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Toward a Theoretical Outline of the Subject

The Centrality of Adorno and Lacan for Feminist Political Theorizing

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This essay draws on Adorno's concept of the non-identical in conjunction with Lacan's concept of the Real to propose a "theoretical outline of the subject" as central for feminist political theorizing. A theoretical outline of the subject recognizes the limits of theorizing, the moment where meaning fails and we are confronted with the impossibility to fully grasp the subject. At the same time, it insists on the importance of a coherent (if not whole) subject through which to effect transformations in the sociopolitical sphere. Since the non-identical is more grounded in the material world than the Real, and the Real allows us more than the non-identical to grasp the anxieties and desires that lead to totalizing theories, it is a complementary Adornian-Lacanian theoretical framework that holds a central promise for feminist political theorizing.

Keywords: *feminist political theory; Theodor W. Adorno; Jacques Lacan; limit; subject; continental philosophy*

Introduction

Critiques offered by women of color and working-class and queer women have exposed totalizing or identity thinking in feminist theories—the subsumption of all women under the concept “women.” Such a subsumption has created the illusion of a whole or unified subject of feminism, which mistook and continues to mistake the concerns of a particular segment of society (mostly white, middle-class, and heterosexual women) with the concerns of *all* women. To counter such an illusion, feminist theorists have shifted their focus in the past two decades to plurality and difference among women. This shift led to a tension within feminist political theory, which Linda Zerilli brings to the point: “Posited as a unified category . . .

'women' generates exclusions; posited as 'a site of permanent openness and resignifiability,' 'women' precludes the possibility of speaking collectively."¹

I agree with Zerilli that the critical task of feminist political theories is not to eradicate this tension, but to find resources that challenge the notion of a unified subject of feminism without relinquishing feminism's transformative capacity. This essay aims to show that the "non-identical," elaborated by the early Frankfurt School thinker Theodor W. Adorno, read in conjunction with the "Real," coined by the French psychoanalytic thinker Jacques Lacan, provide such a resource, because they allow us to formulate a "theoretical outline of the subject."² The non-identical and the Real refer to the remainder in concepts (Adorno) or signifiers (Lacan), the moment of a hole in any w/whole theory, which underlines that we can never completely theorize the subject, because there is always a moment in our theories that resists absolute signification.³

A theoretical outline of the subject challenges the notion of a unified subject of feminism *and* insists that it is only via a coherent (if not whole) subject that feminist political theorists can counter its own tendencies to become total. This essay aims, then, to provide the philosophical grounding for a feminist politics that embraces the moment of its permanent openness, while it acknowledges the importance of a certain closure to effect change. I argue that only a feminist politics that moves within the tension of (minimal) closure and permanent openness can make sure, as Lacan puts it, that it "remain[s] in a problematic position, which always leaves the door open to progressive rectification."⁴ Such open doors are important to invite those women into the project of feminism who have been kept outside in the name of unity.

If feminist political theorizing proceeds via a unified subject or if it fails to theorize a better notion of the subject, it is in danger to eliminate difference and to exclude those that contradict feminist political theories posited as noncontradictory. A theoretical framework as derived via the Adorno-Lacan connection shows us that a rigorous critique of the notion of the subject does not imply that we can dispense with the subject altogether. Rather, it underlines the necessity to theorize an outline of the subject, which is never complete. Adorno's materialism leads his non-identical, more than Lacan's Real, into the realm of the sociopolitical sphere, where feminists aim at transformations. Lacan's psychoanalytic framework by contrast allows the Real more readily than Adorno's non-identical to explain the fears and desires that lead to totalizing thinking.

The differences between the non-identical and the Real do not mean that political and feminist theorists have to choose between one or the other

thinker. Rather, a reading of the non-identical in conjunction with the Real brings complementary aspects of Lacan and Adorno to the forefront and renders them—in tandem—as constructive for feminist political theorizing. Adorno's critical theory corresponds well with Lacan's psychoanalytic theory, because both challenge the notion of a whole subject without dispensing with the subject altogether or invoking her merely as a pragmatic strategy—a problematic move, which is prevalent in some strands of continental philosophy.⁵

Especially Adorno's notion of the non-identical has produced secondary literature, which put him in line with such strands of continental philosophy.⁶ Moreover, it has earned him the reputation as a forerunner of post-modern thinking—a reputation this essay aims to challenge. Although Adorno critiques the self-identical, modern subject with his notion of the non-identical, he is far from giving up on the subject altogether. Rather, he insists that it is only via a better notion of the subject that we can counter totalizing thinking. Such a better notion needs to acknowledge the moment of the non-identical and with that its own fallibility, to make sure, as Adorno puts it, that it “will not come to rest in itself, as if it were total.”⁷ The non-identical is then not so much the sign that Adorno gives up on the subject. Rather it is the concept that allows him to theorize a subject, who remains an *outline*.

Also Lacan, with his theoretical account of the ego, challenges the notion of a whole subject. However, this challenge does not imply that Lacan dispensed with the subject altogether. Rather, he makes the crucial distinction between the ego (*moi*) of the imaginary domain and the subject (*je*) of the symbolic domain. Whereas the unstable ego is caught up in totalizing thinking, only the subject, who obtains a certain coherence via identifying with the signifier, is in a position to get out of the imaginary illusion of false wholes. However, this subject needs to acknowledge that she remains an outline, since the source of her coherence—the signifier—is nonwhole itself because of the moment of the Real in the signifier. If the subject aims to gloss over this moment of noncompletion, she is in danger to fall back into the imaginary domain, which is for Lacan the domain of injustice and alienation.

Both thinkers, Adorno and Lacan, show us then the centrality of a theoretical outline of the subject for a feminist political theorizing that opts for a politics of permanent openness and sociopolitical change. Such a feminist political theorizing is weary of any notion of a whole or unified subject of feminism *and* acknowledges that it is only via a coherent (if not whole) subject that it can counter its own tendencies to become total *and* contribute

to change. Political and feminist theorists alike have so far failed to appreciate the Adorno-Lacan connection. There are only few attempts to read Adorno in conjunction with Lacan, and this is the first work that shows the affinities between the non-identical and the Real.⁸ One explanation is the cold reception of both thinkers in Anglo-American political and feminist theory.

Political and feminist theorists have focused their attention foremost on the contemporary Frankfurt school, especially on Jürgen Habermas.⁹ However, some feminist theorists have recently shifted their attention to the early Frankfurt School, especially to the works of Adorno.¹⁰ Although this shift resulted in some important feminist appropriations of the non-identical, the full potential of this concept for feminist theorizing has yet to be realized.¹¹ I argue that this potential can be realized only if Adorno is appropriated in conjunction with the complementary psychoanalytic framework of Lacan. Nonetheless, those few theorists who approach Adorno via psychoanalyses are critical of Lacan. As a result, attempts to provide Adorno with a complementary psychoanalytic theory have remained insufficient.¹²

Also, there are currently no attempts to provide Lacan with a complementary sociopolitical framework. An explanation for this is Lacan's marginal reception within Anglo-American political and feminist theory.¹³ (Feminist) political theorists are hesitant to draw on Lacan, because they are concerned that any attention to psychoanalysis might lead to a psychological reductionism of sociopolitical phenomena—a concern this essay aims to ease.¹⁴ Although Judith Butler discusses the Real in her work, her dismissal of this concept, which is mainly based on secondary literature, is another reason for the marginal appropriation of this concept in feminist political theory.¹⁵ A recent essay collection on Lacan's *Book XX* introduces the constructive aspects of the Lacanian Real. However, the thinkers presented in the volume fail to explain the relevance of the Real for challenging the sociopolitical sphere.¹⁶ There has then thus far been no scholarly attempt to explain the importance of the Real for feminist political theorizing.

