

*Fromm and Horkheimer.
On the fundamentals of
critical theory's anthropology*

*Fromm y Horkheimer. Sobre los elementos
fundamentales de la antropología en la Teoría Crítica*

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Abstract

Erich Fromm was central to the Frankfurt Institute of Social Research under the direction of Max Horkheimer, but the works of each author, while handling at times similar issues, took different paths. The article’s aim is to analyze how Horkheimer’s anthropology, which would be of importance in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, was built as the author embodied in his essays elements of Fromm’s social psychology, albeit overcoming some of its limitations, as well as suggesting new potentials of critique.

Palabras Clave: critical theory; anthropology; character; Max Horkheimer; Erich Fromm; domination.

Resumen

Erich Fromm fue fundamental para el Instituto de Investigación Social de Frankfurt dirigido por Max Horkheimer, pero las obras de cada autor, mientras que a veces se enfrentaban a problemas similares, siguieron caminos diferentes. El objetivo del artículo es analizar cómo la antropología de Horkheimer, importante en la *Dialéctica de la Ilustración*, se construyó cuando el autor incorporaba elementos de la psicología social de Fromm, aunque superaba sus limitaciones y sugería nuevos potenciales de crítica.

Keywords: teoría crítica; antropología; carácter; Max Horkheimer; Erich Fromm; dominación.

The incorporation of ideology and psyche as research objects was a clear expression of the route change in the intellectual work done at the Frankfurt Institute of Social Research, after the 1920s had been marked, under Carl Grünberg's directorship, by issues in Political Economy. Having been responsible for sociopsychological matters in the Institute between 1930 and 1938, Erich Fromm carried out the reunion of Marxism and psychoanalysis within Max Horkheimer's research program, and coordinated the empirical studies with workers and employees, which took place in the beginning of the thirties: the idea was that a corpus of "authoritarian" representations - such as the belief in the eternal necessity of hierarchical order and in the irrelevance of individual action in view of society powers - would play a fundamental role in conserving social order, as they were accepted by members of German proletariat, which was undergoing a process of social integration since the failure of revolution attempts in the dawn of Weimar Republic, and which would be soon a target of Fascist propaganda¹. If Fromm's social psychology was decisive for the study with workers and employees, that does not mean that he and Horkheimer had been building identical social theories. It is important to understand the specificity of Horkheimer's and Fromm's theoretical undertakings during the 1930s, for early critical theory's reception largely obliterates differences between them². In the following I try at first to outline the main

¹ The central role played by Fromm in the Institute is transparent and well-known in the reception of early critical theory. See, among others, Wiggershaus, R., *The Frankfurt School: its history, theories and political significance*, Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1995, *passim*. The study with workers and employees, whose results, in its complete and analyzed form, would only be published several decades later, is documented in the *Studies on Authority and the Family* from 1936, the first publication to be viewed as a result of the Institute's collective research program, and Fromm was mentioned nominally in Horkheimer's "programmatic" essays. See, for example, Horkheimer, M., "Geschichte und Psychologie", *Max Horkheimer - Gesammelte Schriften* (Vol. 3), A. Schmidt and G. S. Noerr (Eds.), Frankfurt am Main, Fischer, 1988 (1932), pp. 60-61.

² This interpretation, which goes back at least to Martin Jay and Helmut Dubiel (whose works date respectively from 1973 and 1978), was shared by Axel Honneth, when he accused critical theory from the 1930s of functionalism and of a "sociological deficit", as well as by John Abromeit, who (although in a different direction) argued for the existence of "theoretical elective affinities" between Fromm and Horkheimer, at least until 1937. See Dubiel, H., *Wissenschaftsorganisation und politische Erfahrung - Studien zur frühen Kritischen Theorie*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1978, p. 177; Jay, M., *A Imaginação Dialética - História da Escola de Frankfurt e do Instituto de Pesquisas Sociais: 1923-1950*, Rio de Janeiro, Contraponto, 2008, pp. 149-153; Honneth, A., "Teoria Crítica", A. Giddens and J. Turner (Eds.), *Teoria Social Hoje*, São Paulo, Unesp, 1996, pp. 524-536; Abromeit, J., *Max Horkheimer and The Foundations of the Frankfurt School*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp. 207-219. As Katia Genel pointed out, though, convergences between Fromm and Horkheimer were rather "ephemeral" and "ambivalent". See Genel, K., *Autorité et émancipation: Horkheimer et la théorie*

elements of Fromm's theory of "authoritarian character", in order to argue in a second moment that they were dialectized in Horkheimer's essays, having been used by the Institute director in the development of his "anthropology of bourgeois era" and of his conception of bourgeois individual as resting mainly on self-preservation, a notion which would play a central role in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. By so doing, Horkheimer undertook, as I hope it will become clear in the following, a sort of fetishism critique that analyzed the contradictions of bourgeois society as evolving by means of historical processes of domination. This operation also made it possible for Horkheimer to indicate emancipation possibilities, albeit scarce and needing of systematic elaboration. As long as in Horkheimer's texts the basic concepts provided by Fromm assumed new meanings and functions, the relation between both authors' contributions can be understood not only from an institutional point of view, but also as one between "traditional" and "critical" theories, in the sense predicted by Horkheimer in the famous 1937 essay³.

1. Aspects of Erich Fromm's "characterology"

FROMM PROVIDED THE BASIC CONCEPTS to determine the prevailing character structure among individuals who answered the survey belonging to the study done with workers and employees: a) "authoritarian character", in which submission to authority would be the main source of drive gratification; b) "revolutionary character", in which this source would have disappeared and the individual would be tendentially anti-authoritarian; c) "ambivalent character", a specific manifestation of authoritarian character, in which authoritarian personality trends would be less extreme, and almost always mixed with "progressive" tendencies. Having started to conduct the survey in 1929 (four years before Hitler's rise to power), Fromm expected initially that individuals belonging to the proletariat would be less likely

critique, Paris, Payot, 2013, pp. 134-148. This also seems to relate to the progressive character of Horkheimer's adherence to Marxism - an issue unfortunately impossible to handle here.

