

Aisthesis



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Identifications

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The present issue of *Aisthesis, Identification as Embodied Practice: Performing Counter Discrimination*, appears at a moment when the question of identification has acquired renewed urgency. Across different geopolitical and cultural contexts, the consolidation of far-right politics, the normalization of exclusionary nationalisms, the intensification of anti-migrant rhetoric, renewed attacks on gender and sexual dissidence, and the persistence of racialized violence have made clear that identification is not a secondary matter of private psychology, nor merely a descriptive category of identity. It is a central mechanism in the formation of political subjects, in the organization of belonging and exclusion, and in the production of symbolic, affective, and embodied attachments through which contemporary conflicts are lived and enacted. This issue situates this urgency within a broader conjuncture shaped by overlapping crises and by the increasing capacity of reactionary movements to mobilize identification as a force of social cohesion, polarization, and hostility.

The opening dialogue between this special issue editors, Goran Petrović Lotina, Francesco Della Puppa, Susanne Franco, and Aneta Stojnić, “Performances of Identification in the Age of Polarization. Bodies, Affects, Symbols”, responds to this conjuncture by proposing a broader account of identification than those usually available in either psychoanalysis, political theory, or performance studies alone. Rather than treating identification as an internal psychic mechanism, it approaches it as a symbolic, affective, and performative process through which subjects are discursively constituted at the intersection of languages, embodied practices, and institutions. In doing so, it places psychoanalysis, political philosophy, and performance studies into a productive dialogue. Freud, Klein, Lacan, and Kristeva, Laclau, Mouffe, Stavrakakis, and Žižek, Butler, and Schechner are revisited not as isolated traditions, but as resources for understanding how attachment, bodily intensity, signification, repetition, and exclusion participate in the formation of political and social identities. What emerges from this theoretical reflection is an argument for extending Laclau and Mouffe’s discourse theory through psychoanalysis and performance. This implies that political signifiers are not only symbolically articulated and affectively invested, but also sustained through bodily (re)enactment and the unstable return of what they exclude – namely, the abject.

From this perspective, the issue’s central proposition is clear: identification must be understood as an embodied practice. It is not limited to the formation of identities in the abstract, but concerns the ways in which subjects are attached to ideals, values, fantasies, communities, signs, and institutions through bodily and affective processes that are always symbolised and socially mediated. Such a perspective allows the issue to move beyond narrow oppositions between internal and external, psychic and social, symbolic and material. It also allows a more precise account of contemporary reactionary politics, which mobilize identification not simply by naming enemies or invoking fixed identities, but by binding bodies and affects to signifiers such as “the people”, “the nation”, security, or tradition. At the same time, this framework opens a path for thinking alternative, plural, and democratic forms of identification capable of contesting antagonistic closures and discriminatory regimes.

The essays gathered in this volume approach this problem from distinct methodological and theoretical positions, while remaining anchored in the shared concern announced by the issue’s title. In this sense, the issue brings together sociologists, psychoanalytic practitioners, political and aesthetic theorists, theatre, dance, and performance scholars, philosophers, and artist-researchers, whose contributions reflect its interdisciplinary engagement with identification across psychic life, politics, artistic practice, and public culture.

Following the opening dialogue, the volume first turns to psychoanalytic practitioners and theorists, whose contributions lay the conceptual groundwork for the political, aesthetic, and artistic explorations that follow. Laura Álvarez Garro's contribution, "The Moralization of Politics and the Denial of Constitutive Aggressiveness as a Mode of *Jouissance*", addresses the far right, fascism, and contemporary extreme violence by focusing on the moralization of politics. Rather than treating political aggression as an exception or aberration, the article argues that many academic and public readings of fascist and far-right phenomena conceal a more troubling issue: the refusal to acknowledge constitutive aggression and the possibility that destruction itself may be desired. In doing so, it relocates identification within a libidinal economy of denial, aggression, and *jouissance*, and insists that any serious political analysis must confront these dimensions directly. Isak de Vries, in "The Sameness We Cannot Accept", turns to anti-trans violence and heightened transgender visibility through a reading that combines Jacques Lacan's theory of the imaginary with René Girard's theory of mimetic desire. His article shows that transgender people become targets not simply because they are perceived as radically different, but because they are perceived as disturbingly similar, threatening the distinctions that stabilize personal and communal identity. Identification here appears as an image-bound and conflictual process in which narcissism, rivalry, and scapegoating converge.

