

EDITED BY KIP JONES

# DOING PERFORMATIVE SOCIAL SCIENCE

Creativity in Doing Research and  
Reaching Communities



“Kip Jones brings the genre of what he calls Performative Social Science forward with wide-ranging theoretical, academic, and artistic products in various media that takes up how social scientists can use art for investigation and dissemination.”  
“Embodied Methodologies, Participation, and the Art of Research”

—Madeline Fox *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*.

“U.K.’s Kip Jones has pioneered Performative Social Science (PSS) which seeks to spread narrative research to the public through lit, theater and film. Jones’ aim is to harness research as a catalyst for social change.”

—Nisha Gupta PhD *The Phenomenological Art Collective*.

“Kip Jones is one of the most inspiring sources of social science performance work in the world today.”

—Ken & Mary Gergen, *Playing with Purpose*.



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# DOING PERFORMATIVE SOCIAL SCIENCE

*Doing Performative Social Science: Creativity in Doing Research and Reaching Communities* focuses, as the title suggests, on the actual act of doing research and creating research outputs through a number of creative and arts-led approaches. Performative Social Science (PSS) embraces the use of tools from the arts (e.g., photography, dance, drama, filmmaking, poetry, fiction, etc.) by expanding—even replacing—more traditional methods of research and diffusion of academic efforts. Ideally, it can include forming collaborations with artists themselves and creating a professional research, learning and/or dissemination experience. These efforts then include the wider community that has a meaningful investment in their projects and their outputs and outcomes.

In this insightful volume, Kip Jones brings together a wide range of examples of how contributing authors from diverse disciplines have used the arts-led principles of PSS and its philosophy based in relational aesthetics in real-world projects. The chapters outline the methods and theory bases underlying creative approaches; show the aesthetic and relational constructs of research through these approaches; and show the real and meaningful community engagement that can result from projects such as these.

This book will be of interest to all scholars of qualitative and arts-led research in the social sciences, communication and performance studies, as well as artist-scholars and those engaging in community-based research.

**Kip Jones** was a visiting scholar in the faculty of media and communication, Bournemouth University. Before his retirement, he was Director of their Centre for Qualitative Research.

Reports on Jones' work appear on BBC Radio 4 and BBC TV news, as well as in *Times Higher Education*, *LSE Impact Blog*, *New York Times*, *International Herald-Tribune* and *The Independent*.



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Reaching Communities

*Edited by Kip Jones*

Cover image: Quayside Carousel, Honfleur, Normandy. Photo by Kip Jones

First published 2022

by Routledge

4 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge

605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

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*British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data*

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

A catalog record for this book has been requested

ISBN: 978-1-032-03521-5 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-032-03523-9 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-1-003-18774-5 (ebk)

DOI: 10.4324/9781003187745

Typeset in Bembo

by Apex CoVantage, LLC

*Doing Performative Social Science  
is dedicated to the memory of Mary Gergen, 1938–2020*



Mary Gergen; photos by Trevor Hearing

*Pioneer in Performative Social Science,  
Social Constructionism and Feminist Psychology*





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# FOREWORD

*Kenneth J. Gergen*

A very young Kip Jones came to visit Mary and me one summer's day. With her adventures in performance on the stage of science, Mary had been pressing the boundaries of the acceptable. Why, after all, would a theatrical monologue by a woman wearing a bright boa count as science! Kip had sensed their affinity, but rightfully realized that for a budding professional, danger lurked in the disregarding of boundaries. Was there a possible future for him?

Yet, it was clear from the moment Kip stepped into our garden that day, that there were hijinks ahead. His very appearance—colorfully outré—drew Mary's fascination. As our conversation glided across issues of reality and representation, the limits and potentials of language, and the state of the arts, new horizons were glamourised into being. Blooming before my eyes was an affective alliance between the two of them, a celebration of the theatrical and the preposterous, along with the intellectual rationale for the irrational. It was also clear that while mutually conscious of the barbed wire boundaries, they were compelled to press forward.

