

Edited by **RACHEL BOWDITCH, PAULA MURRAY COLE**
and **MICHELE MINNICK**

A photograph of a group of people in a workshop setting. A woman in a white t-shirt is pointing her finger towards a group of people. They are all looking in the same direction, suggesting a focused activity or discussion. The background is dark and out of focus.

INSIDE THE PERFORMANCE WORKSHOP

**A Sourcebook for Rasaboxes
and Other Exercises**

INSIDE THE PERFORMANCE WORKSHOP

Inside The Performance Workshop: A Sourcebook for Rasaboxes and Other Exercises is the first full-length volume dedicated to the history, theory, practice, and application of a suite of performer training exercises developed by Richard Schechner and elaborated on by the editors and contributors of this book. This work began in the 1960s with The Performance Group and has continued to evolve.

Rasaboxes—a featured set of exercises—is an interdisciplinary approach for training emotional expressivity through the use of breath, body, voice, movement, and sensation. It brings together:

- the concept of *rasa* from classical Indian performance theory and practice
- research on emotion from neuroscience and psychology
- experimental and experiential performance practices
- theories of ritual, play, and performance

This book combines both practical “how-to” guidance and applications from diverse contexts including undergraduate and graduate actor training, television acting, K-12 education, devising, and drama therapy. The book serves as an introduction to the work as well as an essential resource for experienced practitioners.

Rachel Bowditch, PhD, is Professor of Theatre in the School of Music, Dance, and Theatre at Arizona State University, USA, and a theatre director. Bowditch is author of *On the Edge of Utopia: Performance and Ritual at Burning Man*, *Performing Utopia*, and *Physical Dramaturgy: Perspectives from the Field*.

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For workshops and more information, you can reach us at www.rasaboxes.com.



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Edited by

**RACHEL BOWDITCH
PAULA MURRAY COLE
MICHELE MINNICK**

Cover image: Participants doing chorus work in *vira rasabox*, TPW at NYU.

Photo courtesy of Ryan Jensen Photography, 2004

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Dedicated to Richard Schechner
and to practitioners of the work—past, present, and future.



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And finally, to all our students, who are our best teachers, and who help us deepen the work.

Crossing the Line

Why The Performance Workshop?

MICHELE MINNICK, PAULA MURRAY COLE, AND RACHEL BOWDITCH, WITH COBINA GILLITT

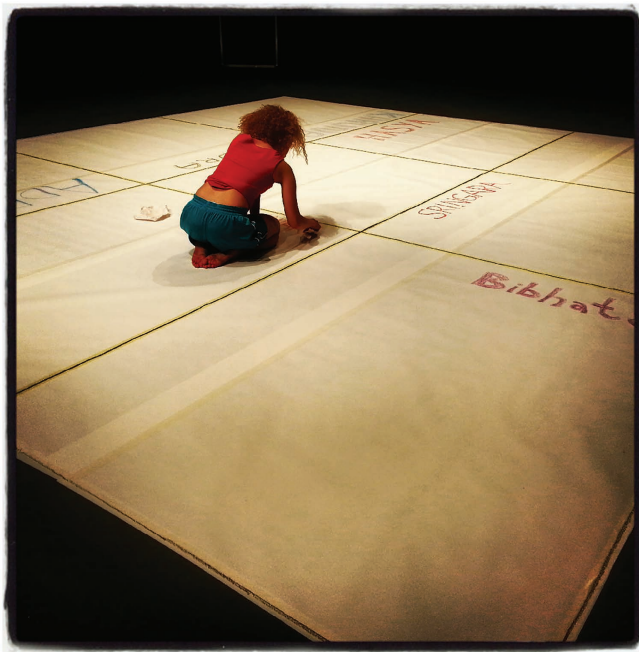


FIGURE 0.0 Participant in Rasaboxes workshop led by Richard Schechner in Norway, 2013.

Source: Photo courtesy of Richard Schechner.

Welcome to The Performance Workshop (TPW).

