

JOURNAL OF HOMOSEXUALITY,  
Vol. 29 (No. 4, 1995)



Propriety of the Erich Fromm Document Center. For personal use only. Citation or publication of material prohibited without express written permission of the copyright holder.

Eigentum des Erich Fromm Dokumentationszentrums. Nutzung nur für persönliche Zwecke. Veröffentlichungen – auch von Teilen – bedürfen der schriftlichen Erlaubnis des Rechteinhabers.

## Between Marxism and Psychoanalysis: Antifascism and Antihomosexuality in the Frankfurt School

Randall Halle

Cambridge, Massachusetts

**SUMMARY.** In their efforts to utilize individualist psychoanalysis as a tool for understanding mass behavior, the social theorists associated with the Frankfurt School increasingly came to rely on a static, essentializing construction of sexuality which ultimately led to an equation of fascism and homosexuality. Heretofore unexamined in studies of the Frankfurt School, this equation will here serve as the starting point for a fundamental critique of the concept of sexuality developed by this influential circle of Marxist thinkers. While directed at the concept of sexuality, such a critique more importantly opens up the underlying understanding of the social and psychological realms advanced by Critical Theory. Attending to the equation of homosexuality and fascism as the central point of concern, this essay will first trace the introduction of psychoanalysis into Critical Theory through Erich Fromm and then investigate the extent of Fromm's influence on the concept of sexuality propounded by his colleagues, especially Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno. Finally, it will take up a frequently overlooked essay by Herbert Marcuse which promoted a vision of sexuality radically different from that of his associates.

---

Correspondence may be addressed: 31 Rice St., Cambridge, MA 02140.

[Haworth co-indexing entry note]: "Between Marxism and Psychoanalysis: Antifascism and Antihomosexuality in the Frankfurt School." Halle, Randall. Co-published simultaneously in *Journal of Homosexuality* (The Haworth Press, Inc.) Vol. 29, No. 4, 1995, pp. 295-317; and: *Gay Men and the Sexual History of the Political Left* (ed: Gert Hekma, Harry Oosterhuis, and James Steakley) The Haworth Press, Inc., 1995, pp. 295-317; and *Gay Men and the Sexual History of the Political Left* (ed: Gert Hekma, Harry Oosterhuis, and James Steakley) Harrington Park Press, an imprint of The Haworth Press, Inc., 1995, pp. 295-317. Multiple copies of this article/chapter may be purchased from The Haworth Document Delivery Center. [1-800-342-9678, 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. (EST)].

© 1995 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.

295



I

With the end of the Cold War, the work of the Frankfurt School deserves increased attention. From the beginning, the social theorists associated with the Institute for Social Research occupied a difficult ideological position. Critical of the effects of capitalism on modernity and apprehensive about the increasing power of authoritarian structures throughout the world, they embarked on a series of studies which separated them from contemporary left and liberal positions. Their efforts to unite Marxist dialectics and psychoanalysis placed them outside traditional party lines. Their interdisciplinary research established paradigms applicable to current studies of culture. These paradigms have added significance, for the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School was developed in the West, separate from the “scientific socialism” of the East Bloc, and continues to maintain its critical edge. It is beyond the scope of this essay to act as an introduction to the oeuvre of the Frankfurt School, especially since historical studies by a number of scholars have extensively chronicled its development and described its place within the Freudian left.<sup>1</sup> Instead, in the spirit of Critical Theory itself, this essay will focus on and seek to critique one of its major tenets: precisely the union of Marxist dialectics and psychoanalysis. This essay will examine how, in their efforts to utilize individualist psychoanalysis as a tool for understanding mass behavior, the social theorists associated with the Frankfurt School increasingly came to rely on a static, essentializing construction of sexuality which ultimately led to an equation of fascism and homosexuality. In examining this untenable equation at length, this essay seeks both to historicize the Frankfurt School and to liberate its legacy for even more productive forms of critical analysis.

The introduction of the homosexual into Critical Theory can be traced to Erich Fromm. Born in 1900, Fromm remained in his hometown Frankfurt am Main until 1919. After studying law for two years, he transferred to the university of Heidelberg, where his interests turned to sociology, philosophy, and psychology. Fromm’s exposure to psychoanalysis also began during this period. In 1927, he was invited to deliver his first lectures on psychoanalysis at the Berlin Institute for Psychoanalysis, whose membership formed an impressive list: Hans Sachs, Sandor Radó, Siegfried Bernfeld, Karen

Horney, Wilhelm Reich, and Ernst Simmel. It was not simply a matter of chance that the Institute, which had steadily grown in reputation until it finally came to rival Vienna, championed a rather unorthodox approach. Its location in Berlin, while still within German-speaking territory, allowed for some distance from Freud.

In 1929, one year prior to completing his training as an analyst, Fromm accepted a position at the newly founded Frankfurt Psychoanalytic Institute (Frankfurter Psychoanalytisches Institut), a branch of the Institute for Social Research (Institut für Sozialforschung). Max Horkheimer, recently elected head of the Institute for Social Research, was responsible for establishing this branch with the specific intent of drawing the psychoanalytic method into the working practice of the Frankfurt School with the hope that it would aid the Institute in its efforts at social criticism. For the next three years, Fromm travelled back and forth regularly between Berlin, where he had established a private practice, and Frankfurt, in order to hold lectures. This came to an end in 1933, when Fromm left Germany for a guest lectureship at the University of Chicago—a trip that turned into an extended period of exile.

