

# Desires and Fears: Women, Class and Adorno

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## 1. Introduction

Feminist thinkers have both appropriated the central concepts of the early Frankfurt School thinker Theodor W. Adorno, such as his concept of the non-identical, and pointed at his problematic depictions of the feminine.<sup>1</sup> Despite the growing literature on the latter there is so far no scholarship that shows how the feminine interacts with class in Adorno's figuration of the working-class woman.<sup>2</sup> She appears in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and Adorno's later texts as the maid, Circe, *süsse Mädels* (sweet girl) and the waitress. Although Adorno's central aim was to challenge instrumental rationality as he found it in its exploded forms in modern societies -- in the culture industry and in fascism -- I show that he resorts to such a rationality in his figurations of the working-class woman.<sup>3</sup>

I draw on the theoretical framework of the French psychoanalytic thinker Jacques Lacan to grasp the deeper desires and fears that implicate Adorno in the very same instrumental rationality he aims to counter with his critical theory. Working-class woman appears in Adorno's works as the fantasy object *petit a* in three figurations, the *phallic woman*, the *castrating woman* and the *castrated woman*. I show that these figurations are a response to what Lacan termed the Real -- the element in the symbolic domain and its signifiers that resists absolute symbolization. Objects *petit a* are the historically contingent objects that takes on the function of unconscious fantasies to conceal the impossibility of attaining wholeness in the symbolic domain.<sup>4</sup>

1. In her first form, we encounter working-class woman as the "*phallic*

woman," the fantasy object petit a as she is linked to the imaginary domain.<sup>5</sup> In this domain the subject desires to obtain her/his wholeness via identifying with an idealized whole image of an other with a small o, which is either the subject's mirror image or the image of a fellow human being.<sup>6</sup> In Adorno's writings we encounter the *phallic woman* as the idealized "whole" woman that marks the utopian moment of reconciliation and a time when instrumental rationality has not yet made its advances. The central moment behind this unconscious fantasy object is *desire*, the desire to achieve an impossible wholeness via the identification with the idealized whole woman.

2. As fantasy object petit a, which refers to the moment of the Real, working-class woman appears in her second form as the "*castrating woman*." The Real is linked to anxiety insofar as it confronts the subject with the fact that she remains a *subject troué* (a subject-with-holes or non-whole) in the symbolic order no matter how much she desires to become whole.<sup>7</sup> Here working-class woman turns into the "object, which by essence destroys him...in which he will never truly be able to find reconciliation."<sup>8</sup> We find her in this second form in Adorno's texts as the *Wesen* (essence) of instrumental rationality, which castrates subjects in late capitalist societies.<sup>9</sup>

3. Precisely at the moment when the anxiety-provoking image of the *castrating woman* appears, we encounter her in her third form, the fantasy object petit a, which is linked to the symbolic domain -- the "*castrated woman*." The *castrated woman* serves a central means to ward off the intrusion of the traumatic Real. Whereas the *phallic woman* is the result of the desire to become whole, the *castrated woman* is the result of the anxiety that such wholeness is impossible. We encounter her in Adorno's texts as the complete victim of instrumental rationality, unable to resist the culture industry or fascism. Since the working-class woman (and the working-class man) end up "castrated" in Adorno's thought, Adorno hopes to spare the bourgeois male from his "castration" through instrumental rationality.

In section two, "Odysseus's Encounter with the Maids" I draw on "Excursus 1: Odysseus or Myth and Enlightenment," a chapter in the *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, to show that despite Adorno's central insights into the mechanisms of bourgeois, male domination, he fails to reflect on how his figurations of the working-class woman contributes

to such a domination. In section three, "Odysseus's Encounter with Circe," I explain the three figurations of the working-class woman in Adorno's interpretation of Odysseus's encounter with Circe in *Excursus 1*. To show the instrumentalizing aspects of his engagement with Circe, I also introduce Adorno's stance on prostitution.

In section four, "The Working-Class Woman in *Minima Moralia*," I explain how the idea of the *castrated woman* parallels the idea of the *castrating woman* as two sides of a coin. Both serve to render working-class woman harmless, either through castrating her or through demonizing her. In section five "Instrumental Rationality and the Working-Class Man," I draw on the *Dialektik der Aufklärung* as well as Adorno's later writings on the culture industry to show that his depictions of the working-class man as feminized is another means to ward off the possibility of bourgeois men's mutilation in modern societies. In the last section six, "The Possibility of Resistance" I aim to show the possibilities for the working-class woman to resist her instrumentalization.

## 2. Odysseus's Encounter with the Maids

The self-reflexive starting point of the *Dialektik der Aufklärung* is Adorno and Horkheimer's experience with German fascism and the culture industry in the United States. One of the central books of the early Frankfurt school, it was initially published in 1944 under the title *Philosophische Fragmente*. In this book, the authors aim to defend their central thesis: "myth is already enlightenment; and enlightenment reverts to mythology."<sup>10</sup> We can already find in myths the moment of enlightenment rationality, and enlightenment rationality depends on myths. "Myth is the original form of the objectifying definition," argue the authors, "The same form is already far advanced in the Homeric epic and confounds itself in modern positivist science."<sup>11</sup>

Feminist thinkers have pointed at the inherent contradictions in the *Dialektik der Aufklärung*. Regina Becker Schmidt, as an example, acknowledges the importance of this work to explain the mechanisms of bourgeois, male domination already present in myth and complete in modernity. At the same time she argues that we can find in it "virile projections upon women that remain caught in traditional

prejudices."<sup>12</sup> More recently, Robyn Marasco shows us that despite Adorno's awareness of the instrumentalization of woman in the *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, he cannot break out of instrumental rationality in their depictions of the feminine.<sup>13</sup>

Despite these important feminist insights there has so far been no attention to the ways in which the feminine interacts with class in the *Dialektik der Aufklärung* as we find it played out in the figure of the working-class woman. We encounter her for the first time in "Excursus 1: Odysseus or Myth and Enlightenment," the chapter ascribed to Adorno in the lengthy footnote 5. Here Adorno aims at an interpretation of Homer's *Gesang* twenty<sup>14</sup> to point at the moments of enlightenment rationality in myth. Aiming to sleep, Odysseus "notices how the maids *Mägde* sneak toward the suitors at night."<sup>15</sup> Since Odysseus's bourgeois self is not completely formed, rationality has not yet managed to completely suppress nature (his desire).