We have spoken those words at the beginning of workshops for over two decades now. Over the past six years, the editors of and contributors to this book have faced the strange and wonderful process of putting these words, and everything that follows, into print. It is always a challenge to translate embodied practice into the written word, producing the inevitable impression that once published, what was once alive and fluid is now frozen and fixed. This book invites you to peer into the world of TPW, and some of what has contributed to its development

which, up to now has been a present tense, body to body, oral tradition, passed on through multiple generations in the privacy of intimate, vibrant theatre and studio spaces. For those of us who have nurtured this tradition, the book is not a stopping point, but rather a transition. Writing it down has allowed us to reflect on how we have shaped and shared this work thus far, while at the same time serving as a jumping off point to its many possible futures.

Created by director, educator, theorist, and editor Richard Schechner (b. 1934), the origins of this approach to performer training and group collaboration extend back to the 1950s, even before his work with The Performance Group (TPG). Schechner continued to develop the training as an independent workshop, at first in the 1980s and 1990s in the Department of Performance Studies in the Tisch School of the Arts at New York University (NYU), where he was a professor from 1967 to 2017, and with members of East Coast Artists (ECA), a theatre company he has led since 1992. Shortly after *Rasaboxes* was introduced to TPW's extensive catalog of exercises in the mid-1990s, Schechner began to pass on the teaching of the work to ECA members and others who, in turn, have continued to teach and develop its pedagogy while maintaining a strong connection to its core practices and foundational principles.

This volume includes key elements of the historical development of TPW, the theoretical foundations that support the work, a detailed inside view of its pedagogy, and examples of how the work has been applied in a variety of contexts. It is neither a teacher's manual nor a critical analysis; rather, it is a *sourcebook*, a companion to the living practice that is TPW itself. TPW is an important part of Schechner's legacy, a unique hybrid of embodied practices inspired by his experiences during the civil rights movement in the 1960s, his experimentation in environmental theatre, physical performance training he learned and adapted from Jerzy Grotowski and others, his work with performers and other collaborators in TPG, and an exploration into and adaptation of *rasa* theory from the *Natyashastra*, a classical Indian manual of performance. The development of TPW can also be seen as a practical reflection of much of what Schechner has contributed to the academic field of performance studies since its inception as an academic discipline. This sourcebook addresses all of this and more. But the book is not the work. It does not replace training with experienced practitioners. To fully engage with TPW or *Rasaboxes*—certainly as a practitioner, but even as a theorist or scholar—one must meet oneself within the context of the work itself, in an embodied fashion—not as an observer, but as a participant, from the *inside*. That is when the context, how-tos, and reflections about the work we offer here will gain their full meaning and usefulness. This book is intended for several overlapping groups of people: performance practitioners, scholars, teachers, and others interested in getting to know TPW as a significant contribution to 20th- and 21st-century performer training. Perhaps most importantly, it is for current and future teachers of the work—a resource that holds what is (currently) most fundamental to its continued practice.

Many are familiar with Schechner's theatrical productions—which have taken place across four continents over seven decades—or may have read some of his prolific collection of books and essays, or attended any number of his presentations at conferences and various events. Others around the world have experienced some version of *Rasaboxes*, which, among the essential exercises/practices of TPW,

is the most widely taught and developed. Few of these individuals may be aware of TPW's deep and broad investigations into self, group, and performance-making that grew from a practical need: to innovate performer training in support of the experimental directing and devising work of TPG. This book continues Schechner's long-term interest in/commitment to the development of new traditions in performer training as taken up and continued by his collaborators and those they have taught. Articles by Schechner (2001, revised and updated for this volume), Minnick and Cole (2002), and several of our contributors have helped to introduce Rasaboxes to a broader audience. However, Rasaboxes is only one element within the complex set of exercises, experiences, and explorations that comprise TPW. This is the first publication to present TPW as a whole, along with many newer Rasaboxes exercises.

This book represents a particular lineage of teaching of TPW and Rasaboxes that traces back to first wave teachers (or facilitators—we use the two words interchangeably) and members of ECA: Ursula Neuerburg (Montreal, CA), Paula Murray Cole (Ithaca, NY), and Michele Minnick (Baltimore, MD), and follows on with second wave teachers Rachel Bowditch (Phoenix, AZ), Fernando Calzadilla (Valencia, Spain), Marcia Moraes (Berlin and Rio de Janeiro), and Scott Wallin (Berkeley, CA). At the time of this writing, these seven core facilitators represent a lineage that includes values, exercises, and applications we have developed together and independently of each other. In the tradition forged at NYU and represented by this book, no TPW teacher completes their teacher training without first experiencing TPW as a participant, then as a participant-observer, then as an assistant teacher, before co-teaching with experienced workshop leaders and then teaching the work independently. The larger national and international TPW network includes teachers who have trained extensively with us and developed their own practice in Rasaboxes but have not yet experienced TPW. It includes apprentices or teachers-in-training, and practitioners who have stayed in touch with us over the years.