³ HORKHEIMER, M., "Traditionelle und kritische Theorie", *Max Horkheimer - Gesammelte Schriften* (Vol. 3), A. Schmidt and G. S. Noerr (Eds.), Frankfurt am Main, Fischer, 1988 (1937), pp. 190-200. As we shall see, Horkheimer's anthropology is thus in my view (and together with its consequences in the joint work written by him and Adorno in the 1940s) the result of a specifically Marxist critique of traditional anthropological conceptions, instead of consisting on a break with the Marxist approach presented by Horkheimer in the famous 1937 essay. If it is correct, the interpretation presented here therefore suggests some continuity lines between Horkheimer's Marxism in the 1930s and his and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, which has traditionally been interpreted as a break with early critical theory - a perspective to which Habermas has mostly contributed. See, for example, Habermas, J., "Nachwort", *Dialektik der Aufklärung* - Philosophische Fragmente, M. Horkheimer and T. W. Adorno, Frankfurt am Main, Fischer, 1986, p. 282 ss.

to have an authoritarian character structure, since they presumably had not undergone the same process of internalization of social coercion which historically was a part of the rise of the bourgeoisie (having expressed itself in the ethics of work and duty most particular to this class) - a kind of socialization, though, which had lost its effectiveness along with the decline of paternal authority⁴.

Although the main position occupied by “family” in Horkheimer’s research program (and in Fromm’s social psychology) was due to psychoanalysis, this subject was important to Marxism at least since Bebel’s *Woman and Socialism* and Engels’s *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, and Fromm’s attention to these issues was (as well as Bebel’s and Engels’) strongly influenced by the debate on matriarchal societies, which went back to Bachofen’s theories. Mother right would have been essential to primitive communism, and patriarchal domination was seen as bound to the class character of domination under capitalism (of which followed, as a result, that fight against capitalism and fight for woman’s liberation should be connected)⁵. The view of matriarchy as a sociability form in which class domination was absent influenced Fromm’s concept of “revolutionary character”, whose main traits were generosity and solidarity, in opposition to the aggressive and egoistic “authoritarian character”: both were named in Fromm’s 1934 text on matriarchy respectively “matricentric” and “patricentric” character⁶. During history, given the existing alienation between social life and the individual, the main libidinal structure would have been the “authoritarian character”, a set of personality traits related to the sadist and masochist tendencies, which are manifest in the anal stage of sexual development⁷.

⁴ FROMM, E., “Die sozialpsychologische Bedeutung der Mutterrechtstheorie”, *Erich Fromm Gesamtausgabe* (Vol. 1), R. Funk (Ed.), Stuttgart, DVA, 1999 (1934), p. 107 infra. This forecast would meet difficulties within Fromm’s own theoretical framework, as we shall examine later. Fromm gave particular attention to the “authoritarian” character type, leaving the two others scarcely described. “Revolutionary character” was defined as the one in which sadistic and masochistic drives would be less significant or have disappeared: this would be a “revolution in a psychological sense”, which would render those individuals particular apt to take part in anti-capitalist movements and in the foundation of a society in new bases, in which authority relations would become rational and lack of “regressive” psychological elements. See Fromm, E., “Sozialpsychologischer Teil”, *Studien über Autorität und Familie – Forschungsberichte aus dem Institut für Sozialforschung*, M. Horkheimer *et al.*, Lüneburg, Dietrich zu Kampen Verlag, 1987 (1936), pp. 130-132. Horkheimer’s indication that the empirical studies aimed at the construction of “character types” leaves no doubt about the centrality of Fromm to the Institute’s collective research program. Horkheimer, M., “Vorwort”, *Studien über Autorität und Familie*, *op. cit.*, p. X.

⁵ The domination over women would guarantee patrilineal transmission of private property, in opposition to the collectivism existing in matriarchal societies, a kind of social organization that did not rest on class domination and could therefore present “fraternal” and “democratic” trends. Fromm, E., “Die sozialpsychologische Bedeutung der Mutterrechtstheorie”, *op. cit.*, p. 92-101.

⁶ See FROMM, E., “Die sozialpsychologische Bedeutung der Mutterrechtstheorie”, *op. cit.*, p. 104 and p. 107.

⁷ See FREUD, S., “Charakter und Analerotik”, *Sigmund Freud - Gesammelte Werke* (Vol. VII), A. Freud *et al.* (Eds.), Frankfurt am Main, Fischer, 1987; and also Fromm, E., “Sozialpsychologischer Teil”, *op. cit.*, p. 115 and p. 121.

As for Freud both tendencies would always occur together, societies that produce as their typical libidinal structure the “authoritarian” one should supply gratification for both: thereby, members of the ruling class would oppress sadistically individuals belonging to the dominated classes, but their masochistic tendencies would be satisfied, by their turn, through submission to those at the top, should they be elected rulers, kings or fascists leaders, or even the mere ideas of God or destiny. In a similar way, members of oppressed classes, if on the one hand they could express their masochism by loving and admiring their aggressors, on the other, their sadistic tendencies could be satisfied through the oppression of women, ethnic minorities, children and animals: “every hostility and aggression that cannot arise against the stronger finds its object in the weaker ones (...) and what would mean a more complete domain than compelling them to pain!”⁸. Following this scheme, Fromm’s basic idea was that individuals’ libidinal structure would adapt to the social relations of production: it would be the mortar [*Kitt*]⁹ that could endow such relations with stability, for it would be capable of anchoring them in the individuals’ psychic apparatus. Family, by its turn, would be, in Fromm’s terms, the “psychological agency of society”, for it would, as the first locus of socialization, fulfill the role of producing the libidinal structure at each time most adequate to social needs¹⁰.

