

Theatrical and Ritual Boundaries in South Asia: An Introductory Essay*

devānām idam āmananti munayaḥ kāntaṃ kratuṃ cākṣuṣam

“Sages celebrate this [theatre] as a ritual offering, beautiful for the gods to behold”

Kālidāsa, *Mālavikāgnimitra* I.4

Origin and development of a debate

The pertinence of maintaining a strict dichotomy between the categories of theatre and ritual has been questioned in recent years. It has been

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argued that such a clear-cut separation is a construct of European modernity and its organisation into academic disciplines, which cannot possibly be applied to different times and cultures, especially to the South Asian context.¹ The disciplinary boundaries between theatre and ritual have been initially challenged with the enlargement of already established fields—such as Theaterwissenschaft in Germany²—and eventually broken down, and even transcended with the emergence of new domains of study at the crossroads of different disciplines—for instance performance studies,³ cultural studies and ritual studies.⁴ New approaches to the study of theatre and ritual have emerged through a convergence of interests and overlapping methodologies between the humanities and the social sciences.⁵

In the field of theatre studies, more specifically, the focus shifted away from a text-oriented and literary approach to theatre, to one privileging aspects of performance as an event and experience binding together actors and spectators. This widening of the horizon encompassed various processes hitherto neglected, such as stage production and the actor's experience, with an additional focus on audiences and the reception of theatre—both in social, religious and aesthetic terms. Besides being at the crossroads of the different arts it contains, the field of theatre potentially encompasses several other human activities. Moreover, theatre is also a performance deeply rooted in society, involving the community and its transformation. In consequence of theories developed by social scientists such as Turner, Geertz and

¹ See Brückner and Schömbucher 2007.

² On the establishment of theatre studies through the work of Herrmann in Germany, and its enlargement with the performative turn, see e.g., Fischer-Lichte 2001.

³ Schechner 1985; 1988.

⁴ On the beginnings of ritual studies, see Kreinath, Snoek and Stausberg 2006.

⁵ The 'speech act theory' of Austin, to whom generally goes the credit of theorizing the so-called 'performative turn' in the 1950s, is a result of this convergence. See Fischer-Lichte 2005.

Goffmann, theatre came to be seen, within the field of performance studies, primarily from a sociological, ethnographic, or cultural perspective.⁶

Central to these enlarged or emergent fields of studies were concepts such as that of ‘performance’ and ‘performativity’, which were shaped at the beginning of the 20th century in opposition to terms such as ‘text’ and ‘textuality’ or ‘referentiality’, but also as broad categories meant to regroup a variety of cultural phenomena. The latter was especially the case in performance studies as shaped by Schechner in the United States, although it was preceded by earlier, less systematic attempts in theatre studies, as developed in Germany, to extend the field of theatre to festivals, processions, ceremonies, plays, dances and rituals (Fischer-Lichte 2001). Among these forms, which today scholars generally refer to as ‘cultural performances’ (Singer 1982), theatre was either treated as the main type or as an instance among others, where ritual often kept a prominent place.

The so-called ‘performative turn’—preceded by a shift in the perception of culture at large from ‘textual’ to ‘performative’ at the turn of the 20th century (Fischer-Lichte 2001), but first theorized in the field of language communication by Austin in the 1950s (Austin 1962)—occasioned a new attention to extra-European and ‘folk’ cultures, which were considered ‘primitive’ and as such abounding in entertaining spectacles. Prior to this turn to performance and to the community of people brought about *in* and *by* theatre, a similar shift from text—the sacred, religious text, or myth—to performance—the ritual or sacrifice integrating individuals into a community—had taken place in religious studies, with a similar focus on the so-called primitive cultures. Attention on community processes and transformations brought about by ritual and theatrical performances eventually converged in the concept of ‘liminality’, epitomized by the anthropologist Turner

⁶ On the influence of the theories developed in anthropology, ethnology and religious studies on performance studies, see Carlson 2001 and Fischer-Lichte 2005.

in both spheres, although drawing on Van Gennepe's earlier analysis of the rites of passage.