This essay aims to show the usefulness of Lacan when read in conjunction with Adorno (and vice versa) for conceptualizing a theoretical outline of the subject. I argue that such an outline is crucial for a feminist political theorizing, which aims to counter its own tendencies to become total *and* remains committed to a transformative politics. The first section, "The Real and the Non-identical: Fears and Desires" discusses some of the commonalities of Lacan's concept of the Real and Adorno's concept of the non-identical. It shows the complementary relevance of Lacan for Adorno, insofar as the Real allows more readily than Adorno's non-identical to

explain the fears and desires that lead to totalizing thinking. The second section, "Capitalism and the Imaginary," shows the complementary relevance of Adorno for Lacan, insofar as Adorno allows us to grasp more the sociopolitical relevance of Lacan. The third section, "Feminist Political Theorizing," explains the relevance of the combinative effect of Adorno and Lacan for feminist political theorizing.

I. The Real and the Non-identical: Fears and Desires

The mirror stage is Lacan's early theoretical account through which he challenges the idea of a stable subject. In the mirror stage, which pertains to the imaginary domain, the subject, for the first time, obtains a premature unity based on the identification with an idealized whole image of an other with a small *o* (*autre*, symbolized as *a*).¹⁷ Since the ego (*moi*) is the result of the identification with a foreign image, it remains an "ideal unity, which is never attained as such and escapes [her/]him at every moment."¹⁸ The lack of coherence of the ego leads the subject into a frantic quest to shore up the instability of the ego through successive identifications with the other, further reinforcing a rigid identity.

Despite Lacan's critique on a stable subject, with his notion of the ego, he is far from giving up on the subject altogether. Rather, he makes the crucial distinction between the ego of the imaginary domain (*moi*) and the subject of the symbolic domain (*je*). Whereas the ego is the result of an identification with an other with a small *o*, the Lacanian subject is the result of an identification with the signifier in the domain of the big Other, the symbolic domain of language. Although the identification with the signifier allows the subject a certain consistency beyond the momentary existence in the imaginary, Lacan insists that the identification with the signifier still does not allow the subject to become entirely whole either, because the symbolic order is not whole itself; there is a hole in it.

This hole in the symbolic order and its signifiers leads us into the domain of the *Real*. It is important to note from the beginning that the Real does not refer to any reality. On the contrary, it tells us that we can never reach such a reality. The Real is an element in the symbolic order that resists absolute symbolization. Lacan calls the Real "a fault, a hole" in the Other and its signifiers.¹⁹ It is the gap, the unnamable, and the limit of discourse that points to that which is beyond meaning. It is the bar (/) between the Signifier (*S*) and the signified (*s*), which indicates that the signifier can

never fully express what the subject is all about, since there is always a moment that remains beyond signification. In the moment of the Real lies then the moment of *political agency* of the Lacanian subject. The subject cannot achieve total unity in the symbolic order via the signifier because of the presence of the Real.

However, the symbolic identification allows her to attain a certain coherence necessary for agency. Lacan's explanation of the subject as the result of the signifier comes close to Michel Foucault's notion of the subject as determined by linguistic or objective structures. However, Lacan goes beyond Foucault because of his sophisticated account of objective structures themselves. Since there is a hole in the signifier and the symbolic domain, the signifier fails to fully determine the subject. It is then the moment of the Real, which opens up the space for the subject to contest her determination by the signifier. I disagree then with Judith Butler, who argues that the Lacanian "symbolic survives every and any contestation of its authority."²⁰ The Lacanian symbolic domain does *not* survive every contestation because of the moment of the Real, which opens up the space for the subject to challenge the authority of the symbolic order.

In identity thinking, the subject subsumes a *Gegenstand* (object) under a concept. However, Adorno argues that the concept can never convey an object as a whole, for it can represent only some aspects while necessarily neglecting others.²¹ The non-identical refers to these neglected aspects of the object. In the introduction of *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno explains the relation of the non-identical to dialectics: "The name of dialectics says no more than that objects do not go into concepts without leaving a remainder."²² Like Lacan, who understands the Real as *un reste* (remainder) in the signifier, Adorno conceptualizes the non-identical as a remainder in the concept, which refers to the blind spot in all identity thinking.²³ Adorno's critique on the total concept via the non-identical leads us to Lacan's critique on the total signifier via the Real.

"In the presentation as a whole," argues Adorno, there will always be a "gap between words and the thing they conjure."²⁴ In identity thinking, the thinking subject aims to gloss over this gap and do away with the non-identical aspect of the concept so as wholly to know the object. However, the non-identical evinces, as Adorno puts it, that "no object is wholly known."²⁵ Although Adorno does not as clearly distinguish between the ego and the subject as Lacan does, his critique on the modern subject, who engages in identity thinking, refers to the ego (*moi*), and his notion of the subject, who is capable to resist identity thinking, refers to the Lacanian subject (*je*).²⁶ In the imaginary domain, the subject aims at total identification with the other

with a small *o*, which produces the rigid ego. Such total identification refers to Adorno's characterization of identity thinking also as *identifying thinking*.

In identity thinking, the subject engages in what Adorno calls a "compulsion to achieve identity."²⁷ Such a compulsion, which recalls the ego's frantic quest to shore up her instability via successive identifications, leads to the self-identical subject, who falsely believes herself to be independent from objective structures, whereas she is in fact ruled by such structures. For Adorno, then, the notion of a "free subject" in modernity is nothing else but a delusion and a "mere narcissistic self-exaltation of the I, not the hubris of an autonomy of the I."²⁸ Adorno argues that modernity welcomes such a delusion, since it impairs an insight into the objective conditions of subjectivity, which is central for it to function. In a similar language as Adorno, Lacan grasps the ego as narcissistic, whose attempted abstraction from the other is delusional, since the ego *is* the other, which Lacan underlines with the statement that in the imaginary domain, the "I is an other (*Je est un autre*)."²⁹

Recalling what Lacan termed "the images of the fragmented body," central in the imaginary domain, Adorno shows us that the self-identical subject is everything else but "whole."³⁰ Rather, identity thinking, central in modern societies, *massakriert* (massacres) and *zerstückelt* (cut into pieces, dismembers) the subject's thought, and it leads to the *Verkümmerung* (atrophy) of her imagination.³¹ Since for Adorno an intact imagination and the capacity to think dialectically are crucial to resist identity thinking, the Adornian self-identical subject of modernity has (almost) lost her capacity to resist objective structures. With that, she succumbs to the worst outcomes of identity thinking in modern societies: fascism and the culture industry. Although Adorno paints a rather grim picture of the modern subject, he is far from giving up on the subject altogether.

