

From 'Man is Different', 'Commodity Deal Structure and Destroyed Interpersonal Relationships' and 'Fear in Capitalism' by Dieter Duhm. Translated by Tobias Tripler.

## Introduction

As you can learn from the foreword, the whole project started with the reading of the early seventies works of Dieter Duhm, which have been out of print for decades.

The original 'study group' first put its attention here, before it embarked on a broader approach that finally lead to the project we're introducing you to via this website.

In this process, parts of these books have been typed into digital media and translated to English.

We make these texts available here to the wider audience.

If you're one of those who equate the controversial life of Duhm and his projects with his remarkable academic life and publishing<sup>1</sup>, the first quote is definitely for you.

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<sup>1</sup> As we had the case when we looked for a house to rent for our three months experiment: An alleged anarchist, who owns a house (sic!), transformed into the worst possible version of a patriarchal landlord, demanding in order to get a rental contract we put a disclaimer on the website that Duhm, who to our knowledge has never been charged and obviously neither been convicted of any crimes, according to material he called a must read. Sorry, buddy, but to us you're a fascist.

**Dieter Duhm**

**Man is different, 1975.**

*Dogmatism is not at all concerned whether any held opinion is correct or incorrect. Dogmatism means the way in which an opinion is transmitted and defended. Dogmatism is not the content of thought, but the structure of thought.*

...

*In the social context with infidels, the held position reaches identity-creating powers. It becomes paradigmatic and emotionally charged, so that any doubt becomes unbearable. Assuming solid ideological positions generates advantages for the psychological economy of the individual. It relieves from doubts, frees of inner conflicts and spares the effort of own thinking. Furthermore it produces a strong surrogate identity by knowing oneself to be connected with many others.*

*From this psychological perspective it becomes apparent, why the opponent must by all means be weakened, debased, black-mailed and made appear illegitimate. What power can rational arguments hold against the need to be identified of an individual charged with suppressed fear and low self-esteem that is not even used to think rationally? No, the ultimate authority one claims, the almighty guarantor of ones own backbone, shall never be challenged.*

*There are many such authorities: God, the church, the leader, the state, the party, the bible, Marx Lenin Maozedong. As different as they are as individual entities, psychologically they serve the same mechanism: One derives ones self-strength from the identification with a superior power, one protects this identification through intellectual blindness and through heavy defence towards the outside.*

*Emancipation first and foremost is liberation of thinking. Let's shatter the chains, wherever we recognize them!*

## **Commodity Deal Structure and Destroyed Interpersonal Relationships, 1972.**

### **Communication strategies for fear suppression**

*The fear of the others is rarely experienced directly, because strong fear automatically sets unconscious fear suppression mechanisms in motion through which the danger (the repetition of the traumatic situation) can be avoided. Viewed from this angle, it seems no exaggeration to say that the alienated life is a system of anxiety defence techniques, which allow biological survival, but psychologically sever from crucial life experiences. The most common form of defence against fear is the market driven accoutrement of one's own person, conformance. Socially positive-valued properties are spruced up (overawing), the negative hidden and veiled, excluded from communication, literally excommunicated.*

*This excommunication of a part of one's personality forms the basis and prerequisite for alienated communication. Let us consider what happens if someone does not comply with these conditions, he actually will be ... excommunicated from the community.*

*As each individual interacts with the others by excommunicating a part of himself, the alienated communication principle is perpetuated, which also forces the partner to excommunication. The dialectic of communication and excommunication inherent in the antagonism of character mask and actual person bestows its dangerous ambiguity onto the entire communication. Mutual assurance of sympathy, pleasantries and friendly expression must serve to mask the ambiguity itself and rid one another of one's anxiety. We laugh when the other is laughing, talking with him about a topic that one is not really interested in, confirm him in his opinions, even if we hold different ones. In order to weather through, everyone is dependent on the insincerity of the other. Casual coffee drinking and cigarette smoking are rituals of socialisation with which the gap <of social alienation> is to be bridged, which separates the communication partners from one another. Would one of them break the rules of the game, as to ask a question that does not fit into the choreography, or laugh, where it is "out of place", inevitably fear would arise in the other. Who then in turn has to*

*protect himself very quickly against his fear with new fear suppression techniques ... The concerted game can now even turn into open hostility. Also for this, long practiced defence patterns are ready, for example, the "identification with the aggressor", I try to forestall the anticipated hostility of the other by making allegations, demonstrating my superiority, or -when there is an audience- by making a mock of him.*

...

