THEODOR W. ADORNO:
ethics and politics of forms of life

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ABSTRACTS OF THE PAPERS
Julia Christ (UPJV)
Entre pensée du fétiche et pensée de l'un. Quelle totalisation traverse la société capitaliste?
Tout au long de son œuvre Adorno opère avec deux concepts centraux pour penser la société capitaliste: d'un côté le concept marxien de fétiche de la marchandise qui remplace celui d'idéologie. De l'autre côté celui de totalité qui décrit la forme de cette même société. S'il est évident que le concept d'idéologie peut servir à comprendre un processus de totalisation, le concept de fétiche en revanche pose problème. En deçà de la pensée de l'un, le fétichisme bien au contraire constitue une représentation de forces multiples structurant le monde. Notre question sera alors de savoir quel concept de totalité est à l'œuvre dans la philosophie d'Adorno lorsqu'il fonde sa théorie de l'idéologie sur le fétichisme.

Peter Dews (University of Essex)
Adorno and the Philosophy of Improvisation
It is known that Adorno's highly critical response to jazz was based on reference of a limited range of music – for example, works by Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington and Benny Goodman. He does not show any familiarity with the style of jazz known as bebop, or with the various kinds of post-bop jazz which emerged in the nineteen fifties and sixties. In this talk I will seek to do two things. Firstly, to test whether aspects of Adorno's critique which might be considered to have some validity can be extended to later forms of jazz, subsequent to the swing era. Secondly, to examine the extent to which jazz improvisation, as an artistic practice, can in fact fulfill Adorno's requirements – as explored in Aesthetic Theory – for art to retain its integrity in the era of advanced capitalism.

Estelle Ferrarese (UPJV)
A life that does live. Reflections on the meaning of life and death in Adorno’s work
This paper aims to grasp what Adorno means by describing capitalism as a form of life in which 'life does not live', and what would be a life that does live. On the one hand, neither force erected into an absolute principle, nor the support of a biologizing reductionism, the life that Adorno refers to cannot be separated from its form – and, in contrast with what we find in Giorgio Agamben, this in-separation does not have anything normative about it. On the other hand, Adorno gives importance to phenomena of ossification, fossilization, and death, under the influence of the young Lukacs, of Benjamin, and of Marx himself. Death is here a form for which everything is both thing and instrument, built upon ruins and forgetting, one that has become autonomous from social practices and from human activities. It thus seems that 'death' refers in general in Adorno to the seizure of possibles, to the loss of possibles for a society, for labour, or for a subjectivity.
The paper examines Adorno’s ambivalent view of human love, and especially of mimesis and the “warmth of things”: Adornian reflections on (non) damaged material objects for and within love can be better understood, finally, by comparing these things damage human relationships in various ways. The ambivalent place of love that might offer a special lens through which social critics can glimpse the deficits and contradictions of society and, at the same time, what social relations in general could be in a better world.

I proceed in two steps: In the first one, I try to explain the critical function of love by focusing on Adorno’s idea of mimesis, intended both as a form of human interaction and as a form of knowledge in which sameness and difference, autonomy and heteronomy, fusion and separation have to be thought as dialectically intertwined. In the second part, I clarify the ambivalence of love by analyzing Adorno’s intuition that intimate relationships can flourish only outside “the isolated cell of pure inwardness”, “in live contact with the warmth of things” (Adorno 1951/2005, 42–43). Far from escaping the “external world”, as e.g. in Hannan Arendt’s view, lovers need a world of material things that connect them and make their relationships flourish. Produced and exchanged as commodities in a capitalist world, however, these things damage human relationships in various ways. The ambivalent place of material objects for and within love can be better understood, finally, by comparing Adorno with the early work of Eva Illouz (1998).