The largest communities who engage with the specific TPW and Rasaboxes lineage represented here are in the US and Brazil, which has become an important site for its development since Minnick taught the first Rasaboxes workshop in Rio de Janeiro in 2003. The proliferation of Rasaboxes throughout Brazil, in practice as well as in writing through numerous publications and graduate theses, is one example of the spiraling spread of this work and the feedback loop between generations of practitioners. The resonance with viral spreading is apt—the work spreads easily in a way that is difficult to manage or control as it is highly contagious. Because its focus is a visceral sharing of emotions (which are contagious), and because of how enjoyable it is to play with them, Rasaboxes in particular seems to have this effect of spreading out in all directions from any point of contact. Schechner prefers it that way. Other teachers and practitioners of this work, many of whom learned from Schechner, have developed their own derivations of Rasaboxes or other exercises, such as Sun Huizhu (William Sun) and his colleagues at the Shanghai Theatre Academy in China. The fact is, we have no idea how many people are out there doing something they call “Rasaboxes,” or “rasa boxes,” or “Rasa Box.” We certainly cannot represent in these pages the many people around the world who have taken up this work and are creating their own lineages and pedagogies. As we continue to build community through and around

the work, we look forward to meeting more practitioners and teachers who have brought their own distinctive backgrounds to it. At the same time, we hope this book makes accessible to a wider audience the principles by which we have been practicing and training the next generation of TPW and Rasaboxes teachers. It also can help to anchor current and future practitioners with key concepts and best practices to engage with as the work continues to spread, grow, and change.

The process for becoming core facilitators of TPW has been both unconventional and highly traditional. Current core teachers learned this work the old-fashioned way—by apprenticeship. We encountered the training because we were working with Schechner, either as a member of ECA or as a graduate student in the Department of Performance Studies at NYU, or both. After participating in TPW multiple times, he gave us his blessing to teach the work. There was no structured mentoring process for the first wave/generation; no pedagogical materials other than his teaching of TPW itself, the many conversations we had with him over the years, and Schechner's publications about performance. Then, with one another, we learned to teach teachers of TPW. We have offered workshops, integrated the work into our graduate and undergraduate teaching programs, and presented it at conferences and festivals around the globe. We have used it to direct and devise numerous productions, in both professional and educational contexts. The work has flourished with the support of individuals and their institutions, who have believed in and supported its development.

The editors of this book were born and grew up during the era in which Schechner first developed his approach to performer training. We are white, privileged, American women—cisgendered, straight and queer, and in our forties and fifties. We all have worked extensively with both graduate and undergraduate performance students and are all directors of both plays and devised work. Unlike Schechner, we are performers and acting teachers trained in other forms of expressive and somatic movement modalities, including the Laban/Bartenieff approach, Viewpoints and Suzuki, the Alexander Technique, Lecoq, and Body–Mind Centering®, among others. This gives us both the concern and the know-how for working with the nuances of the actor's process. We have trained with and been directed by Schechner in theatre productions from the mid-1990s to the 2000s. Neuerburg, Bowditch, Calzadilla, Wallin, Cole, and Minnick studied with Schechner in the Department of Performance Studies at NYU. Along with somatic, anti-racist, and consent-based practices, these experiences continue to shape our conception, implementation, and practice of this work in diverse communities.

We have written this book, and invited others to contribute, because each of us, in our own way, has been changed by encountering ourselves, the group, and Schechner in *The Performance Workshop*. Although we work with many modalities in our own teaching and directing, we have not known anything like *The Performance Workshop*, which functions as a kind of total training, an immersive ensemble and world-building experience. Nor have we encountered anything that liberates the performer's creative being and agency in quite the way TPW does. We have written this book for the same reason we have been dedicated to teaching and developing the work for over 20 years—we want to share its transformational possibilities with you.

