

Regaining the Subject: Foucault and the Frankfurt School on Critical Subjectivity

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**Miguel Alirangues,**

**"Regaining the Subject: Foucault and the Frankfurt School on Critical Subjectivity"**

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**Abstract:** In his article "Regaining the Subject: Foucault and the Frankfurt School on Critical Subjectivity" Miguel Alirangues sketches a possible meeting place in which two currents of critical thought (Adorno and Horkheimer, on the one hand, and Foucault, on the other) can come into dialogue. Without these two currents and, more crucially, without the dialogue between them, as he points out, we cannot today think of political antagonism towards the social structures of domination and therefore we cannot think of praxis and agency. The essay proceeds as follows: firstly, the author notes the places in which Foucault spoke of his relationship with the Frankfurt School, and the limits of his reading. He then addresses some relevant contributions regarding this relationship from the side of Critical Theory to propose a common ground between Foucault and the first generation of the Frankfurt School with respect to truth and subjectivity. Thus, he tries to bring Foucault closer to the positions of a rereading of the Frankfurt School. The intention is to provide some textual references that may show us today how this confluence may be of benefit to us when developing a conception of critical subjectivity.

## Miguel ALIRANGUES

### Regaining the Subject: Foucault and the Frankfurt School on Critical Subjectivity.

The relation between Foucault and the Frankfurt School is not a new topic, although it may appear so. In several texts Foucault made explicit reference to some members of this group, and in a number of interviews he came to reflect on his relationship with them. It is in his 1978 conversation with Duccio Trombadori where Foucault points out the willingness of his books to generate "an experience that might permit an alteration, a transformation, of the relationship we have with ourselves and with a world in which before we recognized ourselves without inconvenience (in a word, with our knowledge)" (*Remarks* 37, modified translation). Foucault conceives this through a "decentering of the subject," the relevance of which will become apparent when we analyze the role that the subject has to play in Critical Theory. Later in the interview, Foucault highlights the importance of some of the problems posed by the Frankfurt School and in particular "the effects of power that are connected to a rationality that has been historically and geographically defined in the West, starting from the sixteenth century on" (117). He speaks here of an inherently Western rationality that is inseparable from its practices and devices, and Foucault goes on to offer a reflection that seems to be drawn from *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: "Couldn't it be concluded that the promise of *Aufklärung*, of attaining freedom through the exercise of reason, has been, on the contrary, overturned within the domain of Reason itself, that it is taking more and more space away from freedom?" (118). Hereafter, Trombadori asks Foucault about the differences he observes between his own work and that of the German philosophers, to which Foucault answers that "Schematically one can affirm that the conception of the 'subject' that was adopted by the Frankfurt School was quite traditional, was of a philosophical character" and continues: "I'm convinced that given these premises, the Frankfurt School cannot by any means admit that the problem is not to recover our 'lost' identity, to free our imprisoned nature, our deepest truth; but instead, the problem is to move towards something radically Other" (120-21). A possible answer to this interpretation, *avant la lettre*, can be found in *Eclipse of Reason*, precisely in the chapter dedicated to the individual, where Horkheimer states that the critique he makes "[...] is not to say that a return to the older forms should be desired. The clock cannot be put back, nor can organizational development be reversed or even theoretically rejected. The task of the masses today consists not in clinging to traditional party patterns, but rather in recognizing and resisting the monopolistic pattern that is infiltrating their own organizations and infesting their minds individually" (146).

Despite this, Foucault maintains a mistaken reading of the notion of subject in Adorno and Horkheimer when he says: "Now it seems to me that the idea they had of this 'production of man by man' basically consisted in the need to free everything that [...] had been experienced at a distance from man and his fundamental essence" (*Remarks* 121). He even charged the Frankfurt School with having an ahistorical view of the subject, although one of its central assumptions, as Adorno maintained quite early on, was that "the subject of the given is not ahistorically identical and transcendental, but rather assumes changing and historically comprehensible forms" ("The Actuality" 125). I will return to this topic, but it is worth noting for now that the position at which Foucault himself felt furthest away from the Frankfurt School was the one concerning their notion of subject.

