NEXT TO NOTHING: ART AS PERFORMANCE

A meeting of art and philosophy in the age of post-dematerialisation

PARTICPANTS

Gillian Arrighi, Senior Lecturer, Creative and Performing Arts, University of Newcastle

The Performance of Absence: the Neutral Mask

First developed in Italy in the years immediately following WWII, the neutral mask is one of the rare tools created specifically for the actor in training. Designed with the purpose of capturing no distinguishing personality characteristics other than an alert and present being-ness, the neutral mask challenges its wearer to not be her-or him-self, whilst not yet being someone else. Between self and other, the neutral mask demands the performer be present with an absence of signifying character.

What are the psychophysical challenges to an actor working with this mask? This paper and demonstration aims to open up and pursue conceptual and grounded dialogue concerning the performance of absence and the responses it draws from viewers.

Deidre Brollo, Artist and Lecturer in Printmedia, University of Newcastle

Deb Mansfield, Artist and Associate Lecturer in Photomedia, University of Newcastle

TIME/LAPSE: Voice, Gesture and the Material Self

Mansfield and Brollo will present a performative lecture exploring the dynamics between materiality and performance. Through the simultaneous transmission of two different texts- one mediated by and through the audience, the other gestural and unspoken-the artists will seek to problematise the process of information dissemination. Dissonance, error and distraction will intersect with the frequencies of care, kinship and exchange. The resulting collisions of voice, gesture and meaning call into question the assumption that materiality and performance are at a loss to one other. This performative lecture will question binary tensions associated with materiality and performance, together with other oppositions often posited between artist and audience, action and object, process and document.

Dale Collier, Artist and PhD candidate, University of Newcastle

HYPERVENTIL-NATION

Dale Collier investigates issues of hyper-nationalism and processes of collective identity formation. Through new media, performance and installation, his work seeks an amplified participatory experience and to challenge fixed notions of identity. Collier is particularly interested in new interactive modes of audience engagement. In exploring the performativity of objects, his work beckons active participation in an attempt to provide a reflexive platform for the contemplation of an Australian identity he sees in crisis. Collier's inclusive approach towards the relationship between technological-centred arts and community development emphasises an interrogative approach to performance and liveness.

Alexandra Day, PhD candidate (English Literature), University of Newcastle

Reading Jane Lumley's Iphigenia

Mainstream western theatrical performance relies on a number of persistent distinctions: between audience and performer; between auditorium and stage; between the performance

and the material text. Jane Lumley's sixteenth century English adaptation of Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis*-the first drama in English known to be written by a woman- asks us to question these binaries. It presents an ontological challenge: while it survives as a complete, unique, undamaged manuscript, its performance history is entirely unknown: is it a 'closet drama', written to be read? or is it a stage drama, written to be performed? Does it matter? This staged reading operates in the space between – and whether classified as performance or non-performance, is a first for Newcastle, and probably Australia.

Steve Dutton, Artist and Professor in Contemporary Art Practice, The School of Fine and Performing Arts, University of Lincoln, UK

1. The Work is a Score

By locating his thinking and artistic practice within the context of 'performing' (as opposed to teleological models of progress, measurement and outcome) Dutton will map some of the tactics and strategies which are central to his current work as an artist onto what he describes as an 'imaginary Office of Institutional Aesthetics which sits within an imaginary Art Institution'. Following the sometimes perverse 'performative logic' of his practice, he will propose, and play with, a conceptual model of an institution which prioritises the work of art, (what the work of art can do), exploring the relationships between potentiality and actuality which come to the fore when thinking of the work of art as thing which is always unfolding.

2. Midpointness

Midpointness is an evolving curatorial and artistic project that explores ways in which works of art might be understood as 'being in the midst'; a place W. T. J. Mitchell has usefully described as an 'inescapable zone of transaction'. When is something finished? When might something begin? *Midpointness* explores these questions through a performative process of exhibition making in which artists and curators are present throughout. The project will begin with an exhibition of work by selected artists, which is then dismantled and constantly reconstructed, re-imagined, re-classified and augmented throughout the exhibition by curators, artists, students and gallery visitors. An integral part of this project is a series of events and workshops that will shape and inform the evolution of the exhibition. These events will include talks, reading groups, critiques,

Brian Joyce, Writer/ Co-Producer at Ngarrama Productions

Watching the Audience

A person sits on a chair on a bare stage. They look at the audience as the audience looks at them. After a period of time the 'performer' rises and asks the audience to leave and return in five minutes time for the second part of the performance. When the audience returns all seems the same but changed. Roles of performer and audience, and the direction of the gaze are disrupted and questioned through a series of successive performances of the simple act of sitting and watching.

