

Fromm and Horkheimer – On the fundamentals of critical theory’s anthropology¹

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Abstract: Erich Fromm was central to the Frankfurt Institute for 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 critically embodied the core elements of his colleague’s social psychology in his essays. By doing so, Horkheimer could overcome some of the limitations of Fromm’s early work, as well as suggest new ways for critique.

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

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- 1 This text was first published (with the same title and – except for corrections, small changes and a larger paragraph in one of the last pages – with exact the same content) in *Bajo Palabra, Revista de Filosofía*, II Época, n. 21, 2019, pp. 59–80. I would like to thank Emanuel Kapfinger for discussing several aspects of Fromm’s and Horkheimer’s social theories with me. I also thank Rainer Funk, Thomas Kühn, Catherine Silver, Neil McLaughlin and Lynn Chancer for debating this text at the 4th International Erich Fromm Seminar for Doctoral Students and Postdocs, held in Tübingen in September 2019 by the Erich Fromm Institut and the Erich Fromm Study Center. The article is based on ideas developed in my doctoral thesis, *Crítica da autoridade: dominação e emancipação na obra de Max Horkheimer* (»Critique of authority: domination and emancipation in the work of Max Horkheimer«), supervised by Prof. Dr. Ricardo Musse and defended in September 2017 at the University of São Paulo. This study was financed by CAPES (Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior) and CNPq (Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico), both of them Brazilian federal agencies for the development of scientific research.

The incorporation of ideology and psyche as research objects was a clear expression of a route change in the intellectual work carried in the Frankfurt Institute for 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 empirical research program, and coordinated the 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 societal powers – would play a fundamental role in preserving social order, as they were accepted by members of the German proletariat (which was undergoing a process of social integration since the failure of the attempt at revolution in the dawn of the Weimar Republic, and would soon be a target of Fascist propaganda)².

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 a well-known fact that in the early 1930s both authors shared a similar interpretation of psychoanalysis, but that changed when Adorno's influence on Horkheimer led him to incorporate Freud's theory of the death drive, and eventually break with Fromm (an event to which institutional, mainly financial reasons, also contributed)³. It is important, though, to go beyond both authors' different views on psychoanalysis and understand the specificity of Horkheimer's and Fromm's different versions of Marxism, for early reception of critical theory largely obliterates differences between them, which has frequently led to considering them as identical⁴.

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- 2 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 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* (Horkheimer, Fromm and Marcuse 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 1932, pp. 60–61).
 - 3 About Horkheimer's break with Fromm, see Adorno's letter to Horkheimer from 23rd March 1937 (Adorno 1937, pp. 98–99). On the same subject, see also Jay 1973, pp. 149–153 and McLaughlin 1999.
 - 4 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 the critical theory of the 1930s of functionalism and of a »sociological deficit«.

In the following I'll try at first to outline the main elements of Fromm's theory of the »authoritarian character«, which was built during the early phase of Fromm's work, and displayed some of the shortcomings emerging from his reunion of Marxism and psychoanalysis, as I shall later indicate⁵. In a second moment I will argue that key elements of Fromm's early theory were dialecticized in Horkheimer's essays, having been used by the Institute's director in the development of his »anthropology of the bourgeois era«, and his conception of the bourgeois individual as resting at the same time on self-preservation and sacrifice, a notion which would play a central role in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. By doing so, Horkheimer undertook, as I hope it will become clear in the following, a sort of critique of fetishism 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 possibilities for emancipation, whose systematic elaboration would challenge later developments of critical theory⁶.

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 defended by Horkheimer in his famous 1937 essay: critical theory (Marxism) had for him the task of dialectically incorporating contributions from traditional theory, understood as all sorts of empirical science and philosophical reflection which took for granted, without examining and criticizing them, dualisms like subject and object, or like theory and practice. This incorporation should happen by means of historical analysis of traditional theories' contradictory presuppositions, as well as pointing out to possibilities for emancipation in the present (Horkheimer 1937, pp. 190–200). Instead of consisting on a break with the Marxist approach presented in »Traditional and Critical Theory«, Horkheimer's anthropology (together with its consequences for the joint work he carried with Adorno in the 1940s) was thus, in my view, the result of a specifically Marxist

as well as by John Abromeit, who (although going in a different direction) argued for the existence of »theoretical elective affinities« between Fromm and Horkheimer, at least until 1937 (Dubiel 1978, p. 177; Jay 1973, pp. 149–153; Honneth 1996, pp. 524–536; and Abromeit 2011, pp. 207–219). As Katia Genel pointed out, though, convergences between Fromm and Horkheimer were rather »ephemeral« and »ambivalent« (Genel 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.

