RECONSTRUCTING IDENTITY

a transdisciplinary approach

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Introduction

Nicholas Monk, Mia Lindgren, Sarah McDonald, and Sarah Pasfield-Neofitou

Identity as a subject for analysis and discussion, and as a lived reality for all of us, has never been more complex and multi-faceted. Uneven though they are, technological advances and globalization change the ways people understand their identities. Social media, as a synthesis of both, shapes the identities of the groups we belong to and the identities of individuals and other groups that have hitherto existed beyond our view. Reflection on, and thoughtful reconstruction of, identity exists side-by-side with simplistic and hostile categorizations on Facebook and other social media. Personal online expression can be met by equal shares of sympathy and

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e-bile, in what Emma Jane calls "the recreational nastiness that have come to constitute a dominant tenor of Internet discourse" (2014, 532). Brands take on identities of their own, mental health deteriorates in Western countries, and crises and celebrations of identity occur over nationality, sexuality, culture, and politics.

That these shifts and complexities in public and private identities take place across such a range of human interactions, and on a global scale, is significant. Under these conditions, our identity escapes from disciplinary bounds to a place where the sophistication and complexity of its existence have to be matched by openness, analyses, and reflections that also transcend disciplinary categorization. This book attempts analyses of this kind, and its structure is designed to be sympathetic to this aspiration in that it moves from disciplinarity through multidisciplinarity to transdisciplinarity and extradisciplinarity. Two overlapping thrusts exist in this book, which are interdisciplinarity and identity. We will write more on both shortly, but before we do we should explain the origins and structure of this book. The book is divided into three sections:

Section 1: Biological Identity
Section 2: Structures of National and Personal Identity
Section 3: Creating and Mediating Identity

These sections suggested themselves during the editing process and, like everything else about this book, they have grown, organically, as the editors have discussed and developed them.

The idea of an organic structure is so important to us because of the way the larger project, of which this book is a part, grew. Such a structure, too, reflects our own perceptions of identity as fluid, malleable, open to telling and retelling, or composed of elements that may be rearranged to create different narratives. Form and content are interwoven, therefore, throughout this project. Practical pedagogy provided the impetus for this book, and it owes its dynamic and unpredictable life to the design, delivery, and outcomes of a teaching module, or unit, called Forms of Identity for honors level undergraduates, the creation and delivery of which was shared by the University of Warwick in the UK and Monash University

in Australia[1] (for a background on the Forms of Identity portal pedagogy teaching project, see Monk et al. 2015). The chapters that follow reflect the diversity of the contributions made to the Forms of Identity module by a variety of lecturers, as well as perspectives from academics working in connected areas. This is by no means, though, a textbook nor a guide to teaching and learning. Material that relates to learning and teaching is included only if it has informed and changed the thinking of the editors and contributors. We hope that such a process has enabled what we might describe as "teaching-led research", in some of the more sophisticated examples, where the learning and teaching space has acted as a crucible for an understanding of identity (for both the editors of this book and the students involved) in a particularly self-reflexive fashion. The translation of ideas into the learning and teaching unit, the effects of these ideas on tutors and students, the development of these ideas, the collection of these ideas in this book, and the use of this book to inform further thinking on identity are precisely performative of the form–content relationships we have sought to encourage, which have created an experience for many of us that is greater than the sum of its parts. The experience, itself, has an identity—one of fluidity and interchangeability. And part of this project is to narrate that identity.

The experience of sharing the module with our students, of teaching them, and of learning from them has reinforced for us the fluidity of identity, the elusiveness of an easy or succinct definition of it, and its persistent facility to escape disciplinary classification. More specifically, in terms of the students' interaction with us, our interaction with them, and their interaction with each other and with the disciplinary material we offered them, the module required that we all encounter identity in an embodied way that moved beyond the module into the world outside the academy. We "did" identity on a daily basis in an academic setting and beyond, not merely in our roles as academics and students, but in terms

[1] The module is one of a number of similar interdisciplinary "modules", as they are called at Warwick, or "units", as they are called at Monash, hosted jointly by the institutions. The terms "unit" and "module" will be synonymous and interchangeable in the remainder of this volume. A different disciplinary specialist was present each week, as well as a facilitator from each university at either end of the link. Completing the picture were individuals from Information Technology Services who also became part of the process. For more details on the practicalities of the teaching and learning experience for students and staff at the two universities, see Monk et al. (2015).