Examining with some more attention Fromm’s “analytic social psychology” can bring to light some of its problems. Fromm stressed that the amount of sadistic and masochistic traits in the individuals’ libidinal structure had varied along socio-eco-

⁸ FROMM, E., “Sozialpsychologischer Teil”, *op. cit.*, p. 117. By that reasoning family was considered to be a structure that held a continuity relation with a social order which it would merely reproduce, and family’s specificity was not taken into account. The mechanicism of this postulate is easily refuted by observing a few concrete examples. Besides, if so, in order to know what happens in social structure it would suffice to analyse family structures and compare them with each other. This critique was developed by Görlich, B., *Individuum und Gesellschaft – zum Versuch der Synthese von Freud und Marx im Frommschen Gesamtwerk* (doctoral thesis), Frankfurt am Main, University of Frankfurt, 1979, p. 98. Fromm’s formulations on this subject become even more unintelligible if we consider the results achieved in the survey with workers and employees, which revealed – in accordance with Reich’s thesis of fascism as a lower middle class movement – that employees, a higher *status* group than that of workers, had at the same time stronger authoritarian inclinations than them. See Reich, W., *Psicologia de Massas do Fascismo*, São Paulo, Martins Fontes, 1988 (1933), p. 52.

⁹ Fromm, E., “Über Methode und Aufgabe einer analytischen Sozialpsychologie”, *Erich Fromm Gesamtausgabe* (Vol. 1), R. Funk (Ed.), Stuttgart, DVA, 1999 (1932), p. 57.

¹⁰ In general, therefore, individuals belonging to dominated classes would have to repress their drives more intensely than those belonging to dominant class. This theoretical conception excluded then the own research hypothesis, which predicted that members of proletariat would tend to develop anti-authoritarian character traits. The seeming simplism of Fromm’s reunion of Marxism and psychoanalysis is apparently fit to support the accusation of functionalism brought by Axel Honneth against the explanations on authoritarian character developed by Fromm and Horkheimer in the 1930s. But Honneth has in my view not differed sufficiently between both authors. See Honneth, A., *Kritik der Macht – Reflexionsstufen einer kritischen Gesellschaftstheorie*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1985, pp. 33–41.

conomic conditions though history: this way, the typical bourgeois entrepreneur in the free concurrence period of capitalism had reached a sense of autonomy that corresponded to the development of genital sexuality. This process had presumably expressed itself in the domination of nature and society according to the bourgeoisie's class interests, as well as in meritocratic and "more democratic" ideologies and forms of domination¹¹. In this parallelism between class domination, the psychosexual development of its members and the correspondent rising of specific ideologies there are several presuppositions, which can be the object of critique. The first of them is a rationalistic distinction between "autonomy" and "heteronomy", which considers the "autonomous" or "strong" ego to be the one capable of dispensing with emotional elements in submission to authority, and therefore with sadistic and masochistic drives, these being seen as "heteronomy" sources¹². The second presupposition is the overlap between socio-economic domination exercised by some class and the level of autonomy reached by its members, which is to say the implication between control over external and internal nature, the last one being understood as ego strengthening and the reduction of sadistic and masochistic elements¹³. The third presupposition is that ideologies, be they "authoritarian" or, otherwise, "liberal" and "democratic", would be mere rationalizations of drives originated from the id, which would rely, for their effectiveness, on the character structure of individuals¹⁴.

The psychic apparatus of these would be formed according to the demands of productive structure – Fromm conceived this one, yet, as a sphere that would be

¹¹ See FROMM, E., "Sozialpsychologischer Teil", *op. cit.*, pp. 132-133.

¹² In his "culturalist" period, after having emigrated to the United States, and when Marxian and Freudian elements in Fromm's work were to be progressively dissolved in a "humanist psychoanalysis", this perspective would nonetheless remain valid through his concept of "productivity". See Fromm, E., *Man for Himself – an Inquiry into the Psychology of Ethics*, New York, Henry Holt, 1990 (1947).

¹³ This would have been the case of individuals belonging to the bourgeois class that ascended in the eighteenth century: they would have been individuals with a "strong ego", capable of dominating internal and external nature, and thereby "autonomous". On the other side, in twentieth century monopoly capitalism, individuals belonging to petty bourgeoisie would have a weakened ego, that is to say an ego with a libidinal structure in which prevailed pregenital elements of sexuality. According to Fromm, sadistic and masochistic drives would be bound to class domination, and would tendentially disappear in emancipated society, being reduced to a pathological individual manifestation, as men would have freed themselves from alienation and established rational authority relations, in the pursuit of common interests. Fromm, E., "Sozialpsychologischer Teil", *op. cit.*, p. 122. For a critique of this view, see Görlich, B., *Individuum und Gesellschaft*, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

¹⁴ Ideologies would be, according to Fromm in his programmatic text from 1932, "the expression of determinate desires and needs anchored in the drives", or "rationalized manifestations of the drives". Fromm, E., "Über Methode und Aufgabe einer analytischen Sozialpsychologie", *op. cit.*, p. 37. According to Helmut Dahmer, the conception of ideologies as private rationalizations (instead of as necessarily false consciousness) brought Fromm nearer to Pareto than to Marx. See Dahmer, H., *Libido und Gesellschaft – Studien über Freud und die Freudsche Linke*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1973, p. 311.

“extra-human” and subsist independently of man, and not as a socially mediated one: the author remained tied to matter/mind dualism, succumbing himself to the inversion between subject and object, a trait of the fetishism inherent to social relations under capitalism¹⁵. The same as what refers to his concept of “character”, understood as a *productive force* that would link certain socio-economic structures and corresponding ideologies: the aim of socialization would then be to form individual libidinal structure according to social demands, therefore being rewarded those individuals to whom socially desirable behavior appears as something natural (an idea that served, although under other theoretical perspective, as the core assumption of functionalistic sociology). Fromm yielded in that way to a reifying perspective, inasmuch as he did not historicize the own fact that one can discern something like “character structures”, which are only possible as a result of the inversion between subject and object. In so doing, Fromm postulated a sort of functionality between socio-economic conditions, character and ideologies, taking social phenomena in their positivity and reducing the critical potential of his theory¹⁶.