If these threads are brought together, a life that does live appears as a life for which living must remain indeterminate, and the spectre of a life conscious of its always-already social and mediated character.
by confronting it to Adorno’s aesthetics texts such as the critic of cultural industry in Dialectic of Enlightenment, the Philosophy of New Music, and The Fetish Character of Music and the Regression of Listening. What status can we confer on this classification which, beyond the types of listeners (expert, emotional, etc.), points to ethical attitudes, ways of living and referring to the social order? What sort of normativity is at work in the concept of infantile regression in musical listening and how is it produced by the musical and compositional style itself? As we know, music is never cut off from the socio-economical context in which it is made and broadcasted, however it is not freed from axiological consideration. We will try to describe this narrow path Adorno takes which excludes both the idea of progress in culture and the conservative complaint of cultural decline.

**Philip Hogh** (Carl von Ossietzky Universität Oldenburg)

**Pain and Progress**

The idea that the expression of suffering is constitutive for any philosophical search for truth plays a central role in Adorno’s thinking. However, Adorno’s definition of suffering has always remained very general. If, according to a widespread critique of Adorno, he had said more precisely which kind of suffering should not be and how it could be prevented, his theory would have led to far more concrete practical consequences. In my talk I will try to understand Adorno’s general remarks about suffering as an instruction for specification. To this end, I will associate recent philosophical approaches to bodily pain with Adorno’s concept of progress, whereby pain and the social interaction with it will appear as a significantly political issue. As a political concept, pain can thus provide us with an idea about when a form of life can truly be called human.

**Maria Muhle** (Akademie der Bildenden Künste München)

**Adorno, Caillois, and mimetism**

In 1935, Roger Caillois publishes his short text on “Mimicry and legendary psychasthenia” in the Surrealist journal Minotaure in which he looks at forms of excessive mimetic animal behavior, specifically in insects, that he links, through his analysis of “legendary psychasthenia” to the human subject. Against the assumption that the insects’ mimetic adaptive behavior to their surroundings or milieu is to be understood as a defense mechanism, Caillois claims that it does not correspond to the instinct of self preservation but instead it enacts an “instinct of renunciation”. Mimicry becomes pathological inasmuch as it dissolves the distinction between the organism and its milieu. In 1937, Caillois publishes a version of his famous text on “The praying mantis” that specifically attracts Theodor W. Adorno’s attention, who then refers repeatedly to Caillois’ provocative theses in his correspondence with Walter Benjamin and Max Horkheimer and reviews the mantis text the following year for the Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung. Adorno also refers to the thesis on mimicry in his correspondence before explicitly quoting Caillois in the Dialectics of Enlightenement. The talk will look at the different lines of reception of Caillois’ thinking by Adorno and the members or friends of the Institut für Sozialforschung, which is at least ambivalent in the beginning before radically rejecting Caillois by calling his position “proto-fascist” (Benjamin). At the same time, Caillois’ reflections on mimesis seem to have marked Adorno’s own concept of mimesis from the Dialectics of Enlightenment to the Aesthetic Theory (as well as the one Benjamin puts forward in “On the mimetic Faculty”). The talk will thus focus on this ambivalent relationship as well as on the wider relationship between the Collège de Sociologie around Caillois, Georges Bataille and Michel Leiris and the Institut für Sozialforschung in the pre-war years in Paris in order to retrace the understandings and misunderstandings between the two schools of thought, as well as to possibly uncover their common ground.

