

# Performed Imaginaries: Richard Schechner's Vision of Theater as a Transformative Force

Richard Schechner, an acclaimed theater director, scholar, and anthropologist, has dedicated his life to exploring the intersection of theater, culture, and society. His concept of "performed imaginaries" offers a profound lens through which we can understand the dynamic relationship between performance, ritual, and the construction of social realities. This article delves into the multifaceted world of Schechner's performed imaginaries, examining their significance in the realm of theater, anthropology, and beyond.

## Schechner's Journey into Performance Anthropology

Richard Schechner's fascination with performance began at an early age, influenced by his involvement in experimental theater groups in the 1960s. However, his transformative journey into performance anthropology commenced during his fieldwork in the Eastern Himalayas in 1968. Witnessing the Bardo Thodol, a Tibetan Buddhist ritual performed during the transition between life and death, profoundly impacted Schechner's perspective on theater and ritual. He recognized the performative aspects embedded within the ritual process and the transformative power it held for participants.



### Performed Imaginaries by Richard Schechner

★★★★☆ 4 out of 5

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Screen Reader : Supported

Enhanced typesetting : Enabled

Word Wise : Enabled  
Print length : 196 pages



## **The Birth of Performed Imaginaries**

Building on his experiences in the Himalayas, Schechner developed the concept of "performed imaginaries" as a framework to analyze the relationship between performance and the construction of social realities. He defines performed imaginaries as "the ways in which we enact and embody our ideas about the world." These imaginaries are not merely fictional constructs but rather dynamic, lived experiences that shape our perceptions of reality and social norms.

## **Theater as a Site for Transformation**

Schechner views theater as a potent site for exploring and enacting performed imaginaries. Through theatrical performances, actors and spectators alike engage in a shared ritual experience that allows them to embody and reflect upon different perspectives, values, and beliefs. In Schechner's words, theater becomes "a laboratory for the imagination," where we can experiment with alternative ways of being and challenge the boundaries of our social realities.

## **Performance as a Window into Culture**

Schechner's approach to theater extends beyond the stage, recognizing performance as an integral part of all human cultures. He argues that performance can provide valuable insights into the values, beliefs, and social structures of a particular society. By studying performance practices,

anthropologists can gain a deeper understanding of the cultural context that gives them meaning.

### **The Political Dimensions of Performance**

Schechner also emphasizes the political dimensions of performance. He notes that performed imaginaries are often used to reinforce or subvert social hierarchies and power structures. By examining the ways in which power is expressed and challenged through performance, we can better understand the political dynamics of society.

### **Ritual and Ritualization in Everyday Life**

Schechner's concept of performed imaginaries sheds light on the ritualistic aspects of everyday life. He argues that many of the actions and interactions we perform daily are imbued with ritualistic qualities. By recognizing the performative elements in our daily lives, we can become more aware of the ways in which we construct and negotiate social realities.

### **Contributions to Theater and Anthropology**

Richard Schechner's work on performed imaginaries has significantly contributed to the fields of theater and anthropology. His concept has inspired scholars to explore the performative dimensions of culture and society, leading to a deeper understanding of ritual, ritualization, and the interplay between performance and the construction of social realities.

The performed imaginaries of Richard Schechner provide a captivating lens through which we can explore the transformative power of performance. His work highlights the dynamic relationship between theater, culture, and society, demonstrating the ways in which performance can shape our

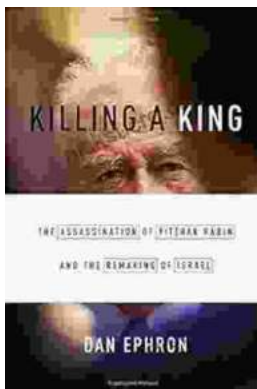
perceptions of reality, challenge social norms, and foster personal and collective transformation. As we continue to grapple with the complexities of our rapidly changing world, Schechner's insights into performed imaginaries remain an invaluable resource for artists, scholars, and all who seek to understand the performative aspects of human experience.



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