



The postmodern Critique of the Subject and Fromm's Idea of the Birth of the Subject in Time and History

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In this article we will explore the postmodern conception of the »death« of the subject and the following postmodern philosophical premises: the *critique of the master narratives*, the *critique of metaphysics*, the *deconstruction of foundationalism*, and the *critique of the Enlightenment notion of the autonomous and free subject*. In the central part of the article we will explore the limitations of the postmodern philosophy and introduce Fromm's notion of the birth of the self in the *time-history continuum*. Contrary to the postmodern philosophy, we will insist on Fromm's non-essentialist notion of being as a paradox and on the notion of the human agency which is crucial for the psychoanalytic (therapeutic) work and a personal transformation.

1. Postmodern philosophy and experience of the death of the subject

First we would like to explore the general climate and the philosophical premises of the postmodern philosophy. The postmodern authors based their understanding of the structure of the subject on the work of the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. He was critical of the search for the foundations of the human actions and beliefs. The most important authors or »originators« of the postmodern philosophical themes are the philosopher *Jean Francois Lyotard and Jacques Derrida*. We also need to mention Martin Heidegger who developed the forceful critique of the metaphysics and the Western conception of



the individual and the Supreme Being. Derrida developed the method of the deconstruction which allows us to uncover the hidden or repressed dimension of *every text* and *living practice*. Lyotard in his work (1984) showed the problematic aspect of the philosophical thinking which is trying to »erase« or »suppress« the differences and reduce the manifold phenomena under one and all-embracing concept or idea. The postmodern philosophy deconstructed the obsessive search for grand theories and the idea of the Renaissance humanism (human being as the supreme value).

In this work we will follow Terry Eagleton's emphasis on the difference between the notion of postmodernism which »refers to contemporary culture« and post-modernity »as a historical period« which is characterized by the specific style of thought. We will emphasize that postmodern philosophy is characterized by the specific style of the experience of three categories of the traditional philosophy: *world – self – and transcendent reality*. Philosophy emphasized strong critique of the Enlightenment and humanistic view of the self as a *free, authentic, autonomous or self-grounded*. We can see also the persistent and forceful aversion to:

»Classic notion of truth, reason, identity, objectivity, and idea of universal progress or emancipation, of single frameworks, grand narratives or ultimate grounds of explanation. Against these Enlightenment norms, it sees the world as contingent, ungrounded, diverse, unstable, indeterminate, a set of disunified cultures or interpretations which breed a degree of skepticism about the objectivity of truth, history and norms, the givenness of natures and the coherence of identities.« (Eagleton 1996, p. vii.)

Postmodern philosophy was critical of the desire of the scientists to uncover the objective laws which govern the humans, society and intrapsychic or interpersonal lives of human beings. We can find the persuasive scepticism in connection to the notion of the (absolute) truth and acceptance of the *multiple narratives, modes of being and identities*. The French philosopher, Alain Badiou, emphasized that Michel Foucault triggered the »scandal« when he proclaimed the death of the subject and that Louis Althusser understood history not as a development of Hegel's »Absolute Geist« but as a »process without the subject« (Badiou 2001, pp. 5–6). Badiou explained that the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan emphasized that the »subject has no substance, no »nature« and is completely dependent on the language and the movement of the desire (Badiou 2001, p. 6). In the last century we can find two possible routes to the understanding of the »nature,« *genesis and the disappearance of the human subject* (Šumič-Riha 2002, pp. 130–138):



(1) The existential-humanistic philosophy of Jean Paul Sartre (1992) and his insistence on the radical human freedom of self-creation – on the ethical, religious and political level. Sartre emphasized the importance of the human agency and idea of the »absolute« freedom of self-creation. He stressed that human beings are »condemned to be free« because a human being was thrown in to the world and was »responsible for everything he does« (Sartre 1956, p. 295). The question of the human freedom is in Sartre’s philosophy the basic and most fundamental ethical value.

(2) The critique of the Sartrean and existential-humanistic project of the self-creation and the belief in the human being as a supreme value. In this context there is one very important Foucault’s anti-humanistic (anti-Enlightenment) perspective according to which the search for the authentic, free and self-grounding subject is a dream. The West explains the movement of philosophy from the Ancient (focus on the *psyche, life or soul of man*) to the Medieval worldview which was centered on the »central categories« of »purpose, meaning, and divine will« to the modern »disembodied subject of consciousness« (West 2010, p. 14). It is precisely this idea of the disembodied subject and the notion of the humanism or »eternal« human nature, will and purpose (or *telos of human life*) which has undergone some strong critique. Foucault stressed that the hypothesis of the autonomous and self-conscious or self-identical subject was an illusion and served the interest of the domination and exploitation. In his literature Roland Barthes emphasized the famous idea of the »death of the author« (Barthes 1968). From the philosophical perspective the idea how the human *subject becomes the subject* through the *process of »interpellation«* (Althusser 1980) is of great importance. We may also add the critique of modernistic idea of the power of human rationality (or *logos*) which in the 20th Century led to the development of new forms of domination and destruction – *totalitarianism and fascism* (Horkheimer and Adorno 2006). Another dimension is the emphasis on the psychoanalytic idea of the split subject and how it is through the *Other* (Society, laws, different prohibitions) that the subject is becoming the unconscious amalgam of the other. Lacan developed the thesis that the so-called humanistic and autonomous subject is at his core a prisoner of the other’s desires (Lacan 2006). Lacan showed how the unknown images of the *Other* were situated in the unconscious dimension of the postmodern and the split-subject.