Developing the foundation for a social-psychological method was not easy for Fromm, who found it necessary to overcome what he saw as the psychoanalytic concentration on individual psychology. The application of psychoanalysis on a social level required that Fromm make many modifications to orthodox Freudianism. Paradoxically, it was these modifications which would later force him to leave the Frankfurt School.

In his first essay for the Frankfurt School’s journal, Fromm laid the foundation for his later theoretical developments. He admitted that psychoanalysis was deficient because of Freud’s personal (pre)occupation with individual psychology. This (pre)occupation, combined with the psychoanalytic community’s concentration on “sick and healthy members of modern society and largely of the middle class,” meant turning “bourgeois-capitalist society into an absolute.”<sup>2</sup> Such a generalization resulted in the exclusion of questions of class and economy, i.e., “the material living conditions of the group under study.”<sup>3</sup> Fromm refrained from criticizing the psychoanalytic apparatus itself, critiquing just its class-specific deployment.



Dismissing the notion of the Oedipus complex as a product of this deployment, Fromm went on to define the proper object of a new social-psychological method: “to explain the shared, socially relevant, psychic attitudes and ideologies—and their unconscious roots in particular—in terms of the influence of economic conditions on libido strivings.”<sup>4</sup> Fromm thus replaced the Oedipus complex with a drive-based concept of human behavior. In positing the existence of essential universal human drives, Fromm was asserting the fundamental psychological equality of all men. He was also able to explain the diversity of human desire as a result of social inequality. Class positions, he maintained, were responsible for variously limiting and deforming the expression of the drives, resulting in different forms of desire. He did not, however, support a heterogeneity of desire. Retaining a psychoanalytic base, Fromm gave coitus a privileged position as the telos of essential drives. Other forms of desire were thus positioned as deviant, as expressions of social deformation, and these desires were seen as forming character.

## II

Social psychology found rapid acceptance at the Institute for Social Research. Max Horkheimer (1895-1973), a former analyst himself, was open to the psychoanalytic method and especially to Fromm’s application of it. Born and raised in Stuttgart, Horkheimer delved into Gestalt psychology as a student, although he eventually turned his attention from Gestalt psychology to psychoanalysis. His university studies in Frankfurt soon led to a position as lecturer, an affiliation that helped him in establishing the Institute for Social Research, whose directorship he eventually assumed.

The influence of psychoanalysis on Horkheimer, and particularly Fromm’s developing social-psychological model, can be discerned very clearly in an essay on “History and Psychology” that Horkheimer wrote for the first issue of the Institute’s journal in 1932. Here Horkheimer pursued the understanding of social psychology set forth by Fromm in the same issue. History, Horkheimer asserted, could not remain theoretically unaffected by psychology. Following Fromm, he stated that as helpmate to history, psychology “is no longer concerned with man in the general sense”:

Instead, for each epoch the totality of psychical forces which can unfold in individuals, the strivings which underlie their manual and intellectual accomplishments, and further the psychical factors which enrich social and individual life processes must be differentiated from the relatively static psychological constitution of individuals, groups, classes, races, nations that are determined by the overall social structures in each instance—in short, from their characters.<sup>5</sup>

Without such assistance from psychology, historiography was impossible.

With the introduction of psychoanalysis into Critical Theory, a split occurred between what we can recognize as the social and the psychic. Up to the point of Fromm’s entry into the Frankfurt School, dialectical materialism as adumbrated in the writings of the young Marx had served as the main theoretical apparatus. Now dialectical materialism became a theoretical tool with a specific object: it was used to explain the social. This object was separate from that of psychoanalysis, which was used to explain the psychic. Before the work on social psychology, both theories had existed in a state of competition as a result of their claims to be absolute epistemological systems. Fromm sought to undo this competition by making them into cooperating theories within a unifying system of social psychology. Through his rejection of the Oedipus complex, he defined social psychology in such a way as to make both the social and the psychic its objects of study. The psychic, as embodied by the natural drives, was held to be immutable and static, whereas the social was understood as alterable and dynamic. The psychic was the moment of universality, and the social was the moment of limitation. Individual character formed at the intersection of these two moments. Yet the social-psychological interest in character did not sublimate the difference between social and psychic.

Character was like a thin membrane between the social and the psychological located on the individual. It grew out of the interaction of natural, universal human drives and a predetermined social setting. Fromm posited certain types of character resulting from the method of production of a particular society. Character was supra-individual, and character typology (characterology) provided the



theoretical means to move between individual and mass. Fromm saw healthy character as the result of a balance between a healthy society and a healthy psyche.

As the means to bring about healthy social organization, Fromm devoted himself not to mass organizing but rather to understanding the interaction between society and the psyche. He regarded libidinal energy as a constant force towards genitality, an ever-present psychic drive whose redirection required that society expend a certain amount of oppositional energy. Society was always confronted with the demands of these drives, whose persistence led to a constant restructuring of society, resulting at times in a decrease, at times in an increase in the amount of social energy expended to direct libidinal demands. Neither revolutionary nor reformist, Fromm's understanding remained primarily a critical project directed at describing existing conditions.

In a second 1932 essay, "Psychoanalytic Characterology and Its Relevance for Social Psychology," Fromm sought to delineate the power dynamic of society and the psyche as constructed under capitalism.<sup>6</sup> He described how capitalism gave rise to anal character and went on to suggest that inasmuch as certain forms of social organization gave rise to types of character, these forms of organization could in turn be described as having their own social character. The essay ends rather abruptly, having relied heavily on a tautological argument.