The show must go on! Over subsequent years, they drew continuous sustenance from each other. There was laughter, personal revelation, animated discussion, bitter argument, and an indestructible bond. The two went on to write and edit together, and at one point Kip created a performance piece for his “thoroughly postmodern Mary.” In later years, I could also see that Mary harbored a secret sense of pride: her young protégé had become a major force for transformation. Kip had stimulated, inspired, promoted, crafted, and created. He had built an audience, networks, conferences, and educational programs that stretched across continents.

As for me, I felt the two of them were especially keen observers of the anesthetizing and oppressive effects of social convention. And, it was in their playing with conventions—inverting, inflating, and subverting—that they opened fresh and inviting spaces of vitality. As the chapters of this book make clear, their spirits still roam the center of the stage.



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# 1

## INTRODUCTION

### Performative Social Science as Methodology

*Kip Jones*

I start by returning to the early days of establishing Performative Social Science (PSS) or arts-led research by revisiting a more traditional research platform—the academic journal. Thanks to the editors of an online qualitative journal back in 2007, a band of like-minded academics were able to cobble together 42 articles for a Special Issue on PSS for the journal, *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* (Jones et al., 2008, May). The issue provided a wide range of examples and manifestations of PSS, with contributions from various disciplines/subject areas and contributors from 13 countries.

In the Editorial for the Issue that I wrote with Mary Gergen I suggested:

Thinking performatively is about putting aside that analytical part of ourselves that normally deals with data and such and moving to the other side of the equation and getting in touch with that earlier place where we were energized by the data itself—how it was sparking ideas that were coming from our own personal experience which, every creative person will tell you, is the fount of all creativity.

It's also about communication; it's about how we are going to develop our skills in collaborating with someone who is speaking a different language, coming from a different background; going through that learning process is almost as important as the end product itself. Where I see people going a bit off is when they want to sit and talk about “What is Truth?” and other cerebral gymnastics that we all do all the time anyway. In reality, it's more about how we find our creative impulses and how we contribute those to the experiences. It isn't the end production, really.

Ultimately, is it possible to collaborate and produce something creatively that is better than having research printed in a journal? It's one of those either/or things and you may walk away and say, “I'd rather have my material





**FIGURE 1.1** Cast and crew shooting scene for research-based biopic RUFUS STONE. Kip Jones Author and Executive Producer.

printed in a journal”, and that’s one answer. If, however, you’re interested in tapping into a zeitgeist in a wider arena than just standard scholarship, PSS is one way to go.

*(Gergen & Jones, 2008)*

Many more scholars in the social sciences have, since those early days, in fact, explored what is conceived of as “the performative” or “arts-led research”. These efforts are still often met with curiosity: “What is it?” and “Is it Art or is it Science?”

PSS isn’t one or the other. It is a fusion of both, creating a new model where tools from the arts and humanities are explored for their utility in enriching the ways in which social science subjects might be researched and/or disseminated or communicated to various communities. Ideally, audiences should be almost unaware of the seams where practitioners have cobbled together in-depth, substantial scholarship with artistic endeavour. PSS is defined as the use of tools from the arts or humanities in investigating and/or disseminating social science research.

PSS has gained attention, even popularity, amongst academics who are particularly frustrated with PowerPoint as the only “show and tell” game in town. In addition, the use of “Zoom” and other virtual environments for academic communication have devolved mostly into hours on end of “talking heads”. In fact, academic PowerPoint and Zoom lectures and presentations have morphed into

mostly “tell”—slide after slide of text simultaneously recited to captured audiences. In addition, academic publishing has its limitations in reaching the wider community. The actual readership of academic journal articles is quite low and, by their nature, have a limited readership. New means of including a wider public (the “impact factor”) are sought.