We would like to emphasize that for psychoanalysis it is the postmodern philosophical sensibility that is important for the following themes; the *body and affects* (being as embodied), the *unconscious desire* (our desire as the desire of the Other), the *language* (alienated function of the language which removes from the subject the intensity of the concrete sensual and bodily experience),



the *pleasure* (the power of libido which can overwhelm and break up the virtual stability of the ego) and the *unconsciousness* which is structured according to the linguistic logic of the sign and signified. The premises of postmodern philosophy can be captured also by the deconstruction of the dyadic elements: (*body – mind, text – speech, light – shadow; transcendence – immanence, self – mind*) and the critique of domination, social control, and submission of the subject to the external conditions and pressures of Society.

We will maintain the philosophical position that post-modern philosophy is a specific, historically conditioned experience of the (not)-self in the world which is not governed by the transcendental principles and the traditional metaphysics. Postmodern philosophy was trying to reorient itself from the *transcendence to immanence*, from *Divine to human reality*, and from *metaphysics to concrete and ethical (political) concerns in the world*. We can sense the philosophical turn from the Absolute Reality or Divine Being (traditional metaphysics) to the embodied being in the world. There is also a strong need to forge the bond between philosophy and psychoanalysis¹ (for example Jacques Lacan, Slavoj Žižek, and Herbert Marcuse) to explain the chaotic nature of the postmodern reality. It is through the synthesis of philosophy and psychoanalysis that the postmodern philosophers were trying to focus their attention on the fact of the intolerable anxiety and nothingness (subject as an empty signifier without a stable core or identity) at the heart of every human being. Postmodern philosophy is a »style of thought« and also a style of a certain specific »experience« of the no-self, split subject or the subject without the stable identity and the unchangeable core. We can see the specific orientation towards the fact of connectedness with other beings and the understanding of the body processes, desires, *jouissance*, and the unconscious dimension of the subject.

To summarize, in the 20th Century philosophy was concerned with the following important questions: (1) The structure and genesis of the human subject; (2) deconstruction of the metaphysical Reality – God as a Ground or foundation in the theological discourse; (3) philosophy was concerned with the problem of alienation, Anti-Semitism, war and with the possibility of the development of the just, progressive and democratic Society; (4) we can also see the feminist critique of the male (patriarchal) domination and the critique of the primacy of *logos* instead of *body, affects and emotions*; (5) the persistent

1 Erich Fromm was also offering the synthesis of philosophy, social theory and psychoanalysis. He was trying to understand the transformation of the human subject in the modern world. The important point is that in Fromm's case the complete deconstruction of the subject, as it is the goal of postmodern philosophy, would lead to the weakening of the critical thought and the *emancipatory praxis of psychoanalysis*.



critique of the essentialist philosophies which understood the subject as stable, unchangeable or eternal. Postmodern philosophy also refuses any notion of the autonomous and free subject which has some eternal »nature.« Philosophers were guided by the need to completely deconstruct philosophical concept of the unchangeable substance. To conclude this part, we will list some additional ideas of the postmodern philosophy which can help us to contextualize the psychoanalytic and therapeutic practice in postmodern times:

a) *Perspectivism, and critique of the metaphysics*

In the 20th Century we can see the return to Friedrich Nietzsche² and his critique of the morality and metaphysics which posited the transcendental ground or eternal principle on which the structure of the world stands. He deconstructed any philosophical notion which stands for something eternal. Nietzsche was critical of the concept of the subject which was just an illusion for him. He stressed that »there exists neither ›spirit,‹ nor reason, nor thinking, nor consciousness, nor soul, nor will, nor truth: all are fictions that are of no use« (Nietzsche 1967, p. 266). The next idea, which influenced different philosophers, was the idea of *perspectivism*. He emphasized that there was no absolute knowledge but only »countless meanings« or perspectives of any given phenomenon: »Every drive is a kind a lust to rule; each one has one perspective that it would like to compel all the other drives to accept as a norm.« (Nietzsche 1967, p. 267.)

Martin Heidegger (1996) also deconstructed the »desire« of the philosophers for the foundational knowledge and he emphasized the problem of the »forgetfulness of being.« He was critical of philosophy and theology because their aim was to reach the transcendental reality beyond the perceived phenomena. Heidegger was especially critical of the search for the *primal cause*, *ground of everything* or *causa sui* which is self-caused and is captured by the Aristotle's idea of the *prime mover of the universe*. The notion of God as self-caused (*causa sui*) or the highest Good (*summum bonum*) is for him the »real

2 We must emphasize that Fromm was critical of the following philosophers: *Friedrich Nietzsche*, *Immanuel Kant* and *G.W. Hegel*. In connection to Nietzsche Fromm showed his almost »obsessive« desire to finally kill or »erase« the dimension of the transcendence in philosophy. Fromm emphasized about Nietzsche the following: »Nietzsche visualizes the approaching nihilism which was to become manifest in Nazism and paints a picture of a ›superman‹ as the negation of the insignificant, directionless individual he saw in reality« (Fromm 1941a, p. 144). We can ask ourselves, if the negation of the transcendence does not bring up with it also the narcissist desire of the human subject to be situated as the *Divine or Supreme Being*?



metaphysical concept of God« (Heidegger 1969, p. 60). According to Heidegger, metaphysics is the onto-theology in its obsessive search for the foundation, *arche*, substance, logos, cause or ground of everything (Heidegger 1969, p. 60). In this search for the primal cause the question of the being was forgotten.

b) Master narratives and power of the Institutions

Jean-Francois Lyotard (1984) introduced the concept of the »Grand Narratives« (teleological view of the History and its development) which tried to explain the development of the society from barbarism to democracy and the final unification of people in a distant utopia. Every theory (Marxism, Capitalism, and Scientism) can be a Grand Narrative when picturing the world in »totalistic« terms and harmonizing the contradictory elements (poverty, war) in a grand vision of the secular version of the paradise on Earth. Science (psychotherapy or psychoanalysis) can also produce and maintain the grand story, myth or illusion that all the anxieties – *existential, biological, historical or ontological* – will be cured in the distant future through technical knowledge and progress.