- 5 For the development of Fromm's work and the revision of Freudian theory he carried out in the following years, see Funk 2019, especially pp. 13–15.
- 6 For the practical aspects of critical theory, see Demirović 1999.

critique of conceptions which had been at the core of Fromm's theory of the authoritarian character⁷.

I – 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 carried 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 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 with the decline of paternal authority⁸.

7 In my view, by doing so Horkheimer gave a concrete form to the interdisciplinary goal formulated some years earlier in his inaugural speech as a director of the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research: he had then argued for the »dialectical and continuous intertwining and development of philosophical theory and specialized scientific practice« (Horkheimer 1931, p. 29). If it is correct, the interpretation presented here also suggests a line of continuity 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 contributed (Habermas 1986, p. 282 ff).

8 Fromm 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. The »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 particularly apt to take part in anti-capitalist movements and in the foundation of a society upon new bases, in which authority relations would become rational and lack »regressive« psychological elements (Fromm 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 1936a, p. X.

Although the main position occupied by »family« in Horkheimer's research program (and in Fromm's social psychology) was due to psychoanalysis, this subject had been 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 (as well as Bebel's and Engels') was 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 (from which followed, as a result, that the fight against capitalism and the fight for woman's liberation should be connected)⁹. The view of matriarchy as a form of sociability in which class domination was absent influenced Fromm's concept of the »revolutionary character«, whose main traits were generosity and solidarity, in opposition to the aggressive and egoistic »authoritarian character«: they were named as »matricentric« and »patricentric« character, respectively, in Fromm's 1934 text on matriarchy (Fromm 1934a, p. 104 and p. 107). Across 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 sadistic and masochistic tendencies which are manifest in the anal stage of sexual development (see Freud 1908; and also Fromm 1936, 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 sadistically oppress individuals belonging to the dominated classes, but masochistic tendencies would be satisfied, in their turn, through submission to those at the top, be they elected rulers, kings, fascists leaders, or even the mere ideas of God or destiny. In a similar way, if members of oppressed classes could, on the one hand, express their masochism by loving and admiring their aggressors, on the other, they could satisfy their sadistic tendencies 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!«¹⁰. Following this scheme, Fromm's basic idea was that individuals'

9 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 1934a, p. 92–101).

10 Fromm 1936, p. 117. In general, therefore, individuals belonging to dominated classes would have to repress their drives more intensely than those belonging to dominant

libidinal structure would adapt to social relations of production: it would be the mortar [Kitt] (Fromm 1932a, p. 57) that could endow such relations with stability, for it would be capable of anchoring them in individuals' psychic apparatus. Family, in 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 most adequate to social needs at each time¹¹.

Examining Fromm's analytic social psychology with some more attention 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 with socio-economic conditions throughout history: this way, the typical bourgeois entrepreneur in the free concurrence period of capitalism had reached a sense of autonomy which 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 domination (see Fromm 1936, pp. 132 f.). In this parallelism between class domination, the psycho-sexual development of its members and the rise 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

class. This theoretical conception excluded then the very research hypothesis, which predicted that members of the proletariat, as far as they had not been subjected to the same bourgeois socialization as middle classes, could 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 (Honneth 1985, pp. 33–41). But Honneth has in my view not differentiated between both authors sufficiently.

- 11 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 the family's specificity was not taken into account. The mechanicism of this postulate can easily be refuted by observing a few concrete examples. Besides, if it was 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 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 (Reich 1933, p. 52) – that employees, a higher *status* group than that of the workers, had at the same time stronger authoritarian inclinations than them.

to authority, and therefore with sadistic and masochistic drives, these being seen as sources of »heteronomy«. The second presupposition is the overlap between socio-economic domination exercised by some class and the level of autonomy reached by its members – that is to say, the correlation between control over external and internal nature, the last one being understood as ego strengthening and the reduction of sadistic and masochistic elements¹². 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 individuals¹³.

The psychic apparatus would be formed according to the demands of the productive structure – Fromm still conceived of this as a sphere that would be »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 capitalism¹⁴. The same applies 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 the individual libidinal structure according to social demands, therefore rewarding those individuals to whom socially desirable behavior appears as

12 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 the petty bourgeoisie would have a weakened ego, that is to say an ego with a libidinal structure in which there prevailed pregenital sexual elements. 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 1936, p. 122). For a critique on this view, see Görlich 1979, p. 97.

