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Social networking technologies have become a ubiquitous framework for social interaction, serving to organise much of the individual's social life. Such technological structuring affects not merely the individual's psyche (as a psycho-technics), it also affects broader aspects of society (as a socio-technics). While social networking technologies may serve to transform society in positive ways, such technologies also have the potential to significantly encroach upon and (re) construct individual and cultural meaning in ways that must be investigated. Erich Fromm, who psychoanalytically describes humans as a product of their society and the economic systems within that society, may provide insight into the influence of social networking technologies in contemporary society. He sees the relationship between the individual and society as being in a constant state of dynamic change. Utilising Fromm's psycho-societal insight, social networking technologies are shown to conflate and confuse the relation between Thanatos and Eros – the Thanatos of a lifeless and consumerist agenda-filled mechanisation, and the Eros associated with social engagement. Thanatos and Eros are tied together via social networking technologies. This results in, firstly, social networking technologies functioning predominantly to further capitalist agendas through the monetisation of these technologies – particularly in terms of linking commodity fetishism and the foundational social drive of the individual. Secondly, social networking technologies mechanise human action according to predictable behavioural paths through the use of these technologies, especially in terms of how socialisation is possible via these technologies (shaping how platonic and romantic relationships may take place in the contemporary world). Such a mechanisation of interpersonal engagement contrasts with Erich Fromm's assertion that interpersonal relations (vis-à-vis love) are not "mere emotion", but rather represent an interpersonal creative capacity and interplay. Fromm's psycho-societal insights will show how contemporary individuals may take independent and responsible rational action to establish accountable and psychologically beneficial ways of engaging with others through social networking technologies.

Introduction

Social networking technologies shape, to a considerable degree, interpersonal communication and public discourse in contemporary societies.[1] They provide new and altered ways of engaging

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1   This study, while focusing on the psychoanalytic aspects of social networking use, places the frameworks that mediate such psychological and social aspects on an equal footing with the psychological and social aspects themselves. Such a dual focus is necessary due to the fundamental and crucial role that these technologies and their design play in influencing individuals and communities – these technologies represent the foundation of this form of interaction and must be crucially investigated as the genesis of such encounters. Social networking technologies are thus described in terms of concrete technologies and artefacts, and how these influence the individuals using them, as is done by Verbeek (2005) and other contemporary philosophers of technology. However, the relation between social networking technologies and society may be investigated from various methodological approaches beyond critical theory and the philosophy of

socially with others, but concurrently also present an encompassing challenge and even collapse of traditional ways of socialising (Funk 2006, 7). Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, Tinder – these technological frameworks allow individuals to create online profiles as avatars, share personal information with others in digital public forums, form new relationships and maintain old relationships, plan or celebrate life events, express their emotions and beliefs, and instantaneously communicate with other individuals (Boyd and Ellison 2007; Ivcevic and Ambady 2012; Nadkarni and Hofmann 2012; Tosun 2012). Such technologies see increasing yearly growth across almost all demographics and economic groups (Perrin 2015), pervasively and ubiquitously becoming players in structuring individuals' social lives globally.[2]

Social networking technologies, by encompassingly affecting individuals and communities in contemporary society, function as an ideology of domination.[3] Said ideology is dominant in the sense that only limited social interaction is possible in contemporary society without these frameworks of engagement: think, for example, of the small percentage of individuals who do not have Facebook pages. Contemporary social relationships are therefore grounded, to a measureable extent, in social networking technologies.[4] It is the task of critical theory to identify and critically engage with such ideologies of domination, particularly as society moves from one stable framework of engagement into crisis.[5] Criticism (as a positive action), to put into question all grounds for knowledge concerning frameworks that function as ideologies of domination, is crucial at this point. Critical reflection on social networking technologies – as such a contemporary and encompassing framework which affects both the individual (in terms of the individual's psyche) and broader society (in terms of broader cultural movements) – is needed.

Critical theorist Erich Fromm's psychoanalytic perspective provides valuable insight into these two aspects of social networking technology use – the individual aspect and the social aspect. In Fromm's version of psychoanalysis, there is not merely a focus on the psyche of the individual. Rather, he sees the necessity for an integration of the sociological and other social factors into psychoanalysis (Evans 1966). Fromm is centrally influenced by Freud (in terms of psychology) and Marx (in terms of sociology) – he was trained as both a social psychologist and Freudian analyst, and applied these insights to investigate the relationship between the individual and society. The duality of these influences in Fromm's works allows a critical evaluation of social networking technologies not only in terms of the individual's use thereof, but also allows an investigation into the societal impact of these technologies.

A critical philosophical analysis of social networking technologies, utilising Fromm's psychological-societal insight, presents an avenue for individuals to take independent and responsible rational action to establish socially accountable and life-affirming ways of engagement with said technologies, and with others through such technologies. These ways of engaging stand in contrast to the unthinking adoption of capitalist agendas inherent in such technologies, and therefore serve as a challenge to the invasive commodity fetishism that forms a part of the design of social networking technologies. It is argued that the individual may, through a re-discovery of Eros, react against such Thanatos-directed agendas.

