

## **Richard Schechner and Performance: The Hidden Share of *Theory***

Richard Schechner's singular career occupies a unique, pivotal place in the movement of ideas and forms within the artistic, cultural, academic, and political spheres of the past forty years. From theatrical experiments carried out with the Performance Group in the late 1960s through his role in the establishment of departments of "performance studies" in many universities through the world, Schechner has made a decisive contribution to the theoretic tools used to address "performance," a concept that has become one of the key words of our era. Yet going from "group" to "studies" did not mean a shift from practice to theory—on the contrary, it entailed a constant reflection on the links between theory and practice. How has this relationship functioned for Schechner? From this point of view, what role does it assign to performance within the scene of the artistic, conceptual, and political issues that have informed (especially through the notion of performativity) the recent history of art and philosophy? By analyzing his theatrical experiments and the concepts he has forged—such as "restored behavior"—this paper seeks to show how Schechner and the theory of performance represent a hidden side or "share" of the intellectual constructions derived from post-structuralism and partly inherited from French theory. This share moreover tends to lend "performance studies" a role less visible than, for example, "cultural" or "visual" studies. The hidden share of performance raises the issue of the value of practice, or the "accursed share" as Georges Bataille would have it, in other words what fundamentally concerns a living, embodied and non-immediately profitable operation in the economy and politics of knowledge.

### About the Author

David Zerbib teaches the philosophy of art and aesthetics at the University of Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne. He has written extensively on performance. Among his recent publications : "Is performance performative ?", *Art press*2, n°18, august-october 2010; "Paik, Heidegger and the Chelsea Girl, or, the Electronic ecstasy unveiled", *Nam June Paik*, catalog, Museum Kunst Palast, Düsseldorf, 2010 ; « Les noms du *per*. L'art expérimental et l'épreuve des limites », (*In Actu. De l'expérimental dans l'art*, Paris, Presses du réel, 2010) ; « The *performantial* regime of the work of art», (*Art Press* 2, nov 2007- janv 2008). He recently curated *Ce qui perd forme*, an exhibition devoted to the history of performance art, in Toulouse, France (september-october 2010). About Richard Schechner, he has published a general presentation of his work (*Art press*, n°346, juin 2008), and he is currently directing an edition and translation in French of Richard Schechner's essays.