13 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 1932a, 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 (Dahmer 1973, p. 311).

14 Fromm 1932a, p. 46. It is true that the author referred sometimes to »reification«. But he understood it, under the influence of Weber, mainly as »rationalization«, reducing this phenomenon to its psychological expressions: systematicity, indifference, formalistic sense of duty and stubbornness, all of which combine well with the tendency to commodification of potentially all social relations. See Fromm 1932b, pp. 70–74.

something natural (an idea that served, although under other theoretical assumptions, as the core assumption of functionalistic sociology). Fromm yielded in that way to a reifying perspective, inasmuch as he did not historicize the very 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 theory¹⁵.

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 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 favor a sort of libidinal structure that would act in the direction of destabilizing capitalist social relations (Fromm 1932a, pp. 56 f.), Fromm also argued that the deepening of social contradictions could have the opposite effect, and reinforce authoritarian character structure (Fromm 1936, pp. 121 f.). 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 the 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 nature¹⁶.

15 As argued Wolfgang Bonß has argued, Fromm's social psychology, as far as it naturalized the dichotomy between subject and object and was inspired by a 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 Freud-Marxists like Reich, Bernfeld and Fenichel (Bonß 1982, pp. 381–382). In his brief commentary on Fromm's contributions to the Institute, made in the introduction written for the republication of the Institute's journal, Alfred Schmidt drew attention to the fact that Fromm conceived of Marxism as of a traditional social theory (Schmidt 1980, p. 33).

16 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 the Russia contemporary to him, where the building of this kind of domination would be in course (Fromm 1936, 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 Bonß 1982, p. 384.

II – Dialecticizing Fromm’s concept of »character«: Horkheimer’s anthropology of the bourgeois era

If in Fromm’s early 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 which could not be separated from capitalism. Horkheimer viewed in »character« the result of a process along which personality traits stabilized themselves and gained the status of a second nature, appearing to individuals as things, as if they were independent of their social and historical origins. »Character« would be an expression, in the realm of individuality, of the spread of the commodity form (along with its contradictory and fetishist features) to virtually all social spheres.

I shall now start highlighting some differences between Fromm’s and Horkheimer’s approaches to the general problem of »authority«, in order to analyze how dichotomies of Fromm’s theory of authoritarian character were dialecticized by Horkheimer. As I hope it will become clear, this operation, which took place in a series of Horkheimer’s essays (fundamentally in his 1936 essay on »Egoism and Freedom Movement«, but also in other, mostly subsequent texts), was accomplished independently of Horkheimer’s renewed reception of Freudian psychoanalysis (which led him to incorporate, under Adorno’s influence, Freud’s theory of the death drive)¹⁷. Horkheimer’s critical and historical analysis of the contradictory presuppositions of Fromm’s theory also makes it possible to conceive of the relation between Fromm’s and Horkheimer’s works as of one between traditional and critical theories, in the sense described in the famous 1937 essay¹⁸.

17 For this subject, see the Introduction of the present article.

18 As pointed out by Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, the concept of »character« had already been resorted to by Horkheimer (based on Marx’ notion of character mask and independently of Fromm) in *Dämmerung*, the set of aphorisms written between 1926 and 1931 (Schmid Noerr 2020, p. 47). It could be questioned, therefore, what would be the meaning of asserting that Horkheimer gave a dialectical form to concepts developed in Fromm’s early work. It should be noted, though, that the reading presented here does not rest on the chronological succession of concepts, but on their logical relation within the scope of Horkheimer’s collective research program and of the tasks assigned by him (as the director of the Institute for Social Research) to his colleagues. For the critical incorporation of traditional theory by Marxism, see Horkheimer 1937, pp. 190-200. By asserting this, it is also my intention to argue that Horkheimer’s interdisciplinary research program (or at least this central sociopsychological part of it) can be interpreted in the light of his essay on »Traditional and Critical Theory«, which has commonly been seen as a break with that early research program (for this view, see Dubiel 1978, and also Abromeit 2011).

Fromm had defined »authoritarian character« as related to sadomasochism: it would be, as we have seen above, an element of alienated society in general, albeit intensified under monopoly capitalism. But 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 on the reified form of experience in capitalistic society, expressed in subordination »to the necessity of facts« (Horkheimer 1936/1937, pp. 60-64). Accordingly, if Fromm stressed the intensification of sadomasochism under monopoly capitalism, Horkheimer, in turn, asserted that the fundamental feature belonging to the character structure of individuals living in that historical period (which is still ours) would be its »peculiar 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«¹⁹.

