification, quantitatively and qualitatively, in nipple-sucking. We say that the child has not received, along with his milk, enough *love*. Love is the unity of the nutritive and the erotic, "work and sexuality," as Reich wrote; for as lovers we *nourish* each other. And love, according to Freud, comes not, in the

61. See S. Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (New York: Liveright, 1967).

62. S. Freud, *Totem and Taboo* (New York: Vintage, n.d.), p. 175.

63. There is, according to Freud, an "opposition between sexual love, and group ties," for in sexual love "there is only room for the ego and object." (*Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, pp. 73-74.) On the other hand, "a group is clearly held together by a power of some kind: and to what power could this feat be better ascribed than to Eros, which holds together everything in the world." (*Ibid.*, p. 24.) See also *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p. 89. Eros is the only "combiner" and "holds all living things together." But if this Eros is not the Eros of sexual relations, i.e., genital relations, of what is it the Eros? It is of course the totality of Eros, springing from orality.

64. *Totem and Taboo*, p. 149.

first instance, from the genital as such, but from the mouth, the "labial zone", and its connections in the "organic interior" and *thence* from the genital. For as we have seen, pregenitality is the source of "the affectionate current" in sexual life; and indeed, "a child sucking at his mother's breast has become the prototype of every relation of love."⁶⁵

Now it is true that Freud calls this pregenital organization "cannibalistic"⁶⁶ and many researchers, notably the school of Melanie Klein, have uncovered frightening depths of oral sadism in children. And if our love, our mutual intercourse, is only to be mutual devouring, Marxism is summarily refuted. The question is, then, Is the child sucking at his mother's breast a cannibal? Surely not when he is *sucking*. For then, as Freud writes, "the sexual instinct" (which we have supposed is in primitive unity with the nutritive, self-preservative instinct), "has sexual object outside the infant's own body in the shape of his mother's breast."⁶⁷ And the infant's gratification (which does not, as we have seen, involve the "discharge of the sexual substances") depends on the integrity of that object being maintained. Perhaps, then, it is when the teeth come in that orality becomes cannibalistic? (This is the famous second phase of orality differentiated by Karl Abraham.)⁶⁸ But what does Freud say? It is true that "when the teeth appear and food is no longer taken in only by sucking, but is also chewed up," the child relinquishes, or is forced to relinquish, the breast.⁶⁹ Thus the sexual instinct loses its object, and as Freud writes, becomes *auto-erotic*: "just at the time, perhaps, when the child is able to form a total idea of the person to whom the organ that is giving satisfaction belongs."⁷⁰ Thus the coming of the teeth would mean, not the devouring of the other person, but the first step of *individuation*, both of ego and object; the first step in the development of that reciprocity and communality, in which we stand in relation to one another as autonomous wholes — the first step, as Marx writes, in the dialectical unity-in-differentiation of subject and object, in which the object has its own existence *outside* the subject. For the subject "requires . . . a nature *outside itself*, in order to be satisfied and stilled."⁷¹

65. S. Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, p. 88.

66. *Ibid.*, p. 64.

67. *Ibid.*, p. 88.

68. See K. Abraham, *Character and Libido Development* (New York: Norton, 1960.)

69. S. Freud, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

70. *Ibid.*, p. 88.

71. K. Marx, *Early Writings*, p. 207. Emphasis added.