Editor’s Letter

Identity/exosomatic
Identity/endosomatic
Identity/Impenetrability

With these opening lines from one of his Aphorisms, Ulay evokes and brings into question the radical nature of identity and its other. Holding this dialogue close and resisting the lure of giving didactic and theoretical answers to Ulay’s open question, this issue of cLabels will follow him and others to tease out the subtle mediations that place each of us in a dialogue with the other.

Widely acknowledged as a key figure internationally in performance art, Ulay’s oeuvre consistently dwells on and draws its vivaciousness from the physical, emotional and ethical limits that constitute the dialogic space between individuals. Written between 1970 and 1973, Ulay’s Aphorisms encapsulate this disruptive praxis. Presented as a new sound and text installation in his Cooper Gallery exhibition so you see me, they exemplify the abiding character of language and its possibilities of summoning the other.

Drawn from the ancient Greek ‘aphorizein’ which means ‘to mark off, divide,’ the aphorism is the ideal literary register with which to speak of ourselves and the apparitions of the other. In his choice of words — ‘exosomatic’, which describes the recording of memories outside the brain, ‘endosomatic’, which indicates something within the body, and ‘Impenetrability’, the title of the collaborative work with Abramovic in 1977 that featured them facing each other nude at the entrance to the Galleria Communale d’Arte Moderna in Bologna — Ulay marks the horizons that frame the terms of relations between ourselves and the other. Seeking these horizons that appear outside, inside and between the body and the other, the artists, curators and writers gathered in this issue of cLabels conjure and embody the restless discursivity from which all iterations of the other arise.

For Under Consideration, Jane Rendell enters into and refigures her own space in which Ulay’s practice inhabits a pluralised textual writing, site-writing and life-work, the doublets and predicates of art-writing, scribing and curators and writers gathered in this issue of cLabels conjure and embody the restless discursivity from which all iterations of the other arise.

Comprised of Ulay’s Aphorisms and Seán Elders Encountering [as difference], Notes from the Studio juxtaposes two radically different approaches to identity and its differing inscriptions. Developed during his Cooper Summer Residency in 2017, Elder’s piece conjugates on ‘moments of gesture’ and acknowledges the necessity of identity not being a conclusion; the very raison d’être of Ulay’s Aphorisms.

Reflections & Addenda maintains this necessity through a selection of textual works all presented at the International Symposium alongside Ulay’s exhibition so you see me. Espousing multiple registers that veer between the fictional, the apparent biographical and the intimate, the writing by Amelia Bywater, Kirsty Hendry and Seán Elders draws up a palimpsest of observations, provocations and questions that dissolve the certainties of identity and yield in its stead a fertile ground for writing the other.

For this edition of cLabels What I’m reading now . . . is provided by Morgan Quaintance. Covering pollution, class-consciousness, labour history and politics, Quaintance’s selection of readings offers a timely summary of the emergencies corralling the contemporary world.

Threaded by a commitment to solidarity, the grassroots, the working class and the subcultural, the texts delineate the histories and probable futures within which identity and the perennial other will always be at stake.

Our last section sees a change, instead of the regular N.B. this cLabels closes with a visual cartography of the affinities, ideas and inspirations that underscore and feed into the curatorial programme of Cooper Gallery. Unrestricted by time and space, this discursive reader follows and marks the always open lines of flight that occupy every part of our recent thinking and doing.

Throughout this issue, cLabels has brought to the fore a complexity of perspectives and positions on identity. This has not been done to enable us to arrive at a definitive statement on ourselves or the other, rather the desire motivating these words has been to pencil in a brief constellation, from which you, our reader, can find your own unexpected points of departure.

Happy reading.

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