In the second half of the 20th century, scholars of religion started to use performance as a central category to describe ritual. In some cases, the parallel drawn with theatre through the concept of performance enabled the exploration of the aesthetic dimension of ritual, transcending the older dichotomy between the religious and aesthetic perspectives. Religion and aesthetics had been in fact until then thought of as opposites, belonging respectively to the domains of ritual and of art. These were understood to be utterly distinct spheres, the former characterized as the realm of the real, the latter as that of illusion. When a theatrical performance—for instance an Asian form such as Balinese drama—appeared to more naturally fall on the side of ritual rather than that of theatrical enactment, then also the aesthetic distance between actors and spectators—necessary to build up a world of illusion—was automatically negated (Kreinath 2009). Kapferer, on the contrary, developed an aesthetic approach to ritual, stressing the importance of aesthetic qualities in the functioning of ritual in terms of social transformation (Kapferer 1997). At the same time as aesthetics was recognized as relevant to ritual theory, it was denied that ritual fell under the exclusive purview of religion. Paving the way for the recognition of secular rituals alongside religious ones, Turner did not restrict ritual to the sphere of religion, but placed it somewhat on the verge between religion and theatre. His approach to ritual was very much influenced by his views on theatrical performance (Turner 1982). After the so-called performative turn in the humanities and social sciences, theatre became in fact a key-concept or even the main frame of reference in the study of ritual. One important example is found in the work of Tambiah, where ritual is analysed alongside theatrical performance and speech acts (Tambiah 1979). The widespread insistence on 'performance' and 'performativity' also determined a change in the analysis of rituals from meaning to action, and a new emphasis on the creation of presence, something common to theatrical performances. In this connection, the communicative model for the analysis of theatrical performance

was affected by the notion of embodiment, first theorized in the field of ritual studies (Csordas 1990; Bell 2006).⁷

Beside the attention of anthropologists and theatre scholars on the synchronic relations between ritual and theatre, another avenue of research was inaugurated through the conceptual juxtaposition of the two spheres of ritual and theatre. This emerged particularly when the investigation into the origins of theatre—which meant essentially Greek theatre at the beginning of the 20th century—incorporated the results of anthropological research into the search for a genetic or historical relationship between theatre and ritual. Its protagonists were the so-called Cambridge Ritualists. Following the lead of Jane Harrison, they elaborated a ritual theory of drama.⁸ While Hellenist scholars looked for comparative evidence of ritualistic material in extra-European cultures, drama was considered an invention proper to the Greek civilization. It was argued that theatre originated out of primitive ritual, yet this was considered as a sort of cultural ‘quantum leap’ that led Europe to emerge out of savagery (Csapo, Miller 2007: 2).

The focus on so-called primitive and traditional cultures had a deep impact on avant-garde theatre directors, starting from the 1930s with Antonin Artaud and Bertold Brecht, and proceeding, in the 1960s, with Peter Brook, Jerzy Grotowski, Ariane Mnouchkine, Eugenio Barba and Richard Schechner. Inspired by the Cambridge Ritualists, they strived for a revival of bourgeois theatre by looking back, in a symbolic key, at what they regarded as theatre’s essential core, i.e. ritual. They also integrated anthropological theory on ritual into theatre production, an instance of which is the legacy of Turner on Schechner’s theatrical experiments, where the divide between the audience and the performers

⁷ For an updated and complete annotated bibliography on ritual theory, see Kreinath, Snoek and Stausberg 2006 (v. 2).

⁸ On the Cambridge Ritualists, ‘New Ritualism’ and on the contemporary developments of the ‘ritual theory of drama’ in a renewed search for historical—rather than just conceptual—links between ritual and drama with a comparative perspective, see Csapo and Miller 2009.

was abolished, and rituals were introduced and celebrated within the performance. It is sometimes forgotten, in accounts about these shifts in avant-garde European theatre, that many of its directors were directly or indirectly inspired by Asian forms of theatre, in particular South Asian forms.

Incidentally, one of the first European directors to take an interest in Indian theatre as a performing art, rather than as literature,⁹ was the avant-garde theatre director and critic Edward Gordon Craig. In his early writings, Craig had been a staunch supporter of the idea that theatre was neither just a text nor just acting. His views, emphasizing the importance of the body and the actor in theatre, influenced the birth of Theatre Studies in Germany.¹⁰ Craig advocated a revival of the modern English stage through the encounter with other cultures and theatres of the past. His ideas about Indian theatre, and his ideas about Indian art in general, had been mediated through the reception of the writings of Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy, who first propagated and popularized in the West the idea of Indian art as essentially spiritual and religious. As the correspondence between the two makes clear, it was first of all to satisfy a request of Craig that Coomaraswamy embarked on the first translation ever into English of a Sanskrit treatise on Indian dance, the *The Mirror of Gesture (Abhinayadarpaṇa)*, published in 1917. In the introduction to it, Coomaraswamy spoke about the ritual dances of the Devadāsīs in an idealized way, presenting the art of dancing as akin to *yoga*, and the gestures of the dancers as symbolic and hieratic, and common to ritual. This early translation, pre-dating that of the celebrated *Nāṭyaśāstra* of Bharata, together

⁹ Indian theatre as literature had been known in Europe since the end of the 18th century. The English translation of Kālidāsa's *Śakuntalā* by William Jones in 1789 marks indeed what has been dubbed an 'Oriental Renaissance' in Europe. On this phenomenon, see Schwab 1950.