Rather, he aims to use "the strength of the subject to break through the fallacy of constitutive subjectivity."³² The Adornian subject has the strength to break through such fallacy only if she acknowledges the non-identical in the concept instead of discarding it. With that, she needs to come to terms with the fact she will never completely become whole and that she can never wholly grasp the object. The Adornian non-identical subject parallels, then, the Lacanian subject (*je*) of the symbolic domain. Like the *je*, the non-identical subject can resist the force of the total concept only if she remains an *outline*. Such a subject engages in what Adorno calls dialectical thinking instead of identity thinking. It is important to note that for Adorno, dialectical thinking is *not* radically different from identity thinking, because, as he puts it, "we cannot think without identifying. Any definition is *identification*."³³

However, the non-identical subject identifies differently than in identity thinking. Whereas in identity thinking the subject aims at total identification, in dialectical thinking the subject resists the glossing over of the non-identical, which is the totalizing habit of uncritical identity thinking. Here Adorno alludes again to the Lacanian ego in the imaginary domain who aims at total identification and the *je*, who is the nonwhole outcome of an identification with the big Other. Although dialectical thinking is bound to move immanently within the sphere of identity thinking, this does not imply that it confirms identity thinking. For Adorno, there is always the possibility that in “the end it [dialectical thinking] negates the whole sphere it moves in,”³⁴ which underscores the sense in which his dialectics is a *negative* one.

Like the moment of the Real in the signifier in Lacan’s theoretical framework, the moment of the non-identical in the concept evinces that the subject is never completely determined by objective or sociopolitical structures. Although Adorno, in much the same way as Lacan, starts out from the objective dimension to challenge the notion of a “free subject” in modernity, the subject retains the capacity to act upon objective structures because of the presence of the non-identical in the concept.³⁵ Adorno is then highly critical of thinkers such as Heidegger, who turns subjects “into the stage on which an objective process unfolds.”³⁶ Since the non-identical is this “indissoluble something,” which identity thinking fails to identify, the crucial space for the subject is opened up to become an actor on stage and challenge objective structures.³⁷

Both thinkers, Adorno and Lacan, conceptualize then the non-identical and the Real as a critical force insofar as they interrupt any wholeness or totality of the symbolic order. This interruption is the crucial moment, which opens up the space for the subject to *politically* act. Like Lacan, who argues that the Real is “ready to burst in” at any moment to challenge the conception of a whole, Adorno argues that the “slightest remnant of non-identity” suffices to “spoil the concept as whole, because it pretends to be whole.”³⁸ Butler questions the critical force of the Lacanian Real for politics. “As resistance to symbolization, the ‘real’ functions as an exterior relation to language,” Butler argues, which leads, according to her, to the problem that “there is no way within this framework to politicize the relation between language and the real.”³⁹

The relation between the symbolic order and the Real can be politicized, because Lacan, in much the same way as Adorno, understands (although one can never completely understand it) the Real as *not* something that exists outside the signifier and the symbolic order. Rather, both thinkers

level a critique on identity thinking via the Real and the non-identical from *within* the concept or the signifier.⁴⁰ Although the Real points at that which remains beyond symbolization, Lacan makes clear that this does not mean that we should leave the Real untouched. On the contrary, he argues that we need to symbolize the Real even though we can never completely grasp it. The symbolizing of the Real cannot take place outside of language or the symbolic order. “We have no means of apprehending this real,” argues Lacan, “except via the go-between of the symbolic.”⁴¹

In *Book VII*, Lacan sets out to apprehend the Real through symbolizing it with the notion of *das Ding*. Chapter by chapter, Lacan aims to get closer to *das Ding* by encircling it and approaching it from different angles, without ever fully capturing it.⁴² Lacan’s attempt to encircle the Real is echoed by Adorno’s concept of “constellation.” Whereas in identity thinking, the concept only explicates certain aspects of the object and neglects others, in dialectical thinking, concepts enter into a constellation to get closer to the non-identical aspects of the concept. As Drucilla Cornell puts it, constellations imply that “we can only approach it [the object] from different angles of contextual perspectives, knowing all the while that it is never truly recognized by our conceptual apparatus.”⁴³

Although the encircling of the Real (Lacan) or constellations (Adorno) tells us that we can never truly grasp the object, our approaching it from different angles of contextual perspectives takes place through a thinking subject who draws on concepts. We cannot then do away with the subject if we are to break through the force of identity thinking. However, we can break through its force via a subject, who remains an *outline*. Such a subject explicitly acknowledges the non-identical and the Real in order to counter totalizing tendencies inherent in the act of thinking itself. However, the acknowledgement of these moments of noncompletion is also a rather difficult endeavor, since the confrontation with the moment produces desires and anxiety.

Although Adorno acknowledges the centrality of desire and anxiety as the driving force behind identity thinking, Lacan’s psychoanalytic framework allows us to grasp the relation between such passions and the moment of noncompletion in more detail than the Adornian theoretical framework. For Adorno, desire plays a key role in identity thinking, since the subject, who is “equally desirous and incapable of being” whole resorts to identity thinking.⁴⁴ However, he does not as clearly distinguish between desire and need as Lacan does. Desire is, for Lacan, essentially the desire of the subject to do away with the hole, the moment of the Real in the signifier that, because of the subject’s identification with the signifier, remains at the

center of any subject.⁴⁵ It is then not so much, as Adorno claims, the “need for something solid” that leads to the compulsion to achieve identity but the *desire* to become whole. Also, Adorno explains at certain points that it is the anxiety of nonwholeness that lies at the basis of identity thinking.⁴⁶

However, Lacan elaborates anxiety in more detail than Adorno by relating the moment of the Real to *trauma*. To begin with, I disagree with Andrew Robinson, who argues that Lacan understands the Real as some sort of essential “traumatic kernel” that we cannot touch.⁴⁷ Rather, for Lacan, the moment of recognition that the subject remains “a subject-with-holes” (*subject troué*) in the symbolic order, because there is a fundamental hole in the signifier, *is* traumatic.⁴⁸ Precisely at this point fantasy enters into the scenario. Fantasy is, for Lacan, the screen that conceals the anxiety of nonwholeness in the symbolic order. Lacan calls the fantasy objects that the subject creates to conceal the trauma of never attaining a whole “*objects petit a*.” *Object petit a* is not the imaginary other with a small *o* that Lacan signifies with *a*. Rather, it is the historically contingent object that, in unconscious fantasy, takes on the function of concealing the impossibility of attaining the whole.

For Lacan, it is the anxiety of never being able to attain wholeness that finds *object petit a*: “The *object petit a* is what falls from the subject in anxiety. It is precisely that same object that I delineated as the cause of desire.”⁴⁹ Fantasy *object petit a* aims to close the gap between the Real and reality, which it can never fully close. It seems that also in Adorno’s thought are such fears and desires at work, when he at certain points argues that a denial of whole concepts leads us into the “horror of depersonalization” and into “a recoil into mythology, into the horror of the diffuse.”⁵⁰ In these moments, Adorno himself introduces in his depictions of women, racial minorities, and working-class subjects *object petit a*.⁵¹ Although this can be read as Adorno’s means to cope with the “horror” that the confrontation with the non-identical and the Real incites, it implicates Adorno in the same identity thinking that he aims to challenge with his critical theory.

The presence of identity thinking in the political philosophy of a thinker at whose core it is to challenge such thinking allows us to grasp the sociopolitical relevance of considering deeper desires and fears that the confrontation with the non-identical and the Real incites. I argue that a theoretical outline of the subject can become a fruitful concept for feminist political theorizing only if we engage with the deeper desires and fears that the moment of noncompletion, to which the notion of an outline alludes, incites. To grasp this moment, which confronts us with the fallibility of our theories, as a fruitful moment that leaves our theorizing and our identities

open for change, feminist political theorists need a different attitude toward central passions, such as anxiety and desire. Instead of discarding them, they need to be considered and given their due place.