"The individual as subject is still unreconciled to himself, still unsure. His affective forces (his mettle and his heart) still react independently to him."<sup>16</sup> As a consequence, Odysseus becomes tormented with sexual desire for the working-class woman, who stands in this scene for the "threat of nature," Odysseus manages to escape by using self-preserving *Vernunft*. Adorno aims to explain with this scene the double movement of domination of outer and inner nature. The domination over outer nature (the working-class woman) proceeds here via a domination of inner nature (sexual desire) with the assistance of rationality.<sup>17</sup>

Adorno explains here the two methods that contribute to bourgeois, male domination. First, "the affect is compared with the animal that the human *unterjocht* (subjects)."<sup>18</sup> Once Odysseus becomes aware of the sexual engagement between the suitors and the maids, his heart is "barking him." The comparison of sexual desire with the non-human (barking-dog) allows Odysseus to distance himself from and subject his desires (nature). Second, the subjection of nature proceeds via practicing *Geduld* (patience). Odysseus constantly has to make his desires wait.<sup>19</sup> *Geduld* has, according to Adorno, become the central feature of bourgeois society: a society where desires always have to wait for later.<sup>20</sup>

The problem here is that Adorno is mainly concerned with the bourgeois, male's subjection of his desires for the working-class woman. He fails to concern himself with the fact that the subjection of *his* desires goes hand in hand with the subjection of working-class woman. In the first form, she appears in this scene as fantasy object *petit a*, the *phallic woman*. Here she stands for the Adornian utopia, the blissful time when the bourgeois, male's sexual desire was not yet subjected to instrumental rationality. *Magdt* is the term for a female domestic servant and a female farm worker. It still has its remnants in the German terms *Mädchen* (girl) or *Mädel*.<sup>21</sup>

The *Magdt* is imagined by Adorno as the one who has not yet been mutilated by instrumental rationality into an ideal of femininity, which would preclude active feminine sexuality. It is the idealized wholeness of the maid, fantasized in her active pursuit of her (sexual) desire, that constitutes working-class woman as the moment of utopia, the *phallic woman* and marks her in contrast to the middle-class woman, Penelope.<sup>22</sup> However, the image of the *phallic woman*, who actively pursues her desire, can only be fantasized *secretly* in a (although very lengthy) footnote of the text.

Adorno tells us that the *Mägde schleichen* (sneak) in the night to the suitors.<sup>23</sup> In the original Homeric text, we learn that after Odysseus went to bed "the women came out of the hall, the ones that usually united with the suitors and cause each other laughing and serenity."<sup>24</sup> The *Mägde* then did not, as Adorno and Horkheimer suggest, sneak anywhere. They openly came out from the hall, and had fun and serenity with the suitors "as they usually do." The term *schleichen* suggests something that one does secretly, usually because one has to hide something.

Adorno's imagination of the working-class woman as a (secret) utopia in which *she* enjoys active feminine sexuality can be read as a positive moment in his figurations of the working-class woman. However, Adorno is not so much concerned with *her* pleasure, but merely how well she serves to satisfy bourgeois, male pleasure. He excludes from his interpretation the fact that the *Mägde* not only gave pleasure to men, they also *received* sexual pleasure in Homer's original scene: Homer tells us that the suitor and the maids gave *each other* "laughing and serenity." Thus there was a *mutual* engagement between the maids

and the suitors.

The utopia Adorno is lamenting as lost is the one where the bourgeois male could freely obtain *his* sexual pleasure from the fantasy object petit a. As Andrew Hewitt rightly notes, in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* "the inclusion of women in the general schema is based entirely upon the perspective of male pleasure."<sup>25</sup> However, Hewitt fails to note that it is not women in general, but foremost working-class women who serve to satisfy bourgeois, male pleasure in Adorno's works. This positing of the working-class woman as object petit a is then a means of *sublimation*, which is for Lacan nothing else but a socially accepted way to delude oneself on the subject of *das Ding*, the moment of the Real, and "to colonize the field of *das Ding* with imaginary schemes."<sup>26</sup>

In Adorno's one-sided reduction of pleasure to chiefly male pleasure, he reinforces what he criticizes about instrumental rationality: the coldness of love, because the other becomes merely a tool for one's desires. Such a presence of instrumental rationality in intimate relationships points for Adorno at the falseness of bourgeois society, which establishes love as something unmediated, as a pure feeling, which distracts us from the fact that love expresses the rationality of exchange, where love becomes a mere means of domination.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, the fantasy object of the idealized whole woman cannot guarantee any wholeness.

Consequently, she turns into the second form as she appears in Adorno's texts, the moment of the Real, the *castrating woman*. Here she becomes the impossible, inhuman monstrous thing that marks the moment of the Real. In the scene with Odysseus's encounter with the maids, the *castrating woman* appears as the "threat of nature," Odysseus has to risk and master to obtain his bourgeois self. In the English translation, the term *Magdt* used by Homer (and Adorno) in this scene is translated as "woman," thus erasing the fact that it is specifically working-class woman who occupies in contrast to the bourgeois woman (Penelope) the position of the "threat of nature."

As the moment of the Real, she becomes the object of anxiety, the "essential alien (dissemblable), who is neither supplement, nor the complement of the fellow being (semblable), who is the very image of

dislocation, of the essential tearing apart of the subject."<sup>28</sup> The double movement of the domination of inner and outer nature does then not only proceed by paralleling inner nature (sexual desire) with the animal, but equally by paralleling the working-class woman with outer non-human nature. Since the *castrating woman* stands for the moment of the Real, the monstrous and non-human thing, her subjection via instrumental rationality becomes justified.<sup>29</sup>

Given the anxiety the *castrating woman* provokes it does not surprise that she appears on a manifest level of the text (and out of footnote 5) precisely at the moment when she is already dead. It is here where we encounter working-class woman in her third form, as the fantasy object *petit a* that is related to the symbolic Other, the *castrated woman*. At the end of *Excursus 1*, Adorno comments on the brutality of the murdering of the maids in Homer's *Gesang* twenty-three. The maids were led to the courtyard, where through "slings around their necks they all died in a miserable way" because of their "frivolous" acts.<sup>30</sup> For Adorno, such a treatment of the maids in Homer already foreshadows the coldness of instrumental rationality in capitalist society.<sup>31</sup>

Although I appreciate this "feeling" for the working-class woman, it seems to me that the authors are more concerned with the fate of the bourgeois male, who loses with the "real" death of the maid the fantasy object *petit a* he needs to secure his utopia, where her role as the *phallic woman* is supposed to conceal his fundamental non-wholeness. Rhode-Dachser explains that "woman," who stands for the "threat of death," is a male projection through which "the man attempts to tame his fear of death, by allocating death, as castration before, to the woman. *She* is then the one who will suffer from it, while he -- conqueror of death -- stands on the side of life."<sup>32</sup>

### 3. Odysseus's Encounter with Circe

Working-class woman appears in "Excursus 1: Odysseus or Myth and Enlightenment" also as Circe, which refers to Adorno's interpretation of Homer's *Gesang* ten. Circe, a famous temptress in Greek mythology, lived on the island of Aeaea where she lured men with her enchanting voice into her home and then transformed them into swine to use them

for her own pleasure. According to Adorno, Odysseus's encounter with the maids belongs to the same *Erfahrungsschicht* (level of experience) as Odysseus's encounter with Circe.<sup>33</sup> Once the twenty-three men, sent by Odysseus to explore the island of Aea, give in to their desire for the enchanting Circe they are turned into swine.

