

FA12/Intermedia II Unit III: **Identity**

Description

Despite the admonition to “just be yourself,” identity is no simple matter. We cannot really understand ourselves outside of the realm of the social, and we all choose our role, behavior, and appearance according to context. Far from being pure expressions of our innate beings, our identities are the result of a complex and never-ending process by which our personalities negotiate to day-to-day circumstances and larger historical, cultural, and social forces. In this unit we will explore contemporary art that asks poignant questions about the self as a place where nature and culture meet, where the political becomes personal.

Readings

Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, Routledge, 1999), 3-13 and 171-180.

In-class screening

Marlon Riggs, “Black Is, Black Ain’t,” (1994, available at the University of Iowa Library)

Mini-Project: We’ll Be Your Mirrors

Homework Assignment

In groups of three, one student will relate a short personal anecdote to the other two. A second student will closely listen to the content and verbal delivery of the anecdote, while the third student will attend to the physical delivery (body language, characteristic gestures, clothing, etc.). The second two students will then recount the anecdote, with one supplying the words and the other supplying the body language. Groups should rehearse until they feel they can comfortably perform this in class.

In the following class, the instructor will demonstrate setting up lights and videotape the groups’ performances. We will then debrief about the experience.

Shared Presentation

Select one of the projects below and research as much as you can learn about it in one week’s time. What model(s) of identity does the project seem to assume or question? Whose identity is being addressed or challenged?

Consult multiple sources, both on the Internet and in the Art Library (including digital databases) to develop a sense not just of what the project was and looked like but how it was received at the time and how it has entered into the art historical record. More recent works may have limited citations in art historical literature.

Distill your research into a 5-7 minute explanation and add images, links, and notes to the shared Google Presentation.

Performance

Marcel DuChamp, Rose Sélavy character (1921-1936)
Lynn Hershman Leeson, "Roberta Breitmore" (1974-1978)
James Luna, "Artifact Piece" (1987)
Alix Lambert, "Wedding Piece" (1992)
William Pope L, "The Black Factory" (2005)
Liz Magic Laser, "The Digital Face" (2012)

Installation

Mary Kelly, "Post-Partum Document" (1973-1979)
Daniel Martinez, "I can't imagine ever wanting to be white" (1993)
Amalia Mesa-Bains, "Venus Envy" (1993)
Omer Fast, "The Casting" (2007)
Michael Rakowitz, "Enemy Kitchen," (2004-present)

Photo

Cindy Sherman, "Untitled Film Stills" (1977-)
Sophie Calle, "The Shadow" (1981)
Nan Goldin, "The Ballad of Sexual Dependency" (1986)
Niki S. Lee, "The Ohio Project" (1999)
Dawoud Bey, "The Chicago Project" (2003)

Video

Vito Acconci, "Conversions" (1970-71)
Adrian Piper, "Cornered" (1988)
Sadie Banning, "Jollies" (1990)
Alex Bag, "Untitled (project for the Andy Warhol Museum)" (1996)
Hank Willis Thomas, "Unbranded" (2008)

New Media

Dan Graham, "Time Delay Room" (1974)
Pierre Huyghe and Phillipe Parreno, "No Ghost, Just a Shell" (1999-2002)
Rebecca Bollinger, "Last Year by Color and Composition" (2000, 2002)
Mendi and Keith Obadike, "Blackness for Sale" (2001)
Jill Magid, "Evidence Locker" (2004)
Golan Levin and Zachary Lieberman, "ReFace (Portrait Sequencer)" (2007)

Project Prompt

Informed by the readings, discussions, and works presented in class, create a project that takes explores the social production of identity. Choose from the following approaches:

- Invent an identity or character for you or others to inhabit

- Attempt to observe your own identity from an outsider's perspective
- Challenge the identity and subjectivity of the audience.

You will be graded on the criteria outlined in the syllabus. Due for critique in class December 3 and 5.