The next section turns to political theorists who deepen the political dimension of identification through psychoanalytic theory, showing how collective formations are shaped by fantasy, affect, and processes of democratic rearticulation. Reid Kleinberg's essay, "The Sir George Williams University Protests as Embodied Politics of Traversal of the Fantasy", revisits the Montreal protests of 1969 as a scene of transnational, multi-racial, and cross-ideological coalition building. Drawing on archival research and psychoanalytic political theory, the article argues that these protest practices can be understood as instances of traversing fantasy, loosening sedimented identifications and enabling a left-wing bloc across difference. In this contribution, identification is neither fixed nor merely ideological; it is reworked through embodied political practice. Thomás Zicman de Barros, in "Identification and Aesthetic Transgression in Populism: Toward a Queer Theory of Sublimation", offers a significant reorientation of the debate on populism and identification. Against traditions that treat mass identification primarily as submission, he draws on psychoanalysis, queer theory, and aesthetic theory to conceptualize a radically democratic form of identification grounded not in closure or mastery, but in transgression, vulnerability, and openness to alterity. Through the notion of sublimation, the article proposes a more emancipatory understanding of affective attachment in populist politics.

By foregrounding the aesthetic reworking of identification, Zicman de Barros's contribution opens onto the next section, which turns more explicitly to artistic practices and examines how performance and art actively reshape the forms identification can take. Kate Katafiasz's "Death-cries and Strips of Foam: Indexing the 'other' in Edward Bond's Later Work" shifts the focus to theatre and dramatic form. Through Lacan's registers and a close reading of Bond's drama for young people, the article examines how theatrical boundaries can disturb mirror-stage identifications and release a desire for relation with the other. Rather than reducing theatre to mimesis or estrangement alone, Katafiasz highlights its capacity to index what society disavows and to open an alternative politics of identification through sound, space, and difference. Amanda Piña's "Performance is a Form of Knowing. Cosmopolitical Choreographies for a Burning Planet" broadens the issue's horizon by situating performance within cosmopolitics and political ontology. In dialogue with ritual practices from Abya Yala and with contemporary decolonial and ecological thought, the article challenges colonial understandings of performance as mere presentation. Performance is instead approached as an embodied epistemic practice and a form of world-making through which relations with non-human and more-than-human beings may be reconfigured. Identification here exceeds humanist and narrowly political frames, opening toward ontological pluralism and relational attunement. Helena Botto's "The Performer without Qualities — Empathetic Signification, Non-Performative Performance and Mimesis in Artistic Practice and Populist Politics" examines processes of identification through over-identification, mimesis, and performance practice. By placing artistic strategies alongside certain forms of right-wing populist performance, Botto analyzes how signifiers are resignified and how flexible political subjectivities are produced. Her concepts of empathetic signification and non-performative performance help illuminate the theatrical processes through which populist leaders attach themselves to collective affects and environments. Stephen Elliot Willmer's "Interrogating the Identity of Refugees" examines the asylum process as a site where identity is not only administratively judged but performatively produced. Contrasting national asylum regimes and examining theatre and film that expose their operations, the article shows how refugee identity is interrogated through opaque procedures of credibility and recognition. In bringing these hidden processes into visibility, performance becomes a critical medium through which the politics of asylum can be witnessed, challenged, and rethought.

The final two essays are especially important because they address identification without grounding their analyses primarily in psychoanalysis. Christian Frigerio's "On the Mode of Existence of Symbols: An Actor-Network

Perspective on Identification and Group Formation” develops an actor-network approach to the role of symbols in the formation of publics, particularly through Bruno Latour’s political ecology and the figure of Gaia. Identification here is understood through the circulation and performative efficacy of symbols capable of gathering a collective around shared concerns. Ilia Inishev’s “Postponing Identities. Slowed Perception, Layered Embodiment, and Lateral Politics” turns to phenomenology, enactivist aesthetics, and theories of socially engaged perception to propose that identification can be understood as a perceptual and embodied process. By foregrounding slowness, hesitation, and layered embodiment, Inishev opens the possibility of postponed identities and more plural, lateral, and breathable spaces of counter-discrimination. Together, these two essays show that the problem of identification exceeds psychoanalytic vocabularies even as it remains in productive conversation with them.

Taken together, the essays collected in this issue of *Aisthesis* demonstrate that identification is a crucial site where embodiment, affect, symbolism, exclusion, coalition, performance, and political imagination converge. Some contributions foreground aggression, fantasy, and *jouissance*; others emphasize ritual, mimesis, dramaturgy, asylum procedures, symbols, perception, or cosmopolitics. What unites them is a shared conviction that identification is not merely a question of self-definition, nor only a matter of discourse. It is something enacted, repeated, negotiated, and contested hence shaping public and cultural spaces. It can sustain hostility, closure, and discrimination, but it can also be reworked toward productive tension, plurality, and democratic transformation.

For this reason, the present volume does more than gather studies on identity. It proposes identification as a key analytic for understanding the present. At a time when exclusionary politics intensify by mobilizing fear, nostalgia, aggression, and fantasies of purity, the essays assembled here insist on another possibility: that identification can also be traversed, transgressed, slowed down, pluralized, and performed otherwise. In that insistence lies the intellectual and political timeliness of this special issue.

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