The road to creating a set of principles on which the practice of a “performative” social science is based began for me in reading for my PhD, which involved delving into what were more traditional ways of thinking. I then came upon social constructionism, helping me to understand that ‘knowledge, scientific or otherwise, is not obtained by objective means but is constructed through social discourse’ (Gergen, 1985, p. 270). It was in having free access to the prepublication drafts of Kenneth Gergen’s work uploaded to his website that then guided my thinking electronically (now available on ResearchGate: [www.researchgate.net/profile/Kenneth-Gergen](http://www.researchgate.net/profile/Kenneth-Gergen)). His early use of the Internet to share his work proved crucial on my way to a PhD awarded in 2001 in narrative biography (Jones, 2001) and based in part in Social Psychology. Gergen’s Social Constructionism had further elucidated “the processes by which people come to describe, explain, or otherwise account for the world in which they live” (Gergen & Davis, 1985, p. 3). His Relational Humanism had begun for me what was the quest for the truly relational in the way that I might share my research with a wider world. Social constructionism places the self-concept within the sphere of social discourse (1985, p. 11).

In Norman Denzin’s 2001 seminal article, “The reflexive interview and a performative social science” (Denzin, 2001), he proclaimed that the turn to narrative in the social sciences has been taken, a *fait accompli* (2001, p. 23). One democratising practise within this paradigm shift was a renewed interest in biography as a method of knowing persons. At the same time, I had studied and used in practice the Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method (Wengraf, 2001; Jones, 2001, 2003). I learned to appreciate the process of really listening to the stories of others, without interruption, allowing “story telling” to take place. Nonetheless, as Denzin pointed out, ‘No longer does the writer-as-interviewer hide behind the question-answer format, the apparatuses of the interview machine’ (Denzin, 2001, p. 30). The interviewer, finally, has come into the light as willing participant in a dialogical process. Crucially, narrative biography or “story-telling” offered up the opportunity for democratising the experience of teller and listener (or performer and audience).

*Performative* itself was a term that Denzin first coined in an article using the very the word in its title of this seminal article (Denzin, 2001). Early in the new century, researchers had begun to reconstruct the research interview in what Denzin described as ‘not as a method of gathering information, but as a vehicle for producing performance texts and performance ethnographies about self and society’ (2001, p. 24) where ‘text and audience come together and inform one another’ (2001, p. 26) in a relational way. The relational of social constructionism, informed

by Denzin's take on the performative, came into its own when John Law and John Urry (2004) proposed that research methods in the social sciences do not simply describe the world as it is, but also enact it (2004, p. 391). They stated that they are performative; they have effects; they make differences; they enact realities; and they can help to bring into being what they also discover (2004, pp. 392–3). Indeed, 'to the extent Social Science conceals its performativity from itself it is pretending to innocence that it cannot have' (2004, p. 404). PSS was born.

With these new approaches to research at hand, PSS was then beginning to provide the overarching intellectual prowess, strategies and methodological and theoretical depth to engage and unite scholars across disciplines in this new methodology. In turn, researchers' endeavours could be connected with artists, communities and stakeholders. What "performative" refers and relates to in these contributions and elsewhere is the communicative powers of research and the natural involvement of an "audience," whether that be connecting with groups of citizens, peers or students, a physical audience or a cyber audience, even a solitary reader of a journal or a book. This was good news, not only for participants in research studies, who can often be involved in producing subsequent performative outputs, but also for the larger community to whom these findings should be not only directed, but also connected.

By this point I no longer considered Art and Science a binary, but both as a result of the same activity: creativity. For me, creativity was about working within certain boundaries while, at the same time, somehow changing them (Jones & Leavy, 2014). Art becomes socially constructed (Ekholm, 2004, p. 3). The early waves of renewed interest in qualitative and narrative approaches (or the qualitative and narrative "turns" in research, as they were called in the early 1990s) established protocols, procedures, and a language that, by the 21st century, were repeated habitually. It became time to look elsewhere (to culture, to the arts, to literature, etc., both past and present), to find fresh inspiration and vocabulary to support our new emotive efforts.