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 also because family authority was then in decrease²⁰. The then prevailing character structure led Hork-

19 Horkheimer 1947/1949, p. 389. Psychopathic traits in contemporary individual were also the object of analyses on antisemitism and paranoia carried out in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

20 Let us note that Horkheimer, who refused any functionalism and recognized the legality of social spheres, had a different understanding of the role played by the 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 then were exclusive to the family (such as social security and health), as well as, especially after World War I, the economic crisis and unemployment, led to the decline of paternal authority and to corresponding changes in the socialization and behavior of individuals, like the increase of women's functions within the family. These findings

heimer to interpret the historical formation of bourgeois individual in the light of his »abstractiveness« (Horkheimer 1936b, p. 30), a dominant feature since the rise of bourgeoisie: »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 one's own interests, or those of one's family and 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 the commodity form, and therefore »alienness« [*Fremdheit*] would be, according to Horkheimer, the »anthropological category« of bourgeois era²¹.

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 the individual is inextricably bound to history, of which nothing could be said to be timeless²². Whilst he refused any idealistic anthropology that would postulate some unchangeable human nature, Horkheimer at the same time considered the question whether capitalism produces determinate personality constants (instead of other ones) as legitimate, for it would be especially important for a theory intending to promote historical change to distinguish, in what relates to typical behavior and psychological constitution, between 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 the given reality, on the other²³. Horkheimer's anthropological reflections took, then, as their object, the contradiction between

relied on the researches on family and authority, especially on the second and third ones (Horkheimer, Fromm and Marcuse 1936, p. 273, pp. 303–305 and pp. 315–320). The assessment of family's conversion into an institution that was progressively less able to offer resistance to determinations originating from other cultural spheres made Horkheimer less prone than Fromm to associate some emancipatory potential to the mother's role, even because obedience to fascist state overlapped with children's obedience to their parents (Horkheimer 1936b, pp. 68–74). It may be worth 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 on childhood's increasing commodification and on the fact that children become consumers each time sooner.

- 21 »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 1936c, p. 71).
- 22 From that followed Horkheimer's criticism of Max Scheler and others dedicated to philosophical anthropology (Horkheimer 1935, pp. 250–251 and p. 275). Anthropological theses would rather be themselves historical (*ibid.*, pp. 267–269).
- 23 Horkheimer 1935, pp. 251–253. This would allow incorporating to Marxist theory some of the issues discussed by philosophical anthropology in an idealistic fashion (*ibid.*, p. 260).

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 economy²⁴.

This contradiction and its developments should, nonetheless, be examined historically, taking into account their link to domination processes. The author argued 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 condemnation of egoism 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 the Middle Ages and the beginnings of modernity, which brought to light the specific sociopsychological mechanisms which, in a latent way, belong to daily life in bourgeois society and only manifest themselves in moments of disruption and disorder (Horkheimer 1936c, p. 70). Movements led by Cola di Rienzo, Savonarola, Calvin and Robespierre (the Terror period) were part of bourgeoisie's struggle against aristocracy, but had to rely heavily on the hatred devoted by the masses to the ruling class, which they associated with egoism and pleasant life. The 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 themselves²⁵. Conducted against absolutism, bourgeois freedom movements were at the same time able to reinforce the masses' ability to obey prevailing authorities (Horkheimer 1936c, p. 33). Exteriorizing resentment through terror fulfilled then (as it has always done) 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 asceticism²⁶.

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- 24 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 in the general ideas and dominant principles in capitalist society (Horkheimer 1937, 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 for instance Nobre and Marin, who interpreted it as a new critical model, which would have moved away from Marxian categories, toward Freudian (Nobre and Marin 2012, pp. 102–107).
- 25 Those movements were in this way the forerunners of modern antisemitism, which associates jews' alleged exploiter role with a life dedicated to intellectual idleness (Horkheimer 1936c, p. 77).
- 26 Horkheimer 1936c, 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« (Escobar Moncada 2014, p. 193).

