

Dr Gareth White

Dialectics of Participation: Meaning in the Midst of Performance

Dr Gareth White delivered his talk – Dialectics of Participation: Meaning in the Midst of Performance – as part of Liverpool John Moores University’s Liverpool Screen School Research Seminar.

Dr Gareth White (Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, University of London)

Dialectics of Participation: Meaning in the Midst of Performance

This lecture explores how we might treat participatory performance as dialectical. It recognises the situation of the participant in a performance event as contradictory, as it asks us to be or do two things at once: to be a spectator and a performer, to act and to watch. Becoming both spectator and performer is an uncomfortable thing, and the proper critical response is not to theorise that discomfort away, but to consider the tensions that both underpin and destabilise it.

It draws on philosophy that concerns itself with thought, perception and action, bringing it together with thinking about the nature of art and performance, and the politics of aesthetics. It is particularly inspired by Theodore Adorno’s Aesthetic Theory, and its exploration of the tensions and contradictions inherent in the idea and practice of art, and (in a dialectic with this) the cognitive philosophy of Francisco Varela and Evan Thompson.

I will use a moment from dreamthinkspeak’s In the Beginning Was the End to examine some of the ways in which a small creative gesture, in the midst of a larger performance, can exemplify the tensions of doing and watching, being and becoming, of autonomy and interconnection, and of presence and reflection, that are often the outcome of an invitation to participate. My aim is a theorisation of practice that helps explain why this work is compelling, as well as re-thinking what this work is.

Biography:



Dr Gareth White is Reader in Applied Theatre and Community Performance at Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, University of London. His research focuses on questions of participation and aesthetics, and is published in a number of articles, chapter and monographs, including *Audience Participation in Theatre: Aesthetics of the Invitation* published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2013, and *Applied Theatre: Aesthetics* published by Bloomsbury Methuen in 2015. He is also a teacher and a theatre director specialising in participatory practices, in the main teaching on BA Drama, Applied Theatre and Education, while also contributing to Central's MA and PhD programmes.