A psychopathology of social networking technology use today: Isolation and loneliness

Modern social networking technologies utilise computer technology to function as a means for multimodal social accessibility. The contemporary age has seen the rise of omnipresent social networking technologies (technologies that apply both software and hardware to "streamline"

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technology. Compare the contents of the following journals: *New Media and Society*, *Digital Media & Society*, and *Social Media & Society*. Compare also Staiger's use of Fromm's ideas on catharsis and aggression in relation to media entertainment (Staiger 2005).

2   Friedrich Kittler suggests that one becomes unaware of the broad-ranging ways in which such technologies shape one's everyday life and society due to familiarity (Kittler 2009).

3   The concept of ideology of domination (or dominant ideology) is here intended to circumscribe those values, beliefs, and morals of the social majority (i.e. the majority of thinking in society as reified by the largest number of the populace). A dominant ideology determines collective societal thought in a given population or in a globalised community (Abercrombie and Turner 1978).

4   Compare White's comment that "digital media has always been associated with social change" (White 2014, 125).

5   Such a crisis may be described, in relation to social networking technologies, in relation to phenomena such as the *hikikomori* (which will be described in the next section).

and "structure" social activity and interpersonal relationships). Speech-and-hearing-based communication by means of a pre-digital telephone, for example, presents a single means of communication, and is often spatially and temporally limited (the individual must be present at a geographically limited device for the duration of a conversation). Modern social networking technologies, in contrast, seem to "follow us around" – they are omnipresent in the sense that the disconnection from such technologies requires an act of will and an active personal decision to avoid such avenues of communication.

It is assumed that social networking technologies serve to connect individuals with the express goal of benefitting social communication. However, one may ask whether the claim of increased socialization via these technologies is unproblematic, and whether these technologies indeed satisfy the human need for interpersonal engagement. Inversely, social networking technologies may function to increase isolation and disconnect (a point supported by some studies). Social networking technologies as psycho-technics is suggested by studies showing a link between the use of these technologies with lower individual self-esteem and higher rates of depression (Vogel, Rose, Roberts and Eckles 2014; Appel, Gerlach and Crusius 2016). Social networking technologies such as Facebook and Instagram provide the individual with continual opportunities for upward social comparison – especially in terms of characteristics such as perceived physical beauty and the purchase of expensive commodities. Vogel et al.'s (2014) research shows a high correlation of increased use of Facebook with poorer self-esteem due to the greater exposure of the individual to such interpersonal comparisons.

While the relation between social networking technologies and self-esteem mostly relate to individuals, there is also a broader trend towards increased isolation of individuals in a population. The *hikikomori* in Japan (Teo 2010) are illustrative of a potentially developing crisis and highlight the need for critical reflection. *Hikikomori* describes the isolation of young people in Japan, which is also reflected in other highly technological modern societies. *Hikikomori* describes the psychological condition through which individuals (the number is at least half a million in Japan) remove themselves from the societies wherein they function, staying in their houses for extended periods of time – over and above six months – while refusing to engage with the broader community (Teo 2010). Any physical person-to-person social interaction is consistently avoided by such individuals, who exhibit behaviour such as social withdrawal, hermitism, rumination, lack of physical activity, addiction, negative thinking, and depression, that lead to significant functional impairment without any physical pathology. A major part of these individuals' lives are spent engaging with others through social networking technologies – they live their lives in digitally constructed fantasy worlds.[6] While there have always been people who choose to isolate themselves willingly in modern society, the large number of people doing so at once negatively impacts social cohesion and political activity (such individuals are less likely to vote or to become involved with social and political projects).

Social networking technologies are here both cause and symptom of social isolation in terms of the individual herself, but also function on a larger scale as a broader socio-technics that increases collective social isolation when many individuals begin acting in the same ways. There is thus a crucial need for critical reflection on such technologies due to their continuous structuring and alteration of individual experience, societal cohesion, and character formation.[7]

Erich Fromm's psycho-social insight
Critical theory is exemplified by reflective criticism and the possible change of society and culture by the humanities and the social sciences.[8] Horkheimer, an early theoretician of the Frankfurt School,

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6   Compare Funk (2009), who describes a la Fromm that modern individuals have a psychological preference for artificial or make-believe realities.

7   Compare also Boon et al. (2015).

8   Critical theory describes the Western Marxist philosophy developed by the Frankfurt School in the 1930s, of which Erich Fromm was an early theoretician. Critical theory encompasses philosophy, literary criticism, sociology, psychology, economics, and political science (Hartley 2002) and was established by the Frankfurt School theoreticians Herbert Marcuse, Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Walter Benjamin, and Erich Fromm. Compare in this regard the definition of critical theory by Max Horkheimer in his essay *Traditional and*

describes a theory as critical if it strives "to liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them" (Horkheimer [1982] 2012, 244). It is against this intellectual background that Erich Fromm investigates the relationship between the individual and society, incorporated both Marxist and Freudian ideas into his questioning.[9] The practice of psychology depends for Fromm on tracing how psychological factors – such as learning – and societal factors – such as integration, assimilation, separation and marginalisation – figure into the relationship between individuals and the societies they inhabit. This is a major innovation by Fromm regarding psychoanalysis: The psyche of the individual must stand in relation to sociological variables.