Fromm nevertheless continued this type of analysis in his next major work, the "Social-Psychological Section" of *Studien über Autorität und Familie* (Studies on Authority and the Family). Published in Paris in 1936, when the Frankfurt School was already in exile, this volume was a collective work comprising contributions by various members writing from their own disciplinary perspectives. As a theoretical work, it can be read as a precursor to the Frankfurt School's later study of the authoritarian personality. Continuing his earlier work in his contribution, Fromm now responded directly to the fascization of the Western world market by positing an authoritarian character which existed in authoritarian social structures. In particular, he proposed a connection between authoritarian submissiveness and the homosexual. The homosexual char-

acter, like the anal character in Fromm's previous study, was both an agent and expression of an authoritarian society.

Confronted with the *Gleichschaltung* (thoroughgoing Nazification) of German society and the apparent willingness of the populace to submit to an authoritarian social organization, Fromm used the homosexual to interpret mass support for fascism. Here it was by no means a sexual act which signified the homosexual—or at least not a homosexual act. The submissive individual was "homosexual" by virtue of his character: "From a physiological perspective, the average authoritarian man is heterosexual. From a psychical perspective, however, he is homosexual."<sup>7</sup> Fromm did open up the possibility that this homosexual might engage in homosexual acts: "In a number of individuals, this component of homosexuality will also transform itself rather frequently into manifest homosexuality in the more narrow sense."<sup>8</sup> But the question of latent or manifest had little significance in this argument.

In Fromm's essay, the homosexual 'in the broader sense' was linked to authoritarian submissiveness through a discussion of sadomasochism. Understood as a form of sexual power dynamic, sadomasochism was used metaphorically to sexualize the power dynamic of fascism. Fromm equated the sadomasochist and the homosexual in terms of misogyny: the sadist beat women, the homosexual rejected them. Bearing in mind that for Fromm the "homosexual" in a broad sense was heterosexual and only in a narrow sense homosexual, it is clear how this linkage could occur. The heterosexual who hated women was the homosexual, provided of course that hetero-coital practices were accepted as the natural telos of sexual development and every other type of sexual practice was seen as deviating from this position. According to Fromm's paradigm, sex between men deviated because it placed the phallus elsewhere, not in the woman. Men who rejected the natural role of women as the 'phallic receptacle' were rejecting woman; they were misogynists.

This conflation of all that deviated from a constructed norm allowed for the simple identification of an anti-utopic force. It should be emphasized that homosexuality was not presented here as the negative in a dialectic process, the moment leading to new synthesis on the journey to utopia. Fascism itself occupied this



antithetical position in Fromm's social psychology, while homosexuality was construed as a braking mechanism that slowed the dialectical process. Regarded as the result of adverse economic conditions, deviant (homo)sexuality was described by Fromm as acting as a conserving mechanism of those economic conditions. Clearly the goal of his antifascist struggle was not to liberate a heterogeneity of sexualities, but rather to establish a homogeneous sexuality. This notion of "homosexuality" became one of the underlying postulates of Critical Theory.

Having been established as a quintessential component of the social-psychological critique of fascism, the nexus of the homosexual and the fascist would reappear in Adorno and Horkheimer's work. Here, however, it was functionalized differently as a result of diverging understandings of the relation of society to the psyche. In exile in the United States, Fromm broke off his connections with his former colleagues because his work was taking him in other directions.

### III

During this period, Theodor W. Adorno (1903-69) came to have increasing influence on Horkheimer. Born and raised in Frankfurt am Main, Adorno had maintained loose connections with the Institute for Social Research during his student years in the early thirties. It was not until 1938, when he was in New York exile, that Adorno actually became a full member. In their collaborations, Adorno and Horkheimer committed Critical Theory to an ultra-orthodox Freudianism, a position which resulted in growing tension with Fromm. Horkheimer accused Fromm of creating a psychology of mere "common sense" with his work on characterology.<sup>9</sup> On the surface, it would appear that the main source of the divergence was Fromm's rejection of the Oedipus complex. Yet beneath this superficial explanation lay a more fundamental difference in the understanding of the relation of society to the psyche. This can be elaborated most clearly by analyzing the appearances of the "homosexual"—the result of a specific theorizing of the social and the psychic—in the work of Adorno and Horkheimer.

Because of their refusal to view fascism as an isolated phenomenon, Adorno and Horkheimer were opposed to any direct discussion

of fascism: "Anyone who does not want to discuss capitalism should also keep silent about fascism," Horkheimer would say.<sup>10</sup> Instead, they embedded their discussions of fascism in research on areas such as anti-Semitism and authoritarianism. "Anyone who wants to explain anti-Semitism must examine National Socialism. Without an understanding of what has happened in Germany, speaking about anti-Semitism in Siam or Africa remains meaningless. This new anti-Semitism is the emissary of the totalitarian order into which the liberalistic has developed."<sup>11</sup>

If we enter into the work of Adorno and Horkheimer through the homosexual, where do we find ourselves? Sprinkled throughout *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950) and mentioned only in a single reference in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947), homosexuality was treated as a side issue, on the margins; even so, it was tied intimately to the study of anti-Semitism and authoritarianism. The homosexual is instrumentalized differently in these two works. Most blatantly and yet most overlooked in the contributions of Adorno and Horkheimer to the Frankfurt School, the homosexual stood at the borders at the very place where enlightenment, in its dialectic, flipped over into its negative. The homosexual here was an anti-Semite.

*Dialectic of Enlightenment* was written in two stages, the major studies having been ended, if not entirely completed, in 1944.<sup>12</sup> Since the book was never polished or refined, it retained a certain notebook quality, setting forth diverse theses and leaving them as such. Prior to publication in 1947, a final section was added to the chapter "Elements of Anti-Semitism: Limits of Enlightenment." The book was written during World War II and was a response to the war, but also to more than the war. Direct discussions of fascism, albeit numerous, were limited, because the book strove in its critique to go beyond the phenomena of war and fascism, taking as its object the metaphenomena which underlay these others.