How to Read This Book

There is no right way to use this sourcebook. It can be read sequentially, or not. You may find that chapters in Part I make more sense after you have read all or parts of Part II, for example. Instructions for exercises have been formatted in an easy-to-follow, numbered format. Text boxes throughout the book contain several different kinds of information for the reader: sometimes they highlight a principle or practice within the work, or provide background information on a theory or historical movement, or offer additional exercises. Schechner's books, *Between Theater and Anthropology* (1985), *Performance Theory* (1988), and *Environmental Theater* (1994 [1973]) continue to serve as key resources for teachers and practitioners, and we strongly urge those interested in diving deeper into the work to use these books as supplements to this sourcebook. In particular, we recommend the reader consult Schechner's *Performance Studies, An Introduction* (2020), which is a useful companion to this book. We reference it particularly in Chapters 1 and 4 for its concise descriptions of topics related to performance studies, but also its positioning of performance practices and concepts within wider historical, political, and cultural contexts. The Sanskrit words related to Rasaboxes practice are transliterated without diacriticals, just as we use them in TPW itself. There are many systems of transliteration. We are using spellings of the words *shringara*, *shanta* and *Natyashastra*, with an "h" to approximate the "sh" sound in these words.

Regardless of the shape the training takes in the future, most next-generation TPW teachers will be the first to not have had any direct connection with Schechner. Many may not know his work or the field of performance studies. In Part I, performance scholars and practitioners who have worked closely with Schechner present historical and theoretical background for TPW. Chapter 1, "Richard Schechner and Origins of The Performance Workshop," is co-authored by Cobina Gillitt and Michele Minnick. Gillitt took TPW with Schechner in 1991 and completed her Ph.D. in Performance Studies under Schechner's mentorship. She has incorporated the work into her teachings on Asian and intercultural performance. Chapter 1 provides context for the work by focusing on the nexus between Schechner's life experiences and key tenets of TPW as they have interfaced with contemporaneous social movements, politics, and aesthetic and cultural theories. This chapter highlights pivotal points of contact and influence between these different aspects of his thought and practice. Chapter 1 also shares some of the history of how we and other core facilitators learned and developed TPW and Rasaboxes.

The second two chapters of Part I focus on theory and practice derived or adapted from the classical Indian theory of *rasa*. In Chapter 2, TPW and Rasaboxes practitioner Shanti Pillai, who worked with Schechner while pursuing her doctoral degree at NYU, addresses the cultural context for *rasa* theory and reflects on Schechner's deep appreciation for Indian performance. "What Is *Rasa*?" stands on its own and functions as a prequel for Chapter 3, "Rasaesthetics," an updated version of Schechner's 2001 essay. Pillai outlines *rasa* as a theory and methodology of emotion and transcendence as elucidated in the *Natyashastra* and as embodied in Indian performance. In "Rasaesthetics," Schechner compares Aristotelian and *rasic* models of performance, explains how a synthesis of neuroscientific workings of the enteric nervous system with *rasa* theory led to the development of

Rasaboxes, and proposes rasaesthetics as an approach to the making and study of a wide range of performance forms.

Part II, Chapter 4, *Inside The Performance Workshop*, is the heart of the book. It takes the reader through fundamental exercises of TPW, elaborating key principles and guidelines for engaging with this unique performative world built through training, workshop, rehearsal, performance, and cool downs. It includes a glimpse of the yoga used in TPW and instructions for breath and sound (vocal) work and extended group improvisations, such as Crossings and Rasaboxes, and invitations for solo and group performance work.

The two chapters in Part III, *Facilitating The Performance Workshop*, are included as resources for those interested in the teaching of TPW. In his 2016 interview, “Principles of The Performance Workshop,” Schechner answers questions about rules, expectations, and process. He summarizes core tenets of this practice drawn from his 60 years of facilitating the work. Scott Wallin’s chapter, “The Unavoidable Guru,” describes and theorizes his first experience of the Workshop and his attempts to continue the work with his cohort. Reflections on their failure to do so in the absence of a strong leader steer him to examine the paradoxes inherent in the role of a TPW facilitator.