Fromm argued, as does Marx, that humans are a product of their society and the economic systems within this society, and that the relationship between the individual and society is in a constant state of dynamic change (this relationship is not static, as Freud presumed).[10] Society may suppress, but it also creates. What may be understood as human nature is a cultural product in relation to the individual's biological nature. Fromm describes how the individual may escape the deterministic systems described by Marx and Freud, of the social in the first case and the unconscious in the second, through a recognition of personal freedom – a centrally defining feature of human nature that Fromm traced historically to describe both the diminution and increase of both individuation and isolation in relation to capitalism.[11] Humans constantly try to disavow their freedom by trying to escape from it. Freedom infers no commitments and nothing to lose, but freedom is also a lonely concept typified by profound separation, in contrast to an orientation of *having* and *possessing* that capitalist societies encourage.[12] Attempts to escape from freedom lead to an appeal to authoritarianism, the fusion with the other that is in its extremes exemplified by sadism and masochism, which leads to destruction and automaton conformity (see below) with regard to the dominant culture.[13] In escaping from our freedom, we are alienating ourselves psychologically from our own selves and from those selves that exist around us in society in lieu of responsible choices for character development. The modern era, with its focus on technological development, paves the way for this type of alienation.[14]

Critical Theory that describes it as a social theory directed towards the critique and transformation of society as a whole in contrast to traditional theories that merely attempt to explain or understand society (Horkheimer 1937).

9 Fromm's psychological perspective is based in the relatedness of the individual with her world (not just instinctually or subconsciously, as Freud argued). Funk (2009) describes six diagnoses regarding contemporary society made by Fromm: Marketing as a new structural principle, having instead of being, a preference for enacted (artificial) reality, collective narcissistic phantasies, necrophilia, and insight into "the art of living".

10 He wishes to show

…not only how passions, desires, anxieties change and develop as a result of the social process, but also how man's energies thus shaped into specific forms in their turn become productive forces, moulding the social process. Man is not only made by history – history is made by man (Fromm 1941, 28).

The influence of Marx is clear, and especially Fromm's *The Sane Society* (1955) was inspired by early Marx. Fromm discards both the capitalism of Western societies and the communism of the then Soviets. The communism of the Soviet nation was deemed by Fromm to be life-denying and mechanising, leading to societal isolation. Fromm developed a new conceptualisation of socialism and communism based in the early works of Marx to become a major proponent and influencer of social humanism.

11 Tracing the concept of freedom historically, Fromm describes how before the Renaissance the individual's economic needs were placed centrally in relation to other human needs, typified by a lack of individual freedom and stagnant social roles. During the Renaissance period, when wealth superseded established social roles, there was increased individuation and social disorder. Fromm describes the relation between freedom as the basis of human nature and the striving of the individual to escape from freedom as follows:

Man is born as a freak of nature, being within nature and yet transcending it. He has to find principles of action and decision-making which replace the principles of instincts. he has to have a frame of orientation which permits him to organise a consistent picture of the world as a condition for consistent actions. He has to fight not only against the dangers of dying, starving, and being hurt, but also against another anger which is specifically human: that of becoming insane. In other words, he has to protect himself not only against the danger of losing his life, but also against the danger of losing his mind (Fromm 1968, 61).

12 See also the similarity with Sartre's existential concept of *bad faith* (Sartre 1956).

13 Authoritarianism is a response to the psychological pain of living through recourse to a death drive, which is not self-destruction but unsatisfied destruction. Destruction here serves as an inversion of Freud's death instinct: Self-destructiveness is frustrated destructiveness for Fromm. Compare also Erikson's (1986) discussion of aggression and self-destructive behaviour in relation to alienation.

14 Marx ([1844] 1982) describes alienation as the estrangement of workers from each other, estrangement from their humanity, "self-estrangement" and estrangement of the product of their labour (Marx [1844] 1982). The alienation that Fromm describes relates closely to the psychology of the self, and one's relation to others.

Fromm, Thanatos and technology

Contemporary social networking technology use fundamentally relates to the concepts of Thanatos[15] and Eros.[16] Fromm consider pre-digital forms of technology to be closely linked to Thanatos, and less to a life-affirming existential and psychological orientation. The technological orientation was more akin to what Freud first describes as the death instinct (Freud 1960).[17] Especially in his later work, Fromm increasingly saw humanity as occupied with the notions of death in relation to automaton ways of being in modern society. His book *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* delves into these concepts to describe an automaton conformity that is derived from the absence of true individuality and the lack of positive psychological engagement with one's existence. Individuals feel unable to tap into their inner resources, feel "empty inside" and become dependent on external stimuli (often on that which is reified and lifeless). He describes this orientation towards the world, prominent in industrialised societies, as necrophilic – a love for that which is lifeless or dead.[18] Technology and its role in modern society links closely to the necrophilic. Such necrophilia is also illustrated in the love of destruction, violence and brutality by groups such as terrorists, criminal gangs, and fanatical religious groups or far-right extremists – often arising from motivations (such as written or non-written rules and group think) outside the individual himself, or borne out of boredom or existential directionlessness.

