

1968: A Global Perspective

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Dionysus in '69: Richard Schechner's Politics of Ambiguity

This essay explores *Dionysus in '69*, by Richard Schechner's The Performance Group, in relation to the international political situation during the late sixties and, specifically, in 1968, the year of its premiere. It will examine how Schechner's text employs ambiguity as a means to accomplish a complex discursive situation that not only emphasizes on his intellectual detachment and political skepticism towards some of the social and political claims enthusiastically held during the period, but that, also, promotes a collective identity, a liberating atmosphere that greatly depends on the rather unique spirit of the time. If in *Dionysus in '69* the clash between Pentheus' authority and Dionysus liberating force prevails as the most conspicuous dynamic of the play, when members of the audience cheerfully identify themselves with Dionysus' deriding attitude towards Pentheus' authority, the performance's outcome challenges such a straightforward polarization, when the liberating Dionysian atmosphere turns to be just the preamble of violence and bloodshed. If the audience will tolerate no more rituals, as the final cry of Dionysus puts it, if they want the real thing, they would first need to recognize what risks such a claim entails, what is the price to pay.