

Identity, Intimacy – Introduction

It is interesting to think about the forces structuring identity and intimacy in relation to our last theme, *Conversations with Tradition*. This gesture toward the past is both identity forming and intimate; if tradition is what comes from *without* and therefore affects identity via external events and other people, intimacy comes from *within* – it is what is closest to us and affects our identity from the interior of our selves. What is intimate is what is inmost, familiar, and seems to lie at the very core of our being – it shares an ineffable space with the private, with “who we really are”, which then constitutes an identity to be lived and expressed. Can we provisionally call this the basic relationship between identity and intimacy, where the former would be an outward manifestation of the latter? If so, how and where does this manifestation (“living”, “experiencing”) occur? Is it willed, forced, or coerced? Does it require an other? What does it mean to have a language of intimacy or an intimate language, and to what extent is identity bound to language and expression? Both identity and intimacy can be considered as conversations, with their own varying degrees of openness to others and openness to oneself, their own languages, expressions and forms of dialogue; in this sense *Modern Horizons* is also a conversation. Our seventh issue brings together six voices continuing the dialogue of our *Identity, Intimacy* conference (October 2015, University of Toronto). These voices also join the ongoing conversation built around *Modern Horizons*.

Intimacy is often considered in terms of physical presence: intimate spaces, intimate settings, intimate encounters, corporal intimacy, sexual intimacy. These physical forms of intimacy have lasting and important effects on our identity, for our environment shapes, determines, and limits how we construct and construe our selves. Yet in addition to these forms of intimacy, we would like to think about what is at stake when physical presence is not necessarily the determining factor for intimacy -- for it can be imagined, dreamt, thought about, and expressed and experienced in art. As intimacy has many forms, it also has many sources. We can think about intellectual intimacy, spiritual intimacy, or even thinking itself as an intimate act and encounter. Do intimacy's effects on one's identity change when we think about it in these other, less physical forms? What are the possibilities for and limits of being intimate with oneself; or is an other – physically present or not – necessary for intimacy to exist? The many forms of and spaces for intimacy cannot be assumed under any one definition; the securities and comforts of one space or form may not always apply to another, where unease and even violence may arise. The differences have immediate as well as enduring consequences.

Co-existing with the spatial dimensions – exterior, interior and the dimensions between and around – of intimacy's possible influences on identity are temporal factors. If physical presence is not necessarily a requirement for intimacy, perhaps a temporal presence, the now, is not a requirement either. For one can be intimate with the past, through memory, recollection, remembrance, and commemoration. These different ways of (re)engaging with the past allow for new intimacies, and can deepen or weaken old ones. Along with ‘immediate’ intimacy, then, one can have ‘delayed’ forms of intimacy affecting one's identity in different ways than the

present or presence does, for time alters our understanding of the past, enhances it, skews it; our identity is altered as a result.

Although intimacy often involves what is familiar or recognisable, it can also arise in new or unknown places and at unexpected times. The excitement that accompanies new or unexpected forms of intimacy can be a source of ecstasy or fear that change or redefine one's emotional, intellectual, spiritual, and even physical identity. The fear that is sometimes brought about by new intimate experiences can push one to reject or refuse intimacy, or even bring about the incapacity for being intimate. Insofar as identity and intimacy are codependent, the danger is clear: a refusal of intimacy or a false sense of intimacy can lead to a loss or disfiguration of one's identity. And yet giving one's self completely to the intimate (other, experience, etc.) can have similar consequences: a dissolving of identity into that of which it tries or purports to be the expression.

The cyclical – with the risk of becoming spiral – and the labyrinthine – with the risk of becoming entrapping – movements binding identity and intimacy offer glimpses (rather than truths) of the makings and breakings of identity and its politics; in this sense intimacy is both an opening up to and a closing off of the other / an other. An important question – perhaps the question at the foundation of thinking, at least in the Western tradition – is *where and when does the subject or the person fit into these movements and relations?* Or rather: does the subject/person have to exist for identity to be established and/or for intimacy to be possible? One is tempted to say yes, but then it seems odd to think about a pre-identity (and pre-intimate) subject. How would one identify and identify with it? How would one relate (as a basic form of intimacy) to it?

Following this we might ask what causes or inhibits intimacy? and what restricts or disfigures one's identity? Or, perhaps a better question to ask would be: what, if any, are the criteria for measuring different levels and registers of intimacy and identity? Since intimacy may be fundamentally ineffable, to judge or subject it to criteria could be a betrayal; it cannot be expressed simply, but perhaps only enacted. Can we say the same for identity? Can identity be said to have the same sense of ineffability? Is it possible to describe identity, or it is only recognisable when it is performed or lived? These questions bring us back to our earlier inquiries into the temporal structures of identity and intimacy.

Addressing the questions raised here, the essays in this issue join the conversation and offer, each in their own way, different takes on the intimate identity-forming experiences of thinking, art, and life.