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Editor

Editorial

Exhaustion and uncertainty

By now, the pandemic has exhausted us of so much: of energy, of words, of precious lives, of faith in political systems, and of our sense that the future will unfold in the ways that we have come to understand and expect. As I write this in the waning weeks of 2020, as the first people are receiving vaccinations for COVID-19 here in the U.K., we are starting to see the first flickers of the ending of this crisis. The toll in death and social disruption has been very high, but we are starting to see a way out.

What will happen once this pandemic has died down, however, is far from clear. The past nine months have so profoundly disrupted the way societies around the world function that it seems obvious that we will be feeling their effects for decades to come. But how this will happen is still unknown. To take the two fields that this journal most concerns itself with, there is a good deal of current research being conducted on what 'gathering' will mean for both the theatre and for religious communities in the future. We are embodied social creatures and long for human connection, but to what extent will virtual presence and online engagement serve that need? Will more of us start feeling more comfortable with our online lives as fundamental to our sense of ourselves and our place in this world? Will we have become so used to online gathering that face-to-face exchange seems less necessary, and so in-person gathering is either increasingly special, or unnecessary, or both? It is, of course, too soon to know, but the fact that these questions are so profound and so open makes for a heightened sense of uncertainty for all those who work in these two fields. That combination of exhaustion from the extraordinary demands of the present and uncertainty about what is to come makes this a time unlike any I have ever known. There is anxiety, of course, but there is possibility, too—if ever there is a time that the patterns and structures under which we live can be unpacked and remake, this is it.

While research will have its role to play in that work, the editorial team at *PRS* thought the most pressing need was to document what is currently going on and how communities are responding to it. In particular, we were interested in capturing the

ways in which religious communities around the world had adapted their ritual lives to the present circumstance. Doing so, we thought, would shed some light on the nature of religion, the performance of ritual, and the continuity and change facilitated by the combination of human ingenuity and the sense of religious need. The result of this effort is our forum section, which offers eight reports from the field of religious adaptation in the face of this pandemic. We are particularly pleased by the diversity of these reports: they come from Canada, Ghana, Gaza, Germany, the U.S. (two), Sweden, and Thailand, and they are written by both scholars and religious professionals who have done work on the front lines of serving their communities during these difficult times. Taken together, they describe the adaptability and affective power of performance in a religious context, even when ordinary venues are closed off.

We also have two articles for this issue which, though not directly addressing the pandemic situation, speak more broadly to that openness and sense of possibility that is conjured up by the uncertain legacy of the pandemic. First, Emma Heron examines the complex identity—religious, cultural, linguistic, and gendered—of the Welsh community in the nearby English city of Liverpool. Her deft combination of archival historical research and creative practice-based methods serves to highlight and interrogate the lacunae in the historical record, and to offer insights on the affect of home, place and exile that bring out the relevance of that history. Not only a contribution to diasporic studies, her methods offer up a useful model for those wishing to use performative tools to deepen their study of popular religious life. Next, Deni Li offers a remarkably new way of examining the notion of spiritual experience and the sense of cosmic unity—what Victor Turner termed ‘*communitas*’—through performance: that of the psychedelic. She engages with an archive of work on the psychedelic that may be unknown to many of our readers to explore questions to which they may be more familiar: knowledge and the numinous, the possibilities and limitations of language, and the role of feminism and queer theory in opening up our intellectual possibilities. She does this through a reading of Gloria Anzaldúa’s work, amongst others, that demonstrates the intellectual possibilities of performance studies’ interdisciplinary engagement.

This issue also marks two milestones for the journal worthy of note. We are happy to welcome Dr. Dalia Basiouny to our editorial team. She is a leading Egyptian playwright, theatre critic and scholar, with a particular interest in independent and feminist theatre in Egypt. She brings a wealth of experience and skills to the journal. We hope that, in this issue and in the future, you will see the ways her contributions have broadened and deepened the scholarship you see in *PRS*. In addition, this issue is the first in which we have incorporated video fully into a text-based article (here, Maysa Utairat’s contribution to our field reports forum). While this may be a modest beginning, we hope it opens up important possibilities for online publication in theatre and performance studies. This has not been without technical challenges, and our thanks go to our partners at the University of Toledo Press for helping us work through them. We remain committed to ensuring that our scholarship is freely accessible to all, and so it is important to us that technological innovations do not present undue hurdles for our readers. If you have feedback on this development, please do let us know.

Thank you for reading, please stay safe, and enjoy the issue.