of our cultures, nationalities, politics, gender, and race: epistemology came face to face with ontology. That our students set up Facebook groups independently of us is evidence of this, as was the flirting between students that took place occasionally across the teleconferencing link. Everything about the production of this work and what has preceded it in terms of teaching and learning and research activity is performative of the ideas of identity that underpin its development: again, the "doing" of identity. We write for example of globalization: the collaboration that is at the core of this book and that motivates us to publish it features staff from universities at opposite ends of the globe, and the undergraduates with whom we have worked on the module represent 14 different nationalities. When we teach we ask students to document these processes of changing and fluctuating identity through reflective journals in which we demand only that students are "immediate" and "honestly reflective"—in other words, they document their experiences according to their condition at the time of that experience, and in the light of the intellectual material with which they are provided. We ask that our students become, in a methodologically unprescriptive fashion, autoethnographers, or documenters of the self.[2] To mirror this process, we close the book with a commentary on the experience derived from the self-reflections of the four editors on what it has meant to us to be teachers, or facilitators, and how this relates to our professional and personal identities, and our understanding of identity as a concept. (The conversation is transcribed in full in Appendix 1.) Taking an autoethnographic approach, *we* become the object of study alongside the material that we offer in writing or in other mediums.

The book is divided into sections that collect current thinking from international scholars from the disciplines of philosophy, history, science, cultural, media and translation studies, performance, and marketing. Each section of the book begins with a meta-analysis which provides a

[2] Autoethnography is an expression of the desire to turn social science inquiry into a non-alienating practice, one in which I (as a researcher) do not need to suppress my own subjectivity, where I can become more attuned to the subjectivities of others, where I am free to reflect on the consequences of my work, not only for others but also for myself, and where all parts of myself—emotional, spiritual, intellectual, embodied and moral—can be voiced and integrated into my work … It's a response to an existential crisis—a desire to do meaningful work and lead a meaningful life. (Bochner 2013, 53)

short commentary that guides the reader through disciplinary transitions, and that permits passage through a threshold of extradisciplinary understanding which facilitates reconstruction of the notion of identity. In other words, the book aims to develop our understanding of identity and what it means to be human, a notion that is central to many disciplines, and should be central to all. We begin with the fundamental relationships of mind to body, move through exploration of narratives of identity, and finally, consider the performance of identity. Alongside these disciplinary essays, which lay a foundation, we describe an extradisciplinary space that we created for our students in which we try to divest them, and ourselves, of our disciplinary baggage in order to reconstruct an understanding (or understandings) of identity that matches the conditions and complexities we describe above. From these positions of extradisciplinarity and disciplinarity, we move to a space in which identity can be considered as a multidisciplinary, and then as an interdisciplinary, concept. Finally, we consider the ways in which identity may have become a transdisciplinary phenomenon that demands of us as academics that we change the way we think about our approach to our own disciplines and to problems and challenges that exist in the world beyond our departmental and faculty structures. Some definitions are necessary here, but we wish to avoid an extensive analysis or review of the literature available on interdisciplinarity. Lack of space and infinite regress are also potential pitfalls, but we recognize that any discussion of what constitutes the various categories of disciplinarity is, itself, a question of identity, so we require a workable theory based on both the literature and our experiences in the learning and teaching and research activities that inform this book.[3]

Robert Frodeman's (2014) *Sustainable Knowledge: A Theory of Interdisciplinarity* is a suitable guide for us in theorizing interdisciplinarity because its analysis grows organically from practice and principle in the same ways that the idea of identity does in this book. Frodeman uses

[3] There are many definitions of theories of interdisciplinarity, a small number of which would be sufficient to fill this book if they were analyzed in detail. Our selection is necessarily selective and, therefore, focused on ideas that seem most relevant to our own experience. As our work emerges from a pedagogic space in higher education, we would refer the interested reader to the Higher Education Academy's report on interdisciplinary provision in higher education for further reading and information (Lyall et al. 2015).