Part IV, *Notes from the Field*, is a collection of short chapters contributed by practitioners and facilitators in a range of fields from drama therapy to clowning, from the preparation of actors on a Brazilian telenovela to K–12 education, as well as directing, devising, and immersive theatre. In “Freeing Emotional Expression in Young Performers: Rasaboxes in K–12 Context,” Elise Forier Edie demonstrates the power of Rasaboxes as an educational tool for young people from elementary through high school. Drawing on her own and other teaching artists’ experience, she shares classroom and rehearsal examples, tips, and techniques. In “Psychophysical Preparation for the Rasaboxes with Strasberg and Stanislavsky,” Ursula Neuerburg offers a view into the possibilities of combining Rasaboxes with Stanislavsky-based acting methods as part of a semester-long class. Using chair relaxation and sense-memory exercises combined with work on the Rasaboxes grid, Neuerburg proposes the grid as a rich field for exploring the subconscious, while also providing a safety net for the performer.

Since the late 1990s, Rasaboxes has developed a presence in drama therapy and the training of drama therapists. Andrew M. Gaines’ “Adapting Rasaboxes to Rasa~Therapy: Clinical Applications in Drama Therapy” offers an overview of some of the ways rasa and Rasaboxes have been deployed in the field. Gaines describes the adaptations of its structure required by clinical environments. In “Rasaboxes, Drama Therapy, and Stability Through Dynamic Change: A Case Study,” Dana Arie focuses on her use of Rasaboxes with a single client. She describes a process of moving from emotions in the body to emotions in story, supporting her client in developing adaptive reactions to unstable environments. In “Rasaboxes in the Training of Drama Therapists,” Director of the NYU Drama Therapy Program, Nisha Sajani, presents Rasaboxes as a model for performing sustained care in the training of drama therapists. Sajani illustrates ways in which Rasaboxes can expand one’s capacities to symbolize inner experience, cultivate a contemplative stance, be present with others in times of suffering, and attune to and transition from the emotional demands of working in managed care settings.

Next, we offer five chapters illustrating how TPW and Rasaboxes have been used in the realms of acting, directing, devising and immersive performance. In “Dancing on the Tongue,” Erin B. Mee asks “What does it mean to ‘taste’ theatre?” Using examples from This Is Not A Theatre Company’s *A Serious Banquet* (2014), *Versailles* (2015), and Impractical Theatre’s *Three Sisters* (2014), Mee explains how rasa theory allows us to understand—more fully than other aesthetic theories—the pleasures of immersive and participatory performance. Brazilian acting teacher and coach Fernanda Guimarães takes us inside the Rio de Janeiro-based television studio in her chapter, “Lights, Camera, Action! Rasaboxes Training and Coaching for Brazilian Telenovelas.” She offers insights into why and how the quick changes and deep psychophysical preparation of Rasaboxes help telenovela and other TV actors to work efficiently and safely on set. She shares exercises that engage with personal material and that prepare actors for the close-up.

In “Character Building Through Rasaboxes: Staging *Electra* at Teatro Prometeo,” Fernando Calzadilla discusses his process of training actors, workshopping, and staging *Electra* at Teatro Prometeo in Miami in 2013. He emphasizes the use of other TPW exercises as support for Rasaboxes in building each character for this highly physical devised piece. In “Experimenting with the Clown in Rasaboxes,” Ana Achcar shares her process of training first-year students by using Rasaboxes to get to the heart of the comic body in her medical clown training program at UNIRIO in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. In the final chapter, “Dramaturgy of the Emotions: The Performance Workshop and Rasaboxes in Directing *Machinal*,” Rachel Bowditch details a rehearsal process at Arizona State University in 2007 that combined TPW’s Slow Motion Transformation exercises, Rasaboxes, and work drawn from the Lecoq pedagogy.

Crossing the Line

At the very heart of TPW is a deceptively simple idea—“crossing the line.” We use masking tape to create literal lines on the floor, designating distinct areas for being, doing, and watching. Whole worlds, relationships, and stories emerge from the simple action of crossing the line, walking across the space, and turning to face someone. “Crossing the line” has many implications—breaking taboos, going too far, or at least pushing the boundaries of what we are willing to do, to explore, and to be seen doing. Generally, when you have “crossed a line,” something has irrevocably changed. Sometimes opening an inner world of experience, and sometimes emphasizing extreme theatricality and fully embodied expression, the lines crossed are performative boundaries enabling both superficial and deep play. The pedagogical methods of TPW enable teachers to invite and facilitate these crossings in ways that are at times everyday, at times extraordinary, sometimes scary, often fun.