Once the men's desire for Circe is paralleled with the non-human (the swine), Odysseus's use of rationality becomes a justified tool to subject Circe and his desires for her. Like the maids, Circe advances in Adorno's imagination to the utopian moment, the fantasy object petit a linked to the imaginary domain. She is the *phallic woman*, since "she will take the erotic initiative."<sup>34</sup> In this first form Circe stands in opposition to the bourgeois wife Penelope, because she has not yet succumbed to an idealized femininity, which has become fixed in modernity. "Circe's call sign is ambiguity," argues Adorno, "it is this non-differentiation as opposed to the primacy of a definite aspect of nature (whether matriarchal or patriarchal) that constitutes the nature of promiscuity: the essential quality of the courtesan, reflected still in the prostitute's look."<sup>35</sup>

Although there is a positive moment in Adorno's call for a time when the feminine and the masculine were not yet appearing as fixed opposites, it is not so much the look of the prostitute that we are getting here, but Adorno's gaze upon *her*. This gaze is not what Adorno calls a "free gaze" that contains (self-) reflection. Rather, it is a cold gaze, the gaze of instrumental rationality, which merely fixes others and, as a consequence, extinguishes the subject. Such a gaze is also present in Adorno's discussion of prostitution in Germany in *Sexualtaubos und Recht heute*.<sup>36</sup> Here Adorno protests homicides of prostitutes and argues that they are not legally dealt with because society wishes them death, since they embody pleasure, which is not allowed to exist in German society.

Although Adorno's call for the prosecution of homicides on prostitutes is important, to call the "pleasure" which prostitutes deliver to bourgeois men "unmeditated" is problematic, since it denies the fundamental exchange character upon which this arrangement is based. His treatment of prostitution in this article remains then caught in an abstract character, which does not consider the oppressive societal factors that lead to prostitution in the first place. Randall Halle brings

this abstract character of the article to the point: "By focusing on the reason why people hate prostitutes, he Adorno entirely ignored the conditions which give rise to prostitution and passed over in silence the actual situation of prostitutes."<sup>37</sup>

Adorno's discussion of prostitution leads us to Lacan's discussion of courtly love. In courtly love, man creates fantasy object petit a by fantasizing woman as the inaccessible, dominating Lady. The cruelty of this work is for Lacan obvious in the fact that this creation remains in stark contrast to woman's reality, which is her non-emancipation in feudal society. The idea of the Lady has then for him "nothing to do with her as a woman, but as an object of desire."<sup>38</sup> Also Adorno's idea of prostitutes has nothing to do with the actual situation of prostitutes, but with her creation as fantasy object petit a.

Whenever the prostitute appears in Adorno's text he is concerned with her "dying out": "Since Expressionism the prostitute has become a key figure in art, though in reality she is dying out, since it is only by portrayal of figures devoid of shame that sex can now be handled without aesthetic embarrassment."<sup>39</sup> Adorno seems to be less concerned with the actual deaths of prostitutes, but with the loss of fantasy object petit a, the utopian *phallic woman*, whom he needs to secure his wholeness. On a textual level Adorno sustains the fantasy object of the *phallic woman* by suspending a crucial element in his portrayal of Circe as a figure "devoid of shame."

Let me cite Adorno again: "Circe has been made the prototype of the courtesan -- a development prompted *of course* by Hermes' lines, which assume that she will take the *erotic* initiative: "Then, *in fright*, she will ask you to sleep with her..."<sup>40</sup> One might pause here for a moment and be surprised about the tension in the text between the erotically initiating Circe and her being frightened. Why is she frightened? Adorno can only uphold the *phallic woman* as an utopian moment by suspending the sentence from the original source that would have allowed us to understand *why* Circe is frightened.

Homer tells us that Hermes, whom Odysseus meets on his way to Circe, provides Odysseus with a counter herb to protect him from Circe's herbs and gives him the following advice: "When Circe will beat you with a long crop, then pull the sharp sword from the hip and

enter into Circe as if you attempt to kill her, in fright, she will ask you to sleep with her. Do not hesitate before the goddess' bed."<sup>41</sup> Odysseus follows Hermes' advice. He violently enters his sharp sword (the phallus) into Circe, as if he attempted to kill her. The place where one puts one's sword (scabbard) is called in German *Scheide*, which is the same term used for vagina, which suggests sexual violence involved in this scene.

The suspense of the "frightened" is then necessary to uphold this utopia for the bourgeois male, which was never an utopia for the working-class woman. This false utopia of the *phallic woman* provides us then already with a taste of what the bourgeois masculinity looks like in a fully rationalized world. Since the phallus stands for the moment of the Real, Circe, being the one tasked with concealing the moment of the Real, cannot guarantee any wholeness. As such she easily turns into the second form as she appears in Adorno's texts, the *castrating woman*. Here she advances to the moment of the Real, "the essential object, which isn't an object any longer, but this something faced with which all words cease and all categories fail, the object of anxiety par excellence."<sup>42</sup>

Adorno argues: "The courtesan assures happiness and destroys the autonomy of the one she makes happy -- this is her ambiguity *Zweideutigkeit*. But she does not necessarily destroy him: she affirms an older form of life."<sup>43</sup> This "ambiguity" of Circe refers to the ambiguity of the bourgeois male, who has to take on a balancing act between the contradicting fantasy objects of the *phallic woman*, who guarantees *his* happiness as whole, and the *castrating woman*, the moment of the Real who threatens to destroy any such wholeness. Adorno achieves this balancing act on a textual level by asserting, right after his acknowledgement that Circe, both assures happiness and destroys, that "she does not necessarily destroy him."