The Holocaust was most directly addressed in the chapter on anti-Semitism. This chapter sought to analyze the conditions which could lead to the Holocaust or, more specifically, the mechanisms under which "individuals are branded as Jews and sent to the gas chamber."<sup>13</sup> This distinction, which focused on a "Jew brand," was an important one. Whether conscious or unconscious, intended



or unintended, it excluded from study all the others who were victims of the Holocaust, focusing solely on the Jewish experience. The object of this chapter then was not the Holocaust in its entirety but the Jews as victims of the Holocaust. It made no pretensions to be a total explanation of the entire mosaic of victims of the Holocaust, all the lives stamped unworthy of life. This distinction alone made it possible for the homosexual to appear here as he did, not as victim but as victimizer.

Of the seven sections of the chapter on anti-Semitism, with the final one being a later addition, the section on the homosexual nature of anti-Semitism appeared as the sixth—the original concluding cause in 1944. The first five sections dealt with the sociohistorical sources of anti-Semitism in terms of its volkish religious foundation. The sixth turned to the psychological sources of anti-Semitism. Here Horkheimer and Adorno explained that their analysis followed “the psychoanalytical theory of morbid projection.”<sup>14</sup> This theory led them beneath the surface of the individual subject to the construction of his unconscious. The use of this theory marked a break with Fromm’s work on characterology by asserting more orthodox psychoanalytic theory. It further served to substantiate their assertion that “the forbidden action which is converted into aggression is generally homosexual in nature.”<sup>15</sup>

The idea of morbid projection returned to the psychoanalytic notion of essential drives, yet it diverged from the understanding of these drives set forth by Fromm. For Adorno and Horkheimer, drives lay in the unconscious, waiting impatiently for their expression. In certain subjects, however, the superego prohibited direct expression of these desires, forcing the ego to discharge the drives of the energetic id through aggressive projection. The psychoanalytic map employed by Adorno and Horkheimer took them to the source of this abnormal prohibition: the “homosexual” character.<sup>16</sup> In this understanding, homosexual desire appeared as inherently repressible—the desire which cannot be named. There was no discussion of the social component of repression. It was presumed that the id of the homosexual, naturally unable to express homosexual desire, found release elsewhere—in anti-Semitism.

Within the Oedipal framework to which Adorno and Horkheimer subscribed, psychoanalysis explained homosexuality as originating

in castration anxiety. Fear of castration at the hands of the father as a result of desiring the mother resulted in the child shifting desire onto the father. The heterosexual child repressed its desire until the time when it found a surrogate for its mother. The homosexual child continued to desire, yet that desire was left inexpressible, resulting in morbid projection.

Given the divergence between Adorno/Horkheimer and Fromm, it is important to point out common ground: once again the homosexual was not an identity whose signification relied on certain homosexual acts. The homosexual here remained a personality-constituting, essential trait, a character. Adorno and Horkheimer were interested in the homosexual as a source of acts, not in homosexuality as an act. In seeking to explain the psychological background to a mass act—the Holocaust—they posited a mass character—the homosexual—as source.

In 1950, the study *The Authoritarian Personality* was published. Here the homosexual functioned as he had in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, albeit with more frequent references. He appeared directly in the discussion of the interview apparatus, yet not openly. Nowhere was any interviewee asked, nor was any interviewer instructed to ask, whether the interviewee was a homosexual. The most direct question which touched on the matter was: “Have you met many homosexuals in your travels?”<sup>17</sup> Yet in her description of the interviewing process, Else Frenkel-Brunswik stated clearly that along with “attention to the ‘orality’ and ‘anality’ of the subject . . . the problem of homosexual tendencies, their degree, and the subject’s acceptance or rejection of them was also given consideration.”<sup>18</sup> This was because “the problem of homosexuality relates to the different ways of failure in resolving the Oedipal conflict and the resultant regression to earlier [oral and anal] phases.”<sup>19</sup>

With this conception of the homosexual, the study took a different tack than its approach, for example, to the role of childhood disciplining. For the analysts, discipline was a learning experience, a question of socialization, whereas homosexuality was regarded as an inherent trait, essentially immature, which prevented a “mature” relationship to authority. The notion of the homosexual personality was evidenced when R. Nevitt Sanford analyzed Mack in the section entitled “Submission, Passivity, and Homosexuality.” Sanford



in no way required homosexual acts to make a diagnosis of homosexuality in Mack's case. He hypothesized Mack's homosexuality on the basis of perceived personality traits. Sanford stated:

Even without this piece of evidence [that Mack was afraid of a picture of a hypnotist] we would be led to hypothesize repressed homosexuality in order to explain some of the outstanding features of Mack's personality development. The material is replete with manifestations of authoritarian submission.<sup>20</sup>

Sanford plainly regarded authoritarian submission as a consequence of homosexuality. He illustrated this idea in a diagram tracing the impact of Mack's homosexuality on his personality construction. This elaborate diagram featured homosexuality as one of its main points. Not only was Mack's homosexuality directly responsible for his "authoritarian submission," but the diagram charted how it was also directly or indirectly linked with his "fear of weakness," "self-pity," "assertions of strength and independence," "glorification of powerful ingroup figures," "striving for power and status," "concealment of softness," "rejection of women," and more.<sup>21</sup> In this study the homosexual, Mack, ceased to function as an individual. He represented here the masses of A-type personalities.