¹⁰ His *On the Art of Theatre* of 1905 was translated the same year into German and had a direct influence on the already mentioned theorist of Theaterwissenschaft Herrmann (Fischer-Lichte 2001: 169).

with other writings of Coomaraswamy on the performing arts, were highly influential in shaping European's perceptions of Indian theatre as a religious art.¹¹

As should be clear by now, the debate on the boundaries between theatre and ritual did not first originate in the study of the West, and then extended to the field of South Asia, but was shaped and theorized in strict connection with scholars working *in* and *on* that field. In a recent discussion on ritual theories, Michaels has noticed how attention to India and its overtly rich ritual culture significantly helped shape modern ritual theory (Michaels 2016).¹² The case of South Asia offers in fact a particularly rich reservoir for an enquiry into the relevance of the concepts of theatre and ritual and their contested borders which, applied to a plurality of contexts of performance, have become an important focus of current academic research.

Theatre and ritual in the South Asian context

Looking at the history of the debate about theatrical and ritual boundaries, it has emerged that interdisciplinarity has been an intrinsic element to the discussion in modern academic studies. It has therefore been kept as a methodological guideline in putting together the contributions of the present volumes (Part I and Part II). Previous important publications on similar topics have also opted for an interdisciplinary and comparative approach. The volume edited by Bansat-Boudon is possibly the first Indological publication to draw attention

¹¹ On the influence of Coomaraswamy on early Western perceptions of Indian theatre, on Craig's reception of Indological writings and on the much-entangled history of *The Mirror of Gesture*, see Ganser (forthcoming).

¹² Among the earlier works drawing on Indian texts, Michaels cites Georges Dumézil, Edward B. Tylor, Marcel Mauss, Henri Hubert, Louis Doumont, Max Weber and Arthur M. Hocart. Recent works are those of Frits Staal, Bruce Kapferer, Stanley Tambiah, Richard Schechner and Caroline Humphrey and James Laidlaw. Besides them, a number of Indological scholars wrote important works on Hindu rituals (Michaels 2016: 18–19).

to the great variety of notions of theatricality in India, which sometimes border—in line with the choice of theatrical and textual materials presented—the sphere of ritual (Bansat-Boudon 1998). In Brückner, Schömbucher and Zarrilli 2007, cultural performance in India has been analysed under the three different perspectives of actor, audience and observer, with a view to investigate the power of performance to transform and bring about effects on these three types of agent. To ritual and theatre, Holm, Nielsen and Vedel 2009 adds religion as a third category, combining theoretical analyses and case studies, some of which stem from South Asia. Michaels and Wulf 2015 focuses on emotions and aesthetics as legitimate domains of investigation both in rituals and other performances, with a majority of contributions on the Indian context but also with a comparative focus on Europe.

If these recent projects are doubtless influenced by the new focus on performance that has emerged in the humanities and social sciences, it is often forgotten that the debate about theatre and ritual in India has an older history of more than a century, which is partly coincident with, but possibly independent from, the debate about the ritual origins of drama sparked among the Cambridge Ritualists.¹³ The debate about the connection of ritual and theatre in Indian studies similarly started as a debate about the origins of Sanskrit drama in the last decades of the 19th century. From the beginning, the question was closely connected with the search for a genealogy of drama in Indian ritual. The other option, envisaged by some European scholars, was

¹³ To the best of my knowledge, the ritual theory of drama, enunciated by Jane Harrison in 1912, was formulated independently from parallel attempts by scholars of Indian studies, to explain the origins of Sanskrit theatre at the turn of the century. As Csapo and Miller notice, Cambridge Ritualism was fundamentally Eurocentric, and conceived of drama as a peculiarity of the Greek civilisation (Csapo and Miller 2007: 1). In the recent reopening of the debate in a more historically grounded way, no acknowledgement was made of the parallel debate in Indian studies, although studies on other cultures—in part directly influenced by Cambridge Ritualism—were included from a comparative standpoint (*ibid.*).