However, this threat cannot be completely swept away, since Adorno argues that she does not *necessarily* destroy him, which always leaves open the possibility that she actually *does*.<sup>44</sup> Odysseus escapes such a threat with another *List* (cunning), an early form of instrumental rationality. Adorno explains: "Odysseus sleeps with her Circe. But first he makes her swear the great oath of the sacred ones, the Olympian covenant. The oath is intended to protect the male from *Verstümmelung*

mutilation." [45](#)

At the moment where the authors point toward the possibility of Odysseus's *Verstümmelung* through instrumental rationality (swearing the great oath of the sacred ones), the fantasy object petit a, the *phallic woman*, who is supposed to guarantee his wholeness, appears in her second form, as the moment of the Real, the *castrating woman*. To ward off the threat of the Real, Circe advances here to the first incarnation of a rationalized society. Adorno proceeds with the citation above: "On the pleasure that she Circe ensures, she sets a price: that pleasure has been disdained. The last of the courtesans shows herself to be the first female character. In the transition from sage to story she makes a decisive contribution to bourgeois coldness *Kälte*." [46](#)

Since Adorno aimed to uphold the *phallic woman* as the utopian moment, he could not see that it was not so much Circe's disdain of pleasure that made a decisive contribution to bourgeois coldness, but her production as an utopia for male sexual desire, which made *the* decisive contribution to bourgeois *Kälte* (coldness). Robyn Marasco rightly points at the fears behind Circe as fantasy object petit a: "It appears that her Circe's powers -- primary sexual powers of the flesh -- are simultaneously produced through male fear and rendered obsolete once the terror provoked by female sexuality is sublimated through the rational renunciation of pleasure." [47](#)

Although there is no essential woman underneath man's fantasy of her, this doesn't stop man, as Lacan argues, from making her the object of his desire: "In return for which man (*L'homme*), in fooling himself, encounters a woman, with whom everything happens: namely that usual misfiring, of which the sexual act consists." [48](#) At the moment where the fool is confronted with the disappointment that the jouissance expected from the *phallic woman* is not the jouissance obtained, he turns her into the *castrated* woman.

Adorno explains: "The influence over nature that the poet ascribes to the goddess Circe shrinks *schrumpft* to become priestly prophecy -- and even clever foresight as the nautical problems are concerned. This lives on in the grimace *Fratze* of female intelligence *Klugheit*." [49](#) The term *Fratze* is used in German as a way to strongly offend. By symbolically *castrating woman* through according her "*schrumpfende*

female intelligence" in late capitalist society, it is her and not him who ends up castrated in modernity.

#### 4. The Working-Class Woman in *Minima Moralia*

In *Minima Moralia* Adorno aims to break the primacy of the universal by starting out from the particular -- his own experiences of coldness in late capitalist societies. In the section "*Kalte Herberge*" (cold hospitality), insinuating such a coldness, Adorno states: "Probably the decline of the hotel dates back to the dissolution of the ancient unity of inn and brothel, nostalgia for which lives on in every glance directed at the displayed waitress and the tell-tale gestures of the chamber-maids. But now that the innkeeper's trade...has been purged of its last ambiguities, such as still cling to the word '*Verkehr*' intercourse, things have become very bad ... no-one is concerned for the client's comfort. No-one can divine from his expression what might take his fancy." [50](#)

Adorno's nostalgic gaze upon the waitress and the chamber-maid does not leave *us* with much ambiguity, since we can easily divine from this passage what might take *his* fancy: *Verkehr* (intercourse) refers here to the German term *Geschlechtsverkehr* (sexual intercourse) and as such stands here for the desired wholeness that the bourgeois male hopes to attain via the fantasy object *petit a* that is linked to the imaginary domain, the *phallic woman*. In Adorno's gaze directed at the waitress and the chamber maids we find working-class woman entrapped in the fantasy of a not-yet fully rationalized world, where she guarantees "warmth" for bourgeois males.

Underneath this fantasy we encounter the gaze of what Adorno calls the "man of affairs" in late capitalist society: "In looking at them with a view of deciding how well they fit in with his intentions, he reduces them from the outset to objects." [51](#) Also the glances Adorno directs at the working-class woman reduce her from the outset to an object, because he considers her only for one purpose -- the "comfort" she is supposed to deliver to bourgeois men. Adorno's nostalgic gaze upon the working-class woman confronts us then with the cold gaze of the subject of late capitalist society that becomes according to Adorno "incapable of looking *suffering* in the eye." [52](#)

In the smooth story about sexual excitements of bourgeois men, it seems that Adorno is himself incapable to look the suffering that working-class women have historically endured under their male and female bourgeois masters in the eye.<sup>53</sup> Certainly, he also warns us that the imagination of those who have plenty often does not take the suffering of working-class women into account: "Imagination gives offence to poverty. For shabbiness has charm only for the onlooker. And yet imagination needs poverty, to which it does violence: the happiness it pursues is inscribed in the features of suffering."<sup>54</sup>

It seems that the happiness that the "*süsse Mädel*" incite in the Adornian imagination is inscribed in the feature of suffering of the working-class woman, which does violence to *her*. A central feature of instrumental rationality is according to Adorno the fact that the thinking subject "cannot stop. The idea which finds no firm hold in reality, insists, and becomes an *idée fixe*."<sup>55</sup> The idea of working-class woman as an utopia is such an *idée fixe*, which does not find any firm hold in reality, but resurfaces throughout his works. In *Inter Pares*, a section in *Minima Moralia*, Adorno states: "Under liberalism, up to our own times married men from good society, unsatisfied by their correct spouses of sheltered upbringing, were wont to indemnify themselves with chorus girls, bohémiennes, Viennese *süsse Mädel* 'sweet wenches' and cocettes."<sup>56</sup>

Like the maids and Circe in Homer's *Odysseus*, the Viennese *süsse Mädel* stands in opposition to the bourgeois wife, the woman from "good society." The married men from bourgeois society were "wont to indemnify themselves" with a woman from "bad society," because her idealized "wholeness" promises to cover-up his lack. Adorno's main concern is again with the bourgeois male satisfaction of desire, which erases any *Betroffenheit* for the working-class woman, whose main means of survival was (and still is) to play along with such a false fantasy.

As in the *Dialectics of Enlightenment*, Adorno laments the "dying out" of the "unmediated pleasure" working-class woman promises in his utopia. He continues the citation above: "With the rationalization of society this possibility of irregular bliss has disappeared. The cocettes have *died out*, the equivalent of '*süsse Mädel*' probably never existed in Anglo-Saxon and other countries with a technical civilization."<sup>57</sup> In

Adorno's lamentation for a time before instrumental rationality made its advances and erased the "irregular bliss" of the bourgeois male, we can discern that working-class woman does not exist except as a fantasy object *petit a*.

Since it is impossible to reach a wholeness via that object, whenever Adorno thinks he has reached real *jouissance* (his hoped for wholeness) he is disappointed and screams, "That's not it," which for Lacan is "the very cry by which the *jouissance* obtained is distinguished from the *jouissance* expected."<sup>58</sup> We encounter such a cry in Adorno's lamentation about losing the "irregular bliss" the working-class woman promises. Since the *phallic woman* cannot guarantee any wholeness she easily turns into the anxiety-provoking moment of the Real, the second figure as we encounter her in Adorno's works, *the castrating woman*.<sup>59</sup>

The disappointing working-class woman, who fails to provide the desired wholeness of utopia, turns in Adorno's works into the expression of instrumental rationality, which is for Adorno a rationality that castrates subjects in late capitalist society. Throughout his works he vividly explains the castrating results, which lead to subjects unable to resist the culture industry or fascism. Instrumental rationality *massakriert* (massacres) and *zerstückelt* (dismembers) thought.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, it leads to the *Verkümmerung* (atrophy) of the imagination and spontaneity<sup>61</sup> and to the *Verstummung* (silencing) of language.<sup>62</sup> Adorno hopes to escape such frightening images, which Lacan calls the "images of the fragmented body," via the idealized utopia of object *petit a* -- the *phallic woman*.<sup>63</sup>