The first step in reporting emotive encounters in research was to move away from concepts that have evolved from measurement—terms like 'empathic validity', 'reliability', etc. Rejecting the use of statistical language to describe the emotional components of our labours was key to communicating an understanding of the How's and Why's of the human condition. The second step was to find our own individual language (a descriptive and poetic one?) that does not mimic the status quo language of a specific scholarship simply because of our insecurities or longing to belong to a particular club or community.

Nonetheless, the answer was not in simply writing a poem or putting on a play merely because that happens to be a pastime (or frustration) of an academic. Rather, it was in finding the right arts-led method to help answer a research question and/or to disseminate its findings to a community. In certain instances, this was about forming collaborations with professional artists themselves. These creative learning and/or dissemination experiences, which include the wider community, engendered therefore, a meaningful investment in a project, its outputs and outcomes.

But where did I find a philosophy and the theoretical criteria in which to base PSS?

The 20th Century was not kind to 18th Century notions of the aesthetic. With Social Constructionism's principles in mind, 21st Century ideas of what "truth" and "beauty" mean need to be re-examined from a local, quotidian vantage point, with concepts such as "aesthetic judgment" located within community.

The principles of Nicolas Bourriaud's Relational Aesthetics (Bourriaud, 2002) offer one theoretical grounding to the search at hand, basing theories of Art in terms of co-operation, relationship, community and a broad definition of public spaces. Relational Aesthetics are suggested as a starting point because Bourriaud offers a post-modern, contemporary framework that allows social scientists to think about aesthetics and means of dissemination in refreshing ways.

Relational Aesthetics also forms a structure on which we can begin to think about a "performative" Social Science—a science that includes more emphasis on collaborations with our research participant co-authors, co-producers or co-performers themselves. It also provides a platform on which to base the production values of our dissemination efforts and gauge the effects that our fabrications have on our audiences as well, allowing for their own participation in a dialogical, creative social exchange.

(Jones, 2016, n.p.)

Relational art is located in human interactions and their social contexts. Relational art bridges or blurs the differences between life and art and involves the public as co-creators of artworks, i.e., art becomes socially constructed (Ekholm, 2004, p. 3). Central to its principles are inter-subjectivity, being-together, the encounter and the collective elaboration of meaning, based in models of sociability, meetings, events, collaborations, games, festivals and places of conviviality. By using the word "conviviality", the emphasis is placed on commonality, equal status and relationship (Hewitt & Jordan, 2004, p. 1). Relational aesthetics or "socializing art" often comprises elements of interactivity, but its most noticeable characteristic is its socializing effect. Through such efforts, it aims to bring people together and to increase understanding (Johannson, 2000, p. 2). In fact, Bourriaud believes that art is made of the same material as social exchanges. If social exchanges are the same as art, how can we portray them?

PSS became increasingly established in the years 2008–11 by means of the following three events:

1. First, Patricia Leavy's ground-breaking book, *Method Meets Art* (Leavy, 2008), was published using substantial references to early work and publications about PSS. Leavy's book opened the floodgates and, in many ways, gave an academic foundation to arts-led work in the social sciences and, in particular, PSS.

2. In spite of the global financial crisis that began in 2008, the Bournemouth University's Centre for Qualitative Research 2010 biennial conference went ahead. PSS approaches were particularly encouraged in the call for participation and, surprisingly, bookings for presentations at the conference came flooding in. PSS approaches subsequently made up over 40 percent of the conference's presentations, coming from a range of countries and disciplines. The conference was written up in *Times Higher Education* (Jump, 2010). In addition, the Arts Editor from *BBC News* spent a day at the conference and produced a broadcast package about the conference that appeared on *BBC One* and in rotation on *BBC World News* ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=RTQn9xrqWYE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RTQn9xrqWYE)) for several years after the event.
3. In 2010 the final preparation from three years of biographic research on rural dwelling older LGBT adults (Fenge & Jones, 2011) was being compiled for a film treatment. This combination of in-depth biographic research and a film as its primary output was generously funded by Research Councils UK. The plan was to make a short film from the data and involve a professional film director to do it. After *The New York Times* ran the story of this unique collaboration of a filmmaker and an academic (Guttenplan, 2011), there was no turning back!