These historical processes had their correlates in philosophy, and the 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 the bourgeoisie, the second one at the masses²⁷. Both currents concealed themselves, therefore, in their common ideal: the 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 unsolvable within the boundaries of class society, it had to be turned, within the self, into indifference and alienness against others: the individual would reduce himself to »self-preservation« and »bourgeois coldness« (Horkheimer 1936c, pp. 9–12 and p. 17). These would then be seen as conditions for progress within society; every demand for unconditional happiness would disappear, and yearning for pleasure would have to be disregarded in favor of more elevated values, such as morality, »common good«, and culture²⁸.

By undertaking such analysis, Horkheimer historicized elements of Fromm's theory (»character« and drives) and lifted them to a different level of critique, as Horkheimer's object here was the constitution of character itself (that is, of a reified form). And therefore, it did not make sense for him to oppose in an undialectical fashion »revolutionary/matricentric character« (generous and sympathetic), on the 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 Fromm's concepts rested, Horkheimer elaborated an »anthropology of the bourgeois era«, which identified individual self-preservation and alienness with regard to others as the »human essence« under capitalism. 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 historically constituted by

27 Horkheimer 1936c, pp. 9–16 and pp. 73–74. It is worth noting that for Horkheimer it was not the case – as for Fromm – that there were different degrees of drive repression according to class, even though condemnation of egoism was naturally linked, in what concerned lower and higher classes, to specific functions in labor division.

28 These ideals wouldn't contradict »bourgeois coldness« in any point (Horkheimer 1936c, p. 19). See also, for this issue, Marcuse 1937, p. 60.

means of concrete class domination – in Horkheimer's words, »with hunger and house of correction in its background«²⁹.

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 that historical process. A motive often emphasized in Horkheimer's essays is the integration of the proletariat: according to the author, the 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 capitalism³⁰. Indeed, as regards the German case, labor process rationalization (»Taylorism«) during the Weimar Republic period (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 domination³¹. 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 in its totalitarian forms) and also – as Horkheimer and Adorno would formulate most clearly in the 1940s – by the culture industry: the decline of parental authority, albeit

29 See Horkheimer 1935, p. 263. This aspect of Horkheimer's argument provides evidence against the common tendency among Horkheimer's and Adorno's interpreters (especially 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 1986, *passim*, as well as the already mentioned interpretation of Honneth 1985, pp. 33–41. It is worth 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, who also understood Horkheimer's anthropology of the bourgeois era as if Horkheimer had historicized Fromm's theory. But while Abromeit underlined that Horkheimer's specific contributions are the use of historical research (supposedly as a means of overcoming limitations of his Marxist theoretical framework) and the integration of the central elements from 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). See Abromeit 2011, pp. 249–261. The aspect of a critique of contradictions, inherent in Horkheimer's analyses of the bourgeois character, was also stressed by Escobar Moncada 2014, *passim*.

30 Horkheimer 1935, p. 264. On this issue, see also Horkheimer 1940/42, pp. 295–298.

31 »In Weimar Republic, proletarian opposition, as long as it did not perish in the midst of a number of sects, succumbed itself to the spirit of administration« (Horkheimer 1940/42, p. 296). On this issue, see also Horkheimer 1939, pp. 126–127. For a detailed view on this subject, see von Freyberg 1989, especially pp. 312–316.

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 domination, for family could not serve anymore as a social sphere capable of fostering individual autonomy³². These changes also had an anthropological meaning, for they implied the constitution of individuals whose character traits would play an active role in their domination:

»The transformation of the oppressed laborer, who in the nineteenth century wandered about in his quest for work, into the diligent member of fascist organizations, recalls, in its historical significance, the change which had been undertaken by the Reformation, as it turned the medieval master craftsman into the protestant bourgeois, or the poor English villager into the modern industrial worker.« (Horkheimer 1939, p. 118.)

The reinforcement of labor ethics went hand in hand with growing political impotence, leading working masses to a sort of deformation which made them »not themselves different from those who have been shattered by the [concentration] camps« (Horkheimer 1942a, p. 346). Social integration of workers had its culmination in the close connections between political mass parties and trade union bureaucracies, and along this process workers learned to obey and by this way prepared themselves for fascism: according to Horkheimer, they had then been »victims« [*Opfer*] of mass parties before playing this role in submitting to authoritarian state (Horkheimer 1939, p. 127 and also Horkheimer 1940/42, pp. 295–296). In the most recent stage of capitalism, repressive elements of bourgeois character had taken the lead, and *self-preservation* as its main element converted itself into its opposite, *sacrifice* [*Opfer*]: the individual's surrender to social totality could be conceived of according to the archaic logic of sacrifice, that is to say as repetition of trauma, as a means of dealing with fear. As Horkheimer and Adorno would write in the 1940s, belief in sacrifice is »(...) probably a formula drilled into the subjugated, by which they once more do against themselves, in order to be able to bear it, the wrong which had been done to them«³³.