However, since the idealized "whole" woman cannot guarantee any wholeness, he projects the images of fragmentation onto the working-class woman as we encounter her in her second form -- the *castrating woman*. Adorno continues the citation above: "but the artists and the bohemians now parasitically grafted to mass culture are so thoroughly imbued with its *Vernunft* reasoning that he who voluptuously flees to their anarchy, the free control of their own exchange value, risks waking up under the obligation, if not of engaging them as assistants, at least of recommending them to a film manager or script writer of his acquaintance."<sup>64</sup>

Adorno's anger towards the "anarchy" of working-class woman's "own exchange value" provides us here with an inkling of the truth: the working-class woman is the object of fantasy for the bourgeois male, who fetishizes her because the identification with fantasy object petit a, the idealized phallic woman, is supposed to conceal his lack. However, behind the utopia of the phallic *süsse Mädel*, the *castrating woman*, the one with whom no relation is possible because of her radical otherness, is always lurking. The *phallic woman* then easily turns into the *castrating woman*, the second form as we encounter her in Adorno's thought.

She becomes completely encapsulated by the instrumental *Vernunft* (reason) of late capitalist society that she puts bourgeois men who "flee to their anarchy" at great "risk." It does not take much imagination (or just a bit) to interpret this risk as the risk of the bourgeois male, who needs the *phallic woman* to confirm that he is not (yet) mutilated, wakes up one morning without *his* phallus. Working-class woman's "vulnerability" to the culture industry then turns into the vulnerability of the bourgeois male, who fears *his* castration through seduction *by* the working-class woman.

The moment working-class woman appears as the threatening *castrating woman*, we encounter her in her third form as she appears in Adorno's texts -- the *castrated woman*, the fantasy object petit a, linked to the symbolic domain. Adorno continues the passage above: "While they bourgeois wives remain as tedious to their husbands...as their mothers were, they can at least bestow on others what they are otherwise denied by all. The long-since frigid libertine represents business, while the correct, well-brought-up wife stands yearningly and unromantically for sexuality." [65](#)

The idealized *phallic woman*, who once actively pursued her own sexual desire in the Adornian utopia, turns into the "long-since frigid libertine." Her "phallus" in this scene becomes literally cut off. Since working-class woman turns into the *castrated woman* she cannot spare Adorno anymore from his fear of castration in late capitalist society. It is here where he returns to the bourgeois wife. Although she does not incite his imagination, at least *she* can provide him what the working-class woman denies bourgeois men in a fully rationalized world -- sexuality -- albeit a tedious one. The idea of the *castrated woman*

parallels then the idea of the *castrating woman* as two sides of a coin: both serve to render working-class woman harmless, either through castrating her or through demonizing her.

## 5. Instrumental Rationality and the Working-Class Man

The central feature of a fully rationalized world is, according to Adorno, sexual *Versagung* (refusal), which produces *masochistisch verstümmelte* (masochistically mutilated) "eunuchs." The main concern of such "eunuchs" evolves around the coitus because they are "never allowed to pass" (have sex). As a consequence, argues Adorno in *Negative Dialectics*, "in their reality, in what became of them, all men are mutilated."<sup>66</sup> Although my elucidation of Adorno's encounter with the working-class woman suggests that bourgeois men are "not allowed to pass" (have sex with her) and thus end up in his "logic" as mutilated in modernity, Adorno recruits male working-class figures to make sure that they are spared their mutilation.

I argue that the contrasting images of the "castrated working-class male" to the sexually intact, potent bourgeois male are another means by which Adorno aims to ward off the "images of the fragmented body." Heidi Schlipphacke shows us that Adorno's construction of the "critical subject" in modernity gains its potency chiefly based through his oppositional stance to the "emasculated masses." Bourgeois, male figures, such as the composer Arnold Schönberg, reflect an idealization of the bourgeois, potent man who is *alone* able to spare himself from the disasters of enlightenment rationality in Adorno's works.<sup>67</sup>

We find the "castrated working-class" already in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, in Adorno's discussion of Odysseus's encounter with the Sirens.<sup>68</sup> To recall, Odysseus escapes the "threat of nature," the song of the Sirens, through a *List* (cunning), a form of instrumental rationality. When his ship passes by the sirens, Odysseus "plugs their his worker's ears with wax, and they must row with all their strengths."<sup>69</sup> At the same time, he binds himself to a mast, which allows him to listen and enjoy the song of the Sirens, without the threat of succumbing to them.

Elisabeth Bronfen shows us that the figure of Odysseus as both distancing himself and enjoying the song of the Sirens served as a model for Americans to consume the Abu Ghraib scandal without having to see its implications. By agreeing to the administration's declaration that Lyndie England, who abused prisoners in Abu Ghraib is rough, Americans could be fascinated by the scandal from a distance without having to acknowledge that England's act was the expression of a larger systematic roughness of America's democratic system.<sup>70</sup>

For Odysseus to be able to experience the song of the Sirens from a distance, he needed the rowing workers -- much like the American society needs the working-classes to fight its wars to "enjoy" such disasters from a distance."<sup>71</sup> Adorno aims to explain with the scene of Odysseus's encounter with the Sirens, how Odysseus uses rationality to achieve domination of outer nature (the Sirens, the feminine) via class domination (the rowing working-class men), which goes hand in hand with his domination of inner nature (his desire for the Sirens).

According to Adorno, one finds "deaf workers" not only in myth, but in its elaborate form in modern society. "The stopped ears, which the pliable proletarians have retained ever since the time of myth, have no advantage over the immobility of the master," he argues and continues: "The *impotence* of the worker is not merely a stratagem of the rulers, but the logical consequence of industrial society."<sup>72</sup> Although Adorno aims to show us here the mechanisms of bourgeois rule, which produces and needs a "deaf" working-class to sustain its power, the problem here is that such a castrated working-class suppresses the non-identical.

He erases a history of that class which shows us that it has not been totally deafened by its oppressors. By abstracting from the particular, i.e., the concrete struggles of the working-classes against class domination, Adorno manages to fix a working-class that must remain deaf and without any potency to resist its domination. In "On the Fetish Character of Music and the Regression of Listening," Adorno asserts that the gas-station attendant and the chauffeur "cannot escape impotence."<sup>73</sup> As a consequence these working-class men lose any potential to resist their domination.

At another instance of the same text, Adorno draws the picture of a

working-class man who "leaves the factory and 'occupies' himself with the music in the quiet of his bedroom. He is shy and inhibited, perhaps has no luck with girls...he is only interested in the fact that he hears and succeeds in inserting himself, with his private equipment, into the public mechanism, without exerting even the slightest influence on it."<sup>74</sup> The "impotence" of the working-class man is here reiterated in the argument that he remained a boy, a child, like the girls (girl means non-grown up woman) whom he can neither have nor satisfy.