a case study of medical diagnosis that is highly personal to him in order to draw out his definitions. His practice is actually very similar to our own rather more extended analysis of ours' and the students' experiences on the identity unit. Frodeman's definitions begin with disciplinarity—which is characterized as being based on the false assumption that the world divides naturally into different kinds of things. It is the case, rather, that these disciplinary categories are nominal only and do not form coherent epistemic units. In this, Frodeman is close to Gregory Bateson (1972) who insists that what is required is not "a set of categories which will throw a light on the problems, but rather the schematic formulation of the problems in such a way as they might be separately investigable" (Bateson 1972, 62). For Frodeman "the simplest way to define interdisciplinarity is in terms of a focus outward, away from a group of peers" (2014, 36), or the co-production of knowledge within the academy. Frodeman defines transdisciplinarity as "the co-production of knowledge between academic and non-academic actors" (ibid., 61). The cardinal virtue of the transdisciplinary for Frodeman is that it breaks the stranglehold of peer review on the creation and production of knowledge. We diverge from Frodeman here, only in the sense that we would not wish to be so specific: the "trans" prefix of transdisciplinarity *does* imply for us the notion of transcendence, but it is our view that such transcendence can take place within the university, and particularly in work with students, where the master and novitiate relationship begins to dissolve. Frodeman offers, too, the notion of "dedisciplinarity" (ibid., 84) in which philosophy and the sciences escape disciplinarity to, once again, transcend "regional ontology" (ibid., 85) and move "beyond the walls of the disciplinary academy" (ibid., 86). Our understanding of the transdisciplinary in this volume is a combination of Frodeman's version, along with his concept of dedisciplinarity.

Forms of Identity Module

For us it is the nature of the subject or object of study that determines its disciplinary condition. So, for example, for Kevin Moffat (who provides a chapter in this collection) to investigate genetic mutation in fruit flies

(in the discipline of biology) is one thing, but for him then to talk about identity in this context (introducing an interdisciplinary perspective) in a group of students from the arts and humanities, who may challenge him on the basis that in their view gender is wholly a social construct (introducing a transdisciplinary perspective), is quite another. If these students then take their discussions and their understanding of the ideas they have helped to create in the seminar out into the world (also transdisciplinary), the idea of identity escapes its bounds. The final category, but the first one we actually use in the module, is "extradisciplinarity". We felt as facilitators that we needed to create a space for students in the first minutes and hours of the module that removed them from their customary disciplinary environments and where our own disciplines as professional teachers and researchers shrank into the background. The creation of an extradisciplinary space was actually made easier by the unfamiliarity of the learning and teaching environment we had created for the students. At the University of Warwick we had installed around £50,000 worth of teleconferencing equipment in what became the portal pedagogy space—a seminar room in a 1980s building. Monash University installed similar equipment in a similar room. We went to the extent of decorating the rooms in the same color, and using similar furniture. The spaces, together, represented not only a point between the two universities in a virtual arena but also a point at which the virtual and physical learning space intersected. We hoped that students would experience this space as unique, with an identity of its own, and feel able to take ownership of it.

We built into the design of the shared spaces a number of features. The first was that there was no lectern from which academics could deliver material to the students; instead, the keyboard, screen, mouse, and document visualizer were placed off to the side. For the international sessions, academics who wished to deliver material via these means stood adjacent to the screen and either faced a moveable head-height camera on their left to address the remote students or simply turned slightly to their right to speak to the physically co-present students, with the equipment close at hand while not coming between teacher and students at either end. Each group of students was able to see the other and they could speak at any time as both rooms had ceiling microphones to pick up interjections. Displayed on the screen at both ends were large projections of the other

group, and any content that formed part of a PowerPoint or was relayed through the visualizer could also be seen. Either display could be minimized or maximized according to the requirements of the session. What the space enabled us to do, as a group of learners and tutors, was to see and hear each other clearly, and to converse as though we were in the same space geographically rather than merely virtually. The technology created a membrane, a window between continents, connecting the student cohorts located in different hemispheres. The immediate consequence was that UK-based students realized there was more than one eight o'clock in the day, and Australian students were horrified by the poor March weather in the northern hemisphere. At a deeper level, it became apparent that the space had permitted us to create a safe and practical way for students to begin to explore one aspect of the notion of identity itself in a virtual space that was as close to a real learning environment as possible. Above all, however, this was a space that represented no disciplinary focus: it was not a lab, nor was it a seminar room, still less, a lecture theater.