*In an effort to not be excluded from the satisfactions made available on the interpersonal market, we must ... seek to make our own abilities appear higher in the public consciousness than those of the others. Even on a personal level, we work with winning tricks, deception, dissembling tactics and strategic debasement. Compelled to appear more and different than we are, we become hucksters of feasible masks, relegate ourselves to directors of a narrow-minded inventory of overawe and conformance techniques, while at the same time having to invent all sorts of preventive measures and alibis in order to keep up the appearances and not ... unmask us as ruthless egoists.*

*In service of individual anxiety defence in groups often a complicated pattern of relationships with complementary defence roles emerges: The group is divided into ... experts and beginners, "strong" and "weak". The defence against anxiety here is based on an implied reciprocity: The strong need the weak to maintain their fear defence strategy and vice versa, which is why the emancipation of one without the other is not possible. (sic!) Through such role assignments the Group acquires a pseudo-stability, which quickly breaks down, however, once the roles are no longer accepted.*

*The situation is contradictory from the outset: on the one hand, the functioning of the defence against anxiety requires a certain reciprocity and mutuality, implied role allocation, common rules, common evaluation criteria. On the other hand, the defence against anxiety requires the struggle of all against all, and thus the destruction of the commonality ...*

*As a result of isolation <alienation> and competition, which even in the most harmonious groups are not missing, each individual is not*

*primarily concerned with the total score of the whole group, but rather with his private score, compared to that of the others. That this will result in a lot of envy and jealousy, is self-evident, but can not be admitted ... To avoid such glitch, the act must be protected by a common system of alibis, rationalizations and mystifications (sic), which guarantee the integrity of ones conduct to each member.*

...

*Who steps out of line falls deep, for time and again the group needs its victims, whose collective expulsion strengthens the internal gang. Whenever the excommunication of one serves as agent for the "in - communication" <inclusion / cohesion> of the others, all pervasive isolation <alienation> rules.*

...

### ***Pseudo-Community and Double Bind***

*Although neurotic anxiety and aggression are connected generally with unconscious libidinal strivings, they stand in antagonistic opposition to love. One cannot love whom one hates. Especially, since through paranoid distortions of perception one's own hostility is also attributed to the partner. Whom one is afraid of, one cannot love either, because, as a result of unconscious anxiety defence strategies, one has sealed off from him already.*

*But no human can live without contact to others. The communication strategies described earlier do <therefore> not only serve as individual anxiety defences, but also have the aim to secure contact with the others, despite fear and hostility. These are forms of socialization with which the attempt is made to build a community of humans, on the basis of mutual isolation.*

...

*Today, we cannot yet express scientifically what it would mean to relate to the other as of one's own kind ... Yet, anybody who has, in a situation exceptionally free of fear, experienced such type of relating, knows that quality-wise it is something entirely different, distinguished from the usual qualities of relationship:*

*The separation between me and the other is dissolved, I no longer am afraid of him, the ambiguity of the relation is discarded, I have a clear sense of identity, that is no longer torn to pieces by defence compulsions and deal relations. Such experiences of solidarity enable*

*us to approximate the extent of separation, of destruction between myself and the other. They constitute important alternative experiences, not just because they are providing us with a benchmark from where to criticise the current state of affairs, but also because through them we can anticipate the reality of the utopia ...*

## ***Some Aspects of a Marxist Concept of Emancipation***

### ***1. Against Despair***

*Such an extensive account of the human crippledness, its constant production and reproduction, as well as its irredeemable necessity within the system that we dwell in, to those, who take it seriously, may feel frustrating. In fact, time and again it has become apparent... that intense preoccupation with their own conflicts has not lead them out of, but rather deeper into despair. ...*

***Whether I have hope or not is by no means solely a question of my character disposition, my subjective optimism or pessimism, but to the greatest possible extend rather a question of an appropriate or inappropriate theory.***

### ***2. The progressive Side of Fear***

#### ***a) Fear as Expression of Refusal and Rebellion***

*The neurotic fear between humans is expression of an unresolved conflict, which we can express on diverse levels:*

*On the level of social theory it is the conflict of wage labour and capital, needy individual and societal statutes; on the socio-psychological level the <conflict> between me and the other, by whom the societal statutes are embodied; on the psychological level of the individual it is the conflict between drives and internalized societal statutes (super-ego). This contradiction, which is the same on all levels, has not yet been resolved in either direction, otherwise fear wouldn't be present. Fear indicates the bondage of the human being by showing his submission to the alienated inner and outer societal forces.*