On the other hand, as Santiago Castro has shown, Foucault ultimately rejected the concept of rationalization that Critical Theory had adopted from Max Weber. In relatively late texts Foucault points out that there should not be a single rationalization process but rather local and specific rationalizations that are articulated by different dispositifs. As Castro states, this is clear in the 1983 interview "Structuralism and post-structuralism" in which he rejects the idea that modernity would produce something like a split between formal and substantial rationality, the basic scheme upon which Horkheimer would raise, in *Eclipse of Reason*, the difference between subjective and objective reason. It follows that the distinction between rational and irrational practices is tendentious and seeks to configure a form of rationality as the only desirable one (Castro, "Michel Foucault"). In this sense, Foucault is not so far removed from the Frankfurt School, because in these thinkers there is no clear distinction between rational and irrational practices in capitalism, and this is the very object of critique. The substantial difference is therefore not located here, but rather in the conclusions that Foucault draws, which claim that reason should not be criticized from the standpoint of a normative concept of reason, thus rejecting the possibility of immanent critique, which is the central method of all dialectical theory. Let us now turn to some classic criticisms of Foucault's work.

Foucault immediately aroused great interest in the ranks of Critical Theory, especially since Habermas's famous critique (Dews; Honneth; Fraser "Foucault"; McCarthy). These texts are of particular interest here, inasmuch that they lay the foundations for considering Foucault as belonging to the

tradition of Critical Theory, while they critique some of Foucault's central presuppositions. Peter Dews and Thomas McCarthy both carried out a critique of Foucault's thinking addressing the limits of a theory of power that does not account for that which power represses, and which therefore hinders the possibility of critique.

Dews has pointed out the implicit dogmatism in Foucault's rejection of the category of reflective subject, which prevented him from producing a social theory that is capable of accounting for the relationship between power and resistance. That would have led him to being committed to functionalism because his own theoretical terms impeded him from appealing to the subject's reflexivity on the categories of knowledge. Moreover, Dews contends that Foucault cannot think the idea of autonomy insofar as power is constitutive of subjectivity, denying the possibility of ascribing intentions and objectives to the subject. For Dews, Foucault's thinking lacks an account of that over which power is exercised, and so he would lose sight of all political dimension. Dews concludes that the pure positivity and productivity of Foucault's theory of power makes it not so much a theory of power, but rather a theory of the constitution of social systems (198). Foucault would then be doomed to an oscillation between the dismissal of the repressive hypothesis carried out in the *History of Sexuality* and the appeal to "the body and its pleasures" (in which the diagnosis of the repression of internal nature in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is echoed): "Foucault's dilemma is evident: his theoretical premises render unavoidable the assumption that modes of experience, systems of meaning and objects of knowledge are entirely determined by 'rules of formation' or —later— by operations of power. Yet, in order to function as a political critique of these rules or operations, Foucault's work must appeal to some form of meaning, experience or knowledge which is not so determined" (225).

However, Dews clarifies that Foucault's two fundamental problems are, first, the rejection of normative frameworks in which the concept of power would be operative by identifying them with coercive totality (in this sense, Adorno's insight in *Negative Dialectics* seems, due precisely to his dialectical standpoint, much more nuanced. For, he approaches the relationship between identity and non-identity without dogmatically rejecting the former as a simple abolition of difference). And, second, the idea that rationality and cognitive validity depend exclusively on the system of practices and discourse in which they are to be found. For the theory of power to overcome this impasse, it might be useful to resort to the way in which the Frankfurt School relates power and knowledge via the idea of truth. As Dews points out, this led Foucault to an untenable position, due to his criticizing of the historically specific forms of knowledge from the standpoint of an ultimately unknowable reality.