From the outset, students could see themselves and others performing, or embodying, a range of identities in significantly different cultural environments. As one student noted:

> [t]he technology, how it is set up and the appearance of people just being on the other side of the wall is really important and meant that I could integrate the students in the UK, even though I was standing in Australia, in a way that I have not been able to do before in other forms of remote teaching. It was like a window and I could look through the window and they were real people actually moving and laughing and participating and it really made me feel like we almost didn't have the distance.

Another feature we found particularly useful in the design of the space was a circle of carpet, adjacent to the screens at either end of the link, of a different shade to the surrounding area. This provided students with a naturally constituted seating arrangement in which they faced their on-screen colleagues in a semi-circle with the facilitator at the intersection of the two semi-circles. The design of the space also permitted tables to be folded and stored in a purpose-built area behind doors, so we were left,

for the purposes of our sessions, with an open space, free of furniture but for the students' chairs. The facilitators at both Monash and Warwick universities each joined their own semi-circle, and we felt ready to begin. We created a number of activities for students which we describe in the commentaries that link each section of the book.

It is worth pausing to note that the outcomes of these practices and activities often exceeded our expectations and were sometimes unpredictable. It is only post facto reflection and discussion between ourselves and our students, and our engagement with their reflective journals, that has permitted us to perceive patterns developing and results emerging that certainly did not feature in the set of learning outcomes we devised during the design of the module.[4] The various categories of disciplinarity we have elucidated above is one example, and another is the sheer complexity of identity and the fact that it is so profoundly relevant to thought and

[4] It is worth recording these learning outcomes here to show where our thinking was before the module began. Students were invited, with us, to:

1. Encounter abstract and complex ideas from a range of disciplines (multidisciplinary), and to synthesize these into thoughtful intellectual responses (interdisciplinary), that lead students to insights that may lie beyond the scope of a single discipline (transdisciplinary).
2. Understand the symbiotic potential of traditionally distinct disciplines.
3. Participate in "active" learning in order to foster the notion that participation and experiential learning permit a deeper understanding of complex multi-faceted material.
4. Enhance and consolidate their academic and research abilities in a collaborative environment, engaging with methodologies and "languages" across the disciplines.
5. Make productive links between theoretical ideas and practical applications.

The module's aims were to offer honors level undergraduates a rich and pluralistic appreciation of "identity" that would be relevant throughout their personal and professional lives and to ask that they respond to notions of identity that are framed as problematic and incompatible, or where such ideas exist in conflicted constellation in the purviews of different and differing disciplines. The module sought, therefore, to encourage students to:

1. Investigate in detail the means by which identities are formed, changed, or imposed—as seen through the lenses of different disciplines.
2. Understand notions such as the nature of individual identity broadly, national identity, bodily identity, gender identity, racial identity, and spiritual identity.
3. Reflect both upon the increasing prominence of consumer, hybrid, border, and marginal identities and upon the notion that identity can shift, that it can be fragmented, and that a variety of identities can exist simultaneously.
4. Develop an awareness of how their subject knowledge and disciplinary approach can be made accessible to wider publics.
5. Explore the relationship between the mind and body in the formation of identity.

life both inside and outside the academy. We might indeed characterize identity as a "threshold concept". According to Meyer and Land's (2005) theory:

> A threshold concept can be considered as akin to a portal, opening up a new and previously inaccessible way of thinking about something. It represents a transformed way of understanding, or interpreting, or viewing something without which the learner cannot progress. As a consequence of comprehending a threshold concept there may thus be a transformed internal view of subject matter, subject landscape, or even world view. This transformation may be sudden or it may be protracted over a considerable period of time, with the transition to understanding proving troublesome. Such a transformed view or landscape may represent how people "think" in a particular discipline, or how they perceive, apprehend, or experience particular phenomena within that discipline (or more generally). (Meyer and Land 2005, 374)