to derive Sanskrit drama—or the idea of drama—from its Greek or Hellenistic homologue. After Sylvain Lévi refuted, in his seminal study *Le Théâtre Indien* of 1890,¹⁴ the thesis of direct filiation, the debate focused, among the partisans of the ritual origins, on the specific form of ritual Indian theatre would have been indebted to. With the discovery of the text of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*—the earliest codification of theatrical art variously dated by scholars around the beginning of the Common Era—and its first Indian edition in 1894, scholarly attention concentrated on the nature of the rituals preceding a theatrical performance, the so-called *pūrvaraṅga*.¹⁵ The narrative about the origins of theatre in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, launching theatre as a Fifth Veda available to all social classes, was also an important locus for the interpretation of the secular or religious origins of theatre.¹⁶ As the study of Lidova—contributing to the debate with new insights on Hindu *pūjā*, rather than Vedic *yajña*, being the immediate antecedent of Indian theatre—shows, the history of *Nāṭyaśāstra* studies is closely connected to the ritual interpretation of Indian theatre (Lidova 1994: 121–122).

Despite this focus in Indology on building up a ritual theory of theatre based on the interpretation of the Sanskrit texts,¹⁷ such early attempts seem to have been mostly obliterated in recent studies of Hindu rituals. As Michaels observes, “the value of indigenous theories of ritual, for instance the Pūrvamīmāṃsā school, or the theory on (*rasa*)

¹⁴ The various steps of the debate about the origins of Indian theatre and its protagonists can be followed in Bronkhorst 2003, where an attempt to reopen the question in the light of Lévi’s later writings and recent archaeological discoveries is also made.

¹⁵ For a summary of the different positions on the nature and scope of the *pūrvaraṅga*, and on Abhinavaguta’s usage of ritual hermeneutics and rule analysis in his commentary, see Ganser 2016.

¹⁶ On this narrative, see Bansat-Boudon 1993.

¹⁷ The different options crystallized especially around the interpretation of the relationship between the narrative about the origins of theatre, the rituals preceding the performance of the plays as described in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, and the available dramas (Gitomer 1994).

aesthetics of theatre and dance performances, have not yet been sufficiently recognized in ritual theory” (Michaels 2016: 19). Not only *rasa* aesthetics, I would argue, but the analysis of the rituals, dances, musical parts and enactments, which were theorized as part of the theatrical performance by Sanskrit authors, could benefit ritual theory, besides being of interest for historians of Indian theatre. For instance, some modern analyses of ritual in religious studies stress the peculiarity of ritual as an action (or a series of acts) *sui generis*, and the agent’s awareness of such action as being meaningful and intentional.¹⁸ Similarly, in the Pūrvamīmāṃsā texts, ritual action is analysed as being performed for the attainment of some transcendent aim, or for carrying out the injunctions of the Vedic text. The ritual act takes the name of *karman*, action, which in India indicates the ritual act *par excellence*. Agency in the various ritual acts which are carried out in the different phases of a rite are also analysed in great detail by the authors of this school, traditionally occupied with the hermeneutics of rituals as enjoined by scripture.

Theatre, in its turn, could be equally said to be a *sui generis* action. In the *Dhātupāṭha* the root *naṭ-*—used to designate the activity of actors (*nāṭayati*) and from which the most common word for theatre, i.e. *nāṭya*, is derived—is given by grammarians the sense of *avaspaṇ-*, i.e. (in its more frequently attested form *spand-*) to throb, quiver, palpitate, to move subtly (*kiṃcicalana*, cf. *Dhātupāṭha*). It is perhaps not by chance that the root *spand-*, in some ways connected to the activity of actors, assumed a special significance in the schools of non-dualist Śaivism and was used by Abhinavagupta to designate the activity of

¹⁸ Some of the modern theorists of ritual tried in fact to overcome the separation of thought from action, advocated in the earlier devaluation of ritual with respect to scripture, claiming instead that ritual is either a purposeful practice (Bell 1992) or a meaningful, qualitatively distinctive action (Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994), and focusing on the strategies of ritualization and ritualized behaviour. For his part, Michaels looks at ritual as “a specific mode of action” comparable in its extraordinary character to playing in theatre, but different from stage acting and games (Michaels 2016: 31ff.).

the dancing god and lord of actors Śiva. Although unmovable, in fact, Śiva appears as if moving, bringing about the activity of cosmic emission and reabsorption (Bansat-Boudon 2004: 211 ff.). This same activity of Śiva is described in other texts as a dance, using the root *nṛt-*, also connected to the root *naṭ-*. Differently from ritual, however, this dance is sometimes said to be devoid of any practical purpose, and, being the activity of cosmic manifestation by a god, it is often described as a play (*līlā*) (Colas 1998). On the other hand, the action of theatre can be compared to that of ritual as it comprises a series of activities, and as such it was described by the grammarian Bhartr̥hari as an action *sui generis* (*Vākyapadīya* 2.373).

