3. EVERYDAY LIFE AND THE SOCIETAL UNCONSCIOUS

In social science theory and empirical social research, in which I include social psychology, there is scarcely any discussion of the phenomenon of everyday life. This was quite different in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. The concept of everyday life did not pass through the mesh of the scientific division of labour. Rather, it was a precious discovery that both theoretically and empirically helped to develop cross-disciplinary social research.

EVERYDAY LIFE AS AN OBJECT FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE

Today there is a critical need for this type of research. Everyday life presents a jumble of societal, political and psychological problems; antisemitism, racism, populism, nationalistic and patriarchal prejudice, the media game with its fake news, etc. all appear as phenomena of everyday life. They penetrate the consciousness of everyday life, condense into cognitive and emotional patterns in our everyday experiences that exert ever more influence on the political and social agency of political parties, groups and individuals. This also includes the systematic trivialization of horror stories about Nazism in Germany from 1933 to 1945.

Everyday life is a difficult societal, political and psychological terrain which requires new research and critical political activity in order to counter the early stages of a destruction of liberal and social democracy. Sociological and social psychological research into the authoritarian personality on a psychoanalytical basis (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950), which took place in the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research in the 1950s, and previous and current social psychology research in the field of the psychology of prejudice, such as Allport's work "The Nature of Prejudice", are once again becoming socially and politically relevant. Particularly important for the understanding of the contemporary rejection of everyday life in the USA and Europe is Erich Fromm's comprehensive, psychoanalytically-based work *Arbeiter und Angestellte am Vorabend des Dritten Reiches* (translated as *The Working Class in Weimar Germany* by Barbara Weinberger). This study shows how rapidly well-established political (democratic and socialist) ways of thinking and attitudes in difficult times can be manipulated into right-wing radicalism and populist consciousness and agency. Everyday forms of consciousness become unstable and receptive to aggressive propaganda.

The dispositions to learning, to education and to identity development which pervade our everyday consciousness are being reshaped and discouraged by regressive mechanisms of repression. Out of the darkness of a societal unconsciousness rise archaic phantasies of violence, which had already seemed to have been overcome since their domination of the propagandistically manipulated everyday life consciousness in Nazi Germany. Nationalistic ideologies again seem acceptable and presentable. Modern everyday life consciousness reveals many faces. The backward-looking ones prevail over the progressive ones. Enlightenment becomes perplexed (cf. Leithäuser, 1976).

EVERYDAY LIFE CONSCIOUSNESS AND IDEOLOGY

In referring to forms of everyday life consciousness, we do not envisage fixed and structured forms. The image is rather that of a container with porous, perforated walls into which all kinds of intellectual rubbish can sink while driving out well-considered thoughts, or of the emergence of a type of intellectual hodgepodge. Such everyday life consciousness easily escapes critical reflection. Yet it also has its own wilfulness. We often find an approach to a form of dogmatic philosophizing, setting up ideological assertions proclaimed with excessive eagerness; these are wrong and obscure, mostly uttered angrily and provocatively, yet almost unshakable. That is the nature of fake news.

Everyday conversations are characterized by a seemingly self-evident use of language. The participants mostly assume that the words they use are understood in the same way by the others. There is little discussion around the meaning of words. Questions like: What do you mean by that? rarely appear. Listeners mostly assume that they inevitably understand everything in the same way as the speaker. In everyday conversation, the participants tend to mutually confirm what is and what is not, what ought to be and what ought not to be. Talk in an everyday context mostly provides assertions and confirmations, and much less questioning and critical reflection. Truths are asserted, not sought jointly. What is sought is agreement with the assertions. We mostly find language games of gossip and chit-chat about immoral and moral events. Such language games satisfy a malicious pleasure by degrading, unveiling and exposing, while pretending to be serious criticism. Such degrading, unveiling and exposing may be understood as psychological defence mechanisms and the repression of truthfulness and serious insight. These mechanisms also create an unconsciousness instead of a critical acknowledgement of societal reality. They constitute what Erich Fromm calls the “societal unconscious”. Everyday life is a glittering mosaic of practical activity, tempting consumption, tediousness, sleepiness, insipid daydreams, but sometimes also a flash of an idea about what is not, but could be, a wickerwork of shadowy prejudices, opinions and vague hopes. Opinions, prejudices and ideologies connected by segments of various religions together provide the mosaic of everyday life consciousness. It is not an individual consciousness, but belongs to groups, collectives, cultures, and entire societies.

THE SOCIETAL UNCONSCIOUS AS AN IDEOLOGICAL FILTER

For many people, everyday consciousness is not at all self-evident and unproblematic. It has a powerful unconscious side, which social psychologists and psychoanalysts describe as the “societal unconscious”, an area of psychological repression.