The film *RUFUS STONE* (<https://vimeo.com/109360805>) was made in the Summer of 2011 with a professional cast and crew of 45, directed by Josh Appignanesi and filmed by BAFTA-winning cinematographer Annika Summerson. The cast included William Gaunt and Harry Kershaw sharing the title role, and Niall Buggy and Tom Kane as their counterparts. It premiered in November 2011 and went on to win two juried prizes at the *Rhode Island Film Festival*, a feeder festival for shorts at the Oscars ([www.film-festival.org/award12](http://www.film-festival.org/award12)). In the years since, the film has been seen by tens of thousands of people, in cinemas and lecture theatres, church halls and community centres, and online more than 20,000 times.

PSS could only grow in its use in research and dissemination of social science, based on this solid foundation of outputs and impact, acknowledgement and praise.

Is PSS the same as arts-based research (ABR) (Leavy, 2018)? PSS is defined as the use of tools from the arts (and humanities) in carrying out social science research and/or disseminating its findings. Philosophically, art and science are both a result of creativity. Often from arts-led exploration, discoveries are made. PSS is a recent paradigm in the social sciences, but both concepts (ABR and PSS) occupy the same broad church: the use of the arts in discovery and communication of scholarship. However, PSS is based philosophically and methodologically in relational aesthetics, an in-depth and establishing methodological foundation—a crucial component of any serious research method.

The philosophical principles of relational aesthetics (Bourriaud, 2002), which include concepts such as involving the public (even as co-creators) in our work

through social exchange, interactivity, bring people together and creating modest connections by using the intuitive and associative aspects of communication. The fact that PSS also establishes its validity through social relations and interactivity, often conceived of as “an audience”, again makes PSS more specific. PSS fuses arts-led and community interests into one dimension. Relational aesthetics, therefore, is the theoretical basis for any work under the paradigm of PSS.

This does not mean that we simply put on a play (Gergen & Jones, 2008) or make a film. It certainly isn't taking interview transcriptions, leaving out a line or two here and there, rearranging it on the page in stanza format mimicking poetry, and then passing it off as poetic inquiry. Within the vast richness of the arts or humanities, which lens, device, technique or tradition might deepen our research process and/or expand our dissemination plan? Is it a good fit (to the research question[s])? Do we automatically put on a play or make a film from our research data because we are so many frustrated actors or film directors, without ever asking which art form best fits the research question or the data that it has produced?

First, we are researchers. We are not actors, directors, filmmakers, dancers or poets. There are many opportunities and outlets (and frustrations and roadblocks) for those who wish to pursue those professions. We can learn a great deal from these folks who often find it necessary to wait tables and do other menial jobs in order to pursue their dream profession. They may help us look at our own field through new lenses, but let's not insult them by falsely assuming their hard-earned mantles (Jones, 2012). PSS challenges the traditional binary between research and (re)presentation, that is, between acts of observing or “gathering data” and subsequent reports on this process (Gergen & Gergen, 2003).

PSS can be carried out on a small scale as well as a larger one. Even with no funding per se, we can work creatively. I really enjoy doing what I term “Kitchen Sink” work, that is, work that is small in scale with few resources and mostly brought about by a desire to be creative. It is really about approaching a problem or question that we are given with a different set of tools. If you teach, for example, you already have a “captured audience” with which to experiment. In terms of funding larger projects, “stealth” is recommended. This means including an arts-led research or dissemination as one component of a larger more traditional project's funding application. Because “impact” and “public involvement” are required of funders more frequently, opportunities are presented in which to make a case for an arts-led output that addresses these newer requirements.