Michel Foucault, as we explained above, was critical of the philosophical and humanistic notion of the free and independent subject. For him it is this image of the autonomous and self-conscious subject that is an illusion. He strongly »concentrates on the domination of the individual through social institutions, discourses, and practices« (Best and Kellner 1991, p. 38). Foucault described the continual process of the subjection of the human subject (Foucault 2013) to the external powers and institutions (prisons, schools, hospitals). One of the important ideas of Friedrich Nietzsche, which we can also see in Foucault's work, is the almost invisible (unconscious) connection between *knowledge and power*: »Knowledge works as a tool of power« (Nietzsche 1967, p. 266). Foucault also highlighted the process how human life (*bios*) and sexuality became the object for manipulations or exploitation and later on introduced the concept of *biopolitics or biopower*.

Jacques Lacan (2006) introduced many philosophical and clinical concepts and developed his own reading of Sigmund Freud. He was advocating, through his critical reading of psychology (Freud), existentialism (Sartre), structuralism, and philosophy (G. W. F. Hegel), a new »return« to the fundamental discoveries of Freud. Lacan emphasized the need to critically examine the modernist notions of the subject and he developed the idea of the split-subject or self as not-whole. In his famous lecture on *The Mirror stage* (2006, pp. 75–82) he demonstrated how the language structured the subject and how it was our own identity that was formed through the *Other* – his demands and wishes. He put forward the argument that subject was the effect of the unconscious play of



the signifying chain and that under the linguistic sign or proud exclamation – »I« or I'm father, mother, worker, or teacher – there was an inherent emptiness and nothingness. We may say that the notion of the self as an autonomous, self-grounded and self-conscious subject is an illusion.

Slavoj Žižek, well-known representative of the *Slovenian Lacanian School* developed a detailed critique of the repressive regimes and wild and invisible reign of the Capitalism. He developed the critical theory which was centered on the concept of the split subject or the subject »out of joint« (Žižek, 2000, 2000a). He proposed a critique of the Marxist notion of ideology as a mere false consciousness and developed the important theory of the ideology as everyday practice of living. Žižek stressed the important role of fantasy and the unconscious dimension of the human being in the social processes. It is also significant to mention his critique of the formation of symptoms and the idea that human praxis is more important than understanding ideology as a false consciousness. He offered in-depth analysis of the constitution of the subject, movement of the desire around the empty object, and the problem of the surplus enjoyment.

c) Philosophy and psychoanalytic practice

What are the implications for the analytic practice, if we take into consideration the philosophical findings (Nietzsche, Foucault, Žižek, Lacan)? Nietzsche's warning in the analytic setting would mean not to reduce the *other* to the *same*; to enforce the analyst truth (perspective) on the subject. In psychoanalysis a subject is not just a phenomenon and an analyst should not »master« or »control« the client's narrative (or bodily and affective experience). The important point is not to reduce the multiplicity of »causes« of human distress or anxiety (intrapsychic, interpersonal, biological, or existential) or affective experiences of the subject to one truth – to the analyst's partial perspective or his limited vision of the subject's truth (the symptom). Under the penetrating and classifying eye of the analyst the subject would become an object. In this context, we would like to emphasize Fromm's warning that we have to transcend the concept of ourselves and others as »things« (Fromm 1930a, p. 184). This »violent« and subversive act of the reduction of a being to an object would lead to the disappearance of the subject and his hiddenness in the analytic space-time matrix. It would also destabilize the relationship between two subjects and lead to the escape from the real and authentic human contact.

The goal or *sine qua non* of analytic practice should be the acceptance of the subject as a subject who is showing or sharing with the analyst his own desires and needs or the »equivalent center of being« (Benjamin 2017, p. 23). This openness towards the »otherness« of the other and acceptance of the



multiple perspectives and narratives enables the analyst to respect the client, his own locus of power, his ability for self-reflection and self-directed agency. With Benjamin's words, we have to go beyond the reduction of the other (analysand) to the object. We have to understand the dynamism of »doer« and »done to« and arrive at the »affectively meaningful experience of the other as not simply an object of need to be controlled or resisted, consumed or pushed away, but another mind we can connect with« (Benjamin 2017, p. 3). Erich Fromm developed the following ideas which we think are important in the psychoanalytic practice: the basic *existential need for relatedness, self-creation* in time and history, and the desire for an *authentic human contact*.

2. Fromm and the limitations of postmodern philosophy – agency, will, and the cogito

In this part of the article we will offer some philosophical comments on the limitations of the postmodern theory, especially in connection to Erich Fromm and his social and psychoanalytic approach to understanding the human being. Fromm offered the notion of being as a *movement, process and constant development*. We think that he is not insisting on the modernist philosophical notion of the »eternal« and unchangeable »nature« of being. We think that despite postmodern critique of the subject, the deconstruction of the ideal of the autonomy, free will, and self-directed activity in the world, there are certain important aspects in Fromm's concepts which are important for the psychoanalytic practice. The following ideas can help us to focus on the creative and emancipatory potential of human beings:

a) A human being as an active participant

Erich Fromm, as a humanist, psychoanalyst, and social critic, preserved the philosophical, existential and ethically oriented concept of the active and fundamentally (ontologically) *relational notion of the subject*. He »introduced« to psychoanalytic theory many concepts which became the central topic of further research: »narcissism,« »symbiosis,« and the »role of agency« (Greenberg and Mitchell 1983, p. 106). The authors emphasized that Fromm was »an existentialist« because »the person is continually choosing, forward and backward, living authentically or languish in illusions« (Greenberg and Mitchell 1983, p. 113). From birth onwards, a human being is not independent or self-sufficient but it needs other beings in order to survive and form the social communities which offer him safety, cooperation and survival.