The kinds of transformation Meyer and Land describe here seem akin to those taking place for our students in their interaction with the material on identity. Student essays, reflective journals, and their contributions to seminar discussions show sometimes radical transformation in view and understanding over a very short space of time. This does not seem to us, however, to be best characterized as an experience of reaching and passing a "threshold", rather it seems to consist in the experience of engaging at an intellectual point that is at the convergence of a collection of disciplines and intellectual approaches to a single subject. These "convergent concepts" seem to have a power of their own to escape the disciplinary silos that contain them under the departmental and faculty arrangements that are found in many modern universities across the world. There are in the process two directions of travel: one is the flow of disciplinary understanding that typically consists in the readings and lecture material supplied by subject specialists and the other is in the response by students and facilitators to this material in the discussion sessions that follow its presentation. Meyer and Land's point concerning "inaccessibility" is important here because this two-way flow of action demands that disciplines make themselves comprehensible to students from across the faculties and that academics develop a language that permits students to

engage with these disciplines on their own terms. For any student, and in UK universities in particular, to stray into another faculty is to become profoundly lost in a forest of discipline-specific language and methodologies. Indeed, even within faculties, the intellectual habits and expressions of another department can be impenetrable. A structure, therefore, that involves the presence of a "guest" presenter every week requires that both the module leader—who is always present—and the students "translate" disciplines into a comprehensible and communicable language and, in doing so, they open a portal to the world of the transdisciplinary. In this way students may find that concepts, ideas, or notions that academics might have regarded as disciplinarily "convergent" open up to them in detailed and complex ways.

Thus was the scene set for the disciplinary interventions of our colleagues in the Forms of Identity module. Importantly, we wanted to open a space for the academics who contributed to the portal sessions to allow that experience with their students to affect their finished contributions to this collection. This means that Lindgren's piece and those of Pasfield-Neofitou, and, to a lesser extent, Watkin, Wilson, Lambert, and McDonald show strong evidence of the process.

What was exciting for us about the selection of material for the module is that under the heading of "identity", and within the pedagogic framework of an hour's discipline-specific material per week, combined with a further hour's attempt at synthesis, most disciplines with an interest in identity could be slotted in each annual iteration of the module. The experience of our students would then be truly unique in their understanding of identity, and the knowledge they created in that module would be so also. This fluidity, for us, was welcome, as disciplines slipped in and out of the structure with relative ease, reinforcing our view of identity as a convergent concept. The content of the module, therefore, varied from year to year, and this volume provides a snapshot of a particular moment. The chapters that follow present their engagement with the intellectual (epistemological) and embodied (ontological) experience of identity. The first section explores and challenges biological notions of identity. It begins with Christopher Watkin who uses the work of the French neuro-philosopher Catherine Malabou to probe fundamental questions about who we think we are, and whether our sense of

identity is immanent to the material brain or embraces a broader notion of identity distributed across relationships, institutions, and shared common narratives. Next, Farhana Omer and Matthew R. Broome consider identity from the perspective of the discipline of psychiatry, specifically the relationship between personal identity and a number of psychiatric disorders. The authors posit that personal identity is a continuously evolving process and the role of family, friends, and clinicians needs to be one of understanding for those suffering from mental health issues. In this way the aspects of the identity of the sufferer that allow them to participate more fully in society can be reinforced. In the final chapter in this section Kevin Moffat explores the complexity of biological identity and asks the question, what gives us identity in a biological context? While our DNA demonstrates our relatedness to each other, by understanding the process by which it operates throughout our lives and is shuffled in our offspring, we can see the biological reason for our own identity.

The second section examines the structures of national and personal identity through a range of disciplinary and interdisciplinary lenses. Mridula Nath Chakraborty examines the development of a South-East Asian postcolonial feminism or feminisms and the implications of categorizations based on geographic and political location. In this way she illustrates the development of identities in relation to specific territories and terminologies of "color". Continuing the exploration of gendered identities, Sarah McDonald explores how national and individual identity is shaped through cinema. Examining a range of Brazilian films that take place in the poor urban communities known as favelas, she shows the way recent films have introduced a broader, more inclusive social narrative that challenges the masculinist representations of the favela that have predominated up till now. Next, Cath Lambert explores the work of genderqueer artist Cassils in order to address the question of what it is to be human from a queer perspective. The challenges from queer and postmodern scholarship to "identity politics" so central to earlier activist and academic agendas have been well documented. Yet, notwithstanding these valid critiques, identity remains a powerful organizing concept in contemporary experience. These contradictory stances on identity serve as a prompt for thinking about what queer brings to our understandings of being human now and in the near future. The final chapter in this

section by Rita Wilson takes as its point of departure the notion that a "translational identity" is fundamental to a body of narratives written by authors who have been variously described as "migrant", "diasporic", and, more recently, "transnational" (Seyhan 2001) and "translingual". Wilson focuses on contemporary literary production in Italy and analyzes the work of writers who, in their attempt to navigate between languages and social contexts associated with these languages, provide an opportunity to reflect on identity construction in border situations.