I would call the areas of repression found in most members of a society ‘the societal unconscious’. These elements suppressed from people at large represent content that must not become conscious for members of the society if the society with its particular contradictions is to function smoothly. (Fromm, 1962, p. 96)

With this concept of “the societal unconscious”, Fromm seeks to connect the Marxian concept of ideology with the Freudian concept of repression. For Freud, repression is a mechanism where the individual makes something unconscious, while Fromm sees it as a mechanism whereby society makes something unconscious. A society develops social and moral laws, norms and rules that sanction and prohibit (consciousness of) those elements which would disturb the smooth functioning of society. Such elements are filtered out by means of opinions, prejudices and ideologies. Fromm writes about the categories of thinking and feeling: “Some categories like time and space may be universal, common to all people. Others, like causality, may be valid categories for many, but not all, types of conscious perception. Yet other categories have even less general validity and vary from one culture to another. In any case, perceptions can only become conscious if they can be related to and fitted into a conceptual system and its categories. This system is itself a result of societal developments. Every society uses its ways of life and its types of relating, feeling and perceiving to create a system of categories that determines the forms of consciousness. This system could be said to work as a societally conditioned filter. A perception can only become conscious if it passes through this filter” (Fromm, 1950, p. 323). Opinions, prejudices and ideologies, as described above, are just such filters for everyday life consciousness. These filters are inserted into in social and political frameworks that prescribe possibilities and constraints for everyday thoughts and feelings. This takes place in a self-evident manner, quite beyond any critical, enlightening reflection. Each society defines, according to its development, such frameworks that make it difficult to expand the horizon of experiencing and thinking, and difficult to take charge of one’s own thoughts and uncover one’s deeply personal feelings. We might also call these ideological frameworks that take a hold in societies. Where such frameworks are lacking, they tend to be frantically sought after.

Their aim is to provide a sense of security in societal coexistence. Cognitive science uses the term “framing” to describe these attempts to set norms for consciousness. Cognitive scientist Elisabeth Wehling has illuminated these partly conscious, partly unconscious framing mechanisms in her book “Politisches Framing, wie eine Nation sich ihr Denken einredet – und daraus Politik macht” (Wehling, 2016). A translation is forthcoming, entitled “Political framing: A cognitive scientist’s guide to how a

nation turns language into politics". She writes: "Frames are activated in the brain through language. They first assign a meaning to facts and then arrange them by relating the information to our bodily experiences and our accumulated knowledge about the world. In this way, frames are always selective. They highlight certain facts and realities and let others fall by the wayside. They thus evaluate and interpret. And once they have been activated in our heads, in e.g. a public debate, they will guide our thinking and acting, without us even noticing" (p. 18). The current populism and the political game with its fake news represent a broad field of framing. The US President Donald Trump has entered the political stage as a master of populist framing. His celebration of his nationalist slogan "America First" is not far from the "Deutschland über alles" (Germany above all else) of the National Socialists of the 1930s and 1940s. Today's political struggle in Germany increasingly involves the power of definition of framing the "homeland". If we include the Wehlingian research concept of framing in the Frommian investigation of the "societal unconscious", we can understand frames as ideological filters, which regulate our thinking and imagining and the social mechanisms of repression and drive them into the unconscious. In this form of regulation, Trump's policies attempt to suppress the politics of globalization and multilateralism with nationalist phrases and bilateral deals. In the long run, this will probably not succeed. This is because the ideological filter of nationalism is no longer self-evident enough. One self-evident frame in business is the distinction between employer and employee (in German, literally: "work giver" and "work taker"); thus work is understood as something that can be given and taken. Those who possess the means of production are described in natural language as "work givers", while those who have no means of production are seen as "work takers". Such an understanding of the division of roles in work is currently not called into question. It has become an unconscious frame in society, an ideological filter that barely allows for consciousness or critical reflection, unless in an ironically meant role reversal, as suggested by Elisabeth Wehling: "One could equally well say that those who perform the work are the "work givers" and conceptualize the receivers of this work as the "work takers" (Wehling, 2016, p. 132). But how, we may ask, does framing filter out conscious and unconscious parts of thinking and acting? Fromm would probably seek to understand framing as a process of adaptation to the constraints and opportunities of social reality. Framing is the result of the socialization of individuals into society. This socialization begins, as Fromm understands it as a psychoanalytical social psychologist, in the earliest mother-child relationship, and as we know today, even in prenatal developmental processes in the womb. The physical and psychological development of an individual can never be completely separated from his/her social development. It is an interdependent, differentiating developmental process which Fromm addresses as a basic, bodily, emotional, and cognitively intimate social relationship, unlike traditional Freudian psychoanalysis, which would examine it as concerning the development of a single individual. Fromm's research perspective is genuinely social-psychological, not individual-psychological.

