Foreword

Professor David Marshall

Ideas move in interesting ways. And yet the critical analysis of the movement of ideas is a somewhat limited area of inquiry, perhaps because it is so broad and amorphous. From Thomas Kuhn’s exploration of scientific revolutions to the particular studies of creativity, traces of thinking are devoted to how ideas are translated and appropriated. Political ideas are framed in the way that they augur movement and lead to either change or constraint. Despite this amorphousness, I am fascinated with how ideas move into new minds, different communities and then are taken up and transformed.

In April, I was given the opportunity to present my ideas in Bathurst at the provocatively titled Mask: Performance, Performativity and Communication Symposium at Charles Sturt University and organised and run by the School of Communication and Creative Industries. My own presentation tried to make sense of the new focus on the public individual and my talk was entitled also to provoke: “Masks and Publics: Understanding the Singular/Collective Qualities of Contemporary Persona”. I tried to identify that there was a “zone of persona” in the contemporary moment that stitched and kneaded together our sense of singularity and our connection to the collective. I pushed new terms into the audience’s critical lexicon with “the personalization complex”, “presentational media”, “intercommunication”, the “mediatization of the self” and its relation to self-branding and linked them all to “persona studies” – my building field of inquiry.

What I discovered was an incredibly receptive environment. Part of the reason for this openness was the interdisciplinarity of the participants in the Symposium and an acknowledgement of the value of different approaches. With both performance studies and visual artistic practice prominently present as well as critical analytical approaches from communication and public relations, the Symposium managed to build an interesting intersection of ideas around performance, the public self, the translation of meaning, and the play of strategic masks of identity for particular ends and objectives. From that Symposium, this collection has emerged.

I hope that my ideas in some way were able to be entertained, explored, transformed, disputed and embraced by the contributors to this issue of Fusion. And I know that their ideas have entered my thinking and are working their magic on my thoughts. This issue represents both the movement and translation of ideas into new spaces and disciplines and I applaud the contributors and their work as well as the organisers of the Symposium and the editors of this issue in ensuring that these ideas move even further.

Introduction

Dr Johanna Fawkes and Associate Professor Peter Simmons

This edition collects papers and contributions generated around the MASK symposium on Performance, Performativity and Communication, hosted by the School of Communication and Creative Industries at the Bathurst
The event grew from the recognition that staff and students across the University were researching different aspects of performance – some from the perspective of the artist; others looking at construction of professionalism in creative industries; still others about literal, theatrical performance practices.

The theoretical underpinnings of this project are found in the work of Erving Goffman such as Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (1959) and its application to professions; Bourdieu’s (Bourdieu, 1984; Bourdieu & Nice, 1977) concepts of practice, habitus and field in reproducing norms in social organisations, including professions; and concepts of performativity, power and embodiment from Judith Butler (1997, 2003; 2013). These scholars help explicate the formation and maintenance of identity in changing social conditions. They theorise the outward manifestations of performance at work, the creation of team cultures and the notion of gender as a performance. Their work is echoed in the papers gathered in this edition.

There is a renewal of interest in these questions as social pressures and digital media create a climate of permanent performance, at work, leisure and home. Together with aspects of surveillance in contemporary western cultures it is hard to know when one is ‘off’ camera. Some writers, ( e.g. novelist Marilynne Robinson, 2010) suggest this is leading to societies where inner experience is devalued in preference for the consumption and exchange of outward appearances; others (Finkelstein, 2007) point to time and places such as the French Imperial courts where similar pressures prevailed. There is also recent research on performance as methodology (Haseman, 2006; Hadley, 2013).

Overall, then, there has been a flourishing of literature on the promotional aspects of our culture, from Wernick’s (1991) Promotional Culture to Marshall’s (2014) work on celebrity and power. These interrogate what Fairchild (2007) calls the ‘attention economy’ in which selfies displace and replace much traditional discourse including many aspects of journalism, public relations, advertising and other organisational communications. And yet, this work is generally located in the cultural studies schools of research. The applied nature of much research located in Charles Sturt University offers a grounded approach to some of the theoretical discussions evolving elsewhere. What this collection brings to the discussion is a frequent emphasis on the practice and production of cultural goods, such as cop shows, reality TV artworks and performances. This is still an underexplored aspect of communication research and offers scope for pioneering work within and between disciplines and for new research approaches to be built on extending from the MASK symposium. The contents of this edition reflect the multiple perspectives participants brought to the event; our intention was to create a space for discovery and development, and the submissions exceeded our expectations in range and quality. They speak to the potential for collaboration and creativity in this emerging field.