Section 3 explores the ways in which contemporary identities are created and mediated. Mia Lindgren examines the role of personal journalism as part of articulating identity, with a focus on audio storytelling. For journalists, turning their focus on their own lives can be challenging—telling your story puts you and your personal identity in the public eye, open to criticism. Using her own radio documentary as a case study, Lindgren considers the many pitfalls of autobiographical storytelling, examining the benefits and challenges of journalists putting themselves in the frame. Then Sarah Pasfield-Neofitou turns the focus to modern technology and argues that relationships between technology and identity are multi-faceted and complex. Computers have long been used as a metaphor for explaining the human mind and aspects of our identities, and likewise, the mind has been utilized as a metaphor to explain the processes of computers. While we have used the human body as a template for understanding the world around us throughout history, the machine has become a metaphor for just about anything in modern society, with ourselves simultaneously as the most familiar, and the most unknowable, feature of our world. This chapter explores these relationships. Finally, Gabriel García Ochoa and Sarah Lorimer look at identity through the lens of branding, arguing that brand identity stands at the intersection of two important narratives: its own and that of its consumers who, through the brands they select, tell stories about themselves. This intersection of stories has traditionally worked as a dialogue. Lately, however, the balance has shifted toward consumers, whose personal narratives increasingly determine the formation of brand identity. This chapter analyzes the role of narrative in the construction of brand identity.

Each of the sections of this book is preceded by a meta-analysis that forms an entry point to the chapters that follow. These reflective

summaries, or meta-sections, between groups of chapters are present to provide links and connections to offer a degree of summary and analysis, but most of all to suggest ways in which the notions of identity and its status as a transdisciplinary concept are both reinforced and changed as the book progresses.

These analyses also serve at a macro level to contextualize the interactions that allowed for the development of the intellectual relationships that permitted this book to exist at all. At a micro level these sections connect with themes of the chapters to sometimes support and sometimes challenge their content and assertions and by doing so reflect the practice of the authors themselves both in the classroom and in their wider academic and community engagement.

In the final chapter of the book the authors use autoethnographic methods to provide a transparent reflection on their own experience as teachers and facilitators of the Forms of Identity module. Just as the students were encouraged to engage with issues of identity through their learning so their teachers speak frankly about the impact, both pedagogical and personal, of transcending both their disciplinary and their physical confines to illustrate the power of transdisciplinarity.

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Section 1

Biological Identity

Meta-analysis I

The three chapters contained in this first section are biological and material. Christopher Watkin's chapter considers damage to the brain and the relationship of this to identity; Farhana Omer and Matthew Broome look at the impact of mental illness or "disorder" on identity; and Kevin Moffat addresses identity in a biological/chemical sense. This first section provides a material foundation for later, more abstract, analyses of identity. All three chapters situate identity firmly in the reality of the embodied. Omer and Broome argue that personal identity can be defined as: "…certain properties to which a person feels a special sense of attachment or ownership, and is a superordinate concept which subsumes, and underpins, the varying, fluctuating identities we all occupy at different points in our lives." For them and for Watkin, the notion that there is no Cartesian separation of mind and body is apparent both explicitly and implicitly. Omer and Broome quote a sufferer from dissociative fugue who says that "[I]t is as if your mind is not in your body." The implication is that under "normal" circumstances, the mind is very much embodied. Watkin, meanwhile, shows that his position, and by implication that of his discipline, is so far beyond the Cartesian position that other issues of separation have come to dominate: "Malabou has sought to overcome the Cartesian dualism of subject and object, but has replaced it, despite

herself, with an equally unwarranted dualism of the intra- and extra-neuronal." Moffat's analysis of genetics and identity exists without a trace of the notion that something called "mind" might be separated out from something else called "body." One important aspect of Watkin's chapter is its insistence that identity is to a significant extent created in the interaction of the individual with others. This is true too of Omer and Broome, who describe the results of schizophrenia as a "transformation of the self known inwardly, and of a person or identity as known outwardly by others."