II. Capitalism and the Imaginary

The least you can accord to me concerning my theory of language is, should it interest you, that it is materialist.⁵²

Theorists have hardly been interested in foregrounding the material aspects of Lacan's thought.⁵³ Moreover, despite Lacan's claim to materialism, he failed to explain the material aspects of his theoretical framework to us. My reading of the non-identical with the Real in this section aims to bring Lacan's materialism to the forefront.⁵⁴ It shows that what Adorno claimed as characteristic to a specific society and hence historical moment—the prevalence of identity thinking in what he termed “late capitalist societies”—leads us into the Lacanian imaginary domain. Although the Lacanian imaginary seems at first sight as a purely psychological and transhistorical category, a discussion of Adorno with Lacan shows us that the imaginary is linked to capitalism and, with that, to the sociopolitical domain.

To begin with, this section does not suggest that capitalism *is* the Lacanian imaginary per se. I agree with Jean Joseph Goux's psychoanalytic reading of Marx, which argues that capitalism is foremost located in the Lacanian symbolic domain.⁵⁵ However, a reading of the non-identical with the Real evinces that identity thinking “recapitulates” us back into the imaginary domain. The Lacanian imaginary, as well as the Real and the symbolic, are then not merely stages in the psychic development of the subject. The subject does not pass from the imaginary into the symbolic and never back again, as most secondary readings of Lacan suggest. Rather, the subject finds herself in the imaginary delusion whenever she aims to discard the moment of the Real or the non-identical in the symbolic domain, which is characteristic in capitalist societies.

Already Marx linked capitalism to the imaginary. For him, the problem of the commodity form, which is considered as the core of capitalist societies, is that its exchange value abstracts from use value. Such abstractions lead to the *gespenstige Gegenständlichkeit* (ghostly objectivity) of the commodity fetish, whose form is for him, anticipating Lacan's imaginary, “only an ideal or imaginary form.”⁵⁶ Adorno picks up Marx's theory of the commodity fetish to explain that in a society where the commodity form rules,

which is characteristic in late capitalist societies, the thinking subject aims to discard the non-identical in the concept, which contributes to a “conceptual fetishism.”⁵⁷ Such a conceptual fetishism leads to alienated subjects and injustice toward the other. We find parallels between the Adornian critique of late capitalist societies and the Lacanian imaginary in relation to these two themes: alienation and injustice.

Whereas both thinkers use the term *alienation* to explain the consequences of identity thinking for the subject, I use the term *injustice* to show how both thinkers explain the consequences of such thinking for the other.⁵⁸ To begin with, for Marx, the term *alienation* does not imply that subjects are alienated from some sort of human essence. Rather, Marx aimed to express with his theory of alienation that the prevalence of hierarchical oppositions in capitalist societies, in which one side of the pole abstracts from the other side, *leads* to alienation.⁵⁹ Although Lacan makes clear that the subject (*je*) remains alienated in the symbolic domain, because of the presence of the Real, he asserts that “alienation is the imaginary as such.”⁶⁰ It is then the imaginary domain, where we find the one-sided abstractions Marx attacks, that refers to capitalism.

Lacan explains the fundamental alienation of the ego with the fact that the ego manages to establish her fragile wholeness only via total identification with a foreign whole image of the other with a small *o*. The subject’s quest to shore up her fragile unity via successive identifications leads to a “donned armor of an alienating identity that will mark [her/]his entire mental development with a rigid structure.”⁶¹ Adorno and Horkheimer famously elaborated the making of such a rigid subject with Homer’s Odysseus, the first prototype of the modern subject.⁶² The “donned armor of an alienating identity” is for Adorno fully developed in late capitalist societies. Here, the subject, aiming to abstract from the objective dimension in identity thinking, remains “harnessed within everything objective it thinks, like an *armored* animal in its layers of carapace it vainly tries to shake loose.”⁶³ The subject fails to shake her layers of carapace loose, because the self-identical subject is dominated by objective structures.

In her compulsion to achieve identity, the subject is, for Adorno, fundamentally alienated in capitalist societies, because “in the end it always identifies itself alone.”⁶⁴ Since the self-identical subject identifies only herself alone, she remains alienated from the object. “The more relentlessly our identitarian thinking besets its object,” argues Adorno, “the farther will it take us from the identity of the object.”⁶⁵ Although the identity-thinking subject aims to fully know the object, the more the object becomes ungraspable to the subject. The more the subject aims at total identification with

the other, the more she is alienated from the other and reduces the other to herself, which Lacan underlines with the statement that “the ego is the other, and the other is me (*moi*).”⁶⁶ The subject located in the imaginary delusion cannot allow any difference between the ideal whole image of the other and herself. Since the ego is the other, any difference becomes a threat to the ego’s existence. This scenario recalls the aggressive tension, the “either the other or me,” characteristic of the imaginary domain.

In the Adornian and Lacanian parlance of “alienation,” we can find a central explanation for the relevance of a theoretical outline of the subject for feminist political theorizing. A theorizing that proposes a total subject or does away with the subject altogether is implicated in the capitalist enterprise insofar as it contributes to alienation. Such a theorizing alienates itself further and further from its subjects of theorizing, who turn into mere objects. Moreover, it is a theorizing that is alienated in itself, since its rigid concepts do not leave any space for its own transformation and change.⁶⁷ In order to counter alienation, it is necessary to proceed via a theoretical outline of the subject. Such an outline accepts the moment of noncompletion of the subject and insists that it is only a coherent subject that can effect change.

The link between capitalism and the imaginary is further supported when considering the theme of *injustice*. In identity thinking as well as in the imaginary domain, justice has ceased to exist. In language echoed by Lacan—even referring to the mirror—Adorno argues that in identity thinking, the thinking subject “stubbornly mirror[s] the object,” which does not lead to justice toward the other. Rather, it leads to her eventual destruction.⁶⁸ Throughout his political philosophy, Adorno addresses the suffering such injustice causes to subjects subsumed under rigid concepts.⁶⁹ Feminist theorists have picked up on Adorno’s notion of “suffering” to show how a rigidly conceptualized notion of “women” produces suffering for women who have to submit to this concept to become a feminine subject.⁷⁰

In similar language, Lacan asserts that a nonconsideration of the moment of the Real in the symbolic order leads to a “petrified pain” of subjects, who have to submit themselves to signifiers to become a subject.⁷¹ If signifiers are conceptualized as total, without a consideration for the moment of noncompletion, the subject becomes recapitulated into the imaginary domain, the domain of identity thinking and one-sided abstractions. In the imaginary domain, the fellow human being (other with a small *o*) from whom the subject expects to find her wholeness, suffers because the ego reduces the other to herself, which Lacan expresses with the statement that in the imaginary domain, “the other is me (*moi*).”⁷²

The reduction of the other to *me* expresses the fundamentally narcissistic character of the imaginary. The other in the imaginary relation is, then, strictly speaking, not an other at all. Rather, the other becomes me, which does injustice to the other and brings suffering to her, because it leads to my destruction and negation of the other. Unlike Adorno, Lacan does not suggest that such a petrified pain can be the moving force to get out of the imaginary delusion, which allows us to challenge total signifiers in the symbolic domain.⁷³ However, Lacan makes clear that it is only in the symbolic domain, with the creation of signifiers that consider the moment of the Real, that such a suffering can be alleviated.