The working-class *boy* marks here a sharp contrast to the bourgeois *man*, who is always ready to indemnify himself with the working-class woman. In contrast to the "potent" bourgeois male, who has all the influence in the public realm, the "pseudo phallus" of the working-class man (his private equipment) "inserts itself" into the public realm without having the slightest influence on it. Moreover, he is ready to degenerate into child-like rage to avenge himself for the fact that the ecstasy he experienced with his "pseudo phallus" was not actually such.<sup>75</sup>

Adorno and Horkheimer argue in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* that the moment the split between enlightenment and myth is absolute, enlightenment rationality turns into an instrument (hence the notion of "instrumental rationality") of an existing order, because its main procedure, the repetition of abstract "facts," decides the outcome of reality from the start.<sup>76</sup> Also Adorno's constant repetition of the working-class as castrated does not allow us to envision a different reality. Like the "mythical which is that which never changes,"<sup>77</sup> Adorno's dialectical reasoning becomes here an instrument to confirm facts *as* unchangeable.

The "castrated" working-class turns in Adorno's thought into myth and with that has lost any traces of hope for change. Adorno, in *Late Capitalism or Industrial Society*, aims at defining class "by the relation of its members to the means of production, not by their consciousness."<sup>78</sup> However, he creates a picture of the working-class chiefly in relation to its consciousness, or more precisely, its supposed lack thereof. Adorno remains caught in a performative contradiction. In the very act of explaining the mechanisms of class domination, he contributes to class domination by creating a mirage of a working-class

that is rendered completely powerless in late capitalist society.

Any notion of the non-identical, of a working-class that might be aware of class domination and the importance of fighting it, is suppressed in Adorno's theorizing. Regina Becker-Schmidt argues that in Adorno and Horkheimer's depiction of the working-class critical theory forfeits to be a critical tool.<sup>79</sup> "In critical theory and praxis the proletarian class has never been consequently seen in the context of its own history, culture, and life reality, it could not conceive of the working-class in its ambivalence," she argues and continues "maybe the social distance was too great."<sup>80</sup>

Adorno could also not conceive of women in their ambivalence and his depictions of femininity bear resemblances with those of the working-class. He frequently portrays women as complete victims of instrumental rationality, such as in his letter to Erich Fromm: "Women's formation of the ego has remained incomplete."<sup>81</sup> Such an incomplete ego, according to Adorno, finally turns "into the fascist reproduction of stupidity."<sup>82</sup> Certainly, if Adorno had been aware of the works of Lacan, he might have had a better understanding that it is precisely the ego that can never be complete, and any "complete" ego is a mere delusion that leads us into the imaginary, where we find the one-sided abstractions characteristic of instrumental rationality.

Although Adorno aims to show us how the domination of women functions and how women contribute to perpetuate their domination, the problem is that he mythologizes the feminine by constantly reiterating that women are "without a single exception" conformist. Adorno's mythologization of the feminine - which resembles his mythologization of the working-class - forecloses any possibility that women and the working-classes might not be conformist or look through the mechanisms of instrumental rationality. Is there any possibility of resistance in Adorno's account of the working-class and the feminine? It is here where I would like to return to the *resisting* working-class woman.

## 6. The Possibility of Resistance

If we simply release her from her entrapment by the man's fantasy, there is no essential Woman underneath this fantasy who can be reached.<sup>83</sup>

At one curious point in *Minima Moralia*, in the section *May I be so bold?*, Adorno seems to release working-class woman from her entrapment by bourgeois man's fantasy. He explains: "When the poet in Schnitzler's *Merry-Go-Round* tenderly approaches the agreeably un-puritanical wench, she says: 'Be off, why don't you play the piano?' She can neither be unaware of the purpose of the arrangement, nor does she actually resist. Her impulse goes deeper than conventional or psychological prohibitions. It voices an archaic frigidity."<sup>84</sup>

Here Adorno concedes that the "unpuritanical wench" is aware that the purpose of the arrangement in the Adornian utopia is to satisfy the sexual desire of so called "puritanical man." He also cites the working-class woman's resistance to his utopia, since she tells him to leave her alone and occupy himself with the bourgeois means of entertainment -- to play the piano. However, Adorno assures us that she actually does *not* resist. Moreover, for him, any such resistance is not the result of her actual situation, her sexual exploitation by bourgeois men.

Rather, working-class woman's impulse to resist his utopia is the result of her "archaic frigidity." Here we are again confronted with the figure of the *castrated woman*, the third form in which working-class woman appears in Adorno's texts. Whereas we have encountered working-class woman's supposed "frigidity" in the paragraphs above, it is here where it turns "archaic." In my reading of Adorno such an "archaic frigidity" has less to do with the actual sexual potency of the working-class woman, but is a response to the woman who might "look through" and resist her positioning as object petit a, the fantasy object the bourgeois male needs to delude himself about his potency in late capitalist society.

Adorno's fantasy of the *castrated woman*, expressed in her supposed "archaic frigidity" tells us then less about working-class woman's capacity of resistance, but about the inherent narcissism implied in the

imaginary positioning of her as object petit a. Rhode-Dachser explains: "The other woman who refuses his wish, because she has her own laws and follows her own goals, must awaken the narcissistic anger of the man. On a primitive level she provokes alone through her potential refusal, as well as in the presumption through her refusal, violence -- fantasized or real violence."<sup>85</sup>

Also working-class woman who resists the instrumental rationality inherent in the Adornian utopia provokes the narcissistic anger of the bourgeois man, since any departure of the fantasized ideal, the image of the working-class woman who delivers "unmediated" pleasure to bourgeois men, uncovers the delusion of such an utopia. Certainly, in the same passage Adorno also argues that "no man, cajoling some poor girl to go with him, can mistake, unless he be wholly insensitive, the faint moment of rightness in her resistance, the only prerogative left by patriarchal society to woman, who once persuaded, after a brief triumph of refusal, must immediately pay the bill."<sup>86</sup>

Adorno seems to be "sensitive" to the plight of the working-class woman in his acknowledgement of the rightness of her resistance to her instrumentalization by bourgeois men. What does Adorno mean that she must immediately pay the bill after her refusal and why must her triumph remain brief? This becomes clear when we follow Adorno's continuation of this citation: "She knows, as the giver, she has from time immemorial also been the dupe. But if she *geizt* begrudges herself, she is only *betrogen* duped the more."<sup>87</sup> Adorno recognizes here that the working-class woman, who "gives" in the Adornian utopia is the dupe.