I will also add by saying that we can write and publish creatively as well. As academics we become very skilled at a writing style that is often criticized for being too dense and convoluted for more general audiences to grasp. I have personally found that writing my own blog has not only broken many of those “bad” habits, but also allowed my writing generally to become more communicative, even poetic, and hopefully more engaging for the reader. Academic publishing is in a period of great upheaval at the moment and the need to write “journalistically” (i.e., in the style of academic journals) may all but disappear in years to come. New

channels for communication are opening up to us exponentially. Creative people will naturally gravitate towards them. By communicating across platforms through social networking, a new and powerful distribution system is developing for our creative outputs. (Jones, 2014)

A founding principle of PSS is a desire to reach wider audiences with research efforts. We look beyond academic journals or narrow academic subject groups for new audiences where the benefits of our scholarly activities will encourage meaningful communication and dialogue within communities of everyday citizens. This volume demonstrates the variety and accomplishment of such an approach anchored in the aesthetic philosophy of relational art. Contributions to *Doing Performative Social Science* by authors from a wide variety of academic disciplines demonstrate how they have used the arts-led principles of PSS and its philosophy based in relational aesthetics. PSS is explained pragmatically through its use, be it in research, dissemination, performance, exhibition, community action, publication, and myriad outputs yet to be explored.

Any written texts reporting our efforts at PSS should be supporting ancillary documents to our productions. Authors from a variety of backgrounds are involved in this volume, providing rich and varied examples of arts-led social science. These texts are not considered the final results of these efforts. Rather, they provide the reader with a trace, trail or map of these arts-led projects to explore. 'The exposition of an idea through fragments, through a roving and disconnected type of writing, can sometimes better circumscribe its object than can a more linear approach' (Bourriaud, 2009).

We base our efforts in PSS on the following principles:

- Traditional social science 'methods have difficulty dealing with the sensory—that which is subject to vision, sound, taste, smell; with the emotional-time-space compressed outbursts of anger, pain, rage, pleasure, desire, or the spiritual; and the kinaesthetic—the pleasures and pains that follow the movement and displacement of people, objects, information, and ideas' (Law & Urry, 2004, pp. 403–4). Turning to alternative methods opens up possibilities for dealing with the sensory.
- Engagement in co-operation with others outside of our own disciplines itself can become a creative act, often stretching the boundaries of our understanding and prodding us to come up with fresh and innovative ways of overcoming practical obstacles in knowledge transfer.
- It is a historical fact that the major upheavals and transformations in Western art and science occurred during periods of cross-pollination from discipline to discipline.
- We believe that art and science are both 'fuelled by creativity' (Taylor, 2001) and that the potential for inventiveness resides within all of us. After all is said, 'creativity is that uncanny ability to work within rule boundaries while, at the same time, changing them' (Jones, 2006).

Our objectives include the following:

- To establish a ‘space and place’ for novel interactions—both with each other as well as with fresh interfaces with the data itself—providing a new environment for invention, inspiration and collaboration.
- To build a critical mass of social science researchers with a renewed confidence in exploration and use of tools from the arts and humanities in production and dissemination of social science data.
- To forge new collaborations and networks with individuals in the arts and humanities and,
- To engage in on-going dialogue across disciplines through new networks, leading to,
- Collaborative production and diffusion of social science products.

These are exciting times for us in our explorations of a PSS. The potential to cross disciplinary boundaries and work with colleagues from a wide variety of backgrounds abounds. We invite you to join us in our activities, attend our workshops, seminars, public gatherings, exhibitions and conferences and, more generally, share your ideas and projects with us. We look forward to exploring this exciting new territory with you in a future where PSSs will:

allow for intrusions, shocks and surprise endings by focussing the development and production of performative pieces on the audience as the final interpreter, interlocker, magician, sage. This is where the politics become profoundly embodied; the evocative transformed to the provocative; and the possibility of social science research contributing to changing hearts and minds a reality. When we move to the performative, as researchers, we cede “control” of interpretation of our work to our audience. This is the singularly most important shift in social science practice that PSS makes. Ironically and at the same time, we gift ourselves with the opportunity to be more interpretive, more intuitive, more creative, in our outputs. Our job is not so much to convince as to provoke and stimulate.

(Gergen & Jones, 2008, p. 41)

Enjoy these compiled examples of varied, sometimes astounding, often entertaining, forays into *Doing Performative Social Science* in this volume!

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