Ultimately, according to Dews, Foucault's convictions make his criticism deficient in an epistemological dimension that accounts for the inadequacy between the experiences of the subject and the impositions of power. The underlying assumption of its constitutive impossibility for criticizing that inadequacy is the theoretical pos-structuralist coincidence between adequacy, identity and coercion. Of course, Dews is quick to assert the relevance and importance of Foucault's philosophical project of understanding the relationships between power and knowledge, although he indicates that this project "risks discredit for lack of an adequate theoretical framework" (233). I will maintain that this theoretical framework might be the essential contribution of the Frankfurt School to a broader understanding of the problems of modern capitalist societies.

Thomas McCarthy provided one of the deepest insights into the relationship between Foucault and the Frankfurt School in *Ideals and Illusions*. There, he lists a number of meeting points between Foucault and the Critical-Theoretical program: the radicalization of the Kantian concept of reason by paying attention to practices; the idea that the structures that transcend the individual are socioculturally constituted; the rejection of the Cartesian rational and autonomous subject; the primacy of the practical over the theoretical that constitutes the theory of knowledge in social theory; the idea that the meaning of practices are not exclusively decided by their agents (together with Foucault's genealogical denaturalization project or the Frankfurt School's conviction that ideas are only meaningful in their practical contexts); the need to study the human sciences through the question about how the subject-object relationship of knowledge is constituted, together with the need to problematize that which is taken for granted; and ultimately "they hold in common that the heart of the philosophical enterprise, the critique of reason, finds its continuation in certain forms of sociohistorical analysis carried out with the practical intent of gaining critical distance from the presumably rational beliefs and practices that inform our lives" (48).

On the other hand, McCarthy also synthesizes the points of friction between Foucault and the Frankfurt School. First of all, Foucault elaborates a total critique of rationalism, whilst Critical Theory aims to provide a more adequate concept of reason through the immanent critique of the claims of rationality. Second, and in continuity with the previous point, in their shared determination to overcome the philosophy of the subject, Foucault declared the death of man (although later, as we shall see, he

would substantially alter his position regarding the subject) while Adorno and Horkheimer sought to redeem the concepts of subject and autonomy. Third, the primacy of practical reason in Foucault is not compatible with the transcendence of truth claims, whereas in Critical Theory universality is not denied, but rather dialectically mediated with practical contexts. Fourth, McCarthy points out that, while Critical Theory starts from the vision of agents and their experiences, Foucault is wary of this possibility of access, denying a priori the very possibility of immanent critique. Despite this, Foucault criticized the human sciences and their pretensions as a whole, while the Frankfurt School seeks to find spaces in them in which instrumental reason is not reproduced. Finally, in Foucault quite different concepts of power and knowledge are to be found as he rejects both the idea of repression and the notion of ideology (keeping in mind Dews' argument about Foucault's difficulty in sustaining this position).

The main point of reference for McCarthy is, indeed, Habermas, but his considerations allow us to draw an analysis that fits our purpose of comparing Foucault and the first generation of the Frankfurt School. It is not my intention here to reconstruct Habermas's criticism and the limits he finds in Adorno and Horkheimer's proposal on the subject. But I believe that both *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and Adorno's later texts indicate certain paths that are not reduced to the definitive closure of the individual in the administered society. The decline of the individual is not synonymous with its extinction, and the hope of reversing the effects of instrumental rationality, although diminished as with the subject, is not absent in the form of critique itself.

McCarthy considers genealogy as a form of critique of reason. In fact, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* can be read as a genealogical study of reason, rationalization and the constitution of the modern subject. The problem, for Foucault, Adorno and Horkheimer, from a Habermasian point of view, is that understanding rationalization as a process of increasing domination that leads to the administered society misses something about this process. It ignores the fact that the process of rationalization has other positive aspects if we are to understand modernity as the promise of the unfinished project of The Enlightenment. As McCarthy indicates, Habermas also studies the relations between power and knowledge, although he considers that the hermeneutic, genealogical and dialectical forms of the critique of modernity allow for a reflection that is not determined by the functioning of power, and this is why Habermas is able to eschew the self-sabotage of the Foucauldian presuppositions that, according to Dews, would make his own theory a product of power.