This work was born of the liberatory social and aesthetic impulses of the 1960s and 1970s. Those movements, and the various forms of reckoning that appear now to many as new, are not. Since we have known it, this work has embraced and celebrated difference of all kinds. However, the primary pedagogical leadership has remained in the hands of a small group of mostly white practitioners.

The resilience and longevity of TPW's approach lies in the incredible breadth of what it can hold, and still there are questions to ask ourselves moving forward. Here are a few:

- What are our own inherent biases, not only those inherent to our identities, but also as longtime practitioners of the work? What are the power dynamics, embedded in the structure of the work, that we and future practitioners and teachers might need or wish to examine more closely?
- What will existing and new practitioners bring to this work, with their own experiences and identities, fields of expertise, and cultural backgrounds that might shape it in new ways?
- What can be gained by exploring the limits and possibilities of adapting this work for online contexts? On the other hand, how does the deep, embodied, juicy set of practices fill a deep need to engage with one another in person in our changing world?
- How can the “intercultural” aspects of this practice, especially of Rasa-boxes, continue to be a source of productive dialogue and the building of new relationships?

Finally, this book is an invitation. Schechner's retirement from NYU in 2017 coincided with the end of TPW's long run in the Department of Performance Studies, last taught in the summer of 2016. New partnerships with performance makers and practitioners, teachers, and institutions around the world will ensure that this unique and vital approach to ensemble and performer training continues to nourish and inspire future generations of artists and teachers. Above all, it is important to us that the work be accessible. This book is one step in that direction. We hope the book, in combination with the practical work of TPW and Rasaboxes, provides grounding and provokes questions that inspire innovation. You are the future of this work.

Now, we invite you to step up to the line of tape on the floor, with your toes right up against it but not touching.

Look out into the space on the other side.

What do you imagine?

What do you desire?

What will you do?

When you are ready, cross the line.

