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Editor

Editorial: Performance as Spiritual Techne

We are happy to present the next issue of *Performance, Religion and Spirituality* with three articles which all investigate different means by which the performative can serve as a ‘technology of the spiritual’—a means of accessing, deploying, and understanding it, even if in ways that frequently evade language. Together, they suggest some of the ways in which performative thinking and performance processes can contribute to a richer understanding of the spiritual as a potentiality that remains present in our postmodern, everyday lives. Some more historically inclined scholars may meet these claims with scepticism. This is a reasonable response, and one that I, to a great degree, share. But all three writers here are analysing their cases as possibilities, not certainties. And even if we see their breadth as limited by the cultural field they stand in (Western theatre, live art, internet culture), they provide compelling lines of thought that deserve to be taken seriously.

Elien Hanselaer takes a practice-as-research approach to understanding the spiritual impulses and potentials in the experience of the collaboration between actors in the Western rehearsal room. Building off acting theory from Stanislavski and Zarelli, mid-twentieth century philosophies of interaction with the other such as Buber and Levinas, and Homi Bhabha’s postcolonial theories of the third space, she offers a practical and creative analysis of the spiritual experience that actors can have in working with one another and with a script. One of the unique aspects of Hanselaer’s article is that she does not simply develop these ideas out of theoretical texts, acting methods, or reports of actors’ experiences, but from her own practical work in rehearsal rooms with students. This practice-as-research method, which has particular prominence in the U.K., is a way of articulating the tacit, embodied knowledge that often

characterises performance experts. To adapt Diana Taylor's well-known distinction, it brings the repertoire into constructive dialogue with the archive as a distinct but parallel form of knowledge. The difficulty with such work is that the personal experience and reflection that are essential data in this method need to be treated with rigour and without indulgence if the research is to be broadly useful. This also makes the written description of the work a considerable challenge. Hanselaer handles these challenges with skill and grace.

Next, Siri G. Hernández looks to performance to bring to our attention indigenous forms of knowledge that Enlightenment-based colonial discourses have sought to hide. These performances draw on what Hernández terms the 'spiritual archive,' which is their term for deep models of wisdom and knowledge, often passed between generations, that have been made invisible by the colonial project. But the project here is not just to repatriate these epistemologies and celebrate what they can contain, but to analyse the nature and function of these ways of knowing. Hernández is explicit that this is both a new direction for performance studies—a move away from the body/mind dichotomy towards the inclusion of spirit—and a grounding of the postcolonial, liberatory and explicitly political project in the wholeness of the human self. The goal here is to understand how this spiritual archive—seen as a third term to complete the Taylorian dyad of archive and repertoire—can be accessed and the work it can do for individual and social healing. Hernández, too, makes use of their own practice as a source of knowledge, but here, with a particular performance situation which, while communicative, is very different than Hanselaer's rehearsal room. Hernández's performance of *Mirror* was a communicative healing act in the context of the transcendence, and their analysis of its structure and function evokes the potencies of ritual known to practitioners the world over.

And finally, Donnalee Dox's contribution to this issue is the long-delayed outcome of a never-completed book project conceived by the editor of this journal with the late Kim Skjoldager-Nielsen on the performative techne of spirituality. The remit was to set aside hugely difficult efforts to define or describe spirituality and instead look to the different techniques, methods and technologies—techne, in short—that performance can offer up to evoke spirituality in one way or another. This idea was to treat spirituality as an opaque black box, focusing our analysis on the performative techniques which are used to evoke it and the psychological, cultural, religious, intellectual and social effects which result. This struck us as a broadly helpful way of working, one which evades the linguistic and epistemological pitfalls of trying to describe spiritual work in written language. Dox's article represents an excellent example of this line of thinking, looking at popular visual depictions of spirituality. Her analysis of these three genres of images—that of the infinite regress, that of the meditating yogi, and that of the monk in an EEG cap—does more to articulate our culture's common, tacit understandings of contemporary spirituality than most sociological and philosophical work that has been written about the topic.

As always, thank you for your readership, and I commend these articles to your interest.

Works cited

Taylor, Diana. 2003. *The Archive and the Repertoire: Cultural Memory in the Americas*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.