A post-Stonewall episteme might lead one to ask: If only poor Mack could have come to terms with his true nature, would he have been so authoritarian? In the Frankfurt paradigm, however, Mack was a homosexual, albeit a repressed one. The goal of the analysis was hardly to cure Mack, and certainly not by helping to remove his 'repression.' Whether a source of anti-Semitism or a source of authoritarian submission, the homosexual functioned within these psychological critiques as the origin of pathological behavior. The homosexual was inherently pathological and had to be overcome, not liberated.

It is important to note that Horkheimer and Adorno's understanding of the homosexual and his relation to either anti-Semitism or authority maintained a strict theoretical division between the social and the psychic. In doing so they rejected the social-psychological attempts to bridge psychoanalysis and dialectical materialism, a rejection with the added consequence of breaking any causal rela-

tionships between the two moments. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the homosexual character of the anti-Semite arose independently of society, determined by a purely psychological reason: fear of castration. To explain this development, Adorno and Horkheimer employed psychoanalysis as a purely psychological method. Society was likewise described as developing according to its own material laws that could be explained through dialectical materialism. And these developments were separate from the psyche. In the seventh section of the chapter "Elements of Anti-Semitism," they furthered the separation of the social and the psychic. The section's opening statement, "But there are no more anti-Semites,"<sup>22</sup> dramatically attested to Horkheimer and Adorno's belief in a spectacular alteration of the postwar world. In this thesis they went on to analyze how anti-Semitism had been sublimated into a different form in the postwar period, leaving the homosexual behind.

For Adorno and Horkheimer, the homosexual character found expression in authoritarian society. The homosexual as pathological deviant manifested itself in a pathological and deviant society. The Third Reich was a social structure in which "the pressure of pent-up homosexual aggression" found release in anti-Semitic projection.<sup>23</sup> The pathological homosexual preceded the anti-Semite, however, just as homosexual pathology preceded fascism. This understanding of the social and the psychic was highly deterministic and rejected Fromm's assertion of the fundamental equality of all men. For Adorno and Horkheimer, just as there was social inequality, there was also psychological inequality. Thus in the relation of the social and the psychic as set forth by Adorno and Horkheimer, the homosexual figured as an ever-present potential. The absence of authoritarian society would not mean that the authoritarian personality had disappeared as well, as the study on the authoritarian personality was meant to show. A tension was established in Critical Theory by Horkheimer and Adorno in relation to the homosexual. As much as Critical Theory did (or did not) act to change existing society, it left no provision for changing the psyche, unless it would be a declaration of war on heterogeneity. *The Authoritarian Personality* offered only descriptions, no solutions. Pushed back into the dark due to a shift in material conditions, repressed



homosexuality lay waiting for a society which would allow it expression.

In all these instances, the ability to constitute a homosexual origin for anti-Semitism and authoritarian submissiveness resulted from an overinflation of the sexual. By committing themselves to psychoanalysis as the theoretical apparatus used to explain the psyche, Fromm, Adorno, and Horkheimer accepted a sex-based understanding of the subject. All of the individual's desires could only be understood as sexual. This was further compounded in the case of Horkheimer and Adorno by their insistence on the strict distinction between the psychic and the social. Critical Theory was forced into seeking explanations for subjective behavior without any social context. These explanations limited the heterogeneity of subjective desire to two homogeneous sexual sources, one of which was the pathological. The choice of the homosexual to represent the pathological in these explanations was not purely gratuitous. An already established Other to the privileged heterosexual of psychoanalysis, the homosexual had long since been functionalized in dialectical materialism's critique of capitalism.<sup>24</sup>

A superficial reading of Adorno's "Sexualtabus und Recht heute" (Sexual Taboos and Justice Today), published in 1963, might suggest that he later moderated his attitude towards homosexuality. Closer examination reveals, however, that although he seemed to express a spirit of tolerance here, he still had found no way out of the impasse of Frankfurt School social psychology. This essay initially appeared in an anthology entitled *Sexualität und Verbrechen* (Sexuality and Crime), intended by its editors as a response to the new penal code draft under discussion in the West German parliament. The proposed penal code basically brought back into effect pre-Nazi era standards and laws and, of particular concern to the editors, continued to criminalize abortion and homosexuality. The volume aimed to promote a discussion of these issues within the idea of tolerance, hoping that such a discussion might influence the parliamentary debates.

Adorno's contribution opened with a scathing critique of the very possibility of sexual liberation in an "unfree" society.<sup>25</sup> However, to represent where the possibilities of liberation lay, he again invoked the Freudian model of sexuality. At this point there seemed to be a fundamental revision of his attitude toward homosexuality. He

wrote of the hegemony of genitality over the partial drives of the libido.<sup>26</sup> Carrying this critique further could not have undone the opposition of homo- and heterosexual in the Freudian paradigm, yet it could potentially have placed homosexuality on the same discursive level as heterosexuality. This potential remained unrealized. Adorno devoted only one single page to actual discussion of the homosexual. Using arguments already developed in the previous century, he disparaged the new penal code as a gift to blackmailers. He followed this "argument" with a further "defense": If homosexuality is caused by a neurotic inhibition of the normal resolution of the Oedipus complex, added social and legal pressures would only make it even more neurotic.<sup>27</sup> Adorno's brief discussion concluded with the assertion (perhaps a result of his work in exile with Thomas Mann) that many homosexuals are very good artists and thus useful to society.