Convinced that received histories are fragmented and distorted and at best incomplete, Julie Montgarrett interrogates the violent settlement shadows and destruction of ancient indigenous cultures during the first quarter of the nineteenth century in Tasmania, by presenting ‘possibilities from uncertainties’. Her paper is personal in several ways, she speculates an ancestral connection with ‘notorious’ Colonial Naval Surgeon and Magistrate Jacob Mountgarrett, and leads us through her own drawing and embroidery practice, as well as influences such as Hawksley and Gough. The narrative and sumptuous images combine to provide a provocative experience that in and of itself reminds us that the past is not just accessible through memory, but with us and emergent.

In many ways Antony Stephenson captures the complexity of performance and performativity. He reminds us that most of us have limited real life experience of police, but have a great familiarity with policing as presented in cop shows. He uses close analysis of existing literature concerning police perceptions of the ways that police and their profession are portrayed in television programs. He finds dissatisfaction among officers with inaccurate television portrayals of procedure and crime and arrest rates, but various evidence that real life police practices are often modelled on what they see on television.

Ivana Crestani has spent many years working with organisations as a communication and culture consultant. Her
paper provides a fresh approach to using ‘appreciative inquiry’ as a framework to consider when communicating change. Appreciative inquiry is distinct for its emphasis on appreciating and building on the positive in organisations. As Crestani shows however, we can’t all be winners in organisational change, inevitably there are some negative consequences and discourses. To avoid the negative, as pure appreciation of the positive is inclined to do, is to ignore or misrepresent important feelings and realities. To deepen change conversations and improve employees’ sense of voice and engagement, Crestani advocates understanding and use of Jungian concepts, most importantly the Shadow, for communicators, leaders and facilitators of change.

Tony Curran reminds us that photographic and other records have been important to performance art and performance artists, but that the records are always distinct from the performance itself. Drawing on performances by Abramović and critiques of her work, he examines related concepts and engages the reader in a record and reflection on his own, clever challenge to the distinctions between record and performance. In this paper he reports on his own performance at the National Portrait Gallery of Australia, As Long As You’re Here (2013). For 33 days he sat opposite seated participating visitors and drew portraits of them on an iPad. Individual drawings were then emailed to the sitters. Thus he conflated his drawing performance and the record of performance.

Relatedly, Neill Overton’s paper is a virtual, cross temporal and cross spatial journey through a selection of Australian drawing histories, movements and modes that shifted drawing beyond the studio and wall artefact, with a focus on Ian Howard, Mike Parr and John Wolseley. He reflects on drawing as performance, from Wolseley’s “drawing performed” and drawings left outside to be completed by the landscape, through influences such as region and locality, to drawing through car tyre burnout. Overton shows us that in recent decades drawing has been the site of innovation – much of it performative – on a scale unprecedented in its long and ancient tradition.

The site of performance is explored by Jennifer Munday and Emma Kearney in their reflections on the role of a former mental asylum in shaping memories of place, from the respective perspectives of theatre practice and historical research. Their collaborative use of crystallization as a narrative research method offers insights both into their own process of reflection and a potential multidimensional tool for future researchers.

Collaboration and innovative research methods are also a feature of Kate Smith and Michelle Evans’ constructed conversation on performance, transgression and practice-based research. Their dialogue applies a Foucauldian perspective to the tensions of spectator / performer and researched / researcher roles, and observes how these roles can blur and reverse in practice. Insights from their practice as performers and researchers suggest how relational approaches to research can help build community.

Walking through rural New South Wales, Chris Orchard connects eyes and feet, photography and walking. His senses suffused with scents of earth after rain, he turns to Sontag and other writers on place, memory and image in a poetic piece of imaginative writing, accompanied by exquisite images.

The theory and practice of constructing a Reality TV show are investigated by Bruce Gater and Jasmine B. MacDonald, demonstrating the value of grounding theory in practice. Descriptions of the process of selecting and assembling the ‘cast’ for Reality TV illustrate the artifice involved in every moment of its creation.

In contrast, Bill Green contributes a deeply scholarly piece exploring writing as research, or research-as-writing. His focus is on the cultural practice of research, particularly the practice of practice-based research, where both method and study relate to the kinds of practice evoked by other contributors. This piece extends and deepens notions of creative research and provides a fitting conclusion to this edition.

Several of the papers suggest ways forward. It is our intention to maintain this space for collaborative, creative research and practice (and research-practice), this collection is the first step in that project. Your comments are responses are warmly welcomed – please respond either to fusion at moconnor@csu.edu.au or the MASK website.

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