*But simultaneously it indicates freedom by showing that the submission faces individual counterforces that have not yet been integrated <submitted>. Within fear, the forbidden, the secret wishes and needs dwell, the non-oppressed human. If we ceased to have*

*fear within this social order, capital would have won its final victory over man. Viewed from this angle, a different assessment of fear results, we do not have to be ashamed of it any longer. At least in leftist groups that have awareness of this connection, it should by and by become less mandatory to hide fear from one another by destructive manoeuvres of compensation and winning tricks. ... Instead, we have to come to a point where fear in us as well as in others is accepted as something self-evident (within the given society). Whenever fear is really accepted, it will recede by itself, for the therapeutic dictum is valid that whenever one is allowed to be afraid, no fear remains.<sup>82</sup>*

*Social suppression fosters individual aggression, which in itself is suppressed, furthering the unconscious conflict with society and its dangerous potential. The fiercer the aggression, the more paralyzing the fear. ... expression of dynamics captivated in an equilibrium of antagonistic forces ... <which> can be unleashed at any given moment. Suppressed rebellion breaks free and forms up - if channelled in the right way- to revolutionary force. That is the chance signified by the fear, and it is not just a personal emancipatory task, but a historical task of revolutionary groups, to make use of this chance, for the rebellion which is suffocated in fear bears witness to the demand for freedom, which nowadays, due to the historical level of development of the productive forces, could actually be cashed in.*

*Whosoever recognizes his own fear in this context, whosoever knows that it is not primarily a personal defect, but a social one, that it results from the control of brutal conditions that cannot be legitimized anymore by anything, will see his perspective on fear fundamentally altered. The fear will become the driving force of his new consciousness, the driving force of his actions. ... His consciousness will point<sup>2</sup> a way where acting is enabled and will save him from falling back into passive subjectivity.*

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<sup>82</sup> ... Only where I know that the other can see himself in my fear without dismay, I can truly have fear. Whether the other did see himself in my fear, I will recognize by how he reacts to and speaks about it ...

<sup>2</sup> The original text has "proove" as verb here, which in German sounds okay-ish, but on second glance odd. Or containing a deeper meaning that I didn't grasp.

## **Fear in Capitalism, 1972.**

### ***Psychological theory of fear***

#### ***2. The Origin of Neurotic Anxiety***

##### ***a) Punitive Authority Figures***

...

*The child ... may not do what it wants, but has to do what the parents want, must obey. Obedience is not reciprocated voluntarily, because it means at least partial relinquishment of immediate gratification. The parents ... reward ... and punish ... In this way, the parents become judges on whose judgement the well being of the child depends.*

...

*The fuel for this conformance is the fear of the loss of love and of punishment ... the fear of an external threat ... "Concrete Fear". ...*

...

##### ***b) Irrational Rules of Conduct***

*... While eating ...: "Take your elbows off the table!"*

*... irrational ... because they can neither be justified by any cognizable inherent necessity, nor by any alleviation of community life. This eliminates insight as a motivation for voluntary adaptation ... In a intimidating society the child is exposed to a plentitude of ... basically unreasonable standards, especially in the sexual realm. Brought to comply ... by external authoritarian pressure ... the anxiogenic heteronomy of man is initiated ...*

##### ***c) General notion of a threatening environment***

*The environment is ... also experienced as a hostile and threatening authority. In laudatory word, as well as in loving care the parents still reveal themselves as the almighty jurisdiction ... This judicial function of the environment ... creates ... persistent fear disposition. Important ... to the understanding of anxiety that later will be experienced by the adult. ...*

##### ***d) Situations of Probation***

...

*The adaptation takes place before the judge's eyes of the parents.*

*The judges' eye becomes the reference point ... To this extrinsically oriented life inextricably belongs the fear of judgment, of the gaze, the thoughts of the judicial surroundings. Only ... if approved, the child ... has a right to love and well being.*

..