Fromm’s conception of Marxism, which reduced it to a theory of determination and retroaction between base (social relations of production and productive forces, among which were character structures) and superstructure (ideologies), tied it to

¹⁵ FROMM, E., “Über Methode und Aufgabe einer Analytischen Sozialpsychologie”, *op. cit.*, p. 46. It is true that the author referred sometimes to “reification”. But he understood it, under the influence of Max Weber, as “rationalization”, reducing this phenomenon to its psychological expressions: systematicness, indifference, formalistic sense of duty and stubbornness, all of which combine well with the tendency to commodification of potentially all social relations. See Fromm, E., “Die psychoanalytische Charakterologie und ihre Bedeutung für die Sozialpsychologie”, *Erich Fromm Gesamtausgabe* (Vol. 1), R. Funk (Ed.), Stuttgart, DVA, 1999 (1932), pp. 70-74.

¹⁶ As argued by Wolfgang Bonß, Fromm’s social psychology, as far as it naturalized the dichotomy between subject and object and inspired itself in methodological thinking proper to natural science, was very little able to overcome the limits of other experiments in uniting Marxism and psychoanalysis, such as those made by Freudo-marxists like Reich, Bernfeld and Fenichel. See Bonß, W., “Psychoanalyse als Wissenschaft und Kritik. Zur Freudrezeption der Frankfurter Schule”, *Sozialforschung als Kritik*, W. Bonß and A. Honneth (Eds.), pp. 381-382. In his brief commentary on Fromm’s contributions to the Institute, in the introduction written for the republication of the Institute’s journal, Alfred Schmidt drew attention on the fact that Fromm conceived of Marxism as of a traditional social theory. See Schmidt, A., “Die ‘Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung’ – Geschichte und Gegenwärtige Bedeutung”, *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* (Vol. 1), M. Horkheimer (Ed.), Munich, DTV, 1980, p. 33. Adorno, evoking the criticism which had been made by revisionists (neo-Freudian psychoanalysts) against Freud, argued that “(...) neo-Freudian school has done to character traits that which Freud [according to themselves] would have done with drives”, in other words, neo-Freudians (such as Fromm) accused Freud of biologicism and of having been tied to a naturalism from which followed the need to complement his psychoanalysis with a social theory, but at the same time hypostatized themselves the manifestations of drive dynamics – Adorno ironized them by saying they “projected” in Freud their own rationalistic scientific procedure. See Adorno, T., “Die revidierte Psychoanalyse”, *Sociologica II - Reden und Vorträge*, M. Horkheimer and T. Adorno, 1962, pp. 120-125. On the differences between Adorno’s theory and that of “ego psychology” proper to revisionists, see also the considerations done by Crochik, J. L., *Preconceito, Indivíduo e Cultura*, São Paulo, Casa do Psicólogo, 2006, p. 102.

a determinism whose narrow explanatory power revealed itself clearly when the author focused on the role that the psyche could play in overcoming capitalism. While suggesting that economic crisis and the deepening of class struggles could favour a sort of libidinal structure that would act in the direction of destabilizing capitalist social relations¹⁷, Fromm also argued that the deepening of social contradictions could have the opposite effect, and reinforce authoritarian character structure¹⁸. As far as he conceived of “character” as of something natural, Fromm was not able to undertake a sort of ideology critique that took into account emancipatory elements pertaining to capitalist mode of production itself, and his social theory drew on the undialectical projection of a kind of domination to be based on “solidarity and mutual interests”, which would command labor organization and the domination of nature¹⁹.

2. Historicizing Fromm’s concept of “character”: Horkheimer’s anthropology of the bourgeois era

IF IN FROMM’S WORKS THE CONCEPT of “character” was regarded as something natural, in Horkheimer’s essays it was understood as a result of reification, and therefore as a form of subjectivity, inseparable from capitalism. Fromm had defined “authoritarian character” by sadomasochism: it would be, as we have seen above, an element of alienated society in general, albeit intensified under monopoly capitalism. However, for Horkheimer domination relied not so much on the sociopsychological traits of social relations: although these might very well play their role, as in the case of emotional identification with the political leader, domination rested mainly in the reified form of experience in capitalistic society, expressed in subordination “to the necessity of facts”²⁰. Accordingly, if Fromm stressed the intensification of sadomasochism under monopoly capitalism, Horkheimer, in turn, asserted that the

¹⁷ FROMM, E., “Über Methode und Aufgabe einer analytischen Sozialpsychologie”, *op. cit.*, pp. 56-57.

¹⁸ FROMM, E., “Sozialpsychologischer Teil”, *op. cit.*, pp. 121-122.

¹⁹ This would be the case in classless society, which would allow an “authentic community between higher and lower ranks”, which Fromm viewed in primitive communism as well as in Russia contemporary to him, where the building of this kind of domination would be in course. See Fromm, E., “Sozialpsychologischer Teil”, *op. cit.*, p. 112. His concept of “revolutionary character”, which Fromm used in the research with workers and employees, had similar shortcomings (Ibid., p. 131.). On the lack of a proper place for this concept within Fromm’s own theoretical framework, see Bon , W., “Psychoanalyse als Wissenschaft und Kritik. Zur Freudrezeption der Frankfurter Schule”, *op. cit.*, p. 384.

²⁰ HORKHEIMER, M., “Aus Vorlesungen über Autorität und Gesellschaft”, *Max Horkheimer - Gesammelte Schriften* (Vol. 12), A. Schmidt and G. S. Noerr (Eds.), Frankfurt am Main, Fischer, 1985 (1936/1937), pp. 60-64.

fundamental feature belonging to character structure of individuals living in that historical period (which is still ours) would be “abstractiveness”:

“As long as character bound to authority, i.e. the sadomasochistic one, is not at all a new phenomenon – it can be seen in the whole history of bourgeois society – its peculiar abstractiveness and hardening seem symptomatic of a world that holds on to family authority, even after family’s internal substance has dissolved. To the abstract glorification of family corresponds an almost total absence of concrete relations with parents, be they positive or negative. In consequence, the whole emotional life of character bound to authority contains traits of superficiality and coldness that sometimes are close to the ones that can be observed in psychopaths”²¹.

