

Strictly speaking theatre: Schechner's notions on performance as applied to the therapeutic use of theatre and drama

Schechner saw the link between theatre and therapy way back in the 60's. Although at the time this link was already under consideration by various scholars, their approach to it came rather from a psychotherapeutic perspective, whereas Schechner's novel contribution was that he was strictly speaking theatre. Rather than looking at theatre's therapeutics one dimensionally – as a tool to reach the unconscious or work on personal issues –, his understanding of the healing aspects of theatre extended to encompass the shamanic roots of theatre, as well as some structural features of the performance process, such as group process, work on text, social event, ritual, etc. His views on theatre and therapy are seminal to the development of the field of drama therapy.

This paper addresses Schechner's notion of *performance activities* – a concept which he developed as a theoretical challenge to the ideas on the origins of theatre held by the Cambridge school of thought. According to Schechner, theatre does not develop out the Festival to Dionysus, but is one of seven *performances activities* which are primal, and evolve autonomously and horizontally in every culture. They include games, play, sport, ritual, theatre, music, and dance. This notion constitutes the basis for the definition of *dramatic reality* – a core concept in drama therapy. The paper asserts that performance activities are different forms of dramatic reality created by individuals, and shows that drama therapeutic interventions can be made in every one of them.

About the Author

Susana Pendzik, PhD, is drama therapist and supervisor. She lectures at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, is a main visiting lecturer of a Drama Therapy Training Diploma in Switzerland, teaching also in the Drama Therapy Program of Tel Hai Academic College in Tel Aviv, as well as in other institutions of higher education in Europe, the U.S., and Latin America. Susana has published extensively in the field of drama therapy, and is the author of a book on Action Techniques for Working with Abused Woman. She has developed a drama-based assessment model (the 6-Key Model) founded on the notion of dramatic reality, which is informed by Schechner's ideas on performance.