Fromm emphasized that *Plato, Hegel and Heraclites* explained the core »concept of process, activity, and movement as an element in being« (Fromm 1976a, p. 21). The notion of *being as a process* is clearly not the modernist and essentialist notion of the being as static and eternal. Fromm's relational approach is focused on the individual and his being in the world: »the key problem of psychology is that of specific kind of relatedness of the individual to the world and not that of the satisfaction or frustration of this or that instinctual need per se« (Fromm 1941a, p. 9). A complete deconstruction of any notion of the human agency, will, and consciousness would lead in Fromm's case to anti-humanism and weakening of the critical thought. Elliott explained that »love, empathy, anxiety, shame, depression: no study of social life can be successfully carried out, or meaningfully interpreted without reference to the human element of agency (Elliott 2004, pp.20–21). In his work Fromm offered an *anti-essentialist reading of the subject* when he developed the notion of the subject as a process and emphasized that »nothing is real but as a process.« According to Fromm's understanding a human being is not some static and unchangeable entity (Fromm 1976a, pp. 21–22). The understanding of the subject only as an effect of the signifying chain or historical (economical) or political circumstances is untenable because »man is not only made by history – history is made by man« (Fromm 1941a, p. 10). A human subject is the active participant in the world and it *re-creates itself in the historical process* and also »the history of man is a history of growing awareness« (Fromm 1964a, p. 73). A human subject has potency, will and power to manifest its own potentialities in the historical (and analytical) space and time matrix. The deconstruction of the modernist notion of the subject as eternal and autonomous does not necessary lead to the complete deconstruction of the subject. In this context Frie explained that change required both desire and will to open ourselves to the new possibilities of being:

»It is the response from the Other within the therapeutic dyad that makes possible realization of agency in a tangible way. Once we come to understand ourselves as agents of our world, it becomes possible for us to imagine making different choices, and begin relating to others and acting in our worlds in new and different ways.« (Frie 2003a, p. 19.)

Fromm emphasized that the individual psychology was a social psychology from the start. In this context Frie emphasized that a psychoanalytic practice »always takes place within sociopolitical and cultural contexts« (Frie 2009, p. vii). The social and radical psychoanalytic theory has as its goal the exploration of the dialectic relationship between the subject and society: »the basic



entity of the social process is the individual, his desires, and fears, his passions and reason, his propensities for good and evil« (Fromm 1941a, p. ix). In connection to the *Other*, Frie emphasized the important point that »the assumption and experience of agency always takes place within a relational context« (Frie 2003a, p. 19). No cultural or political hegemony can be total or complete. We think that no theory can completely deconstruct the human agency; desire and consciousness which creates the existential condition for living and at the same time transcends the concrete history. Elliott stressed that »no system of domination, no matter how apparently »total« in character cannot contain or exhaust the individual subject's unique mode of being« (Elliott 1999, p. 44). Fromm emphasized that a human subject is not some pure »play-doh« which the society, mode of production, certain ideology, political or economic circumstances can mold into some unchangeable pattern of thinking, feeling or behaving. Fromm wrote: »if man were infinitely malleable, there would have been no revolutions; there would have been no change because a culture would have succeeded in making human submit to its patterns without his resistance« (Fromm 1968a, pp. 70–71).

b) The critique of the Cogito

Fromm developed in *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis* (1960a, pp. 79–81) an important philosophical critique and deconstructive reading of the modernist (Descartes notion) of the subject. He explained that »I« is not just a *thinking thing*, but »I is experienced also in the process of feeling and creative action« (Fromm 1955a, p. 60). The fundamental is the ontological and existential fact of the existing subject and not the reduction of being to thinking (Fromm 1991, p. 165) or the split between the affective and intellectual dimension (Fromm 1968a, pp.50–55). Fromm is critical of the neglect of the human body, affects and emotions and the erosion of the authentic relatedness between human beings. His emphasis is on the understanding of the unconscious dimension of the human being and the development of the human capacity for reflection, relatedness and freedom.

Similarly to Fromm, the postmodern theory (Lacan, Žižek) or the relational psychoanalysis (Greenberg and Mitchell) and inter-subjective psychoanalysis (Stolorow and Brandshaft) also focused on the desire to deconstruct Descartes' isolated monadic cogito. We can also see the important critique of the traditional psychoanalytic notions of the *neutrality, objectivity and notion of the disinterested (neutral) science*. Stolorow deconstructed the notion of the separated and autonomous mind and explained the shortcomings of the »heroic image or heroic myth that portrays the inner essence of the person surviving



in a state that is separated from all that sustains life« (Stolorow and Atwood 1992, p. 12). Žižek, in his work *The Plagues of Phantasies*, also offered a critique of Descartes' cogito and stressed his emptiness. He explained the crucial problem of »Descartes' de-substantialization of the subject, its reduction to S, to the pure void of self-referential negativity« and his position is anti-humanistic because he »dissolves the Renaissance Humanist unity of man as the highest Creature, the summit of creation, into pure cogito and its bodily remainder.« (Žižek 1997, pp. 13 f.)

Fromm explained the fact that *Freud, Darwin and Copernicus* contributed to the decline or dethronement of the subject as the »highest creature« and to the decline of the vision of the subject as the self-identical and autonomous. Their scientific discoveries »wounded the narcissism of human race very profoundly« (Fromm 1964a, p. 91). This irrecoverable wound changed the subject's self-understanding in postmodern times but it did not lead to its complete dissolution, disappearance or forgetfulness. The postmodern man has to live with the realization that there are forces which he cannot control and that the philosophy of a pure and disinterested cogito does not enable the subject to cross the barrier between the self and the other. Fromm stressed the dimension of the bodily experience of a human being and inter-relatedness which meant the *primary experience of being-with-others*.

c) *Fromm's humanism*

Fromm placed a great trust in human beings and the humanistic principles. He often quoted Sophocles' *Antigona*: »There are many wonderful things, but there is nothing more wonderful than Man« (Fromm 1963f, p. 400) or that »the humanistic position is that there is nothing higher and nothing more dignified than human existence« (Fromm 1947a, p. 13). Fromm retained the faith in the human »will« to live, develop and evolve: »faith in man, in his possibilities to develop to ever higher stages, in the unity of human race, in the tolerance and peace, and in reason and love as the forces which enable man to realize himself, to become what he can be« (Fromm 1963f, pp. 397–398). The ethical living or different practices mean that a human being cannot live without the attempt to find the meaning of existence or to »find an answer to the question of the meaning of his existence and to discover norms according to which he ought to live« (Fromm 1947a, p. 7).