Adorno dropped the discussion of homosexuality at this point. In all fairness, it should be noted that, contrary to the stated goals of the anthology, he did not even touch upon the issue of abortion. Instead he discussed at length prostitution and the age of consent, suggesting that under the hegemony of genitality two groups—prostitutes and minors—came to bear the burden of society's taboos. Individual social suffering, Adorno argued, was transferred onto sexuality and then projected outward.<sup>28</sup> But the essay offered neither an analysis of social suffering nor any suggestion on alleviating it. Adorno remained on the psychoanalytic level, excluding all questions of social power; for example, while focusing on the reason why people hate prostitutes, he entirely ignored the conditions which give rise to prostitution and passed over in silence the actual situation of prostitutes. He also viewed child abuse as a sexual act. While the overt homosexual had apparently become socially acceptable in this essay, the dangerous realm of latent sexuality remained intact. Such a discussion was only possible through the continued overinflation of the sexual, mediating all social actions through sexuality.

#### IV

The means to deflate this discursive sphere of the sexual, to prevent this conflation of the homosexual and the fascist, had al-





ready been mooted within the journal of the Institute for Social Research itself. Marcuse's 1936 essay "On Hedonism" marked an opening in Critical Theory which would later be shut down. Born in Berlin, Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979) had joined the Institute in 1932 after studying in Freiburg, where he had been heavily influenced by Martin Heidegger. The essay was written at a time when Marcuse was working most intently on Hegel and before he was heavily influenced by psychoanalysis, and it was published in the midst of a series of collaborations between Marcuse and Horkheimer. These collaborations figured as the initial manifestos of Critical Theory, committing it to dialectical analysis. This analysis, which provided the central theoretical framework for the historical development portrayed in Marcuse's essay, offered the means within the tradition of the Frankfurt School to obviate the division of the social and the psychic discussed above. Marcuse himself did not maintain this analysis, for his further work resulted in his acceptance of the psychoanalytic framework. After Fromm's departure from the Frankfurt School, Marcuse joined Adorno and Horkheimer as the most vocal defenders of Freudian orthodoxy as well as critics of Fromm's conception of social psychology.

In his 1936 essay, Marcuse returned to the classical philosophical debates on hedonism, situating them as the framework for the debates of the modern period. Marcuse pointed to a dialectical tension between happiness and reason in modern philosophy inherited from the Greek tradition, a tension primarily expressed in conceptions of the desiring individual and the state. In developing this argument, Marcuse promoted a structural relationship between the economic and the ideational world. Productive forces affected and were affected by the conceptual world, as expressed here in philosophy.

Marcuse constantly correlated developments in philosophy with developments in the means of production, identifying two types of hedonism within the philosophical tradition. The hedonism of the cynics stemmed from the more originary stance of an anarchic period of society. It was succeeded by the hedonism of the Epicurean tradition, which stemmed from a time after the development of a slave economy.<sup>29</sup> Epicurean hedonism responded to and resulted from the development of rational philosophy as part of a concurrent development out of anarchy. The desiring individual of the cynics,

whose sole purpose in life had been the achievement of happiness, was opposed by rational philosophy which sought "the free rational shaping of the conditions of life, the domination of nature, and the critical autonomy of the associated individuals."<sup>30</sup> Epicurean philosophy extended the cynical critique to this new stage. The tension between rational and Epicurean philosophy, the result of the move out of economic anarchy, was then carried through all subsequent changes in the economic and ideational world, because at no point in time was the master/slave relationship ever completely undone. Marcuse pointed to the condition of the proletariat as the continuation of this relationship.

In the cynical concept of hedonism, the individual was understood as the locus of heterogeneous desires not primarily sexual. Marcuse accepted this conception of the desiring individual, yet sought through the category of truth to differentiate between the real and false desires of the individual. He turned first to Epicurean hedonism as the failed result of such a project and discussed how it made happiness a dependent subcategory of reason. Accepting reason as the highest human pursuit, the individual was doomed to accept present unhappiness for greater future happiness. Epicurean hedonism established a tenuous system whereby suffering, or the repression of pleasure, was accepted as necessary for the attainment of future pleasure. In response, the rational philosophy of Plato resulted in a further differentiation of real and false desires by defining real pleasure as a form of reasoning which supported the social order. "Only those wants may be satisfied which make the individual a good citizen."<sup>31</sup>

In order to differentiate between real and false desires, Marcuse established a form of analysis which, by taking the various constructions of desire as its object, broke with all previous critiques. Marcuse presented neither inscriptions of desire into various acts like coitus, as in Freud's work, nor moral modalities of sex-love, as in the work of Friedrich Engels or August Bebel.<sup>32</sup> He accomplished this through a double maneuver: proceeding in his analysis from the desiring individual, and analyzing the history of desire as the history of social limitations and constructions. Engels had begun such a process in the analysis of family structures, but he had assumed that desire itself was static, sexual, and limited to a



specific choice of object. Marcuse, on the other hand, simply separated desire from reproduction, which had the added effect of liberating his analysis from viewing women as reproductive vessels. Marcuse's desiring individual was limited neither by sex nor by gender. Such limitations were understood as stemming from socio-economic conditions, not as inherent and essential traits. In opposition to the work of Fromm, or the later developments of Critical Theory (which he himself would participate in), Marcuse did not separate the social from the psychic. If he assumed an individual who was essentially desiring, he did not follow the psychoanalytic model that resulted in essential forms of desire or character.

