

**T**wo hundred years ago, the utopian socialist Charles Fourier (1772–1837) wrote *The Theory of the Four Movements*, introducing a political vision based on sex, art and other everyday pleasures. Many books followed, and well before Marx or Freud, Fourier sharpened his critique of bourgeois morality and articulated his philosophy of “passionate attraction.”

His message seems clear: go with your gut, and the rest will follow. By maximizing and circulating our desires, our natural impulses become guides leading us toward a better life. If that sounds hedonistic and anarchistic, it is. But Fourier saw the future of industrial society as being about harnessing our natural passions and channeling them towards productive ends. He understood that the satisfaction and accumulation of passions will in turn attract other passions and form the glue that can hold a community and an economy together. In other words: we all want good sex, exquisite food, and the company of interesting people, but that's fully compatible with social and political progress.

Having lived through the bloody French Revolution, Fourier learned that nothing is too big to fail, and that change works best when it happens on small scales, and spreads gradually.

For this, he designed the Phalanstery, an architectural structure where 300 families would live and work in a state of harmony and prosperity. It had its share of idiosyncrasies, especially for 19th century France: women and children were to play prominent roles, and no-one was to work on a single task for more than two hours at a time. Roland Barthes once wrote, “Utopia is a state of society where Marx would no longer critique Fourier.”

Things didn't quite turn out like he had hoped, but the same can be said of many great thinkers. Nevertheless, he's been on the mind of many artists over the years, including André Breton, Guy Debord, Robert Filliou, or Pierre Klossowski.

Artist Paul Chan also has a lot to say about Charles Fourier. He shares some of his thoughts in a lecture entitled "What is an orgy? On Charles Fourier," on November 14th, 2010.