Both thinkers show us how the moment of injustice toward the other is implied in love relationships, which are situated on the imaginary plane. Adorno extends Marx's insights of the commodity form at the core of capitalism into the sphere of human relationships. Subjects in modern societies abstract from the particular qualities of the beloved one and, with that, turn her into an equivalent that can be exchanged easily with another.⁷⁴ For Adorno, such an abstraction leads to a central *coldness* that permeates modern societies, without which the disasters of modernity could not have been possible. As Jay Bernstein puts it, coldness in Adorno's works is the "*Stimmung*, of identity thinking in its exploded bourgeois form."⁷⁵

Lacan's discussion of love evinces another element that shows the link between the imaginary and capitalism. In *Book I*, Lacan explains that love, situated on the imaginary plane, "is essentially an attempt to capture the other in oneself," which reduces the other to me.⁷⁶ He also alludes to Adorno's notion of coldness by arguing that we find on the imaginary plane a *cold jouissance*.⁷⁷ Such a cold *jouissance* is present in all those humanitarian activities that aim at the "love of one's neighbor," where we find instead of love for the neighbor, the other with a small *o*, a violent reduction of the other to me.⁷⁸ Adorno also knows about the coldness implied in such a love for one's neighbor, since for him, "all too human slogans lend themselves to new equations between the subject and what it is not like."⁷⁹

This extended discussion of love explains in what ways a cold love is not "merely" a personal matter but intimately connected to injustice in the sociopolitical sphere, underscoring yet another respect in which a theoretical outline of the subject is central for feminist political theorizing. Without such an outline, theories find themselves on the imaginary plane, where violence toward the other is often hidden behind humanitarian slogans of "bringing love" to the other. We are confronted with such a cold love also in a recent sad example in feminist politics, where under the guise of bringing "freedom" to their Afghani "sisters," the feminist majority in the United

States endorsed the U.S. administration's bombing of Afghanistan. Drucilla Cornell rightly calls the cold love implied in this act as the "sacrilege of feminism," which brought, instead of love to the other, a violent reduction of the other to me.⁸⁰

In order to challenge such a coldness, it is important to consider the moment of the non-identical and the Real and proceed via a theoretical outline of the subject, because it is only such a consideration that allows us to reach the other in her difference without having to reduce her to me. If feminist political theories dispense with the subject or invoke her as total, which are two sides of the same coin, then they are in danger to remain cold theories that perpetuate injustice and contribute to suffering instead of alleviating it. Such a theorizing does not reach its subjects of theorizing but alienates itself further from them. This essay suggests that only a political and feminist theorizing that draws on a theoretical outline of the subject can counter the alienation prevalent in modern societies and contribute to a society where justice reigns.

III. Feminist Political Theorizing

The non-identical in conjunction with the Real implies important insights for feminist political theorizing, to which Regina-Becker Schmidt brings this point: "If we expose male discourses, in which femininity is failed, then we also need to apply such a critique to ourselves. We are not immune from the logics of identification or the mechanisms of one-sided abstractions."⁸¹ I argue that the Adornian and the Lacanian framework offer a complementary theoretical framework to counter feminism's tendencies to such one-sided abstractions that eradicate differences. Since the Real and the non-identical mark an "indissoluble something," they allow us to acknowledge difference(s), such as sexual differences, without fixing them as an absolute. These concepts tell us then that we can never fully capture what sexual difference, the difference between women and men, is all about, since there is always the moment that resists absolute signification.

Butler, in her more recent work, challenges my claim in relation to sexual difference. She argues that "it [the Lacanian symbolic] insists upon masculine and feminine as symbolic positions which are finally beyond all contestations and which set the limit of contestation as such."⁸² As this essay has shown, sexed symbolic positions can be challenged in the Lacanian theoretical frame because of the presence of the Real and the non-identical in the symbolic. It is precisely this moment of incompleteness in the

signifier or the concept that opens up the space for both men and women to challenge their sexed positions and, with that, the symbolic order. The moment of the Real and the non-identical mark, then, the crucial space for the subject to act upon and transform sociopolitical structures. Moreover, Lacan makes clear, consistently throughout his work, that “there is nothing by which the subject may situate himself as a male or female being.”⁸³

For him, sexual difference is situated in the Real, which opens up the political space for contestations of what this difference implies. The Lacanian statement in *Encore* that “there is no such thing as a sexual relationship,” then, does not refer to the impossibility of sexual relations as such, as Luce Irigaray has argued, but to the impossibility of ever fully capturing sexual difference.⁸⁴ Every attempt to define “woman” via a set of “static” symbolic oppositions to “man” (such as active/passive) always refers to a surplus, something that does not fit into this opposition. In *Ecrits*, Lacan explains this via the gendered separation of toilets. He replaces the Saussurian scheme of a single signifier (the word *tree* above the bar) and the signified (the drawing of a tree below the bar) with a pair of signifiers: we see two words (*ladies* and *gentlemen*) next to each other above a bar (signifying sexual difference).⁸⁵

Below the bar, we see two identical drawings of a door (signifying “real” women and men). Lacan’s illustration underlines that sexual difference does not designate any “real” oppositions between the sexes. Rather, it refers to a symbolic opposition to which nothing corresponds in the designated objects—but the Real that cannot ever be captured. The signifier *S* (*ladies* and *gentlemen*) dominates the signified *s* (real women and men), and there is a genuine barrier (a bar) between them (*S/s*). The bar underlines how the relation between the signifier and the signified is not a one-to-one relation. Rather, they “have a strictly arbitrary relation.”⁸⁶ It is precisely this arbitrary relation between the signifier and the signified the space opens up for the signified to contest the signifier. The signifier of sexual difference refers then to *das Ding* that resists symbolization and hinders us from grasping what sexual difference means in any absolute sense.

Precisely in the moment of “not completely grasping” sexual difference, the possibility of contesting any given meaning of “femininity” or “masculinity” opens up. Although the situating of sexual difference in the Real and the non-identical agrees with Butler’s recent stance on sexual difference as an “open question,” which remains unresolved,⁸⁷ she argues that the “phallus” is the element in Lacan’s theory that contributes to fix the masculine and feminine positions in the symbolic order.⁸⁸ Lacan answers Butler’s challenge in his argument that the phallus is a signifier and as such does not

denote any positive meaning.⁸⁹ For him, the phallus is fallible, which he underlines by equating the phallus with the bar between the signifier and the signified (*S/s*)—the Real. However, Lacan cannot counter Butler's challenge completely. The problem with Lacan's notion of the phallus is that he draws on the language of patriarchal sexuality to represent the Real, and with that, he reifies a set of contingent historical relationships.⁹⁰

Although both Lacan and Adorno failed to situate "other" forms of difference, such as class and racial difference, in the Real or non-identical, these concepts can help us to think about such differences. Any attempt to state in positive terms, for example, what class difference implies via a set of "static" symbolic oppositions (such as working class/middle class) refers to a surplus, that is, to things that do not fit into this opposition (such as the unemployed), which refers to the non-identical and Real aspects of our thinking. Any undertaking to "capture" class or racial difference through static and fixed binary oppositions is doomed to fail and leads us into the imaginary, the domain of violence and injustice toward the other. Class and racial difference, like sexual difference, refers then to the Lacanian Real and the Adornian non-identical that resist every attempt of symbolization, which opens up the term *class*, as well as *race*, to hegemonic struggles over the determination of its meaning.

Adorno's statement that in identity thinking, "racial difference is raised as an absolute so that it can be abolished absolutely, if only in the sense that nothing different survives"⁹¹ does not mean, as Espen Hammer suggests, that Adorno posits racial differences as invariant or given.⁹² Rather, for him, the non-identical evinces that we can never completely grasp what racial difference implies, which opens up the road to think about it *differently*. This essay does not argue for a feminist political theorizing that espouses a thinking about difference that is "fluid" and whose meaning we can never determine. I believe such a theorizing would miss the radical insight of the Adorno-Lacan connection, which remains committed to a theoretical outline of the subject.