One of the introductory exercises we adapted for the identity learning space was "two truths and a lie," in which each participant is required to tell the group three "facts" about themselves, two of which are untrue and one of which is true. The rest of the group then try to decide what is fact and what is fiction. There are a number of ways in which this exercise is useful for participants, but one of the things it does most clearly is to show that the creation of identity is actually partly the result of interactions with others: participants create a version of the self in these moments which may or may not be "real," or may exist only in the moment, or may be something that is built into their broader sense of identity. Another level is that of narrative. What students choose to reveal and what they choose to invent are significant in the ways we construct the narratives that form us. These ideas of narrative become increasingly prominent as the book progresses, but they have their foundations in the material nature of the way in which our identities are constructed. Omer and Broome's work offers a narrative of the normative and non-normative self, while Watkin's resembles audience/reader reception theory in which meaning is generated in a dialogue between performer/author and audience/reader. The narrative has no meaning without the participation of each. Again, we seek to mirror this idea in the assessment we create for our students, the main component of which is a "reflective journal," or "commonplace book." The idea of the journal is that students should trace both changes in their understanding of the concept of identity and changes in their own identities as learners—or, indeed, in any other way. The essential requirements are that entries should be immediate and genuinely reflective—in the sense that it is not enough for students to simply record notes, they must analyze and sift new material against that which has gone before, allowing students

to reflexively explore their personal experiences and interactions to gain a wider cultural understanding (Pace 2012).

Identity is an important example of an idea that exists between disciplines. It exists in an epistemological and ontological "trans-space," in which both its existence and our ability to conceptualize that existence are not amenable to the apparatus of any one single discipline. Identity constantly re-establishes itself as material for the study of any one of many potential identities. In this sense, it is transdisciplinary. The "trans" prefix is extremely useful to us in these meta-sections, and a number of "trans" words will appear in each. In Moffat's chapter, for example, "transgender" occurs prominently. His chapter is also to an extent transgressive in its refusal to abandon the idea that it is at least interesting to pursue the idea of a "gay gene." Ideas like this, and others in his teaching session on the identity module, proved highly controversial with students who had become firmly wedded to the idea that sexuality and gender are social constructs. There is, therefore, a potentially transformative element to the experience for students, who will find that the received wisdom of their disciplines is constantly in question. Naturally, the relationship functions in reverse. Those students from the natural sciences who may not have encountered theories of the kind that are current in the social sciences and humanities—some of those that are so eloquently rehearsed in several chapters in Section II, for example—will find their assumptions challenged. This transactional behavior that the idea of identity promotes, and that the learning space supports, is a live component in both the theory and practice of the transdisciplinary. We should note, however, that each of the chapters in this section sits very much within its own specific discipline. It is only through the choice we have made as editors that these chapters are placed in a relationship with each other. The Biological Identity section might be described, therefore, as multidisciplinary. And each of the authors has produced in their contributions to this volume material that follows closely that which was offered to the students in the learning and teaching sessions. This is reflected in the experience of staff and students, all of whom felt that, at the time the material was delivered, it was hard to create synthesis with other disciplines that might lead to a transdisciplinary experience.

2

If My Brain Is Damaged, Do I Become a Different Person? Catherine Malabou and Neuro-identity

Christopher Watkin

Introduction

The growing field of neuro-philosophy raises important questions about how we understand the persistence of personal identity over time and how we use the language of personhood and humanity: if my brain is damaged or otherwise altered, do I become a different person? Do I acquire a different self? Furthermore, if I do, who or what is the "I" who can acquire such different selves, different identities, or different personalities over time? In a number of recent engagements with neuroscientific thought,[1] the French philosopher Catherine Malabou offers

[1] Malabou's main engagements with neuroscience are to be found in: *What Should We Do With Our Brain?* trans. Sebastian Rand (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), hereafter *WSD*; *La Chambre du milieu: de Hegel aux neurosciences* (Paris: Editions Hermann, 2009), 'Les nouveaux blessées : Psychanalyse, neurologie et plasticité' (Les conférences d'AGORA, Orange, France, Friday 19 October 2007, available at psychanalyse.com), *The New Wounded: From Neurosis to Brain Damage*, trans. Steven Miller (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), hereafter: *TNW*; *Ontology of the Accident: An Essay on Destructive Plasticity*, trans. Carolyn Shread (Cambridge:

