

Reopening the Conversation: a Welcome from the Editors

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After nearly two years without publication, the editorial team is delighted to introduce this new issue of *Performance, Religion and Spirituality*, which marks a moment of renewal for the journal, and also marks the tenth anniversary of its first volume. We present several developments intended to reinstate and relaunch our presence within the international landscape of arts and humanities scholarship.

First, we are strengthening our connection with the Performance, Religion and Spirituality Working Group of the International Federation for Theatre Research (IFTR), which originally inspired the journal and provided the first global platform for research in this field. We are also opening the journal to a wider range of territories, formats, parent disciplines and practitioner-researchers in Performance as Research, welcoming unorthodox interventions and diverse points of view. A key part of this expansion is the introduction of the new section *Insights*, which replaces the more institutional *Reviews* section. With *Insights*, we aim to create space for briefer testimonies, exchanges and analyses, exploring and sharing ideas outside the structure of peer-reviewed contributions.

This renewal, along with a new logo, accompanies changes within the editorial team, beginning with the appointment of the new co-editors, Alexandra Mackenzie Johns and Giuliano Campo, who also serve as co-convenors of the PRS Working Group at IFTR. We see this not only as a necessary cyclical renewal, but as an opportunity to propose a more inclusive and global approach, attentive to the radical transformations taking place in society and in the arts. Our aim is to strengthen the journal's ability to respond to the evolving worlds of performance, religion, ritual and spirituality, and to reflect the rapidly changing international panorama with its dramatic challenges and emerging opportunities. We extend our warm thanks to our predecessor and founder of the journal, Joshua Edelman, who has generously accompanied us through this transition and remains a pillar of the publication, alongside several senior members of the editorial board, especially Edmund B. Langan.

The successful expansion of our international pool of peer reviewers, ensuring an uncompromisingly rigorous academic process, and the remarkable response to our call for papers and unconventional interventions for this relaunch, confirm that we have responded to a genuine need within a changing community of researchers and practitioners. Their enthusiasm for contributing to this renewed enterprise has been deeply encouraging.

We are also aware of the limitations of our still small team in maintaining high editorial standards while processing a large number of submissions. For this issue, we were able to accept only a limited selection. We warmly invite our readers, members of the IFTR Working Group and fellow researchers to remain in contact with us, and to consider submitting their proposals, papers and other interventions for future issues. As we continue to renew the roles within the editorial team and expand our reviewer pool, your support remains invaluable.

This issue presents four scholarly articles, followed by two contributions in the new *Insights* section. The first article, *Sense of Caste as Sense of Ritual: Ritualization in Thirayattam* by Neeraja Sasikumar, forms a bridge with the previous issue of the journal. In our 2024 volume, the article *From Grove to Temple* by Filipe Pereira, Rajesh Komath and Joshua Edelman examined the consequences of templisation, Sanskritisation and Hinduisation of sacred groves in northern Kerala, particularly in relation to the ritual of the teyyams, the living gods who inhabit these forests. Continuing in this line of inquiry, Sasikumar offers a detailed, first-hand account of the Thirayattam ritual, focusing on the production of ritual environment through the strategic actions of participants. The article argues that interactions between ritual actors and space structure the ritual environment as sacred, pure and hierarchical, and that the processes of ritualisation implicitly affirm caste.

The next two articles examine contemporary and unconventional uses of performance within religious or spiritual contexts. *The Emergence of Pop-Masses: How Pop-Cultural Aesthetics Shape Contemporary Norwegian Worship* is Sander Jensen Schipper's study of the rise of what he terms pop masses within the Church of Norway. Since 2017, Norwegian Lutheran congregations have experimented with theatrical strategies and spectacular visual languages drawn from popular culture. Through case studies of Harry Potter-themed services and a mass inspired by *Les Misérables*, Schipper shows how these innovations unsettle the minimalist aesthetic long associated with Norwegian Lutheranism and invite new forms of theological engagement. By tracing their development from early carnival services to their current prominence in Oslo and Bergen, the article offers a detailed account of a new dramaturgical approach that blends sacred and secular repertoires, illuminating the changing landscape of contemporary worship.