Although we can never completely grasp what differences are all about, because of the remainder in the concept, this does not mean that we cannot or should not say anything about what these differences imply. On the contrary, a theoretical outline of the subject evinces that we need to be very specific about the material reality of differences. Lacan insists that "there is undoubtedly a hidden signifier here which, of course, can nowhere be incarnated absolutely."⁹³ This hidden signifier marks the reality of sexual difference, although we can never completely grasp what that reality is because of the hole in the symbolic order. A feminist theorizing that acknowledges the

moment of noncompletion makes sure that it does not fix difference as absolute, which is, as Adorno rightly argues, nothing else but “another monism. Absolute duality would be unity.”⁹⁴

The Real and the non-identical have crucial consequences for *feminist politics*, since they point at the *Gespalteneheit* (rivenness) within feminism itself. Feminists are *gespalten* (riven) along class, racial, and sexual lines. By arguing that there is no split between women, feminist political theories contribute to the problematic argument that gender, racial, and class antagonisms have ceased to exist in contemporary societies and that women live in harmony with each other. Feminist political theorists have been (though not completely) able to break through the false picture of a society free of racial and sexual antagonisms, but the mirage of the “classless society” and, with that, the false assumption that there are no class differences between women continues to circle through feminist theories. The Real and the non-identical are crucial for feminist politics, because they challenge the lie that women are free of objective contradictions.

A feminist politics that aims to encircle the Real and the non-identical in the symbolic domain does not attempt, then, to start out from or create unity among women. It does not assume in advance what the content of “women” will be and does not aim to fix this content. As such, it does not aim to resolve contradictions between women. Rather, it accepts conflict between women and unfolds its critical potential via contradictions. The Real and the non-identical contribute to enliven the sociopolitical sphere, since they allow feminists to see what Adorno called the “beauty in dissonance.”⁹⁵ For him, dissonance “is the truth about harmony. If the ideal of harmony is taken strictly, it proves to be unreachable according to its own concept.”⁹⁶ Harmony is unreachable because there is always the moment of the non-identical, the remainder in any notion of a harmonious whole.

The notion of harmony in feminist politics is, then, nothing else but the illusion of wholeness. Such an illusion erases contradictions between women, which recapitulates feminist politics into the imaginary domain. If feminist politics decides to gloss over the moment of the Real and the non-identical, if it aims to start out to resolve contradictions between women to arrive at some notion of harmony, then it is in danger to become oppressive to those women who represent a disturbance to such “harmony.” Although the non-identical and the Real point at the importance of acknowledging objective contradictions between women, it is important to understand such contradictions *not* as absolute, since, as Adorno rightly claims, “total contradiction is nothing but the manifest untruth of total identification.”⁹⁷ Here it is perhaps crucial to make a distinction between antagonism and contradiction.

Whereas a feminist politics that aims to do away with objective contradictions (or declares them as absolute) merely leads to heightened antagonisms between women, a feminist politics that proceeds via contradictions gives hope to future, less antagonistic relations between women.⁹⁸ However, such a future society is possible only if feminist politics acknowledges the deeper fears and anxieties that the moment of the Real and the non-identical incite. Only such an acknowledgement can assure that it does not return to fantasy, to the creation of feminism as a false utopia, where all we can find is the eradication of differences. Only if feminist politics embraces the moment of noncompletion, something like affinity between different women—which Adorno calls the state of differentiation without domination, “with the differentiated participating in each other”—becomes a possibility.⁹⁹

The notion of dissonance is central for feminist politics, because it dissolves the illusion of wholeness in feminism and allows the moment of noncompletion to take center stage in the sociopolitical sphere. Such a center stage is important, because it is only in the moment of noncompletion where existing concepts can be contested and new ones can emerge. A feminist politics that encircles the moment of the Real and the non-identical in the sociopolitical sphere and, with that, proceeds via a theoretical outline of the subject comes in many ways close to the feminist politics Butler aims at.¹⁰⁰ In Butler’s earlier work, she counters the notion of a stable subject of feminism with a feminist coalitional politics, which “acknowledges its contradictions” and proceeds via a concept of “women” as a site of “essential incompleteness [that] permits that category to serve as a permanently available site of contested meanings.”¹⁰¹ In her more recent work, she also addresses the importance of acknowledging the moment of desire and anxiety that such incompleteness incites to counter an oppressive feminist politics.¹⁰²

A feminist political theory that draws on Butler comes to a similar conclusion as a feminist political theory that draws on the Adorno-Lacan connection—the need simultaneously to affirm the concept of “women” and to recognize the impossibility of ever giving a complete and uncontested account of what women are all about. Both acknowledge the centrality of openness for feminist political theorizing and admit the importance of a certain closure. However, there is a crucial difference in *how* these feminist political theories arrive at this conclusion. A feminist political theory that draws on Butler does *not* rely on a theoretical outline of the subject. Rather, Butler’s reliance on a Foucauldian theoretical framework does away with the subject altogether. Whenever Butler invokes the importance of the subject (or the concept), it is merely meant as a *pragmatic* strategy.¹⁰³

In contrast, a feminist political theory as derived via Lacan/Adorno provides a philosophical grounding to a feminist politics that challenges the notion of a unified subject of feminism without giving up on such a subject or invoking her merely as a pragmatic strategy. A theoretical outline of the subject shows that a feminist political theorizing that gives up on the subject or invokes her merely as a pragmatic strategy does not lead to a feminist politics that remains open for different women and contributes to change. A theoretical outline of the subject evinces the *necessity* of a coherent (but nonwhole) subject to get out of (and not fall back into) the imaginary delusion of false wholes. It is only in the symbolic domain and via identification with a signifier where the subject obtains a certain stability that allows her to challenge identity thinking. If there is no subject or a subject that is not coherent enough, then we are confronted with the narcissistic ego, which does nothing else but alienate and perpetuate injustice toward others.

A theoretical outline of the subject reminds feminist political theorists that it *matters* to be very specific about what it means to be a “woman,” “woman of color,” “working-class woman,” or so on to address and redress the injustices *different* women face. Feminist political theorists need to explain the material reality of different women, their concrete daily struggles, to abolish the suffering they face in contemporary societies. However, such attempts to create a more just society can only be successful if feminist political theories remain open and do *not* make the dominating gesture that different “women” are so and not otherwise, since such a gesture recapitulates us into the imaginary delusion. If feminist political theorizing is situated in the imaginary domain, it leads to nothing else but an empty theorizing. Such a theorizing is not only alienated from itself but also alienated from those its aims fully to capture—women.

Any love such a theorizing pretends to show toward women remains a cold love, which does not lead to any justice. Rather, it perpetuates injustice, since it eradicates difference and reduces the other to false imaginary constructs. Such a theorizing leads to pain and suffering of those subsumed under total concepts. Although, as Lacan notes, “one doesn’t distinguish easily between the imaginary, symbolic and Real,”¹⁰⁴ it is then crucial for feminist political theorists to know in what domain they find themselves. If feminist political theorizing is located on the imaginary plane, then it is perpetuating injustice. The only way for feminist political theorizing to get out from the imaginary (and not fall back into it) is in the symbolic domain, by encircling the moment of the Real and non-identical with the assistance of (nonwhole) concepts.