According to McCarthy, Foucault universalizes a closed ontology of the social in excessively negative terms. The fact that Foucault analyzes power as a network of relations makes him, as McCarthy suggests, lose sight of who holds the power and who suffers its effects; this laxity of the concept would also lead to a dangerous lack of differentiation between types of actions based on normative schemes, the existence of which Foucault would refuse to engage with. Despite this, McCarthy points out that in Foucault's account there is a great sensitivity to the coercion of any social constitution that gives his theory considerable force.

Let us dwell, however, on McCarthy's reconstruction of the subject in Foucault. For the latter, the subject is constituted by specific historical and social systems of signification. Thus, he is confronting a tradition that universalized a particular development of the subject as an original foundation. This tradition saw the development of the subject as an objectification of its inherent potential that should be recovered. In this sense, McCarthy diagnoses an important confluence with Adorno and Horkheimer, as "Foucault sees this as inherently a project of domination, a project that defines Western man's domineering relation to otherness and difference in all forms" (56). Yet, McCarthy believes that Foucault's response to this diagnosis is an "overreaction," and charges him with replacing "an abstract individualism [which he defended in the 60s] with an equally abstract holism" (56). McCarthy proposes instead "the less radical thesis that individuation is inherently linked to socialization" (56). Like Dews, McCarthy accuses Foucault of losing sight of any and all concept of agency when accounting for the subject as an effect, proposing "a mode of inquiry that makes no explanatory reference to individual beliefs, intentions or actions" (57). The recurrent problem is the anonymity of the practices that Foucault studies, refusing to acknowledge the relationship between resistance and "the capacity of competent subjects to say, with reason, "yes" or "no" to claims made upon them by others" (58).

I mentioned earlier that, in 1978, the matter which Foucault felt most distanced him from the Frankfurt School was precisely that of the subject. Axel Honneth has insisted on this idea, in an article in which he considered Foucault's critique of modernity just as radical as that of Adorno. Both critiques, in Honneth's opinion, were directed at the mutilation that power inflicts on the body, which is considered in both authors as the "real victim" of a process of rationalization (54). This process was expressed in Adorno's concept of the domination of nature and as the social control of bodies and subjectivities in Foucault. However, these two instances are indeed present in both authors, who converge precisely in



their diagnoses of the perfection of the means of social domination that produce, under the guise of moral emancipation, the "modern, forcefully unified individual" (54). For Honneth the difference lies, then, in the fact that Foucault understands psychic individuality as the precipitate of an external action over the body whereas in Adorno the modern subject would have lost its psychic force, and its conditionability would be a historical product of civilization. Therefore, Adorno's critique of the modern subject is understood as a questioning of the instrumental form in which subjectivity has been hypostatized. The point I want to stress is that there are enough reasons to justify a different reading of Foucault's last works and of the first generation of the Frankfurt School, and in doing so we are perhaps able to reach a certain meeting place that would allow for a reconceptualization of subjectivity and its link with critique. This would permit a resolution to the supposed political impasse so frequently associated with these authors.

Both Dews and McCarthy dealt with the ethical turn that Foucault took towards the end of his life. The relation between truth, individuality, freedom and autopoiesis is acknowledged as a means to break "with many of the Nietzschean assumptions which were central to his thought the major part of his career" (Dews xviii). As Dews comments, Foucault finally appreciated that "far from the concept of truth implying domination and forcible unification, it is precisely contempt for the truth which characterizes the arbitrary use of political power" (xviii). McCarthy, on the other hand, had a profound understanding of the trend that Foucault would note from 1980 onwards. McCarthy developed an analysis based on a Kantian shift in Foucault's proposal of an "ontology of the present" as a philosophy that, as the philosopher himself acknowledged, "from Hegel to the Frankfurt School, passing through Nietzsche, Max Weber and so on, has founded a form of reflection to which, of course, I link myself insofar as I can" (Foucault, *The Government* 21). Drawing on Charles Taylor's critique of Foucault (namely in "Foucault on Freedom and Truth"), McCarthy considers the Frankfurt School's meta-theory of truth to be the most suitable framework for the theory of power in Foucault.