However, Adorno also tells us that the resisting working-class woman, who does *not* give, but *geizes* is even more duped. To refer to working-class woman's resistance to sexual exploitation by bourgeois men as something that she can *geiz* with (or not) turns the working-class woman who resists her exploitation into one who becomes the *Geizige* (grudge). *Geizige* is in German a rather negatively connotated term that eradicates the rightness of her resistance, however faint it might be, on a symbolic level. To secure the Adornian false utopia, where *he* can be happy, she must not resist or if she resists then it must remain a "brief triumph of refusal."

Adorno gives working-class woman the same advice as "Wedekind

puts into the mouth of a brothel-keeper: "There is only one way to be happy in this world: to do everything to make others as happy as possible."<sup>88</sup> In order for the bourgeois male to remain happy in his utopia working-class woman must remain entrapped in his fantasy. I agree with Marasco, who argues that for "Adorno, woman is never in possession of her disruptive power, never endowed with the subjective agency necessary for resistance against the conditions of her existence."<sup>89</sup> However, what would happen if woman would not play along and break out of her entrapment in his fantasy?

This leads us to the non-identical in Adorno's thought. The non-identical is ready to interrupt identity thinking or instrumental rationality that aims to establish a whole or a totality. As I have shown in this essay, Adorno is guilty of instrumental rationality, insofar as he subsumes all working-class women under the three figurations, *the phallic woman*, the *castrated woman* and the *castrating woman* and insofar as he subsumes the working-class man under the figuration of the "castrated working-class man." The three figures of the working-class woman as we find it in Adorno's thought are empty, and serve as a means to ward off the anxiety provoking moment of the Real.

Adorno's depiction of utopia, the *phallic woman*, is the result of the deeper desires to reach wholeness and to gloss over the moment of the non-identical or Real. This deeper desire explains why Adorno, who is generally suspicious of any nostalgia and utopian thinking, creates such a false utopia in his depictions of the idealized whole *phallic woman*. That she and working-class men end up as "castrated" and without any means to resist bourgeois, male domination, is a result of Adorno's confrontation with the Real -- the *castrating woman* that confronts him with the fact that any notion of a total whole is a *false* whole.

However, these figurations only represent some aspects of working-class woman (and man), while they necessarily neglect others. The non-identical refers to these neglected aspects in his theorizing. It is the "indissoluble something," which instrumental rationality fails to identify.<sup>90</sup> Certainly, Adorno aims to gloss over the moment of the non-identical by creating the false whole of the working-class woman and man. However, the good news is that, according to Adorno, the "slightest remnant of non-identity" suffices to "spoil the concept as whole, because it pretends to be whole."<sup>91</sup> Although Adorno aims to

get rid of the non-identical, working-class woman and man, he cannot completely eradicate nonidentity. It is precisely the moment of the nonidentical, which opens up the space to envision working-class women and men as ready to resist their gender and class domination.

However, the task to break totalizing thinking lies not only on the side of those who find themselves entrapped in bourgeois, male fantasies. The responsibility to challenge instrumental rationality also lies on the side of those who resort to such thinking. As this paper shows, it is important to grasp the deeper desires and fears that the confrontation with the moment of the Real incite, to understand why a thinker, such as Adorno, whose chief aim was to challenge identity thinking, falls back into identity thinking. Such fears and desires do not refer merely to the individual psyche of Adorno. Rather, we find the three figures of the working-class woman pervasively throughout modern societies, especially throughout political philosophy.

Only if we grasp the deeper desires and fears that incite instrumental rationality are we in a position to challenge such rationality. Only then will the confrontation with the moment of the Real lose its threat, but become a fruitful moment that leaves thinking open for rearticulation and change. In the meanwhile, it is important for those that have been falsely constructed as the idealized "whole" woman, the "castrating" or the "castrated" woman to speak up against such false figurations. They need to stop playing along with their positioning as fantasy objects and expose the emptiness of such figurations. At the same time it is crucial for bourgeois men to give up working-class woman as a fantasy object *petit a*. Only then will we be able to live in a society where bourgeois, male domination has ceased to have *any* potency.

## 1. NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> For recent scholarship on the early Frankfurt school see Wendy Brown, "Feminist Theory and the Frankfurt School"; Renee Heberle, ed., *Feminist Interpretations of Theodor Adorno* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006); Lisa Yun Lee, *Dialectics of the*

*Body: Corporeality in the Philosophy of T.W. Adorno*  
(New York and London: Routledge, 2005).

- 2 I use the term "figure" to underline that it is not so much the real or the reality of the working-class woman that we encounter in his text, but a fantasy figure.
- 3 In "Culture Industry Reconsidered," Adorno replaces the concept of "mass culture" used in earlier works with the concept of "culture industry" to show us that the rationality of the culture industry is nothing else but instrumental rationality. For the sake of profit the culture industry absorbs everything, which is spontaneous into planning. As a result, culture's critical impulses get extinguished. Jay Bernstein, ed., *The Culture Industry* (London and New York; Routledge, 2002), 98-106.
- 4 "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." Jacques Lacan, *Television: A Challenge to the Psychoanalytic Establishment*, trans. Jeffrey Mehlman and ed. Joan Copjec (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1990, 1974), 82.
- 5 The phallus stands in Lacan's thought for the bar (/) between the Signifier (S) and the signified (s), the moment of the Real. As such the *phallic woman* cannot guarantee any wholeness and easily turns in Adorno's texts easily into the *castrating woman*.
- 6 According to Lacan, the subject cannot achieve her wholeness via the identification with an other with a small o. Since the ego, which is established in the imaginary is merely an ideal unity, which escapes her/him at any moment, any achieved wholeness dissolves at any moment in imaginary domain. To cope with this instability the subject compulsively continues to identify with the other, which leads to identity thinking and with that the subject's alienation and to the eventual destruction of the other with a small o. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book II: The Ego in*

*Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954-1955*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller and trans. Sylvana Tomaselli (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1991, 1978), 54.

7 To grasp the moment of the Real in Lacan's thought it is important to explain the symbolic domain. Whereas in the imaginary domain the subject identifies with an other with a small o, in the symbolic domain, the big Other, the subject aims to establish her/his wholes via identifying with a symbol, a signifier. Whereas in the imaginary the ego is established, in the symbolic domain the subject appears. In contrast to the imaginary identification, the symbolic identification allows the subject a certain consistency and stability, which is constantly threatened in the imaginary. However, the identification with the signifier does not allow the subject to become whole either, because there is a hole at the center of every w/whole signifier. This hole refers to what Lacan termed the *Real*. See Jacques Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge, Book XX: Encore! 1972-1973*, trans. Bruce Fink and ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998), 28.

8 Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book II*, 166.

9 For Adorno, castration marks the essence of such rationality "*es macht ihr ganzes Wesen aus.*" Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1998); Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 150. Moreover, it keeps subjects in modern societies in line and is at the center of fascism. "For social reality in the epoch of the concentration camps castration is more characteristic than competition." Theodor W. Adorno: "Die Revidierte Psychoanalyse," in *Adorno: Soziologische Schriften I* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Verlag, 1997), 20-41, 32, my translation.

