BOOK REVIEW

Fromm discovers a bored America

THE ANATOMY OF HUMAN DESTRUCTIVENESS;
by Erich Fromm; E.P. Dutton; New York; 1973a; 353 pages; $10.95.

Reviewed by CHARLES OHL

You might say that Erich Fromm has wrestled with a mountain and brought forth an anthill. He hasn't spared the words; there are thousands of them, of all sizes and shapes, strewn about in sentences that sometimes edify but too often wander around erratically like crippled pheasants in a cornfield. It's almost a shame not to take Fromm seriously because this LOOKS like one of those books you should read without a smile, cold sober. Fromm has made a discovery, but he lets you dangle for 243 pages before he gets down to cases:

"Chronic boredom — compensated or uncompensated — constitutes one of the major psychopathological phenomena in contemporary technocratic society, although it is only recently that it has found some recognition."

Now, is this really news? It is to Fromm. And he also has discovered what modern man tries to do to relieve his boredom:

"Alcohol consumption is one of the means men employ to help him forget his boredom," states Fromm. "In the past few years a new phenomenon has demonstrated the intensity of the boredom among members of the middle class. I am referring to the practice of group sex among "swingers."

And that's not all.

"Another and more drastic means for the relief of boredom is the use of psycho-drugs, starting in the teens and spreading to older age groups, particularly among those who are not socially settled and have no interesting work to do."

Alcohol, group sex and drugs. But even this powerful combination doesn't keep middle-class America from slipping steadily into boredom.

So, what's a person to do? According to Fromm, he becomes violent and destructive. Not everybody, however. Those who live in this area but one gathers that he looks favorably upon socialism.

Having made his point, Fromm turns to Adolf Hitler. Although this dead horse has been beaten to pieces for nigh on three decades now, Fromm still detects a flicker of life. Having never met or seen Hitler, having apparently never even talked to ceramists still alive who did know him, and relying on second and third-hand sources, Fromm proceeds to construct a tortured theory that Hitler was a case of malignant incestuousness.

Even Fromm admits that Hitler's mother, a country girl, was perfectly normal, and the worst thing she can come up with on the father is that the father was illegitimate (although Alois Hitler overcame this handicap to rise to a respected position in the customs service).

However, little Adolf did have a mania for playing Indians and soldiers — and Fromm finds the germ of evil in this. At which this reviewer concluded that, if a definitive book on Hitler is going to be written, Erich Fromm is not going to be the writer.

Fromm also tosses in a few thousand words on why Himmler was such a rat: "He had to attain absolute power in order to overcome his own experience of weakness and vital impotence." He followed Hitler because he was looking for a strong father image, according to Fromm.

There are an awful lot of big words in Fromm's book and the sentences are really impressively complex. But if you pick out the meaning and think about it awhile you get the feeling that there is an awful lot of humbug there, too.
Fromm speaks about various theories about the instinctiveness in man. He also speaks about the psychoanalytic approach to the understanding of aggression. The second part deals with neurophysiology, animal behavior, and anthropology. In the last chapter of this part, the author writes an analysis of thirty primitive tribes in which he writes about both the destructive societies as well as the non-destructive societies. Thus he makes a comparison between them. Part three deals with the varieties of aggression and destructiveness and their respective conditions. In this, Fromm sp... The only drawback in the book is that it is boring to read. Fromm, "Anatomy of Human Destructiveness" (Henry Holt, 1973) BENIGN AGGRESSION Preliminary Remarks If human aggression were more or less at the same level as that of other mammals particularly that of our nearest relative, the chimpanzee human society would be rather peaceful and nonviolent. But this is not so. Man's history is a record of extraordinary destructiveness and cruelty, and human aggression, it seems, far surpasses that of man's animal ancestors, and man is, in contrast to most animals, a real killer. Animals, too, exhibit extreme and vicious destructiveness when the envi