

## Adorno & identity seminar series

### Reflections on the politics of non-identity

Frank Müller  
Centre Marc Bloch Berlin

03/26/2021

#### Abstract

Adorno is not a thinker of the political, although his theory is of great political significance. His political intention is expressed in a mode of theory based on the concept of the nonidentical. To talk about politics in Adorno means, then, to describe an impossible kind of politics, a „politics of nonidentity“, because non-identity refuses all kind of identification – even those to the common grounds of political theory as people, public, parties or peer groups. Accordingly, the concept of nonidentity leads to a critical analysis of the constitution of majorities, of the so-called normal, and so to a critical social theory. The aim is, to develop the dialectics within the concept of nonidentity, between concrete intervention and utopian transformation.

#### Theses

The politics of non-identity offers a utopian line of thought, not in the sense of a positively illustrated utopia, but rather in the critical sense of utopia with regard to our present.

Non-identity is neither a kind of radical „counteridentity“ nor a kind of so called „no-identity“.

Non-identity is not the same as difference.

Non-identity knows exactly what it refutes, without defining itself.

The politics of non-identity has to face a double task: a negative-critical contextualization of non-identity and a reflection on some kind of theoretical progress linked to it.

#### Strategies

Non-identity cannot be attributed exclusively to the person of Adorno nor to concrete, actual social movements or theoretical interests. In both cases, the result is an *identification* of non-identity.

A politics of non-identity cannot be contented within a politics of recognition, its aim is the transformation of society – even if this aim can by now only be articulated as a utopian perspective.

An affirmation of negation, of the negative attribution of identity, is possible; an affirmation of non-identity entails critical positioning in a concrete conflict of identities in order to transcend the eternal identity game.

The politics of non-identity develops a *dialectics of non-identity in itself* between the analysis of the experience of non-identity (concrete intervention) and the persistent pursuit of global change.

A politics of non-identity always plays on two tables: without neglecting concrete, daily struggles, it also maintains the global, utopian aspiration that justice will be done.

## References

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**Best, Steven / Kellner, Douglas** (1991): *Postmodern Theory. Critical Interrogations*. Macmillan Education Ltd 1991, p. 225-233: „Adornos Proto-Postmodern-Theory“

**Dallmayr, Fred** (1997): „The Politics of Nonidentity: Adorno, Postmodernism – and Edward Said“, in: *Political Theory*, 1, p. 33–56

„What does the move to otherness, difference, and nonidentity imply? Does it signal a leap beyond the cogito into a quasi-Kantian "thing-in-itself" – a kind of objective *counteridentity* beyond the pale of cognition and interpretation? Or does it again herald an exodus into a no-man's-land bereft of all distinctions, into a realm of radical negativity, of a *nonidentity* in the sense of the negation of every identity?“ (Dallmayr (1997), p. 34)

„Above all, nonidentity in his treatment is not simply a paean to particularity, to an immediately given singularity (or counteridentity).“ (Dallmayr (1997), p. 37f.)

„Most important, nonidentity in Adorno's formulation is not equivalent to a mere erasure of identity, to a leap into a radical negativity (or no-identity). “ And further on: „First, the status of negativity as such demands reflection. Conceived as a vacuum or emptiness, how could nonidentity "be" anything at all? ... To treat it as such a place implies a paradoxical reification of negativity or nonbeing. “ (Dallmayr (1997), p. 38)

„Curiously, thus, nonidentity can be the emblem both of factual-particular distinctness (counteridentity) and indifference (no-identity). “ (Dallmayr (1997), p. 47)

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**Holloway, John** (2009): *Negativity & Revolution. Adorno an Political Activism*. Pluto Press

**Sonderegger, Ruth** (2020): „Eine keineswegs verpasste Begegnung. Zu Fred Motens Auseinandersetzung mit Theodor W. Adorno“, in: *Zeitschrift für kritische Theorie*, 50-51, 2020, p. 255-283.

„Während Moten im Angesicht und vollen Bewusstsein vollendeter Unfreiheit ein affirmativer Denker des Widerstands wird, bleibt Adorno ein negativer Theoretiker des Standhaltens.“ (Sonderegger 2020, 256)

But at the same time, she says: „Nicht zuletzt ist erstaunlich, dass Moten Adornos negative Dialektik auf eine geradezu umwerfend affirmative Weise entführt.“, by the „affirmative force of ruthless negation“ (Sonderegger 2020, 256; 267ff.)

„Die große Differenz von Adorno und Moten scheint mir also nicht darin zu liegen, dass der eine mehr zur Negation und der andere mehr zur Affirmation neigt.“ (Sonderegger 2020, 274)

**Czolleck, Max**: Desintegriert Euch! München 2018.

**Czolleck, Max**: Gegenwartsbewältigung. München 2020.