Heather Kelley's article *Hope Springs Eternal: Performing Grief, History, and Resilience in Boulder's Columbia Cemetery* turns our attention to Columbia Cemetery in Boulder, Colorado, a historic burial ground that has become an unexpected site for contemporary performance. While cemeteries have long been places of mourning and ritual observance, Kelley shows how they are increasingly used for secular and community-based theatrical events that engage with memory, history and spirituality in complex ways. Her study traces the emergence of what she terms cemetery theatre and proposes a framework for understanding the varied relationships these performances establish with their surroundings. Through close analysis of two recent productions, *The Liminal Heart* and *Meet the Spirits*, Kelley demonstrates the range of artistic, emotional and civic functions that cemetery theatre can assume, and highlights the evolving role of such spaces within contemporary cultural life.

The final article in this section, *Rethinking Religiosity: The Reflexive Dimension of Spirituality in Post-Secular Czech Society*, offers a different but complementary perspective. While the preceding articles explore performative responses to increasing secularisation, this contribution addresses the foundational question of secularisation itself. Drawing on sociological methodology, Anna Vostruhová and Jiří Buriánek analyse patterns of religious and spiritual participation in the Czech Republic. Their study proposes extending tools for measuring religiosity to include spirituality, arguing that even in a largely secular society, the need for transcendence persists in complex and sometimes unexpected ways. The authors demonstrate that high levels of religiosity do not necessarily correlate with spiritual experience, and that a declared lack of interest in religion does not imply an absence of spirituality. For the editors, this article offers a valuable reflection on the very conditions that make the study of performance, religion and spirituality possible, even if it approaches these questions from a lateral methodological angle.

The new *Insights* section presents two substantial contributions that we believe will be of great interest to our readers. The section opens with *Sacred Music as a Form of Resistance: Women's Sacred Music from the Protestant Reformation to Contemporary Global Contexts* by Maria Teresa Pizzulli. Her contribution explores how women's sacred music has functioned as a form of resistance from the Reformation to the present, challenging theological and social hierarchies and generating alternative spiritual narratives across diverse historical and cultural contexts.

The section concludes with Enza De Francisci's reflection on *Passion Day*, a collaborative project developed in Naro, Sicily, which reconsiders a long-standing Sacred Representation through the lens of translation and accessibility. Bringing together fourteen local theatre companies and more than four hundred performers, the event drew on an eighteenth-century Sicilian text rarely encountered outside the region. De Francisci shows how bilingual materials, voice-over resources and new translation practices opened this deeply rooted tradition to wider audiences while preserving its linguistic and cultural specificity. Her review highlights translation as a means of safeguarding vulnerable performance cultures at a moment when minority languages and devotional practices face increasing pressure.

By foregrounding the need to protect fragile performance traditions in such a context, De Francisci's contribution speaks to the wider conditions in which this issue takes shape. The pressures facing communities across the world today, whether through war, genocides, displacement or the erosion of cultural and religious plurality, remind us that ritual, language and performance are forms of life that hold histories, identities and futures. They are often among the first to be threatened when violence or political upheaval takes hold.

In this climate, the study of performance, religion and spirituality cannot be separated from the realities that shape the present. The devastation of communities, the targeting of cultural and religious heritage and the instability affecting regions marked by long histories of spiritual and ethnic diversity all call for scholarship attentive to vulnerability as well as resilience. At the same time, accelerating secularisation and the emergence of post-secular sensibilities invite us to reconsider how spiritual expression is lived, contested and reinvented. Performance becomes one of the spaces where these negotiations are most visible, whether through acts of remembrance, gestures of resistance or the creation of new ritual forms that respond to contemporary needs.

This journal has always sought to engage with these complexities, and the contributions gathered in this issue continue that commitment. They reflect a field expanding in method and perspective, increasingly open to diverse epistemologies, responsive to the needs of communities and individuals, and attuned to the ethical demands of the moment. The shifts we are witnessing in academic approaches, from decolonial thinking to embodied and community-based research, are not merely intellectual developments. They form part of a broader effort to understand how performance and spirituality intersect with the urgencies of our time.

Our hope is that the work presented here will deepen scholarly conversations while also contributing, in however modest a way, to the visibility and preservation of the cultural and spiritual practices that sustain communities under threat. In attending to these performances, we affirm their significance and acknowledge the worlds they continue to hold open, even in the midst of profound uncertainty.