



Intercultural Puzzles

Richard Schechner and the Anthropology of Theatre in the 20th Century

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Abstract. – The article focuses on the history of the early work (1969–1985) of Richard Schechner, its significance for the development of the anthropology of performing arts, and his present social critique on the changing politics of culture since the end of the 1980s. In close collaboration with Victor Turner he developed an anthropology of performing arts during the seventies and the eighties. From the mid-1980s, Schechner started to show interest in interculturalism. He is of the opinion that sharing culture turns out to be more important than sharing one and the same political system. This view was strengthened during the 1990s, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the early 2000s by the breakdown of the Twin Towers. Unique about Schechner is the fact that apart from his scholarly and editorial work he is well-known as a theatre director. [*Anthropology of performing arts, Richard Schechner, Victor Turner, structuralism and postmodernism, globalization, ideological systems, arts and politics, intercultural communication*]

Kees Epskamp studied Social Anthropology at Leiden University and was awarded a Ph.D. in Political and Cultural Sciences at the University of Amsterdam in 1989. He was related as consultant to the Utrecht School of the Arts (1994–2002) and external examiner of the M.A. course Theatre for Development at King Alfred's University College (2000–2004). He is coordinator of World Heritage in the National UNESCO Commission (NATCOM) of the Netherlands. His current field of interests is theatre anthropology, performing arts, and intangible heritage. – Publications: *Theatre in Search of Social Change. The Relative Significance of Different Theatrical Approaches* (The Hague 1989) and several articles on theatre anthropology.

One of the first researchers who dared to speak of theatre and “anthropology of theatre” was Richard Schechner, an American scholar of performance studies. At present he teaches performing studies at the Tisch School of the Arts, New York University. Besides his academic career, Schechner's

extra-academic work in the field of performing arts is also of importance to the development of his ideas in the realm of anthropological studies of theatre.

In 1980 he paid a visit to Mickery Theatre in Amsterdam to deliver a lecture on the rise and fall of the (American) avant-garde. In 1998 Richard Schechner was invited a second time to present in the Netherlands a previsionary lecture. The PassePartout Foundation invited him to deliver the 3rd International Lecture in Performing Arts (ILPA) in Utrecht. During this event an exchange of ideas took place between Schechner, students, theatre producers, and a theatre-minded Dutch audience.

The motive for PassePartout to invite Richard Schechner to the Netherlands was at that time an article he published during the mid-nineties in *The UNESCO-Courier* (1997), a magazine with a worldwide circulation. In this article he inquisitively glanced across the threshold of the millennium into the 21st century, yet to commence.

Schechner has published this kind of evaluative discourses at more than one occasion in the past. In his 1980-lecture in Amsterdam he had used defeatist terms regarding the “end of the avantgarde” (1980). In his view, with the arrival of the postmodernism during the seventies of the last century, the humanistic progressive thinking dominating Europe and America from the Enlightenment onwards, disappeared. Schechner did not, however, reject postmodernism. Instead, he asked