

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 founds *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