Fromm’s conception of family as “society’s psychological agency” would not suffice then to explain the main traits of the specific form assumed by authoritarian character in the first half of twentieth century, and this even because family authority was then in decrease²². Contemporary prevailing character structure led Horkheimer to interpret the historical formation of bourgeois individual in the light of his “abstractiveness”²³. Its shaping would go back to the era of the rise of bourgeoisie, and “education for the justice inherent to reality”, which marked protestant families in their beginnings, would be the origin of indifference in view of individual suffering (as far as the own interests, or those of the own family and

²¹ HORKHEIMER, M., “Autorität und Familie in der Gegenwart”, *Max Horkheimer - Gesammelte Schriften* (Vol. 5), A. Schmidt and G. S. Noerr (Eds.), Frankfurt am Main, Fischer, 1987 (1947/1949), p. 389. In this text, reference to the psychopatic traits in contemporary individual recalls the analyses on antisemitism and paranoia in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

²² Let us note that Horkheimer, who refused any functionalism and recognized the own legality of social spheres, had a different understanding of the role played by family, and did not equate it with a structure that would solely reproduce sadomasochism. Horkheimer stressed contemporary family’s crisis: the loss of its role as an economic production unity, the concurrence with other institutions that had begun to influence the education of the youth (like radio and public school), the attendance by the state of functions that until them were exclusive to the family (such as social security and health), as well as, specially after World War I, economic crisis and unemployment led to the decline of paternal authority and to corresponding changes in socialization and the behavior of individuals, like the increase of womens’ functions within the family. These findings relied on the researches on family and authority, specially on the second and third ones. See Horkheimer, M. *et al.*, *Studien über Autorität und Familie – Forschungsberichte aus dem Institut für Sozialforschung*, Lüneburg, Dietrich zu Kampen Verlag, 1987 (1936), p. 273, pp. 303-305 and pp. 315-320. The assessment of family’s conversion in an institution that was progressively less able to offer resistance to determinations provenient from other cultural spheres made Horkheimer less prone than Fromm to associate some emancipatory potential to mother’s role, even because obedience to fascist state overlapped children’s obedience to their parents. See Horkheimer, M., “Allgemeiner Teil”, *Studien über Autorität und Familie, op. cit.*, pp. 68-74. It may be worthy drawing attention to the fact that nowadays children’s subordination to their parents seems to be in an inferior hierarchical level than that of parents’ to culture industry and other ideologies of contemporary society: it suffices to think of childhood’s increasing commodification and on the fact that children become consumers each time sooner.

²³ See HORKHEIMER, M., “Allgemeiner Teil”, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

of members of the inner circle were not in question). Indifference and coldness would characterize the behavior of individuals in a world increasingly mediated by commodity form, and therefore “alienness” [*Fremdheit*] would be, according to Horkheimer, the “anthropological category” of bourgeois era²⁴.

To discover a timeless constant from which could be derived all possible forms assumed by “human nature” would be for Horkheimer an impossible task, since individual is inextricably bound to history, of which nothing could be said to be timeless²⁵. Whilst he refused any idealistic anthropology that would postulate some unchangeable human nature, Horkheimer at the same time considered to be legitimate the question whether capitalism produces determinate personality constants instead of other ones, for it would be especially important for a theory compromised with historical change to distinguish, in what relates to typical behavior and psychological constitution, among those persons and groups “better prepared to change and set up circumstances”, on the one hand, and those who would tendentially reduce themselves to functions of given reality, on the other²⁶. Horkheimer’s anthropological reflections took then as their object the contradiction between the main element of bourgeois moral philosophy – the condemnation of egoism – and the pursue of self-interest, that is to say the practical behavior demanded by capitalist economy²⁷.

This contradiction and its developments should, nonetheless, be examined historically, and taking into account their link to domination processes. The author argued

²⁴ “Every communication is business, a transaction between solipsistically built areas. Conscious being of such people can be reduced to a small amount of relations between fixed orders of magnitude. The language of logistics is its proper expression”. Horkheimer, M., “Egoismus und Freiheitsbewegung – zur Anthropologie des bürgerlichen Zeitalters”, *Max Horkheimer - Gesammelte Schriften* (Vol. 4), A. Schmidt and G. S. Noerr (Eds.), Frankfurt am Main, Fischer, 1988 (1936), p. 71.

²⁵ From that followed Horkheimer’s criticism of Max Scheler and others dedicated to philosophical anthropology. See Horkheimer, M., “Bemerkungen zur philosophischen Anthropologie”, *Max Horkheimer - Gesammelte Schriften* (Vol. 3), A. Schmidt and G. S. Noerr (Eds.), Frankfurt am Main, Fischer, 1988 (1935), pp. 250-251 and p. 275. Anthropological theses would rather be themselves historical. *Ibid.*, pp. 267-269.

²⁶ See HORKHEIMER, M., “Bemerkungen zur philosophischen Anthropologie”, *op. cit.*, pp. 251-253. This would allow incorporating to Marxist theory some of the issues discussed by philosophical anthropology in an idealistic fashion. See Horkheimer, M., “Bemerkungen zur philosophischen Anthropologie”, *op. cit.*, p. 260.