It is the basic postulate of humanism (a human being as the central and supreme value) and Immanuel Kant's demand (*imperative*) to respect the other being: not to do any harm (to preserve life) or »use« the other as an object or tool (Fromm 1947a, p. 121) that are of great significance for the psychoanalytic



practice. Humanism gives priority to the human being and its own processes against the alienated and bureaucratic demands of the world. It respects the human being; its desire for growth, learning and development. We can detect in human beings the innate »drive to live.« According to Baruch de Spinoza and Erich Fromm this »drive« is »inherent in every organism« (Fromm 1947a, p. 18). The basic postulate of humanism to respect every being does not mean a naive stance or a romantic desire for the whole, uncorrupted and happy human race as we can encounter in the mythic Golden Age. The acceptance of Fromm's insistence on humanism and psychoanalytic practice of *deconstruction of illusions, empathy, and relatedness* means that no violence is done to the other being. We have to emphasize that certain psychotherapeutic modalities (schools) through the act of interpretation or use of techniques focus primarily on achieving socially accepted functioning of an individual in society. The main weakness of those practices is that the other (a client) can be reduced to an object. Fromm (1947a) emphasized that when we harm one being we harm the whole humanity; and that by saving one human being we save the whole humanity.

He retained the humanistic (Renaissance) notion of the subject as free, *open and unlimited in his development and growth*. The subject is his own »project« and can manifest his own unlimited (not yet manifested) possibilities in the actual and historical reality. Fromm advocated the concept of the subject who had a deep desire for human relatedness and authenticity. A human being is a fundamentally relational, social or inter-personal being. It develops itself in the time/history matrix and becomes what he/she is capable of becoming. Postmodern philosophy did not completely deconstruct the notion of the subject but it attacked its absolute autonomy and independence from the social reality, context, and ideology. Fromm explained that the pressures of the society can cripple the agency, the capacity for reflection and action of the subject. But on the other side the social and psychoanalytic theory which renounces the concept of active and self-conscious being misses the most radical element – the *capacity for the social change*, development and growth of a human being. Without some non-essentialist notion of the subject we remain caught in Hegel's spiritless »*Universalem und Absolutem Geist*.« In this theory there is no place for the self-conscious human agency which can influence the historical processes. The understanding of history as a process without the subject represents the lessening of our imagination, fantasy and the denial of hopes and dreams which can enable the subject to have a different vision of the society and modes of being.



d) The age of anxiety and alienation

In his work Fromm developed a coherent and important critique of the modern pathologies: *consumerism, alienation and lessening of the human freedom and interpersonal contact*. Like the Frankfurt School (Wiggershaus 1995; Kellner 1989) and postmodern philosophers Fromm was critical of the alienation, »forgetfulness of being« and bureaucratization of the work place. Furthermore he was critical of the reduction of a human being to a mere object on the market or in the abstract historical processes. He analyzed the crucial problem of alienation and the ontological experience of the self in time and history. The same exploration of the pathologies and anxieties was made by the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman who, as Fromm, was critical of the problem of the reduction of a human being to an object which is manipulated in a bureaucratic and consumerist society. In *Escape from Freedom* (1941a) Fromm unveiled the basic problem of *anxiety and the burden of freedom and possible routes of escape (sadism, masochism, automaton conformity, and destructiveness)*. The second topic was the serious issue of *alienation and transformation of a living being into an object*. Fromm offered an in-depth analysis of the economic, existential and historical conditions of the modern man: the experience of the »inner« emptiness and meaningless of life and human relationships, precarious economic conditions, paranoid projection of evil qualities onto *Others* (currently closure of the borders and erection of the barbed wires around Europe) and willingness to surrender the autonomy and privacy for security and pleasure.

The same experience of anxiety was emphasized also by a sociologist Zygmunt Bauman. He subtly captured the conditions of postmodern man: »precarious economic and social conditions train man and women (or make them learn the hard way) to perceive the world as container full of disposable objects, object for one-off use; the whole world – including other human beings« (Bauman 2000, p. 162). And furthermore, this objectification of the *Lived-world* of the postmodern man extends to humans, nature as a whole and it drastically affects the »disintegration of human bonds« (Bauman 2000, p. 165).

e) Logocentrism and patriarchal values

We would like to conclude that postmodern philosophy rightly focuses on the problem of bureaucratization of society, disappearance of freedom and the problem of using the intellectual forces to dominate human beings and the world as a whole. The human mind and the scientific achievements were used in the 20th Century for the purpose of the extermination or domination of the living forms (genocides, concentration camps, war in Ex-Yugoslavia). Another



dimension which postmodern philosophy uncovered, and is deeply rooted in our collective unconscious, is the *logocentrism* (primacy of the logos, mind and negation of the body), *phalocentrism* (domination, control and alienation) and *problem of the patriarchal values*³ which negate the equal rights in the theoretical and political arena. Different dyadic forms such as: materialism – idealism; science – subjective experience; woman as emotional – man as intellectual; humanism – natural science – became problematic. Postmodern philosophy unmasked the unconscious desires of scientists for the pure objectivity and showed that science, art and philosophy, are not the Kantian »un-interested« activity. At the deeper level there remains the need of the scientist to control, understand or manipulate the reality. Fromm rightly emphasized that there was a real problem in the objectivistic epistemology: »man is not a thing. He cannot be dissected without being destroyed; he cannot be manipulated without being harmed« (Fromm 1930a, p. 194).