Underlying such a love for death and destruction is the inability to love life (Funk 2009).[19] The horrors of two world wars witnessed by Fromm, and his observation that individuals were gradually being propelled towards a mechanical existence through increasing "technologisation" of society, led him to argue for the preservation of the individual's purposeful existence in contrast to a disintegrating society based in such necrophilic thought.[20] Fromm argued, however, that humanity could make life-affirming and positive choices that could lead to a global peace and harmony in the future. Central in these choices is his psychoanalytical theory of love as a productive activity in contrast to conformity.

He argued that the individual relates to the world in two ways. Firstly, the acquisition and assimilation of things (an orientation towards the world that is furthered by mechanised ways of living – a *having* mode that aptly describes the ways in which modern technology function and which is based in the aforementioned necrophilic orientation).[21] Secondly, through the relation

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15 Thanatos is the personification of death in Greek mythology. Regarding Thanatos, Sigmund Freud has the following to say: "On the basis of theoretical considerations, supported by biology, we put forward the hypothesis of a death instinct, the task of which is to lead organic life back into the inanimate state…" (Freud 1960, 380–381). Thanatos refers to the life denying negative impulses of violence, brutality, annihilation and death.

16 Eros is the god of sensual love and desire in Greek mythology. Erich Fromm interprets Eros as love in a broader sense, as does the later Freud. Marcuse argues in *Eros and Civilization* ([1955] 2012) that "the fight for Eros – the fight for Life – is the political fight par excellence" (Marcuse [1955] 2012; Cho 2006, 18). We thus find an association of Eros not just with the sexual, but with a broader life-affirming orientation or action. Eros signifies all the life-affirming qualities like love, sexuality, imagination, pride, and progeneration.

17 It is important to note that the understanding of Eros and Thanatos in Fromm's interpretation differs from Freud's conceptualisation. Fromm understood the instinct towards life and the instinct towards death literally, with Eros seen as an element of existence to be embraced, while Thanatos is seen as an element of life to be resisted. This re-reading of Freud's conceptualisation of these terms serves as a major emphasis for the later suggestions of this article.

18 From *necros*, which entails a dead body or lifelessness, as described by Fromm in *The Heart of Man* (1964) and in *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (1973).

19 Fromm refers to the technologically mediated individual typifying "a connection between schizophrenia and the character of cybernetic man" (Fromm 1973, 354).

20 Early critical theorists such as Adorno and Horkheimer, and later also Habermas, described how modern society leads to a form of enslavement through the encompassing sovereignty of instrumental rationality (Horkheimer and Adorno [1944] 1972; Habermas [1972] 2015). Fromm's conceptualisation of technology is informed by Horkheimer and Adorno.

21 Fromm argues in *Man for himself* ([1947] 2013, 58) that

[m]an can acquire things by receiving or taking them from an outside source or by producing them through his own effort. But he must acquire and assimilate them in some fashion in order to satisfy his needs…Man can relate himself to others in various ways: he can love or hate, he can compete or cooperate; he can build a social system based on equality or authority, liberty or oppression; but he must be related in some fashion and the particular form of relatedness is expressive of his character.

Compare Ehrenfeld (2008), who discusses this *having* orientation in terms of modern technology and the lack of personal or ecological sustainability.

of the individual to herself and to other people by means of love – a second mode founded not in merely having, but rather in being.

Thus the relation of technology is, for Fromm, to Thanatos rather than Eros.[22] Before the rise of social networking technologies, such a distinction between Eros and Thanatos in terms of technology was perhaps easier to make: While technology related to mechanised ways of being that influenced social relationships, in a materialistic sense these technologies were something outside the social relationships that people form with each other. These forms of technologies were cars, the printing press, and bombs. Social networking technologies, in contrast, fundamentally intertwine the Thanatos of technological development with the Eros of social relationships. Social networking technologies hereby present a new psychoanalytic problem for both the individual and society through its blending of Thanatos and Eros. Fromm's psychoanalytic framework, and the dual focus of his critical theory on both the individual and society, allows a psychoanalytic analysis of social networking technologies that disentangles the complex fusion of Thanatos and Eros inherent in these technologies.

Thanatos in social networking technology use

Social networking technologies are based in commodity fetishism, which drives the production of technological devices.[23] Both the technologies and people who engage with others through these technologies are reconstrued in terms of commodity value (in terms of their purchasing power of new devices and the attention they give to these devices). This commodity value is divorced from all other measures of value.[24]

Commodity fetishism describes the process through which the entirety of social relations is re-formulated within the apparently autonomous relations of commodification. Marx comments that this is "the Fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour, so soon as they are produced as commodities, and which is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities" (Marx [1887] 1990, 83). These relations of commodification serve to hide the existence of such relations. In other words, commodity relations function in the same way as a fetish to hide the "object of worship" (commodities) behind the allure of a form of commodity that now (through substitutability) takes on a new social dimension that had been absent before. Even more than this, such a social dimension becomes the essence of the commodity. The consumer can no longer fathom their drive towards consumption because the commodity has become a part of the social fabric of society wherein the consumer lives her life.[25] The commodity is only given use value by the field of economic relations where the commodity is introduced. In turn, the consumer has been produced by the social relations constructed by commodity fetishism.