²⁷ In this sense, Horkheimer followed here the core aspect of the method of critical theory, as described by himself: to think “until the end” and expose the contradictions inherent to the general ideas and dominant principles in capitalist society. See Horkheimer, M., “Traditionelle und kritische Theorie”, *op. cit.*, pp. 181-189. This raises a doubt as to whether Horkheimer’s anthropology can be thought of as something apart from Marxist critique. For this view, see Abromeit, J., *Max Horkheimer and The Foundations of the Frankfurt School*, *op. cit.*, p. 17, who interpreted Horkheimer’s “anthropology of the bourgeois epoch” in the spirit of the “interdisciplinary materialism”, as which Horkheimer’s work in the 1930s came to be known in the reception, and also Nobre, M. and Marin, I. L., “Uma nova antropologia. Unidade crítica e arranjo intedisciplinar na *Dialética do Esclarecimento*”, *Cadernos de Filosofia Alemã* (n. 20), São Paulo, Jul.-Dez. 2012, pp. 102-107, who interpreted it as a new critical model, which moved away from Marxian toward Freudian categories.

then that, along with the social rise of bourgeoisie, a new direction was given to the psyche of members of capitalist society: the contradiction between egoism condemnation and the pursue of self-interest was to be seen as a result of the reification of drive dynamics, analyzed by Horkheimer on the basis of freedom movements in the end of middle ages and the beginnings of modernity, which brought to light the specific sociopsychological mechanisms which, at the most in a latent way, belong to daily life in bourgeois society and only manifest themselves in moments of disruption and disorder²⁸. Movements led by Cola di Rienzo, Savonarola, Calvin and Robespierre (meant is here the Terror period) were part of bourgeoisie's struggle against aristocracy, but had to rely heavily on the hatred devoted by the masses to ruling class, associated with egoism and pleasant life. The current image of an aristocracy indulged in luxury and pleasure stimulated popular sadism, and the mob punished in the enemies of revolution the egoistic drives they had to repress in themselves²⁹. Conducted against absolutism, bourgeois freedom movements were at the same time able to reinforce the masses' ability to obey prevailing authorities³⁰. Exteriorizing resentment though terror fulfilled then (and has always done so) an important sociopsychological function, inasmuch as it allowed individuals to go back to hard work and deprivations, after they had taken part in decapitations and lynchings: cruelty against the enemies of revolutionary processes was closely linked with violence mobilized against the self and expressed in asceticism³¹.

Those historical processes had their correlate in philosophy, and difference between schools that conceived of man as virtuous (Locke, Rousseau) and those that stressed his bestiality (Luther and Hobbes) would be much more a political and circumstantial one, instead of properly "anthropological": humanism would be the other side of misanthropy, the first one aiming at bourgeoisie, the second one at the masses³². Both currents concealed themselves, therefore, in their common ideal: the

²⁸ HORKHEIMER, M., "Egoismus und Freiheitsbewegung – zur Anthropologie des bürgerlichen Zeitalters", *op. cit.*, p. 23, p. 70.

²⁹ Those movements were in this way the forerunners of modern antisemitism, which associates jews' alleged exploiter role with a life dedicate to intellectual idleness. See Horkheimer, M., "Egoismus und Freiheitsbewegung – zur Anthropologie des bürgerlichen Zeitalters", *op. cit.*, p. 77.

³⁰ HORKHEIMER, M., "Egoismus und Freiheitsbewegung – zur Anthropologie des bürgerlichen Zeitalters", *op. cit.*, p. 33.

³¹ HORKHEIMER, M., "Egoismus und Freiheitsbewegung – zur Anthropologie des bürgerlichen Zeitalters", *op. cit.*, pp. 86-88. In this sense, liberation from feudal chains produced, as put by Jairo Iván Escobar Moncada, a sort of "(...) internal deformation that presents itself as true freedom". See the author's "Sobre la mentalidad burguesa en Max Horkheimer y José Luis Romero", *Rubén Jaramillo Vélez: Argumentos para la Ilustración contemporánea*, J. C. Celis Ospina & R. A. Rubiano Muñoz (Eds.), Bogotá, Siglo del Hombre, 2014, p. 193.

³² HORKHEIMER, M., "Egoismus und Freiheitsbewegung – zur Anthropologie des bürgerlichen Zeitalters", *op. cit.*, pp. 9-16 and pp. 73-74. It is worthy noting that for Horkheimer it was not the case – as for Fromm - of

notion of human nature as targeted at self-conservation, and based on the aversion to pleasure. Dominant moral philosophy concealed then in its abstract universalism and in the ethics of duty the contradiction between egoism condemnation and a social practice based on individual interest. This contradiction being insolvable within the boundaries of class society, it had to be turned, within the boundaries of the self, into indifference and alienness in view of others, and individual would reduce himself to “self-preservation” and “bourgeois coldness”³³. These would then be seen as conditions for progress within society, and every demand for unconditioned happiness would disappear, as well as yearning for pleasure would have to be disregarded in favor of more elevated values, such as morality, “common good”, and culture³⁴.

By undertaking such analyses, Horkheimer historicized elements of Fromm’s theory (“character” and drives) and lift them to a different level of critique, as far as Horkheimer’s object here was the own constitution of character itself (that is, of a reified form). Therefore, it did not make sense for him to oppose in an undialectical fashion “revolutionary/matricentric character” (generous and sympathetic), by one hand, and “authoritarian/patricentric character” (selfish, aggressive, and based strongly on sadistic and masochistic drives), on the other, for this opposition was itself ideological. While overcoming by means of a determinate negation the dichotomies upon which rested Fromm’s concepts, Horkheimer elaborated an “anthropology of the bourgeois era”, which identified as the “human essence” under capitalism individual’s self-preservation and alienness in respect to others. Horkheimer then shed light on the process of drive hardening, by means of which “character”, in other words the constancy of certain psychological traits necessary to modern social life, was to be possible. This process of reification was besides historically constituted by means of concrete class domination – in Horkheimer’s words, “with hunger and house of correction in its background”³⁵.

different degrees of drive repression according to class, even though egoism condemnation was naturally linked, in what concerned lower and higher classes, to specific functions in labor division.

³³ HORKHEIMER, M., “Egoismus und Freiheitsbewegung – zur Anthropologie des bürgerlichen Zeitalters”, *op. cit.*, pp. 9-12 and p. 17.

³⁴ These ideals wouldn’t contradict “bourgeois coldness” at any point. See Horkheimer, M., “Egoismus und Freiheitsbewegung – zur Anthropologie des bürgerlichen Zeitalters”, *op. cit.*, p. 19. See also, for this issue, Marcuse, H., “Über den affirmativen Charakter der Kultur”, *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* (Vol. 6), M. Horkheimer (Ed.), Munich, DTV, 1980 (1937), p. 60.