**Selim Nadi** (Sciences Po/ Universität Bielefeld)

**T.W. Adorno and C.L.R. James: a missed encounter?**

In his last book, Left-Wing Melancholia (2016), Enzo Traverso writes that in Adorno’s critique of the very idea of “progress”, his focus on Nazism made him completely ignore the colonial world. According to Traverso, this “ignorance” is the sign of a “colonial unconscious” of critical theory. This paper will discuss this assertion in pursuing what Traverso calls a “missed encounter” between T.W. Adorno and the Trinidadian historian and philosopher C.L.R. James. While a few years after Adorno and Horkheimer’s Dialektik der Aufklärung, James published his study on H. Melville’s Moby Dick, developing – in a very different way – some similar topics. Adorno never really wrote on colonialism and racism – except some very simplistic studies on jazz – nevertheless, one could argue that his methodology and some of his favorite themes could help us to understand how colonial-racism works. Our hypothesis, then, is that what the late Cedric J. Robinson labelled “Black Marxism”, and especially C.L.R. James’ “Black Marxism”, could help us to enrich Adorno’s critique of “progress” and “modernity”. As a case study, the “missed encounter” between James and Adorno will help us to interrogate the larger absence of intellectual relations between what is sometimes labelled under “critical theory” (even if this concept is not precise enough: putting together intellectuals from Walter Benjamin to Theodor W. Adorno) and Black Marxism (W.E.B. Du Bois, C.L.R. James, Richard Wright,...).

**Salima Naït Ahmed** (UPJV)

**La méthode de l’« identification dialectique » de Sohn-Rethel et la genèse du patriarchat dans la Dialektik der Aufklärung**

C’est un « grand ébranlement spirituel » que provoque sur Adorno la découverte de la théorie de la connaissance de Sohn-Rethel en 1936. Mais à l’enthousiasme de son critique de la “missed encounter” between T.W. Adorno and the Trinidadian historian and philosopher C.L.R. James, our hypothesis is that what the late Cedric J. Robinson labelled “Black Marxism”, and especially C.L.R. James’ “Black Marxism”, could help us to enrich Adorno’s critique of “progress” and “modernity”. As a case study, the “missed encounter” between James and Adorno will help us to interrogate the larger absence of intellectual relations between what is sometimes labelled under “critical theory” (even if this concept is not precise enough: putting together intellectuals from Walter Benjamin to Theodor W. Adorno) and Black Marxism (W.E.B. Du Bois, C.L.R. James, Richard Wright,...).
de la critique matérialiste. Contre les accusations de Horkheimer, nous aimerions montrer l’influence souterraine de Sohn-Rethel dans la Dialektik der Aufklärung et plus spécifiquement que sa réflexion est la condition de possibilité de la compréhension du propos consacré à la critique du patriarcat. Bien que Sohn-Rethel n’y soit pas mentionné, seule son extension de la méthode génétique matérialiste aux catégories de l’entendement rend véritablement lisible la critique de la rationalité moderne identifiée à l’émergence d’une subjectivité masculine.

Sohn-Rethel's method of "dialectical identification" and the genesis of patriarchy in the Dialektik der Aufklärung

In 1936 the discovery of Sohn-Rethel’s theory of knowledge causes on Adorno a “great spiritual shock”. But after Adorno’s enthusiasm quickly succeeds Horkheimer’s rejection. The latter accuses the genetic approach of Sohn-Rethel of being a veiled idealism under the guise of the completion of materialist criticism. Against the accusations of Horkheimer, we would like to show the subterranean influence of Sohn-Rethel in the Dialektik der Aufklärung and more specifically that his thought is the condition of understanding of the critique of patriarchy in the book. Although Sohn-Rethel is not mentioned here, only his extension of the materialistic genetic method to the categories of the understanding makes the critique of modern rationality - as identified with the emergence of a masculine subjectivity - truly understandable.

Danielle Petherbridge (University College Dublin)
After Exile: Reflections on Vulnerable Life
How might we contend with a form of life constituted by exile? In Minima Moralia, Adorno writes that “[d]welling, in the proper sense, is now impossible” and, that today, “it is part of morality not to be at home in one’s home.” In this paper, I begin with Adorno’s reflections on living in an exilic state and the impossibility of dwelling, and bring them together with Said’s notes about writing after exile. More specifically, I explore what might be drawn from Adorno’s work for an ethics of vulnerable life and the potential for critique after exile.