To summarize, in every »post« there is almost an invisible, unconscious »trace« of the modern style of thought. We maintain the position that even if we completely deconstruct any humanistic, idealist or materialistic notion of the subject, the significant fact is what escapes the deconstruction. In every act of the critique of the Enlightenment (humanistic) notion of the subject, we can see the emergence of the »erased« or repressed dimension of the subject. Through the forceful act of the negation the invisible or repressed dimension of the self emerges. In other words, without some »non-essentialist« notion of the active and self-aware subject there is no philosophy, no experience and no psychoanalytic work. Privileging Nietzsche's perspectivism, openness to multiple meanings, narratives, identities, and blurring the boundaries between the self and the other or the depth and the surface, should not end up in the wild and unlimited *Dionysian »dance« or »play« of the relativism*. Perspectivism offers thinkers and psychoanalysts the perspective on the human being as *an interpersonal, relational and embodied being – in time and in a historical place*. It focuses on the fact that through the whole life span a human being develops different identities, occupational roles and modes of being. If we maintain, that everything constantly changes then change and movement become the *absolute principle*. Consequently postmodern philosophy can become another *absolutist metaphysical principle of explanation*.

3 In this context we would like to emphasize that before a consistent and important critique of feminism emerged Fromm offered in the article *The Male Creation* (1933) a critique of the gender relations based on power and domination (Fromm 1994b, pp. 46–75).



3. The development or the »birth« of the self in the time-history matrix

In his work Erich Fromm developed a *humanistic oriented psychoanalysis*. He focused on the human being and its existence. One of the most fundamental Fromm's discoveries in Karl Marx's work is a tremendous fascination with the notion of history as a place of the continuous development and growth. Fromm *highlighted* the important point that a human being is the part of nature (cosmos) and is also endowed with consciousness and reason which offer him the possibility of transcending the fact of the »animal« existence. Alongside with the Dominican theologian Meister Eckhart⁴ Fromm is one of the few philosophers who constantly used the metaphor of the »birth of human being,« in time, body and history. Fromm stressed the following:

»Man gives birth to himself in the process of history. The essential factor in this process of self-creation of human race lies in its relationship to nature. Man at the beginning of history, is blindly bound or chained to nature. In the process of evolution he transforms the relationship to nature, and hence himself« (Fromm 1961b, p. 15).

Through his work, consciousness and creativity the human subject transforms the objects and develops its own powers of reason and intellect. The development of the human being begins with the *primal unity*, where there is no difference and hence no consciousness of the difference (between the *Self* and the *One*). The decisive step in the human development, according to Fromm, begins with the birth of a human being and awakening of the consciousness. The significant step is the fact of the growth of human consciousness and the realization of the difference between the »I« and »not-I« (if we use the language of J. G. Fichte). History is the unlimited horizon where being can *become what he/she is* – a being who can develop, grow and transform itself in the history. One of the important Frommian ideas is that a human being's nature is not a »blank sheet of paper on which each culture writes its text« (Fromm 1962a, p. 64). The subject is an active and self-conscious and self-directed agent in the world. Fromm suggested that in understanding of the relation between the

4 The theologian Meister Eckhart wanted human being to empty oneself to be able to receive the Divine in his soul. Fromm is on this point following Eckhart. Fromm stressed the ability of a human being to re-create oneself in history and time. The development of human qualities (*relatedness, work, love or compassion*) is possible only in historical time and place.



subject and the history we have to accept the *dialectical standpoint*. He emphasized that there was the important link between the individual and society:

»Yet Man does change in the course of history. He is the product of history, transforming himself during his history. History is the process of man's creating himself by developing – in the process of work – those potentialities which are given him when he is born« (Fromm 1962a, p. 22).

The one dimension which was missing in Marx' theory, but was equally important for Fromm, was the importance of how the society »imprints« or »writes« the laws and taboos on the human subject. This taboos and laws are »stored« in the unconsciousness. The second dimension was how the human subject transformed his environment, institutions and laws through different *practices of living*. For psychoanalysis it is of equal significance to question how the subject is unconsciously structured according to the demands of the *Big other*. Or in other words, in what way is the unconscious desire of the subject structured according to the »desire of The Other« (Lacan 2006). Fromm found in Freud's work an in-depth analysis of the unconscious or intrapsychic universe of the individual subject. He explained that both thinkers placed the question of the human being as the *central ethical category*. The humanistic principles, which Fromm found in Marx's work, such as freedom, autonomy, consciousness, unity of a human being and an ontological matrix or fundamental connectedness, are the very core of the progressive (radical) and humanistic or existential oriented philosophy: »Marx picture of healthy man is rooted in the humanistic concept of the independent, active, productive man, as was developed by Spinoza, Goethe, and Hegel.« (Fromm 1961b, p. 51.) Fromm stressed:

»Marx had an unbroken faith in man's perfectibility and progress, rooted in messianic tradition of West from the prophets through Christianity, the Renaissance, and Enlightenment thinking. Freud, especially Freud after the First World War, was a skeptic. He saw the problem of human evolution as an essentially tragic one« (Fromm 1962a, p. 28).