Richard Kean, Independent artist

Arc

Kean's performance explores how an aural bow interacts with the gallery as an architectural construct. The sounding of the bow will be used to navigate the aural possibilities of the gallery to seek a perceptive focus upon being and space. This will be interwoven with Kean speaking to relationships the bow creates in specific contexts drawn out of the sounding of the bow. This performance continues Kean's research into aural strings as an artistic medium and how this medium relates to the natural world and human artifice.

Miranda Lawry, Artist & Senior Lecturer in Fine Art (Photomedia), University of Newcastle

1. Imaging Breath

This presentation explores the human breath and how it is manifest in reference to artworks and research. In her recent PhD *Vital Signs/Art and Wellness: The Hospital as a Mediated Site*, Lawry analysed ways in which the breath mirrored descriptions of weather and climate,

and framed notions of belonging among the many hospital staff who participated. Lawry will present artworks that describe the breath or that embed breath back into fractured and contested space.

2. "Light is therefore colour" - J.M.W Turner

AART3430 Alchemy is a directed course offered in the Bachelor of Fine Art Degree at the University of Newcastle in which students consider the history of photography by investing time in developing expertise in mixing emulsions, coating materials and exposing them to sunlight (UV light). These processes are then challenged through the creation of digital negatives, thus bonding the historical timeline from 1840 to 2015. Beyond this process however lies a capacity for these 'contact processes' to image light. The 24 students currently enrolled in this course have been invited to collaborate to produce works that describe the performative process inherent in mapping the Lock-up building by coating paper and capturing the light that describes the physical spaces of the building. These images will form a new work in which symposium participants are invited to reimagine the light traces as they form new visual components on the wall in the entry foyer.

Philip Matthias, Conductor (Echology) and Deputy Head of School (Research & Research Training, School of Creative Arts), University of Newcastle

Torres Strait Islander Song- the Creative Process

The creation and performance of Torres Strait Islander song is quite different to western approaches to composition and performance. The music is composed and taught orally, yet is often quite complex in nature. In his research and transcription of Islander song, in consultation with Toby Whaleboat, a Torres Strait Murray Islander, Matthias investigates approaches to melody, harmony, text-setting and performance in sacred songs from Murray Island. When examined through the traditional western canon, this music seems to be made from next to nothing, yet nonetheless culminates in beautifully crafted compositions. This presentation outlines some of these approaches, in relation to both traditional song and more recent compositions.

Faye Neilson, Lecturer in Fine Art, University of Newcastle

Performance Art and Physical Presence

This presentation considers the notion of endurance in performance art and the proposed importance of the 'live' experience for the viewer. Marina Abramović often uses a simple set of written directives to guide her works, also setting the parameters for the audience's response to her immediate physicality. Like Abramovic, Michaela Gleave set guidelines for her 2014 performance *Waiting For Time (7 Hour Confetti Work)*. However this work was delivered to the audience through Youtube for the duration of a seven-hour period. It was also presented on screen, in real time, at the Gallery of Modern Art in Brisbane. Gleave's work raises an interesting question: is performance art diminished when the artist is not physically present?

Emily Parsons-Lord, Independent artist

1. You will always be wanted by me (20h 51m 42.33s 46° 33′ 38.23″)

You will always be wanted by me is a performance presentation that recreates starlight out of smoke, presented alongside a 'performance potential' installed in one of the cells at the Lock-up.
The work examines the suburban sublime experience of contemplating a connection to the universe by naming stars in the International Star Registry. This presentation looks at the performative quality of the (im)material: smoke, and questions the necessity for a performer to be present. The alluring quality and movement of the smoke creates stimulus for a contemplative beat: a star gaze. A space is created with components left in potential of an intimate one off performance.

2. My only lie was… (11h 49m 30.21s 40° 1′ 16.69″)

Installed in one of the cells at the Lock-up are the components for a potential single intimate performance that relies on the agency of the audience to initiate the exchange.