*e) The formation of conscience and the transformation of concrete anxiety into neurotic anxiety*

*Until now, the child's anxiety is the so-called "concrete fear", that is the fear of a real danger (parental punishment).*

*Under the pressure of the parental judge's eyes, the child gradually learns ... what is "good" and what is "evil." Soon it "voluntarily" does and says the right thing. It has internalized the parental standards Normen, the commandments and prohibitions and assesses beurteilen itself as it has been assessed by the parents. It has developed a conscience, that is judging and sentencing by the same code as before had the parents. ... Psychoanalysis calls this conscience, this foreign body, which from now on will dominate life, the "super-ego". ...*

*Through the superego the child is spared a lot of acute concrete fear ... It has become fully identified with the authoritarian oppressors. Through the formation of conscience the child has achieved two things: an effective protection against acute anxiety and the permanent loss of its autonomy, ie the final renunciation of an individual life chosen by free decisions. It has thus redeemed the fear against servitude.*

*Let's examine ... whether the exchange has really been successful, whether the superego really is a suitable means for anxiety avoidance.*

*The authority ... which poses the social requirements, now no longer solely is represented in certain external authorities, but also <exists> within the superego itself ...*

*That superego never exists fully detached from outer authorities, but dwells in a constant interaction with them. When we encounter an external authority, we project the features and punitive powers of our superego onto them. ... By this projection the external authority turns again into an overbearing parent figure.*

*Erich Fromm ... put it this way: "... authority and super-ego can not be separated from one another."*

*... the former fear of the parents is now -through the detour via the superego- newly experienced, even when no real danger exists. The anxiety has become irrational, neurotic. ...*

*Whenever the individual is in an open or latent conflict with the norms of his environment, he responds with this neurotic fear of authority. But we shall soon see that unconsciously he almost always is entangled in this conflict. The above exchange of fear against servitude has by no means succeeded ... because what has been avoided is only concrete fear, but produced has been neurotic anxiety, that from now on unchecked and willfully will disturb the life.*

#### *f) Repression*

*Repression ... and superego formation indissolubly belong together ... only two different aspects of the same psychic process. ...*

*When strong drives have to be suppressed again and again because they ... always mean a conflict that induces fear ..., then such drives are finally repressed. Both, the drive as much as the ideational content associated with it ... now leading a life of its own on in the unconscious which is disconnected from any mind control. ...*

*Most repressions take place in childhood. Thus, the repressed needs continue to live on in their infantile form ... and unconsciously determine his sexual behavior. ...*

*The fear comes in many guises: as fear of authority, as speech anxiety, claustrophobia ... Basically, these fears are not named entirely correct, because in the end they all are but uncoupled fear of authority, detached from the original source of danger.*

*...*

*Although the repression has some benefits initially ... but ultimately it achieves the very opposite. Namely because whenever repressed drive contents are activated in a real life situation, ... neurotic anxiety will erupt. To fend it off ..., new repression efforts must be undertaken ... This energy could otherwise be used for better things.*

*...*

### *g) Existential Fear*

...

*At least now we have to ... leave the purely psychoanalytic explanation of fear and introduce a term that ... does not occur in the entire bourgeois psychology. It is the Marxist concept of alienation ... we will see that the ultimate cause of anxiety ... <lies> in very specific characteristics of social relations.*

### **Psychological Theory of Fear**

#### **3. Anxiety Defence and Anxiety Processing**

##### *a) Anxiety defence facade*

*... The most common fear defense mechanism is conformance, ie, submission to the powers of society. In this way, fear becomes a convenient means of control. In conformance lies the identification with the oppressors ... because the forbidden aggression ... will be redirected to substitute enemies.*

*... Due to the fear disposition ... we respond to every person who confronts us with a seemingly punitive or reproachful gesture with a bout of spontaneous anxiety. ... Again we find ourselves back in a kind of probation situation ... <the chance of> failure means fear. To get rid of this fear, we spontaneously and unconsciously draw out all the stops (employ every possible means), with which we can gain sympathy, recognition and respect of the other. Here we come across the commodity character of our interhuman relationships. We produce all sorts of qualities, intelligence, rhetoric, and even most "moral" traits like modesty, thoughtfulness and honesty in order for it to gain recognition ... Since these techniques have proven successful as fear defenses ever since, they click in automatically, as if they were unadulterated spontaneity. ... I subsume these behavior strategies under the term "anxiety defense facade". ... We develop religious and philosophical structures and teaching systems ultimately to deal with our fear ...*

*... Typology of anxiety defense: ... the seductive, the ascetic, the philosopher, the fashion doll, the entertainer, the brave, the arrogant, the humble, the silent, the amiable, the complainer, the opportunist, the nonconformist, etc. ... Either way, it is a neurotic character formation with a specific overall impression, with which*