Fromm argued that a human being would always be frustrated if he tried to return to the symbiotic unity with nature. In this state of »unity« a human being would »have pleasure,« but »no wisdom.« A human being in history and time becomes »wiser, but also unhappier and sicker« (ibid.). He emphasized also the tension between the humanistic, philosophical idea of the progressive development of the consciousness of a human being (*Hegel's dynamic*



of *self-consciousness*) and Freud's »tragic vision« of the human development or evolution« (Fromm 1962a, p. 28). His interpretation of Marx is important because he showed that a human being had the ability or power to transform itself, to be or become that what he/she can become – »fully born being.« In other words: »For Marx, history is a march toward man's self-realization.«⁵ (Ibid.) The humanistic notion of the subject's self-development in history means that only in *time and history* can a human being actualize itself. In and through the development in *time/body/history* can the being manifest its own »latent« powers. One of the important notions which Fromm used was that the work or spontaneous (productive) activity enabled the being to grow and develop itself. As Fromm explained: »Birth is the negative act, that of being thrown out of original oneness with nature« (1955a, p. 25). He further explained that the »aim of history is the full birth of man, his full humanization« (1955a, p. 227). He was interested in the possibility of transcendence of the »burden of history« and the development of the human being through work, and productivity. Fromm emphasized the following point:

»Marx was capable of connecting a spiritual heritage of the enlightenment humanism and German idealism with the reality of economic and social facts and thus to lay the foundations for a new science of man and society which is empirical and at the same time filled with the spirit of the Western humanist tradition.« (Fromm 1962a, p. 7.)

To explain the dimension of the internalization of the societal demands Fromm offered an important reading of Freud's work. Fromm's approach is situated in understanding Freud as an intellectual thinker who explored the structure and functioning of the subject. Fromm through the synthesis of Marx (the economy

5 It is interesting to note, that Fromm opened up the possibility that in the primeval Unity we can have a *pure pleasure* but *no wisdom*. A similar point was made later on by Žižek (1997, pp. 26–27). He emphasized that in the paradise (*Unity* or in the *One*) we cannot have the unlimited (unconscious) pleasure and knowledge at the same time. At the beginning of human history we have the complete harmony and unity but we do not have yet the self-conscious being and the knowledge of the difference between *Being* and the *One*. A human being chooses knowledge and development of human consciousness. At the same time a human being loses the primal unity. Søren Kierkegaard (1998), in his work *The Concept of Anxiety*, explained the point that »existential anxiety« produces in a human being the feeling of the beginning of the human freedom and separation from the primary unity. In this state of unity there was no independent and self-conscious subject. The historical being becomes the true self only through the break from the nature (paradise) and development of his powers in the historical dimension. The anxiety enables being to have the experience or vision of his possible modes of being in history.



and dialectics between the society and human beings) and Freud's emphasis of the unconscious dimension of the subject offered his own conceptualization of the impact of society on genesis and the structure of the individual. He developed the concept of the »*social character*« as a kind of a »second nature« (Fromm 1941a, pp. 238–256) which all beings share in a certain society (group). The concept combines Marx' insight how society influences the subject and Freud's important discovery of the unconscious realm. Fromm explained the function of the social character: »to mold human energy within given society for the purposes of the continued functioning of this society« (Fromm 1962a, p. 62). He repeatedly emphasized that society through *family as an agent of society* structures and molds the human energy (not just libidinal energy but desires, fears, aspirations, dreams) to the specific end (*telos*) or goal of the society – smooth functioning. Fromm saw in Freud's technique of mastering the realm of the libidinal energy the basic postulate of his psychology: *Where Id is, shall be the Ego*. This idea represents the Enlightenment »demand« to use the human mind, body, and energy to strengthen the ego, control the human passions and achieve freedom. Fromm emphasized regarding Freud the following:

»He created the science of the irrational. He wanted to make use of irrational, not artistic, powers to understand the irrational. [...] He wanted human beings to be able to understand themselves, to discover their unconscious, so that they could achieve independence. His goal was a rule of reason, the destruction of illusion. He wanted to see people become free and mature. His moral goals were those of the Enlightenment, of rationalism.« (Fromm 1983a, p. 73.)

Fromm stressed that Freud combined the philosophy of Romanticism (*desires, wishes, creativity*) with Enlightenment philosophy (*rationality and use of mind to understand self and society*). The goal of the Enlightenment thinkers was the need to know and to some extent control the »irrational« and the »darker« side of the human personality. Fromm emphasized that the goal to know more and to understand, to be free, independent, was the »goal coincided in many respects with that projected by the great philosophers of the Enlightenment« (Fromm 1983a, p. 73). Psychoanalysis is the *science of the irrational* and it offers the possibility to know the limits and unlimited possibilities of the human development. The psychoanalytic method offers the deconstruction of the *old and repetitive ways of being*, the transformation of the human being, lessening of narcissism, and *experience of the different modes of being*. Fromm emphasized the possibilities of psychoanalysis and its radical potential or the transformational effect on the individual:



»It can help us understand ourselves, perceive our own reality, free ourselves from illusion, free ourselves, too, from the grip of anxiety and greed. It can make us capable of perceiving the world differently.«
(Fromm 1983a, p. 86.)

4. The deconstruction of the illusions

The psychoanalytic work is centered on the work of the deconstruction of illusions, fossilized modes of being. It also challenges the unconscious and repetitive »self-constructs« (*about ourselves, the world and other beings*) and enables the human being to develop the authentic modes of being and relatedness. For the psychoanalytic *practice* it is also important to increase the awareness of the social processes and factors which influence the structure of the subject. At the same time, we have to be mindful of the fact that the subject is the *active agent* who can influence these same social processes. In his work Fromm consistently used the method of the dialectics which helped him to understand the continual interplay between the subject and society. We would like to emphasize that the self-conscious being is creating the affective and interpersonal »Lived world« (laws, relationships, institutions, religion, art) and at the same time this »live practices« influence the subject and his consciousness (Fromm 1992a, p. 27). Fromm emphasized that »the personality structure, which we can recognize as affecting the social process, is itself the product of this process.« And furthermore, he emphasized that »the individual's manner of life is determined by society. Society is nothing without individuals« (Fromm 1992a, p. 17).

Analysis helps the human being to decrease its own level of egotism, narcissism and alienation. It can also contribute to the more *open* and *attuned* relationship to other human beings and reality. Fromm emphasized that a human being had to use all the human powers (*mind, capacity for love and relationships*) to »actualize« itself in the world. Fromm's ethical and psychoanalytic theory is based on the supposition of a being which is part of the world and has the capabilities to transcend the empirical world. In the course of history a human being is trying to choose different paths (*progressive or the regressive*) or different modes of being.