Aurelia Peyrical (Université Paris-Nanterre)
« Excédent » et personnalité chez Adorno
Adorno appelle « supplément » (das Hinzutretende) un élément de nouveauté caractéristique de l’activité morale. Une telle activité, aux yeux d’Adorno, est néanmoins « bloquée », car pour la monade qu’est l’individu dans le monde capitaliste, tout est déjà connu, du fait des entraves que subissent sonaptitude à faire des expériences et son attention à la particularité. L’individu authentique serait pourtant une entité en rapport dialectique avec le non-soi, une « personnalité » réalisée, c’est-à-dire ouverte à l’expérience et aux rencontres avec autrui, une entité dont les actions ne reproduisent pas uniquement des schémas d’action ou de pensée hérités de la société. Quel(s) contre-modèle(s) à la conscience réifiée, qui définit pour Adorno la personnalité manipulatrice, sa pensée dialectique nous permet-elle de penser ? On tentera de donner quelques éléments pour dessiner en néogat le personnalité digne de ce nom chez Adorno, à partir de l’analyse de ce « supplément » en jeu dans l’activité morale.

Addendum and personality in Adorno
Adorno calls “addendum” (das Hinzutretende) an element of novelty that characterizes moral activity. Such an activity, in Adorno’s view, is nonetheless « blocked », because for individuals in the administered world, everything is always already known. Their aptitude to experience and to pay attention to particularities are aspects of their personalities which in the current world cannot develop. A fully-fleshed individual, however, would be an entity displaying a dialectical relationship to the world, a real « personality », that is to say an individual open to experience. Which counter-models of the reified consciousness – for Adorno the definition of the manipulative personality – do we encounter in his work? We will try to give some elements on what a fully-fleshed personality would look like, from the perspective of this “addendum” at play in moral agentivity.
Lucie Wezel (Université de Paris 8)
Adorno penseur de l'éthique animale ?
Mon exposé vise à interroger la place et la fonction que l'animal occupe dans la pensée adornienne. En effet, de La Dialectique de la raison co-écrite avec Horkheimer à la Dialectique négative en passant par les Minima Moralia, c'est tout un bestiaire qu'Adorno convoque pour interroger la mutilation conjointe des hommes et des animaux au sein de la « société administrée ». Le « négativisme éthique » (R. Jaeggi) du philosophe de Francfort part des formes de vie aliénées pour critiquer la société engendrant une telle aliénation, et permet d’interroger ce que la mutilation de l’animal révèle de notre société capitaliste dans son rapport à la nature et à la corporéité. L’attention extrême qu’Adorno porte à la souffrance des hommes et des animaux apparaît ainsi comme un moment d’irréductibilité à partir duquel recomposer une éthique. L’enjeu de mon exposé est double : il s’agit de se demander, d’une part, si les réflexions adorniennes sur la question animale convergent vers une éthique de la pitié inspirée des écrits de Rousseau et de Schopenhauer ; et, d’autre part, de se demander quelle peut être la portée et l’actualité de la réflexion d’Adorno sur la question animale pour les antispécistes d’aujourd’hui.

Adorno and animal ethics
This paper questions the place and role of the animal in Adorno’s thought. Indeed, from Dialectic of Enlightenment, written together with Horkheimer, to Negative Dialectics, through Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life, Adorno convenes a bestiary to question the joint mutilation of man and animal in the “governed society.” Adorno’s “ethical negativism” (R. Jaeggi) originates in the forms of damaged lives to criticize the society that produces such alienation, and allows us to wonder what this mutilation of animal says of our capitalist society in relation to nature and corporeality. Adorno’s utmost attention to human and animal suffering thus appears as a moment of irreducibility, from which an ethics may be reconstructed. The stakes of this paper are twofold: on the one hand, question whether Adorno’s thoughts on the animal converge towards an ethics of mercy inspired by Rousseau and Schopenhauer; on the other, question the reach and actuality of Adorno’s thought for contemporary antispécists.

Dagmar Wilhelm (UWE, Bristol)
Adorno and the future of feminism
The paper will analyse what Adorno’s remarks on progress and the “ethical thought” that can be found in the Negative Dialectics and Minima Moralia can contribute to our understanding of feminism. Special focus will be the relation between the notion of progress, the new categorical imperative and current debates in feminism, e.g. the debate that surrounds transfeminism.