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PART I

History and Theory

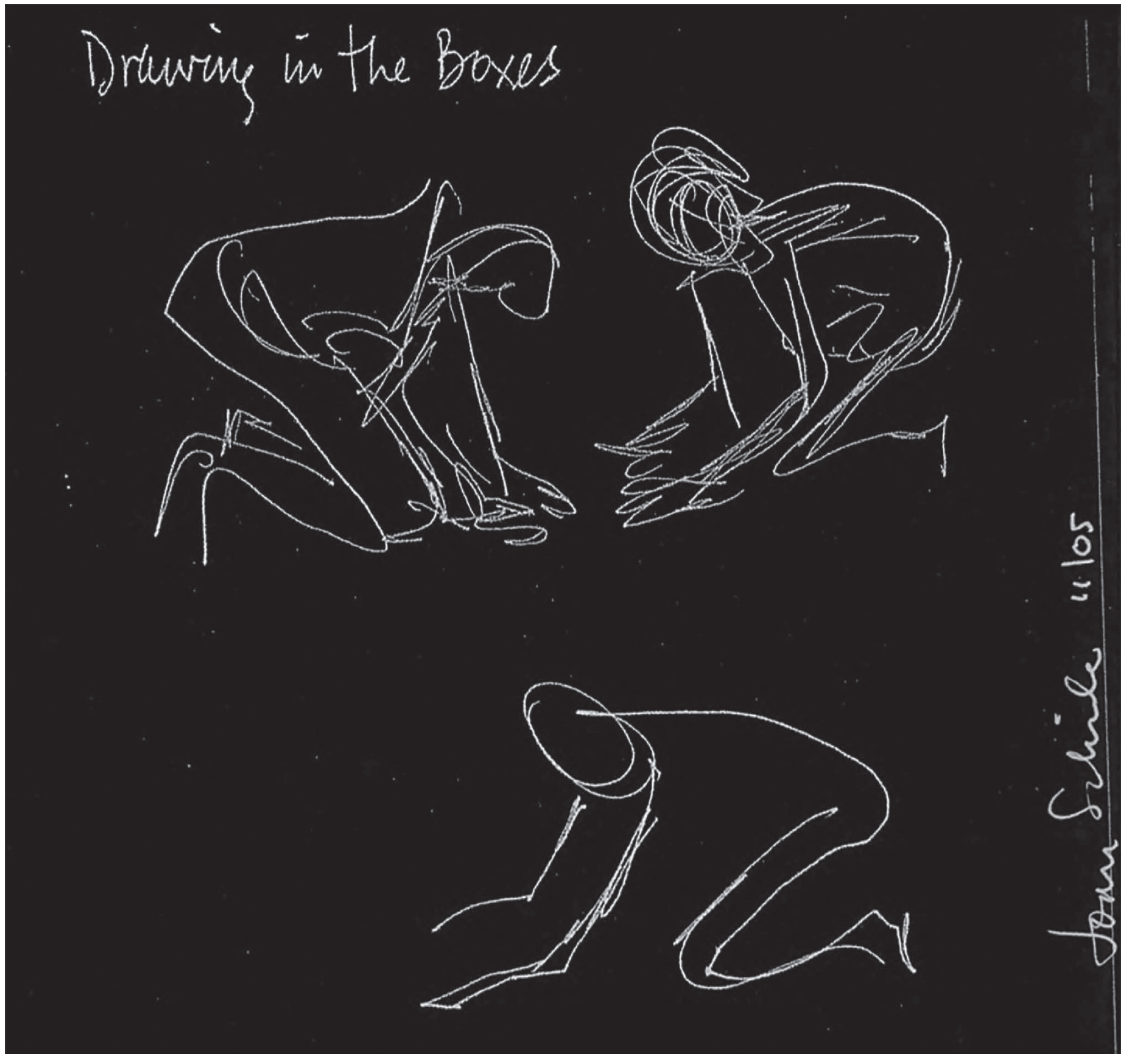


FIGURE 0.1 Sketch of performers doing Rasaboxes by Joan Schirle. Dell'Arte International School of Physical Theatre, 2005.

Source: Courtesy of Paula Murray Cole.

CHAPTER 1

Richard Schechner and Origins of The Performance Workshop

COBINA GILLITT AND MICHELE MINNICK

Richard Schechner's hybrid career combines the identities of scholar, teacher, editor, and director, all of which are integrated in overlapping and dynamic ways. One could argue that Schechner's most important and lasting contribution to performance practice and theory is the impact he has had on the many students who have directly benefited from his teachings and mentorship. While The Performance Workshop (TPW), particularly Rasaboxes, has been expanded by successive generations of practitioners beyond its original pedagogy as developed by Schechner, teachers of the work find tremendous value in grounding their practice in an understanding of the history, experiences, and theories that inspired Schechner's focus on performer training. This chapter offers an overview of key influences in Schechner's life, theatrical practice, and scholarship that have directly contributed to TPW. At its most basic level, TPW grows from his ever active, curious, and critical mind, his desire to provoke, his belief that the best creativity arises from places of discomfort, and his proclivity to be an instigator, one who disrupts—often theatrically or performatively—the system or institution in which he is operating. His experiences and interests are broad and multivarious; they are not a reflection of a linear journey with a fixed goal.

Schechner is an unabashed cultural gourmand; he is interested in tasting, partaking, and ingesting as much as he is interested in shaking things up. His combined contributions and innovations are like a *masala*, a mix of Indian spices that brings together contrasting flavors and textures better savored together than separately. Schechner's openness to new experiences has enabled him to innovate using an expansive menu of materials, while his desire to dismantle conventions (of thought and practice) has also made him controversial at times. This chapter is offered not as an exhaustive history, accounting, or elaboration of what went into the development of TPW, nor does it address critical responses to Schechner's work. Rather, it is intended to provide a taste of the vast array of ingredients that have contributed to his unique approach to performer training. We have provided text boxes, endnotes, and resources for further reading for those who may not

be familiar with specific topics. In particular, you will see many references to *Performance Studies: an Introduction* 4th Edition (Schechner 2020), which provides comprehensive and accessible resources for further exploration into many of the topics you will encounter here.

Setting the Table

Discomfort, Disruption, Resistance

Richard Schechner does not shy away from the complex, the difficult, the sacred, or the controversial. Much of his approach is unique to his personality, while much can be attributed to social and political upheavals taking place during his formative years. What interests him is opening and expanding ideas about performance and culture through dialogue, confrontation, analysis, theory-making, invention, hybridization, encounter, and enactment. According to Schechner, cultures are not bound by international borders, but leak and spread around the world through both benevolent and oppressive means: exploration and diaspora, but also forced trafficking, conquest, and colonialism. His interest in intercultural exchange and hybridization is a recognition that for “as long as we can look in human history, peoples have been deeply, continuously unashamedly intercultural,”¹ and that in fact,

Borrowing is natural to our species . . . What is borrowed is swiftly transformed into native material—at the very same time borrowing re-makes native culture . . . Syncretism and the making of new cultural stuff is the norm of human history.

