

Introduction

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Is *Identity* a term of abstraction that, by a spell, establishes as metaphysical and absolute that which should best be understood as historical and transient? And is it thus also the origin of the resentment of difference, a source of intolerance and aggression, the deathbed of freedom? Or is it instead a meeting ground, a junction of recognition, exchange, rebirth and salvation?

Is identity a tearing away from loneliness, a reconfiguration of the Self? Or is it a shared biological destiny, the representation of the common memories and aspirations of all human beings?

There is a tension that exists in our experience of identity, between the halt of an endless drift of fixed meanings and the rupture caused by the desire of the Other: our experience of identity often appears to occur within this duality.

The articles gathered here in this thematic issue on identity address its wide range of meanings. They explore its functions, and expose the ambiguities and problems this notion engenders, be they cultural, biological, or metaphysical. In so doing they do not shy from testing our common sense perceptions. In the following are singled out the substantiation and the death of identity in history, its inscription in culture, its revival and renewal in creativity. In some instances, these articles circumscribe and question the desire for an irretrievably lost yet memorable origin; others show how a strength to survive can be found in the image or the knowledge of a shared past.

If identity is a deathbed, then it can also be the origin of a resurrection: a dying again perhaps, but also a renewal and thus an avoidance of too long a death. This collection of articles invites us to meditate on the multiple faces of identity, its important strengths and its many frailties. It seems to me that it challenges us to keep a

serenely and creatively watchful eye on the forms of identity and on its outcomes, and to tackle the moorings that trap us into a biological, historical, or metaphysical determination.