32 For the changing functions of family, see for example Horkheimer 1936b, pp. 62–63 and pp. 74–75.

33 Horkheimer and Adorno 1947, p. 58. The concept of *victim/sacrifice* (both for which German language uses the same word, *Opfer*) plays an important role in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, and had been developed by Horkheimer since his criticism of Martin Heidegger, Max Scheler and other philosophical schools labeled by him as »post-war metaphysics«, which could all (according to Horkheimer) be reduced to the concept of *Opfer* (Horkheimer 1934, p. 180). It is worth noticing that until that time (the early 1930s)

How were these anthropological reflections related to the possibility of social change? Until approximately 1936 there still prevailed a revolutionary perspective. Besides alienness, exchange-based economy had, according to Horkheimer, led to the constitution of character traits which could serve in building an emancipated society, as for instance respect for others and the ability to stick, independently of self-interest, to moral values, truth and given word. Taking those into account would be a part of revolutionary process. But instead of trying, like Fromm, 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. To the extent that 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 to moralizing discourse and some leftist condemnation of individual satisfaction (understood as mere selfishness). The deleterious nature of egoism consisted in its mobilization by classes, nations and individuals as a stimulus for competition – in a rational society, egoism (as constitutive of bourgeois individual) would conversely change its function, and also would repression of egoism, which in capitalist society serves mainly class domination³⁴. As for masses in counter-revolutionary movements, there would not be any place left for connecting individual needs with the movement's goals, the libidinal structure of its members being used mainly for the satisfaction of their repressed drives³⁵.

Horkheimer had not assimilated Freud's theory of death drive, which was central for him and Adorno in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. The glorification of the individual's surrender to existing circumstances was then understood by Horkheimer as the main feature of an ideology corresponding to an era of intense social integration, within an irrational mode of production: despite its refusal of empiricist science, post-war metaphysics left intact both work ethics and submission to political authority.

- 34 By this way, idealistic asceticism and the »affirmative character of culture« would tend to disappear. Horkheimer 1936c, pp. 74–75.
- 35 Horkheimer 1936c, 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 »pseudo-revolu-

Around the beginning of the 1940s, as widely discussed in the reception, the »dynamic unity« between critical theory and working class, as it had been asserted by Horkheimer still in 1937, withers away in the author's works³⁶. Discussions about the relation between the individual and the masses are abandoned when it becomes clear that, in an era of integration, bourgeois morals had lost its critical elements, capable of fostering individual autonomy in the face of social totality, and had reduced itself to immediate interest³⁷. In spite of the conversion of individuals into monads guided by self-preservation (which at the same time increasingly meant sacrificing one's needs and aspirations to collectivity), there would still be elements pointing to emancipation (see Horkheimer 1940/42, pp. 316–317). 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« (Horkheimer 1943, p. 99). Individuals would have to desperately repress, in themselves and in others, every drive to the contrary, the more intensely they integrated themselves into society. Emerging from the violence to which individuals were subjected along this process, their hatred was projected onto everything that stands for non-integrated difference – this way, aggressors chose 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«³⁸. Itself an element 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 collectivisation 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 the transformation already induced in them by actual society: under the mere »grimaces« to which individuals have been reduced hides the possibility

tion« led by fascists.

36 See Horkheimer 1937, pp. 186–189. As to the main phases in Horkheimer's work, see Habermas 1993, pp. 49–66.

37 See Horkheimer 1942a. This process of change had been noticed by the author at least since 1935. See Horkheimer 1935, pp. 262–263, p. 267 and pp. 273–275.

38 Horkheimer 1943, p. 99, and for this subject also Horkheimer 1942b, p. 291. Suffering to which individuals are subjected in their socialization would come into light and turn into the hatred of nature which could not be dominated, but in whose »overridden matter« liberty »irresistibly shines through« (Horkheimer and Adorno 1947, p. 192).

of a better reality³⁹. 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«⁴⁰.

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39 See Horkheimer 1940/42, p. 317, and also Horkheimer 1943, p. 392.

40 Horkheimer 1942a, p. 346. This idea would be later developed by Adorno in his reflections on education. See, for example, his essay on »Education after Auschwitz« (Adorno 1966).

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