Moreover, as McCarthy remembers, Foucault himself pointed out that his interest in Antiquity stemmed from a concern about the disappearance of the idea of morality as disobedience to a code of norms. It is here, in this Foucault, where McCarthy sees that, through the recovery of will and intentionality, he can give an account of the very possibility of resistance (70). But the problem now is that the correction of "the holistic bias" from the 1970s may just give rise to an "individualistic bias" (70). As McCarthy states: "The representation of autonomy as aesthetic self-invention eliminates the universality at the heart of his [Kant's] notion, the rational *Wille* expressed in norms binding all agents alike" (70). Evidently, from his Habermasian perspective, and while acknowledging Foucault's implicit notion of a universal morality, without which the search for a personal ethics could not be extended to every human being, McCarthy's most important criticism points to Foucault's lack of attention to the procedural models that could frame any understanding of justice and the law. In this sense, McCarthy diagnoses an "anthetical conceptualization of individual freedom and social interactions," through which Foucault would have understood the latter as strategic interaction, which "displaces autonomy outside of the social network" (72-73).

Nevertheless, Foucault himself made clear, in an interview published in 1984, that in his change of theoretical direction his main concern was a question with relational content: "how is an 'experience' formed in which the relationship to oneself and the relationship to others are linked together?" ("The Concern" 258). Under no circumstance is there an absolute independence of normativity, because the practices of the self that "take on the form of an art of self" are only "relatively independent of moral legislation" (260). This art of life is to be understood as a "slow, arduous process of change, guided by a constant concern for truth" (264). Opening this "relative independence" allows Foucault to make room for freedom, understood here as the tension that mediates between a non-transcendental but reflective subject and the normative and juridical code given at a certain moment. This increasing attention to "the care of the self" as autopoiesis, implies moving away from an earlier model based on coercive practices towards one based on the ethical self-transformation through practices of freedom. In those same years, Foucault wrote an article about himself for the *Dictionnaire des philosophes* under the pseudonym of Maurice Florence, placing himself within the "critical tradition of Kant" while pointing out: "The problem is to determine what the subject must be, to what condition he is subject, what status he must have, what position he must occupy in reality or in the imaginary, in order to become a legitimate subject of this or that type of knowledge [connaissance]. In short, it is a matter of determining its mode of 'subjectivation'" ("Foucault" 459).

The co-dependency that he describes here between the processes of objectification and subjectivation, their mutual determination, is not at all far removed from the philosophical convictions of Adorno and Horkheimer. The interconnection between subject and object, their "mutual development," makes those "games of truth" appear as a series of rules that determine what can be

said in a given field. This is no longer a descriptive-positivist project, but a critical quest directed to show the limits of a historical constitution of subjectivity in order to assess the re-elaboration of the epistemological and normative components of those regimes of truths. There is not a simple rejection of universality at this stage, as can be shown by Foucault's nuanced proposal for permanent skepticism in relation to anthropological universals, "which does not mean rejecting them all from the start, outright and once and for all, but that nothing of that order must be accepted that is not strictly indispensable" ("Foucault" 461). In order to bring Foucault and the Frankfurt School closer together, we can propose a reading hypothesis which would state that the indispensable anthropological universals might be those of autonomy and reflectivity, and that they are posited by historical subjects themselves.