10 Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, xvi.

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. 11 Ibid., 15.

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

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. 13 Robyn Marasco, "'Already the Effect of the Whip': Critical Theory and the Feminine Ideal," *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 17: 1 (spring 2006): 116-46, 90.

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. 14 I refer here to the German translation of Homer's *Odysseus*. Homer. *Die Odyssee* (Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 1999). In the German edition Homer's chapters are translated as *Gesang* (song).

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. 15 Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 47. Translation slightly amended.

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. 16 Ibid., footnote 5, 47.

. 17 The more the Homeric epic advances the more Odysseus's succeeds in such a domination. It is complete in Homer's *Gesang* twenty-four, when Homer is reunited with Penelope. At this point nature is completely subjected to rationality.

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. 18 Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, footnote 5, 54. My translation.

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. 19 "The subject," by abstaining from his desire for the working-class woman, "'punishes' the heart, by forcing it to be patient." Ibid.

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. 20 Adorno argues that such suppressed desires can be found in Europe's "underground history," which "consists in the fate of the human instincts and passions which are suppressed



Porter (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1986, 1992), 99.

. [27](#) Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia, Reflexionen aus dem beschädigten Leben* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Verlag, 1997), 172.

. [28](#) Lacan, *Book II*, 177.

. [29](#) However, since Adorno is more concerned with the fate of the bourgeois male, whose alienation he laments in late capitalist societies, the figuration of working-class woman as threat of nature is less of a concern to Adorno.

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. [30](#) Homer, *Die Odyssee*, Zweiundzwanzigster Gesang, 398. My translation.

. [31](#) Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 79.

. [32](#) Christine Rhode-Dachser, *Expeditionen in den Dunklen Kontinent: Weiblichkeit im Diskurs der Psychoanalyse* (Berlin: Springer Verlag, 1992), 136.

. [33](#) Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, footnote 5, 54.

. [34](#) Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 69.

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. [35](#) *Ibid.*, 70.

. [36](#) Theodor W. Adorno, "Sexualtabus und Recht heute," in *Adorno: Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft II* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Verlag, 1977), 533-54.

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. [37](#) Randall Halle, "Between Marxism and Psychoanalysis: Antifascism and Antihomosexuality in the Frankfurt School," *Journal of Homosexuality* 29: 4 (December 1995):

68-89

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. [38](#) Lacan, *Book VII*, 215.  
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. [39](#) Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 145.

. [40](#) Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 69, my italics.

. [41](#) Homer, *Die Odyssee*, Zehnter Gesang, 176, my translation.

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. [42](#) Lacan, *Book II*, 164.  
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. [43](#) Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 70.  
Translation slightly amended.  
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. [44](#) The translator contributed to this effort of Adorno by using in his translation the term "injuring" (*verletzen*) instead of the term "killing" (*töten*) as used by the author in the original German text, a weaker term that diminishes the danger of the anxiety provoking castrating woman.  
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. [45](#) *Ibid.*, 72. Translation slightly amended.  
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. [46](#) *Ibid.*, 80. Translation slightly amended.  
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. [47](#) Marasco, 95.  
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. [48](#) For Lacan, these are "the images of castration, emasculation, mutilation, dismemberment, dislocation, evisceration, devouring, and bursting open of the body." Lacan, *Television*, 38.  
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. [49](#) Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 73.  
Translation amended.

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. [50](#) Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 117.

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. [51](#) *Ibid.*, 131.

).  
. [52](#) Adorno, *The Culture Industry*, 69, my emphasis.

. [53](#) In a recent article Mary Anne Franks detects Adorno's coldness towards the working-class woman in his depiction of pornography as "unmutilated, unrepressed sex" in *Sexualtabus und Recht heute*. For her Adorno's stance on pornography excludes the fact that women are often forced into pornography by economic circumstances and they often do not agree to the sexual acts. She argues that Adorno does not show a *Betroffenheit* (concern) for the object that goes beyond mere *Gefühl* (sensuous feeling), which is crucial for him to counter instrumental rationality. Mary Anne Franks, "An-aesthetic Theory: Adorno, Sexuality, and Memory," in *Feminist Interpretations of Theodor Adorno*, ed. Renee Heberle (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 193-215.

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. [54](#) Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 170.

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. [55](#) Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 190.

. [56](#) Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 32.

. [57](#) *Ibid.*

. [58](#) Lacan, *Book XX*, 111.

. [59](#) In *Seminar X* Lacan explains the anxiety-provoking moment

of this confrontation: "The fact that the phallus is not found where we expect it to be, where we require it to be. . .is what explains that anxiety is the truth of sexuality. . .The phallus, where it is expected as sexual, never appears except as lack, and this is the link with anxiety." Jacques Lacan, *Seminar X, Anxiety*, June 5, 1963, unpublished seminar. Cited in Renata Salecl, "Love Anxieties," in *Reading Seminar XX: Lacan's Major Work on Love, Knowledge, and Feminine Sexuality*, ed. Suzanne Barnard and Bruce Fink (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 93-97.

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. [60](#) Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, 146.

. [61](#) Ibid., 134. The German term "*verkümmern*" refers to the term "*Kummer*" (sorrow) as well as to "castration" (the *kümmertliche* phallus).

. [62](#) The German terms *Verstummung* und *Verkümmerung* both refer to *Verstümmelung* (mutilation). *Verstümmelung* in German refers moreover to the *Stummel*, which signifies a shrunk/cut-off/short phallus.

. [63](#) Lacan, *Ecrits*, 13.

. [64](#) Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 32.

. [65](#) Ibid.

. [66](#) Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton (New York and London: Continuum, 1973, 1966), 297.

. [67](#) Heidi M. Schlipphacke, "A Hidden Agenda: Gender in Selected Writings by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer," in *Theodor W. Adorno: Volume IV*, ed.

Gerard Delanty (London: Sage Publications, 2004), 391-406.

[68](#) Nancy Love argues in a recent article that in Odysseus's encounter with the sirens, the feminine, expressed in the song of the Sirens, marks a time where instrumental rationality has not yet destroyed sound and its specific quality – its ability to permeate boundaries, which is lost in vision that merely marks hard boundaries. Nancy Love, "Why Do the Sirens Sing?: Figuring the Feminine in Dialectic of Enlightenment," *Theory and Event* 3:11 (1999).

[69](#) Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 34.

[70](#) Elisabeth Bronfen, *Reality Check: Image Affects and Cultural Memory, differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 17:1 (spring 2006): 20-46.

[71](#) Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 34.

[72](#) Ibid., 36-37, my emphasis.

[73](#) Adorno, *The Culture Industry*, 30.

[74](#) Ibid., 54.

[75](#) Ibid., 56.

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