Angela Philp, Lecturer in Art History and Theory, University of Newcastle

Aesthetics, Food and Performance Art

Food has been an integral part of many works of performance art. It can involve growing, eating, commensality, the relationship between performer and audience, the creation and repetition of ritual, the exploration of taboos and sins (such as gluttony and asceticism), feminism and the body (including dysmorphia), relational aesthetics (Bourriaud), activism, power, ethics, food security and politics. What is the difference between food as a medium/subject in art and its use in everyday life and gastronomic practices? How do artists/spectators/participants variously interpret a work of performance art? What judgements can or should be made about performance art?

Jane Polkinghorne, Artist, academic and co-director of Marrickville Garage

Failing to Perform: When Performance Art Isn't

In a failed yet academically-styled presentation, Polkinghorne reflects on failure through her 'bad performance art'. Utilising key signifiers and poses of performance art, the form of the presentation will both illustrate and enact the content. The posing inherent to performance art, together with its signs and indicators, are retooled to demonstrate its artifice. What happens when the pose is disrupted, when it slips and another pose is manifested? Within the presentation Polkinghorne navigates a fuzzy zone in which performance dissipates and another experience manifests in a collision of failure, artifice and authenticity. What is that something else? How failed can performance 'be' before it is no longer performance? How excruciating will witnessing this presentation be? Will she fail utterly, or worse, succeed?

Honi Ryan, Independent artist

A Necessary Nothing

Ryan invites us to participate in an experiment to ascertain how minimal performance art can be. In the absence of an artist, with the absence of prescribed content, how far can a *provocation to think* be the stuff of art, and why? Ryan works with a living practice located at the borders of art and life, where the decision to make something art is the only thing needed to define an action as such. In reflecting upon a recently culminated endurance performance *Gestures of Intent: A Year of Nomadic Social Practice*, Ryan offers *profound simplicity* as a sociopolitical awareness positioned toward peacemaking.

Kris Smith, Lecturer in Photomedia, University of Newcastle

Red/Green/Blue: Philosophy/Art/Science

This installation presents distilled visual information from 3 different perspectives using 3 data projectors, each one only projecting pure red, green or blue light to construct a virtual, reconfigurable interactive image. Offering an iPhone color gamut chart, juxtaposed with a hyper-illuminated human form, deconstructed image components are given a physical, sculptural form that invites closer inspection. When a viewer enters the space their presence disrupts the projected image and an opportunity for interactivity and performance is created. Filtered perspectives are thereby combined, displaced and recombined, questioning the formation and validity of ideas around perceived realities put forward by philosophers, scientists and artists.

Braddon Snape, Casual academic and PhD candidate, University of Newcastle

The Inflating: The Performance of Materiality

Throughout *The Inflating*, Snape performs materiality before our eyes. All senses are awakened when immersed in the experience of this event. As the rush of the compressed air

is heard forcing its way in between cold sheets of steel, the percipient is alerted to the forceful flow. Then, as the steel begins to give and flex to the force and sound of steel popping, creaking and reverberating, an air of drama is introduced to the darkened cell space. As the pressure and tension builds, and the steel continues to yield to the process, we become aware of the unique properties of steel and of the magical dialogue between the invisible- the immaterial and matter. Here we encounter a phenomenological event.

Sally Walker, Performing artist and Lecturer in Flute, University of Newcastle

The Tactile Closeness of a Flute without Keys

What if the flute was 'stripped bare' of it keys and mechanisms? What is revealed in the absence of keys? How is the new tactile closeness relevant for the performer? The earliest flutes were carved out of organic materials such as bone and shell. In the baroque era, one key was added which revolutionised the wooden instrument into a fully chromatic one. In the 19th century, one mechanical genius added keys and made a controversial flute of silver. What happens when a modern flute player becomes interested in these older instruments? What use can be made of the quarter and microtones possible with no keys? What does it mean to be *in between* two systems?