For Horkheimer, objective reason is a structure in reality that demands a specific form of theory and practice at every given moment in history. Objectivity is thus inherently historical, and this is the reason why Adorno will consider the "temporal nucleus" (*Zeitkern*) of truth. Objective reason, as Horkheimer puts it, "is accesible to him who takes upon himself the effort of dialectical thinking or, identically, who is capable of eros" (11). This critical effort is directed against instrumental reason, understood as the "dissociation of human aspirations and potentialities from the idea of objective truth" (31). In this sense, objective truth is opposed to the ideological effects of a historical disposition of a regime of truth or, similarly, objective truth is the process by which a certain regime of truth is reflectively acknowledged. This way of proceeding, immanent critique, is the central form of critique for the Frankfurt School, which depends on the potential of negativity. The false objectivity of second nature must be criticized from the standpoint of nature's objectivity, since the forgetfulness of the concrete and material contents of the subject is what leads him to atrophy and extinction. Instrumental reason is therefore understood as a separating and abstract reason that imposes itself upon the internal and external nature of man. In this sense, Critical Theory is guided by one of the questions that Foucault found most relevant in his conversation with Trombadori: "How, in the name of reason, does it [society] establish the power of men over things" (*Dits* 84, my translation).

We are, thus, entitled to make a considerably different reading of Foucault. Judith Butler, for instance, has offered an alternative way of understanding some of Foucault's last interests which bypass McCarthy's accusation of "aesthetic individualism." In "What is Critique? An Essay on Foucault's Virtue," Butler traces an internal affinity between Adorno's and Foucault's concepts of critique. But in Adorno criticism is necessarily immanent, so it is crucial to understand in what sense Foucault can favor a concept of criticism similar to that of dialectics. Butler focuses on Foucault's lecture "What is Critique?" (1978) in order to develop a concept of criticism that escapes from the model of judgement as the subsumption of the particular individual in general cases. To this effect, Butler proposes to read Foucault's lecture as a form of criticism with "strong normative commitments" (306) whose precondition would be another understanding of normativity. Butler points out that the poietic self-formation found in Foucault is central to the politics of desubjectivation that he proposes, and the condition of such self-formation relies in the modes of existence that are not supported by a specific regime of truth. For Foucault, then, criticism would consist of pointing to the framework itself as a practice in which "we pose the question of the limits of our more sure ways of knowing" (307): "One asks about the limits of ways of knowing because one has already run up against a crisis within the epistemological field in which one lives. The categories by which social life are ordered produce a certain incoherence or entire realms of unspeakability" (307-308).

This is what, according to Butler, Foucault understands by virtue; the critical attitude that is assimilated neither to the current order nor to its regulations. Evidently, Foucault needed to reintroduce "intentional and voluntary actions" for this conceptualization, and to take into account the way in which moral codes are experienced. In distinguishing between obedience and virtue Foucault is close to Adorno and Horkheimer in the sense that the latter criticized the ideology of adaptation as an uncritical acceptance of social objectivity. This critical practice, of course, has "self-transformation at its core" (Butler 311), but not only in Foucault: in Adorno and Horkheimer, too, the subject who can raise to self-consciousness its non-identity with the object goes from being a pseudo-individual to being a subject in an emphatic but also precarious sense. And so, a major point of confluence between these authors would be precisely the acknowledgement that universals are not discovered by critics, but posed by them. Ultimately, this is a Kantian turn of radicalization of the concept of autonomy.

Butler understands Foucault's idea of not being governed as the radically contextualized refusal to accept the dictates of the law if the reasons given for compliance are not considered valid. In this point, through implicit terms of immanent critique, Butler manages to escape a fall into voluntarism. Thus, "saying 'no' to the demand will require departing from the established grounds of its validity, marking the limit of that validity" (313). It is thus through the exercise of criticism, in a broad sense, that what Foucault calls "desubjectivation" takes place, the truth of this process residing in a reinforcement of

subjectivity as a critique of the false social objectivity of truth. According to Butler's reading, resistance to the impositions of power occurs precisely in the stylization of the subject within the limits of the established ontology: "rationalization meets its limit in desubjugation" (317).