According to Fromm, a being can emerge »from the animal form of existence into a more human existence« (this option means freedom and brings up also the existential anxiety – we have to choose our own mode of being) or can return by regression to »the womb, to nature, to certainty and security« (Fromm 1955a, p. 27). The second way is the »regressive« one because it represents the



unity or the *primal oneness without the human consciousness*. Fromm stressed the important fact of the human existence and also the development of the human powers in the world. To actualize itself (to be what we can become) – this goal can be achieved only in the world and with other beings: »Man's own powers develop only in the process of relatedness to the world« (Fromm 1962a, p. 54). Fromm's important insight is the dialectical relationship and the *ontological interconnectedness of human beings and the world* – and a *human being with other beings*. Fromm's ethical philosophy, which is important also for psychoanalysis, puts a great weight on the importance of the passionate and engaged »inner«-worldly activity, artistic productivity and maintenance of a meaningful relationship with other beings.

The future modes of being human are still open. We have to emphasize that in the historical time all the possibilities of what is to be the human being are still not yet manifested. Fromm stressed that the »history becomes the dimension which enables man to develop humanity or, to speak with Hegel, in which the subject translates itself »from the night of possibility into the day of factuality« (Fromm 1963f, p. 399). We understand this sentence from G.W. F. Hegel that the human subject is creating his own history and is developing those qualities or abilities which were only a »possibility« (in mind, consciousness or on the unconscious level) – but they can become an »actuality« (in the history and time).

A human being is a *relational, historical and embodied being*. A human being is from the start »thrown« into history. This movement of the being we can capture with the following idea: *from the unity to duality; from paradise to human reality; from the eternal world to mortality and embodied existence*. Fromm (1950a, p. 23) used the metaphor of the »eternal wanderer (*Odysseus, Oedipus, Abraham, Faust*)« or the notion of the »tragic« seekers of wisdom and knowledge to explain the *paradoxical dimension of the human reality*. This eternal wanderer is trying, in time and history, to »overcome inner split« (Fromm 1950a, p. 23) between mortal (*world of duality*) and eternal existence (*primal unity*). The human being, existentially speaking, has to find the answer to the riddle of the meaning of the existence and at the same time he has to grow and develop its powers: »It is man, who, in the process of history, can and must develop this human potential by his own effort, and by his own activity.« (Fromm 1963f, p. 399.)

Fromm focused on the dichotomy between life and death; between authentic being (*»continuous birth«*) and the mode of being which is caught in the repetitions of thoughts, feelings and behaviors (*»suspension of growth«*). The repetition of the same patterns of relatedness or modes of being leads to the »fossilized« existence or to the »object-like existence« without will and



purpose in the historical process. On the other hand, *openness of being* to the paradoxical dimension of life, development of the self-will and agency leads to growth and expansion. Fromm emphasized:

»I believe that one can attribute to ›life‹ the significance of continuous birth and constant development. I believe that one can attribute to ›death‹ the significance of suspension of growth: continuous repetition.«
 (Fromm 1992b, pp. 100–101.)

To conclude, we think that it is of vital significance to acknowledge Fromm's »anti-essentialist« reading of Hegel and Heraclitus or the acceptance of the idea of *being as a constant process* (Fromm 1976a, pp. 21 f.) and Baruch de Spinoza's idea of the »drive« for development and growth (Fromm 1947a). The second important dimension in Fromm's work is the further development of Marx's idea of the continuous birth of being in time and Freud's crucial remark about the gap between thinking and being (Fromm 1979a, pp. 23–25). Fromm understood, in contrary to the opinion of some critics, the »nature« of a human being as constitutionally *open and unfixated*. Fromm was critical of the hypostatization of being and understanding of a being as a thing, substance or the passive object without will, cognition and reflective capacity for choice and decision.

To capture the theoretically fruitful experience of the subject in the world – the notion of the self has not to be sacrificed but we can accept Fromm's notion of the subject as a *paradox* or as a *process*. Instead of privileging being over becoming or *vice versa*, we have to think the self as the meeting point between *change and stability, silence and action, inner and outer, or as synthesis of different subject positions or modes of being*. The postmodern self is *fragmented, un-whole and de-centered*. It can also become its own opposite – the *whole, grounded in-itself and embodied in time and history*. In this way we do not exclude the opposites but include in a more comprehensive picture the different modes of being in the postmodern world. Similarly, an analytic *space-time continuum* is a place of the »mutual recognition« (Benjamin 2017) and the »misrecognition« (Lacan 2006). It is also the place of the authentic meeting between two subjects where »all real living is meeting« (Buber 1965, p. 11) or the place of the strong and emphatic state of the »therapeutic alliance.« It can also become the place of the breaking up of the »therapeutic bond« and experience of the sudden »alliance ruptures« (Safran 2003, 2014). The subject is constantly moving and choosing different modes of being – one of the ways to approach Erich Fromm in postmodern time is to accept his understanding of being as a paradox and the constant process.



5. Conclusion: A human being as an active agent

From our perspective, it is crucial that in analysis a human being »recreates« itself in the *time-space analytic dyad* and that it remains an active participant and uses its own powers (emotional and intellectual) to ground itself in himself (*intrapsychic dimension*) and in history (*interpersonal dimension*). A human being changes itself during the analytic meetings, develops its own ground on which it can stand and at the same time influences the ontological or unconscious dimension of the dyad (analyst-analysand). A human being, ontologically speaking, is not a dead object (split and fragmented self), without consciousness, will, desire and intellect, but an active and conscious participant. The affective and emphatic *co-creation of the analytic space time matrix* enlarges the client's world and his own experience. In this space of empathy, acceptance or openness as the potentialities of the client are uncovered and further developed.

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