Social networking technologies function along these same lines of commodity fetishism.[26] Firstly, the technological devices that run the digital social networks are, through advertising and

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22 This article should be read as an expansion of the treatment of the subject in Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization* (1955). A major point of departure is the application of Fromm's psychoanalytical approach, of which Marcuse is highly critical. Whereas Fromm argues for an embrace of Eros in lieu of Thanatos, Marcuse holds that to embrace Eros one must also embrace Thanatos (Cho 2006).

23 Fetish: Latin [*fetico*] factitious: Word is associated with that which is artificial or false. An object supposed to be inhabited by a spirit or a special magical power (superstitious), and therefore held in awe; in a transferred sense, an object of excessive devotion.
     Fetishism: 1) Pagan cults that centre on fetishes, 2) Animism, animalistic cults, 3) Blind devotion (Mautner 2005, 218).

24 Karl Marx introduces the concept of the fetish into economic discourse to understand the relations between commodity production and consumers that function under the auspices of economic and market dominance in modern societies (Marx [1867] 1990). Commodity fetishism is problematic, however. A fetish misdirects love from an "object" of affection or devotion towards something else, whether it be a shrine, a sexual object or a commodity (Dickenson 2018). In terms of commodity fetishism, such redirection occurs as part of capitalist agendas in which advertising plays a central part. Instead of merely selling a product (such as Coca-Cola), many advertisements instead market a lifestyle that a consumer might desire (such as a lifestyle of calmness or composure). The consumer's desire for such a lifestyle is thus re-directed to the commodity or product, which supposedly allows the consumer to experience such a lifestyle. The goal here is to sell the product, and manipulation of the consumer's expectations is par for the course with this goal in mind. A commodity is thus given social value beyond its use value (which cannot be determined without relation to the fetish and thus links back to commodity fetishism).

25 Compare also Stiegler (2009) for a discussion of consumerism and YouTube.

26 Social networking technologies are a form of persuasion technology, described by Fogg (2003, 1) as "any interactive computing system designed to change people's attitudes or behaviors". An individual's character (as "entire set of attitudes") may be changed by means of such persuasive technologies (Ajzen 2012; Van Tongeren 2012). Fromm describes character as affecting and reflecting a range of

social engineering, strongly correlated with a social connection to the other (i.e. having friends and not being lonely). Social networking technologies therefore fundamentally function to further capitalist agendas through the monetisation of these technologies by conflating the intrinsic goals of commodity fetishism and the social instincts of the individual. Secondly, and perhaps more insidiously, the individual herself and the people with whom she has social relationships also become commodified through the commodity fetishism of such technologies.

In social networking technologies, the line between consumer and product is unidentifiably blurred in two ways.[27] The individual herself is commodified, becoming a "product" of social networking technologies. Through her purchase of the social networking device, she has become a unit in the economy of attention,[28] where revenue is generated through the prolonged use of social networking technologies to increase exposure of the individual to advertising. She is at once consumer and product, and her identity, psychological makeup, desires and dreams are construed and structured along the lines of the underlying capitalist agendas of these technologies. Without her role as unit in the economy of attention, as a cog in the wheel of the system, the social network would no longer function. Her existence in this system is predicated upon her continued production of representations of her personality and character in strictly controlled systems of personal expression – through photos, snippets of text, videos, shares and the like. Relationships based on Eros are not required in this equation, because all interaction is driven by underlying consumerist agendas.

The commodification of the other occurs via a similar route, and like the other side of a coin, feeding back into the commodification of the individual herself. Other people (her friends, for example) become representative names and ciphers who can only communicate in the same strictly controlled and structured technological ways – photos, snippets of texts, videos, shares, and so on. Self-worth and socialisation of the individual is generated through factors not related to Eros (in its truest sense, related to depth of relationships), but rather to factors such as the number of "friends" that reside in the individual's social networks and to the amount of interaction generated from the other (likes). Furthermore, the individual gains dopamine "hits" from interpersonal interaction through these technologies, and attempts to further expand her social network. These factors naturally form a part of the functioning of the social network, for without other consumers and engagement between consumers no continuing profit may be made through means such as advertising. Just as the individual herself is a consumer and product, so are all her "friends". The other is victim to the same economy of attention as the individual herself, and they thus function as an extension of commodity fetishism whereby interpersonal engagement is commodified in a self-reinforcing system.

The affection or devotion of such social networking technologies is supposedly directed to the other, but the structured frameworks of interpersonal social engagement in such frameworks are fetishistically hijacked to turn the individual into a consumer while promising genuine social interaction (the spectre of Eros is always beyond reach in such a system). The underlying problem is that such fetishes do not allow the individual to make sense of reality – one becomes disentangled and uprooted from the realities of interpersonal interaction. Combined with the lack of universal frameworks for orientation and devotion in postmodern society, the individual is no longer able to impose a rational order upon the universe to anchor her relationships with other people, the world in general, or even herself (Brown 1987).[29] Such fetishes refer to some unanalysed "real", some thing in itself beyond the circulation of substitutions. Social networking technologies, functioning

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thoughts, feelings and behaviours (Fromm [1947] 2013; 1976; Peterson and Seligman 2004).

