

**CfP: Nonidentity. Current Configurations in Critical Theories and Poetics, NYU
Interdisciplinary Graduate Conference at the Department of German, NYU (April 28-29,
2022) in cooperation with the Department of Comparative Literature, NYU**

Guest Speakers: Romy Opperman, Mark Christian Thompson, Anna Parkinson, Robert J. C. Young

Organized by Alexander Braunegg, Ioanna Kostopoulou and Julia Landmann

Can we mobilize concepts of nonidentity as resources for current configurations of resistance and disfiguration in critical theories and poetics? Our conference traces this question by connecting the emergence of nonidentity in the Frankfurt School with Postcolonial, Indigenous, and Black Studies. Focusing on contemporary entanglements of critical theories and poetics, we seek to provide answers on how postcolonial theories and the Frankfurt School enunciate concepts liminal to conceptualization.

According to Adorno/Horkheimer, the identity principle serves to dominate nature by subsuming particulars under universal concepts. An “ur-form of ideology”, the identity principle correlates with the compulsion towards identification with authority. In continuations of the normative and historically contextualized reflection of critical theory throughout the last decades however, certain notions of identity have been discussed as political tools to counter structural violence: identity politics started with analyses of forms of oppression of particularities by the governing concepts to reclaim the previously stigmatized accounts of social groups (Combahee River Collective) and has been critically reconfigured in postcolonial theorems like the third space (Bhabha). For both, the Frankfurt School and postcolonial theories, the relation between identity and nonidentity was intricately mediated.

The Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School deployed the term identity ambiguously within reflections on philosophical, economical, and social discourses. Identity thus figures as a nexus highlighting how structures of thought are sedimented in and carried on by social and economic operations:

- Epistemologically, “to think means to identify” (Adorno), as a reference and an equation. Identity is a necessary stage of dialectics, wherein to think presupposes subsumption, and the form of the subject mediated through conceptual synthesis is itself a form of identity. Its mediating process prevents the concept from generating an identity between subject and object; nonidentity denotes a concept of what escapes conceptualization. Erupting from the contradictions stored within the implementation of the identity principle, it is exerted on conceptual thought as it is carried out by the subject.

- The principles of abstraction and exchangeability, the essence of capitalist society, are correlative with and reproduced by the conceptual operations of identity thinking in society’s subjects and link philosophy to the economic and social sphere. From the standpoint of the reproduction of totality in the capitalist society, nonidentity, then, is living labor, the precondition of the production of value. The nonidentity between capital and subsumed labor appears in the contradiction between reducing the cost of labor and realizing the value of the products as social coercion expressed in sicknesses, accidents, strike.

- The identity principle is also analyzed by the Frankfurt School in its psychic dimension of the connection between the abstract subject and the concept of the modern individual. The experience of transference can be seen as the starting point for Freud's concepts of identification, projection, and the ego ideal. In Freud's *Massenpsychologie*, it becomes clear that the ego ideal has political implications for the formation of mass movements.

For Adorno, any critique of the existing totality has to orientate itself by nonidentity through the process of mediation that performs the self-destruction of conceptual synthesis and transforms theoretical thinking into poetic operations.

Our conference seeks to discuss current reconfigurations of nonidentity in literary texts, in transformations of critical theory in Decolonial Theory, Black Studies, Indigenous Studies, as well as involvements with the Frankfurt School, that mediate between critiques of capitalism, colonialism, and racialization. We want to ask whether nonidentity can serve as a resource for resistance within the entwinement of thought and the economic and social sphere under the present political conditions. As reconfigurations of nonidentity, we could consider notions of disfiguration: the more-than-human "'demonic ground' of Caliban's 'Woman'" (Wynter) liminal to the governing configuration of the human, and Spillers' "undifferentiated identity" of flesh as a passage between the human and the non-human. We could also think of notions of displacement that counter the history of forced displacement as in Byrd's notion of "transit" indigeneity, and in the poetics of "untelling" in NorubeSe Philip's poem *Zong!*. Or we could take into account the explicit interlacing of poetic operations with theoretical practices such as Cusicanqui's "Ch'ixi", and Brand's metaphor of "the door of no return" to continue a way of thought that takes rupture as a point of unending departure.

We are soliciting papers concerned with contemporary entanglements of critical theory and poetics. Topics of interest may include but are not limited to:

- mediations between identity and nonidentity in postcolonial theories, Indigenous Studies, and Black Studies
- mediations between identity and nonidentity in the Frankfurt School
- critical concepts liminal to conceptualization such as "desedimentation" (Chandler), "nonsite" (Moreiras), "poethics" (da Silva) or "disaggregation" (Nichols)
- literary forms of non-identity, displacement, and indigenization
- the authoritarian personality as figuration of identity/non-identity
- nonidentity between the more-than-human and the End of Man
- impasses of identification in psychoanalysis and psychoanalytical investigations in the social formation of identity

We welcome proposals from graduate, doctoral, and postdoctoral researchers working in fields including but not limited to Cultural and Literary Studies, Critical Theory, Decolonial Theory, Black Studies, and Gender Studies. The conference will adopt a hybrid in-person and online format. Applicants are invited to submit a 250-word abstract of their conference paper to Julia Landmann (jal9436@nyu.edu) and Ioanna Kostopoulou (ik2274@nyu.edu) by **January 30, 2022**.