³⁵ See HORKHEIMER, M., “Bemerkungen zur philosophischen Anthropologie”, *op. cit.*, p. 263. This aspect of Horkheimer’s argument provides evidence against the common tendency among Horkheimer’s and Adorno’s interpreters (specially among some of their Frankfurter “heirs”) to associate early critical theory with a closed philosophy of history, to whose principles all social, psychological and political phenomena could be reduced. See, for example, Habermas, J., “Nachwort”, *op. cit.*, *passim*, as well as the already mentioned interpretation of

As for the nearly psychopathic character traits that would be dominant in the first half of the twentieth century (see Horkheimer's quote in the beginning of this item), they also seem to have been a result of such a historical process. A motive often overlooked in Horkheimer's essays is the proletariat's integration: according to the author, bourgeoisie had recently turned "wide areas of Europe into huge labor camps", and here is to be stressed the political and processual character of the phenomenon, which cannot be interpreted as a structural result of monopoly capitalism³⁶. Indeed, in what respects the German case, labor process rationalization ("Taylorism") during Weimar Republic (a trend largely supported by social democrats), as well as the development of mass production and mass consumption ("Fordism") under the Nazi regime were both, in Horkheimer's view, combined efforts for ensuring bourgeois domination³⁷. Social integration of workers was in close connection with the decline of the role of family in education and socialization in general, a function progressively assumed by the state (especially by its

Honneth, A., *Kritik der Macht – Reflexionsstufen einer kritischen Gesellschaftstheorie*, *op. cit.*, pp. 33-41. It is worthy noting that more recent interpreters – such as John Abromeit – insist on the contrary, i.e. on the historical specificity of Horkheimer's analyses. The interpretation which is outlined here has some common traits with Abromeit's one, who also understood Horkheimer's anthropology of the bourgeois era as if Horkheimer had historicized Fromm's theory. But while Abromeit underlined as Horkheimer's specific contributions the use of historical research (supposedly as a means of overcoming limitations of his Marxist theoretical framework) and the integration of the central elements of Fromm's social psychology into a Marxist theory of history, my point is that his anthropology consisted in a specifically Marxist critique of fetishism inherent to dominant anthropological conceptions (which had influenced even Fromm's work). This critique would also point out to emancipation possibilities, as discussed later. See Abromeit, J., *Max Horkheimer and the foundations of the Frankfurt School*, *op. cit.*, pp. 249-261. The aspect of a critique of contradictions, inherent to Horkheimer's analyses on the bourgeois character, was also stressed by Jairo Iván Escobar Moncada. See the author's "Sobre la mentalidad burguesa en Max Horkheimer y José Luis Romero", *op. cit., passim*. Escobar Moncada also criticized the common interpretative tendency mentioned above: in a lecture held in September 2015 at Universidad del Norte (Colombia), he argued that Horkheimer's work would be up to the task of thinking human nature without relying either on historical reductionism or on scientific naturalism, for Horkheimer, who followed here the footsteps of Marx and Engels in *German Ideology*, was convinced that nature and culture are different and united at the same time (the target of the lecturer's argument was Herbert Schnädelbach's appraisal of early critical theory, which would be negligent about this point). See Escobar Moncada, J. I., "Sobre antropología e historia en Max Horkheimer", lecture at *Primera Jornada de Teoría Crítica* ("First Conference on Critical Theory"), Baranquilla (Colombia), 2015. Available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a2p-4cSVyHg> Accessed June 7th, 2018.

³⁶ HORKHEIMER, M., "Bemerkungen zur philosophischen Anthropologie", *op. cit.*, p. 264. On this issue, see also HORKHEIMER, M., "Autoritärer Staat", *op. cit.*, pp. 295-298.

³⁷ "In Weimar Republic, proletarian opposition, as long as it did not perish in the midst of a number of sects, succumbed itself to administration spirit". Horkheimer, M., "Autoritärer Staat", *Max Horkheimer - Gesammelte Schriften* (Vol. 5), A. Schmidt and G. S. Noerr (Eds.), Frankfurt am Main, Fischer, 1987 (1940/1942), p. 296. On this issue, see also Horkheimer, M., "Die Juden und Europa", *Max Horkheimer - Gesammelte Schriften* (Vol. 4), A. Schmidt and G. S. Noerr (Eds.), Frankfurt am Main, Fischer, 1988 (1939), pp. 126-127. For a detailed view on this subject, see von Freyberg, T., *Industrielle Rationalisierung in der Weimarer Republik – untersucht an Beispielen aus dem Maschinenbau und der Elektroindustrie*, Frankfurt am Main, Campus Verlag, 1989, specially pp. 312-316.

totalitarian forms) and also – as Horkheimer and Adorno would formulate most clearly in the 1940s – by culture industry: the diminishing of parental authority, albeit linked with the relativization of conservative cultural patterns and with some emancipatory trends (such as the acknowledgement of women's rights), meant also the reinforcement of social domination³⁸. These changes had also an anthropological meaning, for they implied the constituting of individuals whose character traits could play an active role in their domination:

“The transformation of the oppressed labourer, who in nineteenth century wandered about in his quest for work, in the diligent member of fascist organizations recalls, in its historical significance, the change which had been undertaken by Reformation, as it turned medieval master craftsman into protestant bourgeois, or poor English villager into modern industrial worker”³⁹.

How were these anthropological reflections related by Horkheimer to the possibility of social change? Until approximately 1936 prevailed a revolutionary perspective. Besides alienness, exchange-based economy had for Horkheimer led to the constitution of character traits which could serve in the building of emancipated society, as for instance respect for others and the ability to stick, independently of self-interest, to moral values, truth and given word - considering those would be a part of revolutionary process. Instead of trying to extract some revolutionary character stemming from considerations on class structure, Horkheimer focused on the mediation between the individual and the masses: in revolutionary movement, the mass would be “differentiated and aware”, and individuals with those positive traits would play an active role in politics. Besides, the existence of emotional, i.e. “irrational” elements in the relation between followers and leaders (which for Horkheimer would be part of any authority relation) would not mean the reduction of individuals to insignificance. As far as he did not operate with Fromm's rationalistic distinction between “autonomy” and “heteronomy”, Horkheimer conceived of “authority” as a phenomenon in which both would be intertwined, and for him the existence of “irrational” (we might even say: of sadomasochistic) elements in authority relations did not exclude, for example, that the mass could be taken seriously by the movement's avant-garde, without its members having to obey moralizing discourse and some leftist condemnation of individual satisfaction (understood as mere selfishness). The deleterious nature of egoism consisted in its

³⁸ For the changing functions of family, see for example Horkheimer, M., “Allgemeiner Teil”, *op. cit.*, pp. 62-63 and pp. 74-75.

