

INTRODUCTION. MULTIMODAL DIMENSIONS OF IDENTITY IN CULTURE, SOCIETY, AND THE ARTS

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Abstract:

The concept of identity has been approached from multiple perspectives, as the self always relates to everything and everybody that surrounds it, getting adjusted by every experience it passes through, in a continuous attempt to gain self-apprehension and to recover its sense of belonging. Place, time, emotions, culture are only a few of the factors that impact upon the self, reconfiguring it, as a result of the “troubled condition of the individual, displaced and oscillating between cultures” (Dobrinescu 2017: 156).

It is the quest for personal identity, against the background of social relations, that urges the individual to accept or to reject some configurations and representations of his/her self. This personal-social dichotomy has received scholarly attention, engendering numerous theories that aim to integrate the eclectic nature of identity into a coherent picture. Nevertheless, identity should rather be viewed in its own making, as a process, emerging from constant and fluctuating identities (Hall 1997) and leading to permanent or volatile identity fragments (Norris 2011). As Lawler (2014) argues, despite having a stable core embedding both sameness and difference at the same time, identity is produced in the flow of social relationships. Moreover, as Simon (2004) would add, identity is not only socially constructed and negotiated, but also represented and conceptualised at a cognitive level. Thus, identity pertains to the individual’s own perception of him/herself, to the way s/he wants to be perceived by the others, and to the feedback s/he receives throughout the social interactions. Therefore, the individual will get the complete picture of his/her identity once s/he manages to bind “untold and repressed stories” and “the actual stories the subject can take up to and hold as constitutive of his personal identity” (Ricoeur 1984: 74).

The contributions in this special issue surpass the boundaries imposed by the Self-Other dichotomy that pervades scholarly research, pinpointing to the multifaceted nature of identity. Its versatility is clearly reflected in the semiotic resources people use to express their identity. Regardless of whether they have it acknowledged by the others or not, they adopt different “stylistic resources” resulting into social semiotic manifestations that best reflect their identity. In Van Leeuwen’s (2022: 2) words: “...not only stable but also hybrid and conflicted or confused identities manifest themselves through different uses of shape, colour, texture, timbre and movement” that are “socially and culturally valued and regulated”. Such signifiers of identity distinguish or, on the contrary, unite different categories of people.

Keywords: Identity; Culture; Society; Arts; Self vs Other