(1982b, 3)

Beginning in the 1970s, Schechner’s focus on interculturalism and syncretism was “as a contrast to ‘internationalism,’” the word that was more commonly used at the time (1996, 42). His point has been that international exchanges through the arts based on political boundaries and tied to a sense of nationalism are not as important, interesting, or valid as the exchange of cultures between individual artists not defined solely by their country of origin.²

Interestingly, Schechner’s early life wasn’t syncretic or intercultural. He had a comfortable childhood, spending his early years in the Jewish Weequahic section of Newark, NJ when the city was still characterized by distinct ethnic neighborhoods—Jewish, Greek, Portuguese, Italian, and Black. As a child, he had very little contact with others outside of his insular middle class Jewish circle of friends and family. Although his family synagogue, founded by his great-grandfather, was by then in a Black neighborhood, he remembers having only one close friend who was not part of his Jewish community (Nesmith 2022). The different groups lived side by side but didn’t intermingle. His father worked in the family insurance and real estate business and, as he grew older, he remembers recognizing the unjust disparity between his family’s living conditions and the dilapidated housing in the Black neighborhoods where his father was the landlord’s agent of several buildings. This nascent realization opened the path to his future dedication to activism, and artistic and scholarly pursuits.

The first area he explored seriously was writing—scholarly, but also fiction, poetry, and journalism, which led him to his first real reckoning with racial injustice on a larger scale. He majored in English at Cornell University from 1952–1956. While at Cornell working on the student newspaper, *The Cornell Daily Sun*, Schechner wrote several articles on the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education case while it was being argued before the Supreme Court. Wanting to understand the issues driving the case, Schechner contacted Thurgood Marshall, the head of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund and chief attorney for the plaintiff. Marshall invited him to his office on 125th Street in Harlem for an interview. In a meeting that lasted several hours, Marshall gave Schechner a lesson on the history of segregation in America by eviscerating the notion, upheld in the landmark 1896 case of Plessy v. Ferguson, that segregation was constitutional under the doctrine of “separate but equal.” Marshall opened Schechner’s eyes to the entrenched systemic nature of the racial and social inequalities shaping American life and institutions. The idea that separate was not and could never be equal was a profound revelation (Schechner 2012a).

Schechner’s second passion, theatre, and particularly directing, was sparked and fueled during three summers in Provincetown, MA, just before and just after earning his Masters in English at the University of Iowa. During those years, Provincetown was a haven for eclectic artists and free thinkers. At the end of the first summer in 1957, he founded the East End Players (EEP) with a staged reading of his original one act play *Lot’s Daughters*. He returned the following summer as co-artistic director of EEP (with Karl Harshbarger), and again in 1961 for the final year of EEP. Two of his productions during the summer of 1961 are early examples of what Schechner would later call “environmental theater,” referring to his directorial work characterized by unconventional use of space that specifically encourages audience/performer interaction. He staged Sophocles’ *Philoctetes* on the beach in Wellfleet (a few miles south of Provincetown) with Odysseus and Neoptolemus arriving by boat to encounter Philoctetes on the beach. For his production of Ibsen’s *When We Dead Awaken*, the interior of the Provincetown Town Hall was completely reconfigured. In the final scene, Rubek climbed high into the rafters.

When he left Provincetown in November 1958, Schechner had returned to New Jersey and, despite his dedication to non-violent activism, volunteered for the draft.³ He explains,

By then I knew I wanted to be a college professor and I wanted to do theatre. I knew that I had to go on and get a Ph.D. I also knew I had lived a very insulated life. My life experiences were Ivy League college, summer theatre in Provincetown, that kind of thing. I said, how am I ever really going to meet people who are really not like me?”

(Nesmith 2022)

The conversation Schechner had with Thurgood Marshall while an undergraduate at Cornell ignited in him a strong commitment to the civil rights movement, but it also seeded the notion that the only way to truly understand those for whom the civil rights movement was advocating was through lived experience. Schechner has often articulated the value of being with and moving through difference without