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a non-reductive materialist account of self-identity which privileges her notion of "plasticity"[2] and seeks to provide a consistent response to the question of identity over time. Though plasticity is a common term in neuroscientific discourse, Malabou nevertheless insists on what she calls a "destructive plasticity" or a "plasticity of transition" which, she claims, is absent from the customary use of the term, and it is through this destructive plasticity that she seeks to provide an understanding of identity over time which is able to account for brain trauma and changes in personality. In this chapter I will examine Malabou's notion of destructive plasticity and its usefulness for a materialist account of identity over time, before suggesting that Malabou's position reinvigorates an account of identity stretching back nearly 2000 years in the Western tradition.

Destructive Plasticity

The notion of neuroplasticity was popularized in Norman Doidge's *The Brain that Changes Itself* (2007). For Doidge, neuroplasticity was defined as the phenomenon by which "the brain changed its very structure with each different activity it performed, perfecting its circuits so it was better suited to the task at hand" (Doidge 2007, xiv–xv). Plasticity, for Doidge, is an exclusively positive and creative transformation: developing or restoring lost capacities and compensating for damage.

This, however, is only one of the three senses Malabou gives to the term in her own thinking. In her first two senses, plasticity is a receiving and giving of form. That which is plastic can receive form from influences outside itself (in the case of the human brain from the environment and varied stimuli with which the individual comes into contact). The second, positive sense of plasticity is Doidge's meaning, and the meaning

Polity Press, 2012), hereafter *OA*; Catherine Malabou and Adrian Johnston, *Self and Emotional Life: Philosophy, Psychoanalysis and Neuroscience* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), hereafter: *SEL*; and *Avant demain. Epigenèse et rationalité* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2014).

[2] The notion of plasticity underpinning Malabou's inflection of neuro-identity is elaborated principally in *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic* (translated by Lisabeth During, 2005) and *The Heidegger Change: On the Fantastic in Philosophy* (translated by Peter Skafish, 2011).

that predominates in the neurosciences: plasticity is "a sort of natural sculpting that forms our identity, an identity modelled by experience and that makes us subjects of a history, a singular, recognizable, identifiable history, with all its events, gaps, and future" (*OA* 2). In this second sense, plasticity is the ability to adapt, to give form, and to change. The third[3] sense is plasticity as destruction or explosion, and it is the sense that will be central to our discussion for the rest of this chapter.

It is upon this third, destructive sense of plasticity that Malabou repeatedly insists, drawing on the meaning of the French noun *le plastic* (plastic explosive) and the verb *plastiquer* (to blow up). Plasticity is not only to be understood as receiving, repairing, and creating form, for the destruction of form can also yield plastic transformation. What makes this transformation properly plastic, for Malabou, is that it is irreversible, as opposed to what she calls an "elastic" transformation:

> In mechanics, a material is called plastic if it cannot return to its initial form after undergoing a deformation. "Plastic" in this sense is opposed to "elastic." Plastic material retains an imprint and thereby resists endless polymorphism. This is the case, for instance, with sculpted marble. Once the statue is finished, there is no possible return to the indeterminacy of the starting point. So plasticity designates solidity as much as suppleness, designates the definitive character of the imprint, of configuration, or of modification. (*WSD* 15)

In the process of destructive plasticity, something is transformed by being wholly or partially annihilated. In a lengthy discussion of destructive plasticity in *The New Wounded,* Malabou frames it as "the dark double of the positive and constructive plasticity that moulds neuronal connections" which can "make form through the annihilation of form" (*TNW* xv) and "create an identity through loss of past identity" (*TNW* 60). It is in terms of this destructive plasticity that Malabou offers a materialist account of the persistence of human identity over time.

[3] In *What Should We Do With Our Brain?* destructive plasticity is introduced as the fourth, and hitherto unheard of, form of neural plasticity after developmental plasticity, modulational plasticity, and reparative plasticity (*WSD,* 68–70).