27 Even the relation between product and commodity becomes blurred, due to the relation of these concepts with the needs of the individual for social engagement.

28 Economy of attention was first described by Herbert A. Simon (1971, 40–41) as follows:

in an information-rich world, the wealth of information means a dearth of something else: a scarcity of whatever it is that information consumes. What information consumes is rather obvious: it consumes the attention of its recipients. Hence a wealth of information creates a poverty of attention and a need to allocate that attention efficiently among the overabundance of information sources that might consume it.

29 Fromm (1941) describes how "[f]aced by these pathological conditions in his social world, the individual attempts to escape from his intolerable feelings of helplessness and aloneness" (Brown 1987, 158).

as fetish object, alter the frames of reference of the individual and her relation to the world in accord with capitalist agendas that further commodity fetishism.

Of course, the only way that social networking technologies can function in this way is by being a fetish that belies a longing for something else. A cigar belies something other than the object itself, and in the sexual fetish there is a longing for the sexual act (or at least sexual satisfaction). The religious fetish is understood as a connection to some transcendent being, the gods for example, rather than contacting the being itself. In a fetish object, there is always a longing for enchantment. As iconic representation for something elusive (social engagement in the case of social networking technologies), the symbolic image of the fetish is substantiated through figurative language – our frame of reference of Eros changes, our definition of interpersonal relationships shift to the point where there is little distinction between a Facebook friend and a real-world friend. The challenge here is not that such frames of reference change with new technologies, but rather that these changes – inspired by capitalist agendas – are uncritically accepted. It is therefore crucial that the fetish object be investigated, and alternatives formulated, due to the shortcoming of the fetish object as mere representation.[30] Fetish objects may reveal and link, but they may also obscure and replace. Behind the social technology fetish object is an obscured social interaction in its various psychologically beneficial forms. A major problem in this regard is that the ways in which social networking technologies may obscure such social interaction is not viewed as a problem, and if such a problem is identified, the modern individual appeals to calculative rationality to find a solution. No solution from the basis of Eros is given, for it functions outside these systems of modernist thinking.

Conformity and the death instinct

When social networking technologies become intertwined with commodity fetishism – rendering both the technological device itself, the self and the other as commodities that in symphony create a facsimile of actual social engagement – consumption of these social networks become foundational in one's sense of self-worth and survival. Consumption here is not a positive act. Social networking technologies structure the consumption of the social in the same way that commodities are consumed, because social interaction has been commodified.[31] Consumption of the social lets us feel active in life-affirming acts (both physically and socially) without actual social engagement because these technologies purport to be directed towards Eros.

This illusionary character of the social in social networking technologies is important because genuine psychological satisfaction and fulfilment in terms of the social does not support consumerism and commodity fetishism. Isolation and sadness make a good consumer, especially loneliness that is carefully curated by the frameworks of social networking technologies in lieu of interpersonal connection (Eros). The illusion of true social engagement allows Eros to be advertised but never provided, because fundamentally it is beyond the realm of consumerist culture to package and provide it. Thus, as discussed earlier, we find in societies more isolation and loneliness (such as the *hikikomori*). Consumption may be either life-orientated or occurring in line with the death instinct. However, the fact that commodity fetishism purports so wholly to relate to Eros but provides so little suggests that it is more closely related to Thanatos.

There are three reasons for this. Firstly, in line with Fromm's argument with regard to technology in general, there is a structuring of social engagement occurring through social networking

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30 Thomas Aquinas describes how a fetish, which starts as a representation of the spiritual realm, can become fetishised and taken for the thing itself (Böhme 2014). The fetish places the "object" to which it refers beyond critical analysis, for the fetish objects become the objects themselves (Dickenson 2018). A fetish implies a trust in the "real" on the behalf of the user, a trust that often goes unanalysed when a fetish stands in for the real object of devotion or trust. When trust in the fetish or social networking technologies as stand-in for interpersonal social relationship becomes absolute, the ways in which the individual acts changes. A cigar or religious fetish object is approached with reverence, sometimes even obscuring the object for which there is a longing, and engendering a greater reverence than the fetish object necessitates.

31 Of note here is the concept of "presumption", a conflation of the terms consumption and production that is often used to describe content creation and experience on social networking sites (Comor 2010). This article takes the view that such a concept is limited because production is still bound to strict frameworks that function according to capitalist motives inherent in said technologies. Compare also, in contrast, the optimistic claims of Kozinets, Hemetsberger and Jensen Schau (2008).

technologies that leads to conformity and a shift away from life-affirming ways of being. He identifies technology in this sense with Thanatos. Secondly, the continued and unceasing destruction of the natural environment through technology suggests that the continued consumption of all manner of technological devices, including social networking technologies, is Thanatos-directed. Thirdly, the relation to others via technological means rather than through more embodied and present means is related more to death, where the biological is not present, while artificial constructions take precedent. A major question in the psychoanalysis of social networking technology engagement is whether it is possible to shift these technologies from an inherent drive towards Thanatos to a discovery, or re-discovery, of Eros.