The closest and most radical proximity with Adorno's theory of the subject is to be found here. As I shall argue, this proximity is what allows for a new reading of critical subjectivity towards which Adorno and Foucault's insights may jointly lead us. In Adorno the subject who remembers his nature in such a way that he becomes sensitive to that which is non-identical with and within himself is able to explore the limits of a rationalization process imposed by the identifying thought. For Butler, Foucault's main insight is that "there can be no ethics, and no politics, without recourse to this singular sense of poiesis" (320). We can read this in parallel to the intention expressed by Adorno in *Negative Dialectics*: "To use the strength of the subject to break through the fallacy of constitutive subjectivity" (xx). We should remember that Foucault, as early as 1967, asked himself whether the famous materialistic will to stand the dialectic back on its feet had to be read as putting back "all this play of negativity that the dialectic, at last, had unleashed by giving it a positive meaning" ("Nietzsche" 277). Thus, the interest Foucault showed in the care of the self during Antiquity is mediated by reflectivity and negativity, since it is clear in this reading that "the formation of the subject is the institution of the very reflexivity that indistinguishably assumes the burden of formation" (Butler 320), and that this institution is mediated by the negative tension between individual formation and norms. In this sense, auto-formation cannot be understood as "aesthetic individualism" insofar as there is not subject prior to its constitution through regimes of truth that, at the same time, do not exhaust or completely determine the subject they form.

Butler had earlier addressed this same issue in *The Psychic Life of Power*, noting that "what is brought into being through the performative effect of the interpellating demand is much more than a 'subject,' for the 'subject' created is not for that reason fixed in place: it becomes the occasion for a further making," and she adds that "a subject only remains a subject through a reiteration or rearticulation of itself as a subject" (99). It is a question of thinking the appropriations of power that are only possible as enabled by power and can therefore carry out what Butler calls a "subversive reterritorialization" (100). In her reading, Foucault calls for a remaking of the subject against the identity politics (100). We can read this, again, as the same will as that shown by Adorno and Horkheimer to transcend pseudo-individuality in a reconfiguration of subjectivity. This, of course, is dependent upon a negative force that Foucault also acknowledged in "The Subject and Power": "Maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are, but to refuse what we are. We have to imagine and build up what we could be to get rid of this kind of political 'double bind,' which is the simultaneous individualization and totalization of modern power structures. [...] We have to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality that has been imposed on us for several centuries" (336).

For their part, Adorno and Horkheimer always considered that the constitution of the individual was mediated by the social space. The central problem for them is the acritical adaptation of subjects to the functional demands of society, which led to a "subjectless subject." The regulative ideal of autonomy, as the truth of bourgeois subjectivity, is abstract: its non-realization turns it into ideological falsehood that even disappears as a normative ideal. The disappearance of the individual is the process by which the individual is confined in his abstract particularity. The individuals are, according to Adorno and Horkheimer's diagnosis, increasingly separated, and their interaction is reduced to the pure instrumentalization of the other. Pablo López has stated that one of the objectives of Adorno's theory is "to adopt as the horizon of criticism [...] the maintenance of an unresolved dialectic in which the individual and society are constantly confronted with their own caducity and otherness" (44, all of López's quotations are my translations), and he concludes that "Adorno's critical-negative approach to the question of the subject is oriented towards the radicalization of the mediation between the subjective and the intersubjective" (46). Only an interpretation in these terms can set the right conditions for an encounter with the reading that we have outlined for Foucault.

And this can only be done through an understanding of the concept of nature that appears in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, where Adorno and Horkheimer point out that "through this remembrance of nature within the subject, a remembrance which contains the unrecognized truth of all culture, enlightenment is opposed in principle to power (...)" (32). It is important to stress that the emphasis is placed on the "remembrance," as they themselves wrote on one of the "Notes and Sketches," "Man and Beast": "What threatens the prevailing praxis and its inescapable alternatives is not nature, with which that praxis coincides, but the remembrance of nature" (212). As López points out, this appeal to nature within the subject points to the "defense of negativity and self-reflection within the subject, as well as paying attention to the relational character of subjectivity and its link with the social construction of the body" (52-53). I am contending that this is the most appropriate way of reading the category of subject in Adorno and Horkheimer, in order to escape from the accusations of melancholy that usually haunt them.