Linda Walsh, Senior Lecturer in Music, University of Newcastle

Water Music: a Phenomenological Approach to Music Creation

Drawing on Gaston Bachelard's theories of imagination of matter, this paper presents a phenomenological approach to music creation that explores the dialogical relationships between water, image and sound. According to Bachelard, understanding of the self and our position in the world occurs through our relationship with nature's core elements: earth, air, fire and water. It is through our experiences with the elements that we can access and energise the imagination. Yet in spite of Bachelard's extensive work on imagination and creativity, he rarely refers to music, focusing instead on poetics and literary imagination. This creates an ideal opportunity to expand Bachelard's ideas to musical creativity and demonstrate the possibilities of water as a compositional tool.

Julie Vulcan, Independent artist

RIMA retraced

As the marks and layers of paint on the walls of the Lock Up's exercise yard present themselves as just that, they also resonate a distilled notion of time collapsed into this moment. Through actions and movements Vulcan engages in a wordless conversation with these walls, both now and back in time. Literally tracing the layers, she offers strategies for survival in an interminable passing of time. Accentuating this focus, these traces are further scrutinised via the micro lens of an everyday mobile phone application. The detailed point of view, which is projected onto a cell wall similarly holding its own marks and layers, appears displaced. Yet this displacement also implicates the transition from cell to yard and back again, and in doing so, plays out the cyclical and connected nature of time within these walls.

INVITED COMMENTATORS

Elizabeth Coleman, Lecturer in Philosophy and Communications, Monash University

Coleman writes on freedom of expression and cross-cultural communication. Her research engages with performance largely through Goffman and social aesthetics.
Social aesthetics involves the deployment of codes related to the sensory qualities of the world. In everyday life, the codes provide an epistemology of the pure and impure, the high and the low. People use the codes to display their place in the world, their attitudes towards their environment, and their attitudes towards others. In this sense, the codes are elements of a performance through which we articulate hierarchy and relationships. This performance might be considered an ur-art. However, for art to communicate or 'to express', it must depend on these codes for its intelligibility.

David Macarthur, Associate Professor in Philosophy, University of Sydney

Macarthur works at the interface of contemporary pragmatism, Wittgenstein's philosophy of language and philosophy of art (architecture, photography & film). Two of the main concerns of his current research are 1) to explore the ways the issue of skepticism about other minds plays out in our creation of, and engagement with, art; and 2) to develop a "Liberal Naturalism" in contrast to Scientific Naturalism in order to explore the possibility of non-scientific understandings of people and artworks. The conceptual framework of Liberal Naturalism is articulated in two volumes that he has co-edited with Mario De Caro (Roma Tré): *Naturalism in Question* (Harvard UP, 2004); *Naturalism and Normativity* (Columbia UP, 2010)

James Phillips, Associate Professor in Philosophy, University of NSW

While writing on Kant's aesthetics and the interrelationship between philosophy and literature, Phillips' research interests extend to performance. For example, he asks whether speaking of minimalist performance refers to content, props, etc. that are stripped back rather than the performance itself? Is minimalist performance in a sense maximalist because in scaling down the matter that is performed it leaves room for performance all the more to expose itself, so to speak? Are there criteria for evaluating performance that are specific to it rather than drawn from the content of what is performed, such as the pleasure that is its effect or the good that is its end?

Daniel von Sturmer, Artist and Lecturer in BFA, Monash University

Sturmer's practice involves video, photography, installation and architectural interventions. His works draw connections between psychology and philosophy, making manifest the psychological and perceptual elements at play in the encounter with artworks. Sturmer exhibits at numerous international public venues, including Australian Centre of Contemporary Art, Melbourne, Gothenberg Museum of Art, Sweden, Venice Biennale, Italy. Recent solo exhibitions include Focus & Field, Young Projects Gallery, (Los Angeles, 2014), These Constructs, Anna Schwartz Gallery, (Melbourne, 2014); Video Works, Karsten Schubert Gallery, (London, 2010). He is represented by Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne and Sydney.

CONVENORS

Jennifer A. McMahon, Associate Professor in Philosophy, University of Adelaide

McMahon writes on issues in philosophical aesthetics drawing upon examples of art to demonstrate arguments and to draw out the implications of any particular view. The implications extend to issues in meta-ethics, epistemology and philosophy of meaning.

Sean Lowry, Convenor of Creative and Performing Arts, University of Newcastle

Lowry is a visual artist, musician and writer interested in the limits of quotational and locational specificity in contemporary creative practices. Lowry also the Founder and Executive Director of *Project Anywhere: Art At The Outermost Limits Of Location-Specificity*.