Eros in social networking technology use

Social networking technologies present a unique challenge in the history of industrialised society in the sense that the death-drive of unrestrained technological development and commodity fetishism has never been so closely related to the love and kinship that exists in interpersonal relationships. To a degree, this confusion is intentional in the sense that a mechanised way of social engagement (associated by Fromm with Thanatos) is intentionally marketed and sold as a true form of human interpersonal interaction (based in Eros). Social networking technologies are constantly mixing and remixing categories of everyday life such as public and private, local and global, individual and group (Kittler 2009). The same happens with Thanatos and Eros, and it is the confusion of Thanatos and Eros that problematises the potentially beneficial contribution of social networking technologies to alleviating isolation and loneliness and enhancing societal cohesion.

The problem here does not concern merely an altered understanding of the Eros inherent in interpersonal interaction; rather, new technologies – in shaping the ways that humans engage with each other – have altered the conceptualisation of love that modern individuals form without critical human reflection. While this is a primary problem, the influence of marketing and commodity fetishism alter and shape the concept of Eros even more – intentionally, from the side of business – to such a point that the commodified conceptualisation of Eros presented by commodity fetishism is uncritically assumed as more important than genuine Eros. Fromm argues in this regard that genuine love is not a problem to be solved via rationalistic means, the means provided in a technocratic society, but rather it is an activity to partake in. Social networking technologies constrain and structure the varieties of Eros as creative activity through the limitations of capitalistic ideology that underlies such activity.

The capacity for genuine love begins in character, in terms of the individual and the social unconscious, which Fromm defines as "the [relatively permanent] form in which human energy is canalised in the process of assimilation and socialisation" (Fromm [1947] 2013, 67).[32] He describes five character orientations, which are the receptive orientation (goods and satisfactions come from outside the individual, which are passively received and accepted), the exploitative orientation (individuals who focus on the act of taking wealth and ideas), the hoarding orientation (individuals obsessed with the idea of keeping possessions and potential possessions, as well as commodifying other people), the marketing orientation (individuals who focus on self-promotion and creators of the perfect personal image – Fromm saw this orientation as prominent in modern industrial society), and the productive orientation (healthy, productive individuals who align with their biological and social natures without sacrificing freedom and personal responsibility). The first four represent "dysfunctional" character types, and Fromm argues that the marketing orientation is the primary orientation through which the individual chooses automatic and enveloping conformity as an escape from freedom. This orientation is contrary to his conceptualisation of Eros. For Fromm, Eros is not an emotion but an interpersonal creative capacity and interplay. What is of interest in the context of addressing the problem of social networking technologies is the last type, the productive character. This is the character type that is able to form genuine love attachments to others, who realises and

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32   Fromm felt that we could most thoroughly understand our social unconscious by examining our economic systems. As such, when describing five personality orientations (character), he uses strongly defined economic terms.

reaches the potentialities within herself, and who is able to overcome the commodity fetishism that is founded upon the death instinct inherent in contemporary social networking technologies.

In this character type is the conflation of both self-love and love for the other – not as contradictories but as conjunctive.[33] Such twofold love is not possible, though, when the self and the other are conflated with commodities as occurs in the commodity fetishism of social networking technologies. There can be no care, respect, responsibility or knowledge of commodities to the extent that is required by self-love and interpersonal love, which is based in "the growth and happiness of the loved person, rooted in one's own capacity to love" (Fromm [1947] 2013, 130). Modern society and particularly the narcissism inherent in social networking technologies lead to self-interested behaviour (selfishness, not self-love) that cannot lead to Eros.

A shift in the way love is understood, both arising from and caused by character, allows the individual to challenge the fetish of the commodity which has become so intertwined with social networking technologies. While the description of commodity fetishism is useful to underline the fundamental problem of social networking technologies, that it is directed as a technology and economic activity towards Thanatos, there is also a space for the recognition of a different understanding of social networking technologies as a religious or transcendent fetish. Here we understand social networking technologies as exemplified by an excess of meaning that overflows all boundaries of reality. This overflow reaches towards something beyond our experience of the world in the bundled, hyper-realism of meanings inherent in these technologies. The technological artefact may serve as link between the earthly, the immanent, and that which is holy, the transcendent. A false transcendence, or rather a transcendence that is imminent (there is no infinity, there is only the other) is described here. There is merely the other and the way we engage with her via our fetish object with the recognition that the "godhood" that exists behind the fetish object of social networking technology. Such a recognition can only be reached through a re-evaluation of what love as Eros truly is (love as productive activity) and how commodity fetishism redirects this Eros towards Thanatos.

Desire lines
Thus, there is both awesome peril and potential in social networking technologies. Social networking technology can fundamentally support an idea of productive Eros, creating a canvas for an expanded expression and creation of love, across vast distances and in ways that are physically not possible. There is in love, in person, always delay and fear. Butterflies in the stomach. Individuals can become more expressive of love via social networking technologies. There is thus, beyond the peril of commodity fetishism, an opportunity for a new avenue to explore a psychologically beneficial form of love.