All of this output necessarily entails Adorno's radical defense of the priority of the object in *Negative Dialectics*, not as an inversion of the subject's priority in idealism, but as a dialectization of both moments in tension. The remembrance of nature within the subject is to be read as the acknowledgment of the conditionability of the subject by social norms which precede it, as can be read in the sense of Foucault's regimes of truth (as Adorno expressed it in *Minima Moralia*, intellect can only become so "by reflecting on its own conditions" 132). If, as López contends, the strengthening of the subject is only possible when the subject "can be thought of as a critical impulse of resistance" (59), we can then assert the importance of the critical moment in the constitution of a redeemed subjectivity. This reading allows an encounter with the reading of Foucault that we have made with Butler's assistance. In this sense, pace Dews, the regimes of truth are indeed susceptible to an "assessment of their truth or falsity" (219), although it is true that this assessment is not external, but rather internal, through the immanent critique of the décalage between the concrete and material contents of the subject's experience and a process of subjectivation that simply denies them. Thus, to put it in Adorno's concepts, the unintentional truth of truth regimes would be precisely that these are historical regimes, and the unintentional truth of the regime of truth found in modern capitalist societies is its ideological lack of mediation between the subject and the object, and within the subject itself.

Like the first generation of the Frankfurt School, Foucault finally placed in the subject the possibility of a reconfiguration of the experience that modifies the structures of the social whole that do not recognize an entire variety of experiences (as we can read in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: "The regression of the masses today lies in their inability to hear with their own ears what has not already been heard, to touch with their hands what has not previously been grasped" (28)). López has read this in a way that clearly echoes the last concerns of Foucault when he proposes that, for Adorno, "it is the possibility of a certain work on oneself, a certain treatment —proper or improper— of the subject, which operates as a condition of undeformed subjectivity" (66). The objective truth, the guiding by a concern for truth of which Foucault spoke, finds its place here as the non-propositional and unintentional truth of the tension between the experience of the individual and the processes of subjectivation. For instance, the analysis of parrhesia in Foucault must thus be understood as one of the forms of the critical ethos in which thinking and action are aligned. Truth is thus "a work on oneself," and the objective truth of which Adorno and Horkheimer spoke can lead to a fruitful reading, in this sense, as the task of bringing justice, autonomy and freedom into effect, and thus becoming "living thought." And this living thought is first and foremost a negative impulse with modifying power in its practice of veridiction in the face of power and also from and through power. Both in Foucault and in Critical Theory, there is no ultimate truth to be known as a thing in itself, but rather a truth that comes about as a modification and elaboration of the world on the basis of justice ideals that must respect the non-identical, the radical difference present in the world. Faced with a mimetic and instrumental rationality that reduces the subject to falsehood and mere fungible specimens, the truth expression of parrhesia opens the possibility of localized transformations, which are a necessarily absolute transformation of the social conditions in which we relate.

But can this be achieved under the conditions diagnosed by the Frankfurt School, of a society in which a rationality that is refractory to criticism has so prevailed? Where can we find the parrhesia, the denial that allows this openness to other forms of existence, both individual and collective? Certainly, the diagnosis of Critical Theory is not at all encouraging, such as when Horkheimer stated that "the very idea of truth has been reduced to the purpose of a useful tool in the control of nature, and the realization of the infinite potentialities inherent in man has been relegated to the status of a luxury" (142-43). But there is no need to insist on the pessimism of Critical Theory. It was also Horkheimer who stated that "under the present form of industrialism, however, the other side of rationality has become manifest through the increasing suppression of it —the role of nonconforming critical thought in the shaping of social life, of the spontaneity of the individual subject, of his opposition to ready-made patterns of behavior" (147).

In this sense, truth, subject and criticism form a constellation in which a possible encounter between Foucault, Adorno and Horkheimer can take place. A Critical Theory of society would greatly benefit from it. This would then redirect our attention to those who can most effectively propose a relationship of negative veridiction in the face of power, i.e. the victims. As Benjamin once taught us, "only for the sake of the hopeless ones have we been given hope" ("Goethe's" 356).

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