Marcuse traced the development of desire through the modern period, discussing the continued and growing alienation of individuals from their real desires. In the modern period, desire was constructed as external and damaging to the state. Desire, constructed as the "pursuit of happiness," excluded a pursuit of pleasure. The liberal understanding of the "pursuit of happiness," never available to the proletariat, became further limited in commodity capitalism to a pursuit of enjoyment. During this phase the false desire of commodities replaced real desire. According to Marcuse, enjoyment became bound to market commodities as consumption of expensive goods and entertainment. The proletarian masses, having no access to such goods, were excluded from enjoyment. The proletariat was left with the constant repression of pleasure without even the outlet of the hope of future pleasure. At this point in Marcuse's analysis, sexuality returned as the moment of revolutionary awakening.

Marcuse recognized a revolutionary moment in sexuality itself. Sexual pleasure had long since been excluded from the "pursuit of happiness," yet it remained the one sphere open to the masses which could disrupt the system. "The unpurified, unrationalized release of sexual relationships would be the strongest release of enjoyment as such and the total devaluation of labor for its own sake."<sup>33</sup> The moral prohibitions of the bourgeoisie, according to Marcuse, stemmed precisely from the need to close off the sexual sphere. Yet this could never be fully accomplished without the establishment of a reproductive prohibition. The admission of reproduction as a beneficial act to society allowed for (at least the

potential of) the individual to experience sexual intercourse as pleasure. In that one remaining moment of pleasure left to the proletariat lay the potential for individuals to recognize the extent of their exclusion from pleasure. And—as Marcuse pointed out—if the individual were then to liberate sexual pleasure from the reproductive imperative, it would have extensive ramifications for the socio-economic sphere:

Augmented pleasure would represent immediately increased liberation of the individual, for it would demand freedom in the choice of the object, in the knowledge and in the realization of his potentialities, and freedom of time and of place.<sup>34</sup>

For Marcuse, sexual pleasure was not an end in itself, but rather an act which referred the individual to the utopic demands of a society reuniting reason and pleasure in all its forms. Although clearly speaking here of coitus, the act of reproduction, the essay remained open to a realm of sexual pleasure separate from reproduction. In this system, however, sexual pleasure was only one of the forms of pleasure open to the heterogeneity of the desiring individual, and the only limits imposed on this heterogeneity were due to the choices which reasoning individuals made for themselves. No separation of the social and the psychic was envisioned; individual consciousness was inseparable from lived social experience. And although the essay did not directly address fascism and authoritarianism, it left no room for an intrinsic character giving rise to these social forms.

Regrettably, this line of analysis remained an isolated foray within the opus of the Frankfurt School.<sup>35</sup> Its abandonment was no doubt due to the inadequacy of Marcuse's standpoint in meeting the needs of the historical moment. His historically grounded argumentation offered no remedy for the major shortcoming of dialectical materialism as promoted during the period, the very shortcoming which social psychology and Critical Theory were better able to address. Taking capitalism as its object, the historically descriptive method of dialectical materialism formulated a nonexistent system; the cogency of its analysis and description notwithstanding, this method could not sufficiently account for the unrealizability of that system.

Marcuse's essay clearly evidenced this shortcoming through a



break in the text. In the final section, he moved from historical analysis to an appeal for a superior form of ethics, the analysis alone proving incapable of altering the existent system. The system of ethics Marcuse called for could indeed only exist outside of the capitalist system, thus presuming a revolution of the existing system; yet it lacked the ability to enact such a revolution itself. Only an attentive mass audience would be capable of supplementing the appellative nature of Marcuse's work with the power necessary to establish the ethical system it envisioned, but such an audience was unresponsive. The mass following Marcuse could only hope for what was in fact won by the fascist parties, which increased in power dramatically. Because Marcuse—and so many others—interpreted this support as contrary to the masses' own best interests, psychoanalysis as a form of behavior analysis proved to be a productive analytic addition to dialectical materialism.

The choice of psychoanalysis may have resulted in an overinflation of the sexual, but it did provide a means to account for behavior that could not be accommodated by the logic of dialectical materialism. Instead of seeking to prescribe what the masses should desire, the new social psychology sought to describe exactly what they did desire—fascism—and why they desired it. Yet as we have seen, this led the Frankfurt School to create a new logic that resulted in even more untenable positions.

What developments could have liberated Critical Theory from its fixation on the homosexual? Distinguishing rigidly between the social and the psychic, these thinkers were left fearing both the repressed masses and the removal of that repression. Critical Theory was forced to support exactly that which it purported to oppose. If the best that could be hoped for was to prevent the authoritarian personality of the psyche from expressing itself in the social realm, then an authoritarian system was not only justified—such a system was indeed indispensable to implement the essential repression of the psyche.

It was not, however, the sexual which caused the Holocaust, and least of all the homosexual. Individual consciousness is comprised of more than sexual desire. We must question how that desire in its entirety is directed to form identity. By attending to the social mechanisms which direct desire, we accept a commitment to ever-increas-

ing complexities of analysis. A shift in analysis to the social mechanisms directing desire also situates the individual subject at the nexus of complex systems of determination which render any notion of homogenous masses hopelessly simplistic. Class, gender, sex, and race only begin the list of determining moments that impinge on the individual subject. This move requires rejecting the psychoanalytic definition of the psyche as static, as well as breaking the monopoly of the sexual discourse over the psyche. In accepting the commitment to ever-increasing complexity, we gain the understanding of consciousness presented in Marcuse's essay. No longer static, the psyche reveals itself to be quite as alterable as the social, which allows for both terms to be sublimated into an understanding of consciousness as socially constructed. Viewing consciousness in this manner entails a change from the latent to the overt, shifting the object of pathology from the dark and hidden to the realm of signifying acts. Rather than locating the pathology of the system in a latent homosexuality, it recognizes the system as operating through an overt homosociality, allowing social power and privilege to accrue to that which is defined as like. Far from eliminating the conflict between descriptive and prescriptive moments, this move sustains the question of what and why something is desired as the object of study. Yet it redirects the question of 'what should be desired' back onto the critic functioning as a subject in the political sphere.