³⁹ HORKHEIMER, M., “Die Juden und Europa”, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

mobilization by classes, nations and individuals as an stimulus for concurrency – in a rational society, egoism (as constitutive of bourgeois individual) would conversely change its function, and also would egoism repression, which in capitalist society serves mainly class domination⁴⁰. As for masses in counter-revolutionary movements, on their turn, there would not be any place left for connecting individuals' needs with the movement's goals, the libidinal structure of its members being used mainly for the satisfaction of their repressed drives⁴¹.

Around the beginning 1940s, withers away in Horkheimer's works, as widely discussed in the reception, the "dynamic unity" between critical theory and working class, as had been asserted by the author still in 1937⁴². Discussions about the relation between the individual and the masses are abandoned when it becomes clear that, in an era of integration, bourgeois moral had lost its critical elements, and reduced itself to immediate interest⁴³. Notwithstanding the conversion of individuals to monads guided by self-preservation, there would be yet elements pointing to emancipation⁴⁴. If reification had not, as foreseen by Lukács, led to class-consciousness and to the passing from contemplation to action, workers had in any case become "unwilling, grumpy and disobedient"⁴⁵. Individuals, the more intensely they integrated themselves into society, the more they would have to desperately repress, in themselves and in others, every drive in contrary. Emerging from violence to which individuals were subjected along this process, their hatred is projected in everything that stands for non-integrated difference - by this way, aggressors choose their victims after finding in them signs of their own impotence. Nonetheless, "it is precisely this spite [*Gehässigkeit*] that shows how humanity was not overarched on the whole by repressive collectivization of men"⁴⁶. Itself an ele-

⁴⁰ By this way, idealistic asceticism and the "affirmative character of culture" would tend to disappear. Horkheimer, M., "Egoismus und Freiheitsbewegung – zur Anthropologie des bürgerlichen Zeitalters", *op. cit.*, pp. 74-75.

⁴¹ HORKHEIMER, M., "Egoismus und Freiheitsbewegung – zur Anthropologie des bürgerlichen Zeitalters", *op. cit.*, pp. 71-72. The revolution rehearsals at the end of World War I could not therefore be equated with adhesion of parts of working class to the "pseudorevolution" led by fascists.

⁴² See HORKHEIMER, M., "Traditionelle und kritische Theorie", *op. cit.*, pp. 186-189. As to the main phases in Horkheimer's work, see Habermas, J., "Remarks on the Development of Horkheimer's Work", *On Max Horkheimer – new perspectives*, S. Benhabib, W. Bonß and J. McCole (Eds.), Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, The MIT Press, 1993, pp. 49-66.

⁴³ See HORKHEIMER, M., "Vernunft und Selbsterhaltung", *Max Horkheimer - Gesammelte Schriften* (Vol. 5), A. Schmidt and G. S. Noerr (Eds.), Frankfurt am Main, Fischer, 1987 (1942). This change process had been noticed by the author at least since 1935. See Horkheimer, M., "Bemerkungen zur philosophischen Anthropologie", *op. cit.*, pp. 262-263, p. 267 and pp. 273- 275.

⁴⁴ See HORKHEIMER, M., "Autoritärer Staat", *op. cit.*, pp. 316-317.

⁴⁵ See HORKHEIMER, M., "Zur Soziologie der Klassenverhältnisse", *op. cit.*, p. 99.

⁴⁶ See HORKHEIMER, M., "Zur Soziologie der Klassenverhältnisse", *op. cit.*, p. 99, and also Horkheimer, M., "Die Rackets und der Geist", *op. cit.*, p. 291. Suffering to which individuals are subjected in their socialization would

ment of domination, this behavior would also be a “disturbing factor”, compelling rulers to draw on fascist governments and falsely collective models of socialization, themselves the mere superficial expressions of a more profound collectivization which operates through dissolution of individuals, but whose complete effectiveness would have to be ensured by terror and propaganda. The necessary change in order to build a society where people could “regulate their issues in solidarity with each other” would nevertheless be much smaller than transformation already induced in them by actual society: under the mere “grimaces” to which individuals have been reduced hides the possibility of a better reality⁴⁷. One of the tasks of critical thought would then be making men conscious of their own deformation - this would be, in Horkheimer’s words, the “method in midst of madness”:

“Non-identity of almost every individual with himself - as he is, at the same time and without any intention of coherence, Nazi and anti-Nazi, convinced and skeptical, brave and cowardly, stupid and clever - is the only behavior which really does justice to a reality that is not defined by so-called plans, but by the concentration camp. Demonstrating to men that they are not themselves different from those who have been shattered by the camps is the method in midst of madness”⁴⁸.

come into light and turn into the hatred of nature which could not be dominated, but at whose “overridden matter” liberty “irresistibly shines through”. Horkheimer, M. and Adorno, T. W., *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, Frankfurt am Main, Fischer, 1986 (1944), p. 192.

⁴⁷ See HORKHEIMER, M., “Autoritärer Staat”, *op. cit.*, p. 317, and also Horkheimer, M., “Zur Soziologie der Klassenverhältnisse”, *op. cit.*, p. 392.

⁴⁸ HORKHEIMER, M., “Vernunft und Selbsterhaltung”, *op. cit.*, p. 346. This idea would be later developed by Adorno in his reflections on education. See, for example, his essay on “Education after Auschwitz”.

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