This means that feminist political theorizing approaches its subject—women—from different angles of contextual perspectives, without ever fully grasping their meaning. The recognition that feminist political theorizing can move closer to its subject only by encircling it without ever fully capturing it does not mean that we should do away with the concept of “women” altogether. Rather, it implies that our attempts to symbolize women can never once and for all come to an end. If feminist political theorists also manage to deal with the fears and desires that the moment of noncompletion incites, then they are in a good position to stay out of the imaginary delusion of “grand feminist theories” that become oppressive to all those women who do not fit neatly into its boundaries. Only then can the “never once and for all coming to an end” open the *political* space for transformation.

Notes

1. Linda Zerilli, *Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 170.

2. In earlier drafts, I used the term *minimal theory of the subject*. However, the suggestion of a “minimum” tends to undermine my own call for a coherent (if not whole) subject as vitally important for transforming the sociopolitical sphere, while at the same time, a theoretical “outline” of a subject that can never be wholly defined recalls the sense in which this discussion takes place at just the moment where theory fails. I am indebted to Elric M. Kline for this insight.

3. I use the term *theorizing* instead of *theory* to underline this resistance to absolute signification.

4. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book III; The Psychoses, 1955-1956*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (New York: W. W. Norton, 1981, 1993), 164.

5. While continental philosophers have always been skeptical of the idea that the human subject could be considered a fully autonomous, self-conscious agent, in the late 1960s, this idea underwent the most radical assault that it had been exposed to until that date: With essays like “The Ends of Man,” Jacques Derrida pronounced that the subject was merely a fiction of the narratives by which she constructs herself. Michel Foucault announced the “death of (wo)man” in the *Order of Things* and argued that the subject was nothing else but the product of discourses that were themselves the outcome of oppressive networks of power. Although both thinkers aimed at a “return to the subject” in their later works, Derrida remained skeptical about the possibility of rethinking the subject without evoking the self-identical subject of modernity, and Foucault’s account of the subject remains the weakest part of his thought.

6. We find such an approach to Adorno, for example, in the works of Hauke Brunkhorst, *Adorno and Critical Theory* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999), and Peter Dews, *Logics of Disintegration: Poststructuralist Thought and the Claims of Critical Theory* (London and New York: Verso, 2007). In recent work, there is also a “return to the subject” in Adorno. See David Sherman, *Sartre and Adorno: The Dialectics of Subjectivity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007).

7. Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York and London: Continuum, 1966, 1973), 135, 406.

8. Recently, Rebecca Comay explains some of the commonalities and differences of these two thinkers' writings on Kant and de Sade: "Adorno avec Sade . . .," *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 17:1 (spring 2006): 6-19. However, Comay's treatment of Lacan remains marginal.

9. An exception is the collection of essays in Maggie O'Neill, ed., *Adorno, Culture and Feminism* (New York: Sage, 2001).

10. see Renée Heberle, ed. *Feminist Interpretations of Theodor Adorno*, (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006); and Lisa Yun Lee, *Dialectics of the Body: Corporeality in the Philosophy of T. W. Adorno* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005); and Wendy Brown, "Feminist Theory and the Frankfurt School: Introduction," *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 17, no. 1 (spring 2006): 1-5, 2.

11. Carry Hull shows us that the non-identical challenges totalizing concepts of "women" and acknowledges an objective material "reality" of women. Carry Hull, "Materiality in Theodor W. Adorno and Judith Butler," *Radical Philosophy* 84 (1997): 22-35. More recently, Gillian Howie explains the centrality of Adorno's non-identical to grasp the concrete historical dimensions of "women" without eliminating the contradiction this term implies. Gillian Howie, "The Economy of the Same: Identity, Equivalence, and Exploitation," in *Feminist Interpretations of Theodor Adorno*, ed. Renee Heberle (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 321-44.

12. Joel Whitebook's critical reception of Lacan allows him only to briefly explain similarities between Lacan's and Adorno's critiques on an autonomous ego in his *Perversion and Utopia: A Study in Psychoanalysis and Critical Theory* (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 1995). Moreover, Lacan has yet to make an entry into the contemporary Frankfurt School. "Until today the works of the psychoanalyst Lacan are modestly engaged with in this country [Germany]," argues Tim Böhme, "and if, then in a critical way." Tim Casper Böhme, *Ethik und Geniessen: Kant und Lacan* (Vienna: Turia & Kant, 2005), 9 (my translation).

13. The Anglo-American feminist reception of Lacan is mainly based upon his reading via French feminist theorists and the few texts of *Seminar XX* published in Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose, eds., *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the Ecole Freudienne*, trans. J. Rose (New York: W. W. Norton, 1982). Moreover, the full translation of *Book XX, Encore*, has only in 1998 become available to an English-speaking audience. French feminists, such as Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, and Hélène Cixous, have greatly developed Lacan's concepts of the imaginary and the symbolic but have less focused on the Real.

14. There are some feminist political theorists who draw on a psychoanalytic (albeit not Lacanian) framework. Iris Marion Young explains the unconscious moments of injustice with the assistance of Julia Kristeva's notion of abjection. *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 122-55. Also Judith Butler draws on the notion of abjection in her feminist political theory. See *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

15. Butler's early reading of Lacan in *Gender Trouble* is almost entirely based on Irigaray and Kristeva and the few texts of *Encore* published in *Feminine Sexuality*; see especially chapter 2. Her most sustained discussion of the Real in *Bodies that Matter* is entirely based on Slavoj Žižek's reading of this concept. See "Arguing with the Real," in *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 187-222. Also in her more recent work, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 46, she critiques Lacan without engaging with his work in a substantive manner.

16. Suzanne Barnard and Bruce Fink, eds., *Reading Seminar XX: Lacan's Major Work on Love, Knowledge, and Feminine Sexuality* (Albany: State University of New York, 2002).

17. That is, at the age of six to eighteen months.
18. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book II; The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1945-1955*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Sylvana Tomaselli (New York: W. W. Norton, 1981, 1993), 166.
19. Jacques Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge, Book XX; Encore! 1972-1973*, trans. Bruce Fink, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1998), 28.
20. Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 27.
21. Adorno uses identity thinking interchangeably with instrumental rationality.
22. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 5.
23. Lacan, *Book XI*, 167; *Book I*, 66.
24. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 53.
25. *Ibid.*, 14.
26. Because Adorno did not as clearly distinguish between the subject and the ego as Lacan did, he proposes at times a strengthening of the ego as a prerequisite to resistance against identity thinking. See Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia. Reflexionen aus dem beschädigten Leben* (Frankfurt, Germany: Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Verlag, 1997), 47, 79. However, a reading of Adorno with Lacan makes clear that whenever we have an ego, we can only be in the imaginary domain, which is the domain of identity thinking.
27. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 162, 157.
28. *Ibid.*, 178.
29. Lacan, *Book II*, 7.
30. For Lacan, these are the images of "mutilation, dismemberment, dislocation, evisceration, devouring, and bursting open of the body." Jacques Lacan, "Aggressiveness in Psychoanalysis," in *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 2002), 13.
31. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (Frankfurt, Germany: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1969), 146, 134.
32. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 70.
33. *Ibid.*, 149.
34. *Ibid.*, 197.
35. Adorno, "On Subject and Object," in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 245-58, 250.
36. Adorno, *Prisms*, trans. Samuel Weber and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), 235.
37. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 135.
38. Lacan, *Ecrits*, 388; cited in Dews, *Logics of Disintegration*, 104. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 113, 183.
39. Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 207.
40. The Real and the non-identical are then consistent with Adorno's notion of *immanent critique*. In contrast to a "transcendent critique" that critiques other theories from outside through its own principles, immanent critique unfolds through internal contradictions, which it does not aim to erase. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 5.
41. Lacan, *Book II*, 97.
42. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book VII; The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959-1960*, trans. Dennis Porter (New York: W.W. Norton, 1986, 1992), 118.
43. Drucilla Cornell, "The Ethical Message of Negative Dialectics," in *The Philosophy of the Limit* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 13-38, 24.

44. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 162, 157.
45. Lacan, *Book II*, 227.
46. To take away the fear of nature was already the central aim of myths; however, argue Max Horkheimer and Adorno, Enlightenment thinking is “mythic fear turned radical.” *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Continuum, 2002), 16.
47. Andrew Robinson, “A Political Theory of Constitutive Lack: A Critique,” *Theory and Event* 8, no. 1 (2005). His critique is almost entirely based on secondary literature.
48. For the Real in relation to trauma, see *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book XI; The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1973, 1977), 55.
49. Jacques Lacan, *Television: A Challenge to the Psychoanalytic Establishment*, trans. Jeffrey Mehlman, ed. Joan Copjec (New York: W. W. Norton, 1974, 1990), 82.
50. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 241, 281, 158.
51. Robyn Marasco shows us the prevalence of identity thinking in Adorno’s depictions of the feminine. More recently, I show how the feminine interacts with class in Adorno’s depictions of the working-class woman. See Claudia Leeb, “Desires and Fears: Adorno and the Working-Class Woman,” *Theory and Event* 11, no. 1 (February 2008).
52. Lacan, *Television*, 112.
53. Sebastiano Timpanaro even argues that we find in Lacan a favoring of the mind and a rejection of the body. Timpanaro’s discussion of his argument remains scarce and he puts Lacan in the same “pot” as Foucault. *On Materialism*, trans. Lawrence Garner (London: Verso, 1980), 188.
54. Materialism means here to “start out” from matter (and those poles associated with it, such as the object and the body) to counter the primacy of spirit (or the subject and the mind), prevalent in capitalist societies. However, by starting out from the secondary pole, Adorno (much like Marx) does not mean that we can do away with the dominant pole altogether, since this would imply another abstraction. Rather, the goal of his critical theory is to abolish the hierarchy between oppositions.
55. Jean-Joseph Goux, *Symbolic Economies: After Marx and Freud*, trans. Jennifer Curtis (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1973, 1990).
56. *Das Kapital: Kritik der politischen Ökonomie, Erster Band, Buch I*, in *Karl Marx Frederick Engels Werke, Band 23* (Berlin: Karl Dietz Verlag, 1947, 2001), 52 (my translation).
57. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 49. The non-identical is then linked to Marx’s notion of use value, which both Frederic Jameson and, more recently, Espen Hammer argued. Frederic Jameson, *Late Marxism Adorno, or, The Persistence of the Dialectic* (London: Verso, 1990), 23; Espen Hammer, *Adorno and the Political* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 31.
58. Both thinkers, albeit in unacknowledged ways, draw on Marx’s theory of alienation in their explanations.
59. For a detailed discussion of Marx’s theory of alienation, see Claudia Leeb, “Marx and the Gendered Structure of Capitalism,” *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 33, no. 7 (November 2007).
60. Lacan, *Book III*, 146.
61. Lacan, *Ecrits*, 6 (my emphasis).
62. Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.
63. Adorno, “On Subject and Object,” 252.
64. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 172.
65. *Ibid.*, 149.
66. Lacan, *Book II*, 95.

67. Filled out as a critique of poststructuralism, this is precisely the reason that constructionism and positivism, for all their apparent conflicts, seem to be settling down as complementary poles of a singular *ideology* of social science within late capitalist society, an ideology that wipes clean any notion of a subject capable of change outside the all-powerful "market."

68. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 205

69. Simon Jarvis points out that Adorno's materialism implies an impulse to end suffering: "Adorno, Marx, Materialism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Adorno*, ed. Tom Huhn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 79-100, 80.

70. See Renée Heberle, ed., *Feminist Interpretations of Theodor Adorno*.

71. Lacan refers here to the specific function of the signifier, which "functions as a signifier only to reduce the subject in question to no more than a signifier, to petrify the subject in the same movement in which it calls the subject to function, to speak, as subject." Lacan, *Book XI*, 207.

72. Lacan, *Book II*, 95.

73. For Adorno, suffering and, with that, physical impulses are the central source behind dialectical thinking: "The physical moment tells our knowledge that suffering ought not to be, that things should be different." Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 203.

74. Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia. Reflexionen aus dem beschädigten Leben* (Frankfurt, Germany: Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Verlag, 1997), 47, 79.

75. Jay Bernstein, *Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 402.

76. Lacan, *Book I*, 276.

77. Lacan, *Television*, 31.

78. For Lacan, such a violent reduction underlies the activities of the philanthropist, the pedagogue, and the reformer. Lacan, *Ecrits*, 9.

79. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 191.

80. Drucilla Cornell, "New Political Infamy and the Sacrilege of Feminism," in *Feminists Contest Politics and Philosophy*, Philosophy and Politics Series, ed. Lisa Gurley Claudia Leeb, and Anna Moser (New York and Brussels: Peter Lang, 2005), 247-67.

81. Regina-Becker Schmidt, "Identitätslogik und Gewalt: Zum Verhältnis von Kritischer Theorie und Feminismus," *Beiträge zur Feministischen Theorie und Praxis* 12 (1989): 51-64, 57.

82. Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 47.

83. Lacan, *Book XI*, 204.

84. Luce Irigaray, *This Sex which is not One*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985).

85. Lacan, *Ecrits*, 143.

86. Lacan, *Book I*, 264.

87. Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 177.

88. *Ibid.*, 47.

89. Lacan, *Ecrits*, 275.

90. It seems to me that Lacan's notion of "phallic *jouissance*," which is for him the "idiot's *jouissance*" because the subject never stops trying to reach an impossible wholeness, is perhaps more than his equation of the phallus with the Real in a position to expose the imaginary delusion of the phallus. I would like to thank Patchen Markell, who pushed me to rethink Butler's critique. Lacan, *Book XX*, 111.

91. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 103.

92. Hammer, *Adorno and the Political*, 161.

93. Lacan, *Book III*, 198.

94. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 174.

95. Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

96. *Ibid.*, 110.

97. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 18.

98. Like Lacan, Adorno is then rather suspicious of any notion of utopia or reconciled state of oppositions. However, we find in Adorno—more than Lacan—the *hope* that we might find oppositions one day not as *aufgehoben*, since this is impossible, but at least in a reconciled state, which opens the possibility for a future, less (class-) antagonistic society.

99. Adorno, “On Subject and Object,” 247.

100. I do not aim here to explain out in more detail the similarities and differences between Butler and Adorno/Lacan, since this would go beyond the scope of this essay.

101. Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 21.

102. Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 180.

103. This is what makes her work more of a “flip side” to positivism than a genuine theoretical challenge. A subject employed as merely pragmatic strategy cannot enact political change, because subjectively motivated change presupposes a subject-in-outline. In fact, without subject, there is no non-identical, because everything is totalized under the “object”—which was just the program of positivism from the beginning. Foucauldian approaches to feminist political theorizing get the same result from a different direction.

104. Lacan, *Book I*, 86.

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