#### AUTHOR NOTE

Randall Halle received his doctorate from the University of Wisconsin-Madison with a dissertation project entitled "Containing Desire: Hegemony, Homosexuality, and German Nationalism, 1780-1956." A related essay on "Homosexuality and Alterity: Wilhelm Reich's Response to Fascism" is forthcoming in *Homosexuality and Psychoanalysis*, ed. Tim Dean (New York: Routledge).

#### NOTES

1. See Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School* (Boston: Brown, 1973); Susan Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics: Theodor W. Adorno's Debt to Walter Benjamin* (New York: Free Press, 1977); Judith Marcus and Zoltan Tar, *Foundations of the Frankfurt School of So-*



Propriety of the Erich Fromm Document Center. For personal use only. Citation or publication of material prohibited without express written permission of the copyright holder.

Eigentum des Erich Fromm Dokumentationszentrums. Nutzung nur für persönliche Zwecke. Veröffentlichungen – auch von Teilen – bedürfen der schriftlichen Erlaubnis des Rechteinhabers.

*cial Research* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1984); Helmut Dahmer, *Libido und Gesellschaft: Studien über Freud und die Freudsche Linke* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1973); and Paul A. Robinson, *The Freudian Left: Wilhelm Reich, Geza Roheim, Herbert Marcuse* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969). A study that may also be of interest is Andrew Hewitt, "A Feminine Dialectic of the Enlightenment? Horkheimer and Adorno Revisited," *New German Critique*, no. 56 (1992): 143-70.

2. Erich Fromm, "The Method and Function of an Analytic Social Psychology," in idem, *The Crisis of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1970), pp. 117-18. This essay originally appeared as "Über Methode und Aufgabe einer analytischen Sozialpsychologie," *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* 1 (1932): 28-55; quote on p. 36.

3. Ibid., p. 119; German version, p. 38.

4. Ibid., p. 121; German version, p. 40.

5. Max Horkheimer, "Geschichte und Psychologie," in idem, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 3: *Schriften 1931-1936*, ed. Alfred Schmidt (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1988), p. 57. This essay originally appeared in *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* 1 (1932): 125-43; quote on p. 133.

6. Erich Fromm, "Psychoanalytic Characterology and Its Relevance for Social Psychology," in *The Crisis of Psychoanalysis*, pp. 135-58. This essay originally appeared as "Die psychoanalytische Charakterologie und ihre Bedeutung für die Sozialpsychologie," *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* 3 (1932): 253-78.

7. Erich Fromm, "Sozialpsychologischer Teil," in *Studien über Autorität und Familie: Forschungsberichte aus dem Institut für Sozialforschung*, ed. Max Horkheimer (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1936), pp. 77-135; quote on p. 126.

8. Ibid.

9. Rainer Funk, *Erich Fromm* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1983), p. 98.

10. Max Horkheimer, "Die Juden und Europa," in idem, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 4: *Schriften 1936-1941*, ed. Alfred Schmidt (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1988), pp. 308-9. This essay originally appeared in *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* 8 (1939): 115-43; quote on p. 115.

11. Ibid., p. 308; German version, p. 115.

12. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophische Fragmente* (New York: Institute of Social Research, 1944). This preliminary version appeared in mimeographed form.

13. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Herder and Herder, 1944), p. 202. For the German version, see *Dialektik der Aufklärung: Philosophische Fragmente* (Amsterdam: Querido, 1947), p. 238.

14. Ibid., p. 192; German version, p. 226.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.

17. Theodor W. Adorno et al., *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York: Harper & Row, 1950), p. 319.

18. Ibid., p. 316.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid., p. 798.

21. Ibid., p. 801.

22. Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 200; German version, p. 235.

23. Ibid., p. 193; German version, p. 227.

24. See Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (1884), in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Selected Works* (New York: International, 1984), especially p. 302; and Heinz-Dieter Schilling, *Schwule und Faschismus* (Berlin: Elefant Press, 1983).

25. Theodor W. Adorno, "Sexualtabu und Recht heute," in *Sexualität und Verbrechen*, ed. Fritz Bauer et al. (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1963), p. 301. This essay also appeared in a collection of Adorno's essays: *Eingriffe: Neun kritische Modelle* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1963), pp. 99-124.

26. Adorno, "Sexualtabu," p. 303.

27. Ibid., p. 308.

28. Ibid., p. 305.

29. Herbert Marcuse, "On Hedonism," in idem, *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory*, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro (Boston: Beacon, 1968), p. 172. The essay originally appeared as "Zur Kritik des Hedonismus," *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* 7 (1938): 55-89; quote on p. 64.

30. Ibid., p. 167; German version, p. 61.

31. Ibid., p. 175; German version, p. 67.

32. For a discussion of sex-love, see Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, and August Bebel, *Woman under Socialism* (1883; New York: New York Labor Press News, 1904).

33. Marcuse, p. 187; German version, p. 77.

34. Ibid., p. 189; German version, p. 79.

35. The next proponent of such a critique would not emerge until fifty years later and from outside the Frankfurt School. It was Michel Foucault's work which returned to this form of analysis, describing sexuality as being constructed by specific economic forms. See especially Foucault's *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 2: *The Use of Pleasure*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, 1985), where he discussed the sexual economy of ancient Greece.