*anxiety generating conflicts were processed to minimize acute anxiety. ...*

*Whether it really is fear defensive "character armor" (Reich) or not, is cognizable by the rigidity or flexibility of such characters. ...*

#### *b) Neurosis*

*...*

*In a fear-generating (anxiogenic) society, it is impossible to draw a clear dividing line between neurotic and non-neurotic people ... When the whole society is sick, then being healthy can only mean the average and therefore unobtrusive way of being sick. Capitalist society is a sick society. ... The "healthy" man ... is thoroughly sick, disfigured, crippled. His illness is total and everywhere. ...*

***All typical features of capitalism generate fear***

### ***3. Commodity Character of the Material World and of Human Relationships***

#### *b) The Commodification of Human Relationships*

*... significance of commodity far beyond the economic function out:  
... a formative social function by ... determining the social relations.  
... No man is excluded from these exchange relations, because who wants to live, must buy and sell. Everything ... that <the human> does is clamped into a social fabric, which is determined by the laws of commodity production. The basic structure of their relations is that of commodity exchange and not any of their relationships is totally free from it ... The guiding question asks not what needs do I satisfy through my work, but: What countervalue do I get?*

*...*

*The exchange value determines -consciously or unconsciously- our entire behavior. Everything we possess in skills and assets, we bring to the market as a commodity, in order to obtain a certain redemption.*

#### *c) Commodity Character (Commodification?) as a Source of Anxiety*

*The people face one another as commodity possessors. As possessors of commodities ... they make deals, economic deals in the economic sphere and psychic deals in the psychic realm. But never they have the guarantee that the deal will work out. ... Inevitably fear looms in the background: Am I doing it right? ...*

*It is the fear of the judgment of the others and of the loss of their recognition.*

***Whenever interhuman solidarity is torn to pieces by competitive exchange relations, love and sympathy turn into purchasable commodities that can be obtained by employing certain behavioral patterns. But when love and sympathy need to be earned, permanent fear of the loss of love and the omnipresent threat of a demanding environment ensue.***

#### **4. Alienation as Capitalist' way of Life**

##### *a) Derivation of Alienation from the Economic Relations*

*Through their activity, the people themselves generate the social conditions in which they live together. ... may our social order appear to us as anonymous and inscrutable as it does, ... it nevertheless is but a historical result of human activity.*

*The key feature of alienation is that the people ... are now dominated themselves by these conditions.*

...

*The exchange value is a property which is bestowed onto the commodity by the human being. It does not possess it in itself. The ... people do not know that they are subordinate to a law that they have brought forth by the specific character of their own social action. Marx calls this enormous awareness delusion, which today's entire bourgeois ideology and science are based on, "commodity fetishism".*

...

*Only when man will see through the commodity fetishism ... when he transforms "alienated consciousness" into a "consciousness of alienation", only then can he free himself ...*

##### *b) Alienation as a Source of Anxiety*

*The alienation is reflected subjectively therein that the society is experienced as the threatening reign of anonymous powers. ... Imagine the capitalist being: ... No longer has he contact to fellow humans, but to instances ... This total heteronomy can only be experienced as an existential threat. The feeling of being at mercy, becomes the core feeling of the alienated life. The fear ... experienced as naturalistic, alien power.*

...  
*The environment has become not only risen as an alien power ... anonymous jurisdiction: the fellow human becomes its threatening deputy. ... In the judgemental gaze of the other man loses his sovereignty.*

*How ... this judicial power?*

*One reason ... is the ... dependence on the judgment. Because on this judgment it depends whether my exchange values be realized, whether I will receive love, appreciation and admiration or not. Another reason ... lies in the child-rearing practices, with which parents pass on their own alienation to the children. ... evident that morality ... no longer is at the service of man. It occurs in the form of an anonymous power. ...*

*But not only through the real punitive power of the parents the child learns to submit to anonymous forces. First of all ... the parents through the medium of reward and punishment ... parental punitive power ... later on is projected onto the anonymous forces of society.*

...  
*Here the frightening cycle of alienation closes: Man who passed on his power to his own products, now experiences this lost power in his fellow man, but only as alienated rule over himself.*

*Human solidarity is broken twice in the total commodity economy: firstly, because the people ... face one another as a character masks on a perpetual market, where only the exchange value and not the fellow human. On the other hand ... because on this market they meet as representatives of the anonymous social power. Both aspects inevitably create a basic feeling of isolation and fear in them.*

...