How can such a love be applied practically to social networking technologies? Through developing the desire of individuals to change technology to serve life-giving and beneficial psychological characteristics. Such changes in desire from individuals result in desire lines,[34] which in software engineering describes the ways in which people adopt the same methods to overcome the limitations of the relevant software. An example is Twitter, which has over the years integrated many desire paths into its software (such desire paths include the addition of @ mentions, hashtags, and group discussions) (Honeycutt and Herring 2009; Draucker and Collister 2015). Such desire lines may be trod by practical steps such as education regarding responsible social networking technology use – even from a young age. It is crucial to note here that these technologies have ethical and political meaning, which require some degree of description and explication. The conscious changing of one's behaviour towards such devices is therefore crucial and may be implemented on a social level – still, an altered orientation in the psyche of the individual towards a productive character

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33 Sketched as opposites by Freud, who argues that love for others means less affection for ourselves.

34 A desire path is an unplanned path created due to erosion caused by human or animal foot traffic, usually the shortest or more easily navigated route between one's origin and destination. These are shortcuts that take on the characteristics of the actual path when the original path is inadequate, inefficient or insufficient.

orientation will serve as the most potent counter against commodification of the social by social networking technologies.[35]

Fromm fundamentally challenges the psychological orientation that creates a space which the promise of social satisfaction via social networking technologies purports to fill. There is a psychological absence, or shortcoming of character, that functions as the precondition for exploitation of individual desires by social networking technologies.[36] Character is here related to the part of the personality that is of moral significance (Fromm [1947] 2013) and is not merely correlated with the individual, but also society in a broader sense (Fromm 1941). Thus the authentic re-development of human character would both alter how one lives (in an individual and societal sense) and how one engages with social networking technologies.[37]

The development of a character that is not susceptible to such manipulation is crucial here – what Fromm would term a shift away from a *having* orientation towards a *being* orientation. The idea of not owning, not having, is a prerequisite for Eros in human relationships. Furthermore, such an orientation moves beyond the confines of the consumerism and marketing that is embedded in social networking technologies. Possessions, whether physical objects or number of friends on a social networking site, cannot actualise authentic selfhood in the way that personal reflection and connection with others (through Eros) can. This is the desire for being, in contrast to the desire to gather, collect and consume (in terms of social connection). What is needed, according to Fromm as described by Funk (2009), is the development of a capacity to love, for autonomy, for self-knowledge, for an ambivalent experience of identity, for an ambivalent experience of reality, and for a recognition of reality free from wishful distortion or denial. What is needed is the re-discovery of Eros in our contemporary societies.

Conclusion

In this article, it was argued that social networking technologies mechanise human action according to predictable behavioural paths through the use of these technologies, especially in terms of how socialisation is possible via these technologies (shaping how platonic and romantic relationships may take place in the contemporary world through social technologies). This mechanised action influences both the individual and the society in which she resides.

Erich Fromm provides valuable insight into both these elements that figure into social networking technologies. A psychoanalytic perspective that describes the problem of social networking technologies in terms of a confusion between Eros and Thanatos may allow a rediscovery of Eros as the guiding principle behind social networking technologies, in contrast to capitalist agendas. Such a re-evalution of the ways in which contemporary social networking technologies lack true Eros allows a re-direction of technology use.

Contemporary individuals may take independent and responsible rational action to establish accountable and psychologically beneficial ways of engaging with social networking technologies in contrast to the invasive authoritarian capitalist agendas that form a part of the design and introduction of social networking technologies into the market. By re-evaluating the nature of

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35 An example of how such altered behaviour around social networking devices is the rule instituted at some music concerts of "no phones" allowed – Bob Dylan's concerts, for example. Arriving at such a concert, attendants are usually given a neoprene pouch by ushers. Staff take the phone, lock it in the pouch and give it back to the individual. If the individual wants to use their phone they need to go to a separate area, where they can unlock the pouch by touching it to a base. The concert area would thereby remain phone- and screen-free. The effect is that there are no more distracting screens, allowing people to engage more readily with the artist and each other.

36 Rainer Funk (2009, 2) refers to this as

a sense of inner emptiness, in a permanent desire to take possession of something; or in a state of agonized boredom, of not knowing what to do with oneself; or in an inability to generate activity from within; or in a depressive lack of initiative in which one experiences oneself as "switched off" in the absence of external stimulation; or in fears of loss experienced in part as panic attacks whenever one is left alone with oneself.

Shannon Vallor (2010; 2012) argues that social networking technologies may influence the collective nurturing of values (such as friendship) and communicative virtues such as patience, honesty and empathy – potentially impacting on character development. Compare also Boon et al. (2015) and Sandler's (2007) assertion that technological artefacts do not merely affect behaviour, but rather lead to characterological change, which they link to ecological and psychological well-being.

37 Compare Boon et al. (2015).

love, the experience of love via social networking technologies may present a transformative, even political action, unshackled by commodity fetishism. Here, the true potential of social networking technologies may be unearthed.

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