

Gritten Anthony

Distraction in Performance: Lyotard's reading of Duchamp

standard lecture

Distraction is usually configured as interfering with the production of subjectivity: as an impediment to time keeping, a thorn in the side of consciousness, a drag on performative decision making, and a brake on intentional action. However, I argue that distraction is more productive in performance than normally assumed. Synthesising recent cognitive science with advances in sociology, I argue that distraction ensures that the performer engages with the phenomenological plenitude of her body and maintains an open responsiveness to the changing circumstances of her actions, and that distraction functions as the interface between the performer's cognitive and social engagement with the world. Invoking Lyotard's reading of Duchamp (of performers as 'transformers'), I argue that engaging with distraction – with events beyond the performer's control – affords performance its transformative ethical value: as a way of developing new modes of being in the world and aesthetic action, and of accumulating social capital in everyday life.

Bio:

Anthony has published in visual artists' catalogues, philosophy dictionaries, and on subjects including Stravinsky, Cage, Delius, Lyotard, Bakhtin, Nancy, gesture, distraction, problem solving, ergonomics, listening, technology, timbre, collaboration, empathy, and artistic research. He has edited two books on music and gesture (Ashgate 2006, 2011). Many publications can be downloaded from <https://ram.academia.edu/AnthonyGritten>. A Fellow of the Royal College of Organists, Anthony has championed the music of Daniel Roth, including giving several UK and Canadian premieres. He has also performed complete anniversary cycles of the works of Tunder, Buxtehude (a 6½ hour recital), Homilius, Mendelssohn, and Brahms.