SOCIALIZATION OF THE SOCIETAL UNCONSCIOUS

To further clarify the “societal unconscious” and its entanglement in everyday life, I would like to refer to the psychoanalytical socialization theory of the psychoanalyst and social researcher Alfred Lorenzer (see Salling Olesen & Weber, Chapter 12). Similarly to Erich Fromm, Alfred Lorenzer has a theoretical orientation towards Marx and the critical theory of the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research. Erich Fromm also belonged to this institute in his early days and played a major part in the development of psychoanalytical research in the institute. Lorenzer also sees the constitution of human consciousness and its differentiation into conscious and unconscious from the early stages of psychological development as a social process. Fundamental to the forming of the psychological structure of each individual is the mother-child relationship, which Lorenzer calls the “mother-child dyad”. A central concept for Lorenzer is the “form of interaction”, which he uses to describe the initial symbiotic, emotional and cognitive relationship of the mother-child dyad, which becomes differentiated in the course of the child’s development. This process is by no means devoid of conflict. It constantly requires new agreements on forms of interaction between child and mother. The early symbiotic stages of development, when the child experiences the mother as part of itself, include phases of separation of the dyad, in which the child can gradually experience itself as a being that is independent of the mother. This process of socialization is a process of agreement on continual new forms of interaction that differentiate the mother-child dyad, to the point of detachment of the child from the mother to become a separate individual. This socialization (which involves language development) also causes the differentiation of consciousness into conscious and unconscious parts. Thus, forms of interaction that have become obsolete in the socialization of the child are not simply deleted. Rather, they are repressed and condensed into the unconscious level of consciousness. In frequent repetitions and variations of mother-child interactions, they attach themselves to forms of interaction, a relational context of lactation and weaning, play, strictness and force, conflicts and reconciliation, whims and fancies. Last but not least, this includes the “fort!” and “da!” game, made famous through Freud’s analysis, where the child enjoys making things disappear and finding things. Such forms of interaction shape the everyday life of the mother-child dyad and the family. In the mother-child dyad, the ability for everyday life is socialized with all its apparent self-evidence and contradictions. Consciousness has its foundation and genesis in everyday family life, an everydayness that continues into the working lives of adults and is decisively effective in the general societal and political reality, as characterized above.

DEEP HERMENEUTICS AS A METHOD FOR RESEARCHING EVERYDAY LIFE

Everyday life is a story of relationships that settle in the societal unconscious, and it requires its own social research. Since it concerns the phenomenon of the unconscious,

this research needs a psychoanalytic orientation without any therapeutic intent. Its findings should rather enlighten a political and social practice which aims at the improvement and enrichment of human coexistence. Such research can learn much from individual psychology-oriented psychoanalysis, which still today draws on Freud's therapeutic experience and his theoretical (meta-psychological) elaborations, but later differentiated into different schools. All these psychoanalytic schools can inform social research of the societal unconscious. However, such research must develop a methodology appropriate to its research topic. Its methodological setting is not the therapeutic conversation with a couch and armchair, a patient forming associations and an interpreting analyst. Its method is the open interview where interviewee and interviewer meet on an equal footing.

Alfred Lorenzer has developed an independent interview method of this type, which he called deep hermeneutics (as presented elsewhere in this volume by Salling Olesen & Weber, Chapter 12). These interviews are not about tapping into information and knowledge. They consist of a mutual exploration by interviewee and interviewer; here the interviewee's words have priority, but the interviewer should not hold back his views on the topic either. It should not be a heated argument based on fixed points of view, but an exploratory conversation. The interview partners will tend to become a research team. The aim is to discover and analyse the frames and ideological filters of the societal unconscious of everyday life. Deep hermeneutics is a qualitative research method that is considered to be part of the empirical hermeneutics of social research. In every empirical research project, the methodology has to be justified in relation to the object of study. There are now qualitative, empirical-hermeneutic research projects in several countries, including Denmark, the UK and Germany. In Denmark, it was Kirsten Weber in particular whose research promoted the study of everyday life with its unconscious aspects. I dedicate this essay to her memory.

REFERENCES

- Adorno, T. W. (1950). *The authoritarian personality*. New York, NY: Harper and Row, Publishers.
- Allport, G. W. (1954). *The nature of prejudice*. New York, NY: Doubleday and Company, Inc.
- Fromm, E. (1950). *Psychoanalyse und Religion, Erich Fromm Gesamtausgabe, Bd. 6*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt.
- Fromm, E. (1962). *Jenseits der Illusionen. Die Bedeutung von Marx und Freud, Erich Fromm Gesamtausgabe, Bd. 9* (E. Fromm, Trans., 2001). Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt.
- Fromm, E. (1980). *Arbeiter und Angestellte am Vorabend des Dritten Reiches, Erich Fromm Gesamtausgabe, Bd. 3* (E. Fromm, Trans., 1984). Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt.
- Fromm, E. (1984). *The working class in Weimar Germany* (B. Weinberger, Trans.). Leamington Spa: Berg Publishers.
- Fromm, E. (2001). *Beyond the chains of illusion. My meeting with Freud and Marx*. Continuum Impact.
- Leithäuser, T. (1979). *Formen des Alltagsbewußtseins*. Frankfurt a. Main: Campus-Verlag.
- Lorenzer, A. (1972). *Zur Begründung einer materialistischen Sozialisationstheorie*. Frankfurt a. Main: Suhrkamp Verlag.
- Wehling, E. (2016). *Politisches Framing, Wie eine Nation sich ihr Denken einredet – und daraus Politik macht*. Köln: Herbert von Halem Verlag.