This very quick and superficial dive into the Sanskrit materials brings me to one of the important points of departure of the present project. On the one hand, contemporary forms of performance—with reference to which scholars prefer nowadays to use denominations marking the continuity between the two domains, such as “ritual drama”, “ritual performance” or “staged ritual” (Sax 2009)—are seen to challenge the very existence of two clearly separate spheres for theatre and ritual in India.¹⁹ On the other hand and despite the affinities, since the beginnings of systematic scientific discourse in classical India, theatre and ritual have been treated as different fields, each endowed with its proper textual codifications (*śāstra*) and technical vocabulary. Concerning the vocabulary of theatre, some of the most common Sanskrit terms used to designate a dramatic performance are *nāṭya*, *nṛtta*, *nṛtya*, *prekṣā*, *nāṭaka*, or even *līlā* or *nāc* (in Hindi), while terms like *karman*, *kriyā*, *yajña* or *yāga* and *pūjā* or *upacāra* usually stand on the side of ritual. Some larger terms, such as those indicating festivals (*utsava*, *melā*, *samāja*) are normally seen to include both categories, special worship and rituals, as well as dances, music and dramatic plays (Michaels 2016).

¹⁹ The study and direct observation of many such forms have in fact prompted the debate about the existence of an independent sphere of theatre in Asia, clearly distinguished from that of ritual (Brückner and Schömbucher 2007).

Despite this seemingly clear-cut disciplinary boundary, the ritual and the theatrical spheres are already seen to intersect and to some extent blur in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, something that has puzzled scholars since they started to deal with this fundamental yet troublesome text. As seen above, the debate focused around the much-contested problem of the ritual origins of Indian theatre. On the far end of the spectrum of theatrical performance—i.e. the literary text written by a poet—various interpretations were given to the status of the earliest strata of Indian literature—the hymns of the Saṃhitās—as well as their function in connection to Vedic sacrifice. Starting from observations concerning the Vedic period, the dramatic character of some of the dialogical hymns of the *Ṛg-Veda* and their ritual interpretations in the *Brāhmaṇas* have given rise to speculations about the use of dramatic dialogues in Vedic ritual and their possible connection to the development of a theatrical form (see Malamoud 1998).

The unclear demarcation of the sphere of theatre from that of ritual in the theatrical tradition is reflected at the level of vocabulary. The *Nāṭyaśāstra* showcases strong links between the theatrical performance and the ritual universe: theatre is launched as the “Fifth Veda” (*NS* 1.12), and its performance is preceded by a complex ceremony, the *pūrvaraṅga*, described as the worship (*pūjana*, *pūjā*) of the deities of the stage (*NS* 5.55). In the *phalaśruti* of the *NS*, moreover, the result of a performance is compared to that of a *yajña* (*NS* 37.26–27), and the *pūrvaraṅga* is said to be equally comparable to a *yajña* in its effects on the performer (*NS* 5.170–173). Moreover, the performative arts, such as dance, vocal music and instrumental music, are said to please the gods, providing a transcendent result for its performers in the *pūrvaraṅga* (*NS* 4.319; 31.73). The performance of theatre, on its part, is declared to be even more pleasant to the gods than the items usually intended as ritual offerings, such as incense and garlands of flowers (*NS* 37.29). The comparison of theatre to a ritual is reiterated in the text of some of the extant Sanskrit plays, for instance in the famous stanza of Kālidāsa, where theatre is equated to a visual sacrifice pleasing to the gods (*Mālavikāgnimitra* I.4, quoted *in exergo*). The mention of

the benediction at the opening of the play, together with the occasions for staging a newly composed drama during a public religious festival or royal investiture also attest to the participation of theatre in the ritual calendar, possibly alongside other types of entertainment.

Not only do links between ritual and the performing arts appear in the literature and in the technical texts on theatre, but they also exist on multiple levels throughout the history of South Asia. In classical India, we witness the rise of professional experts connected to the various arts of dancing (*nr̥tta*), singing (*gīta*) and instrumental playing (*vādya*), both at the court and at the temple. In the latter, these become, from a certain point onwards, part of the temple personnel and of the deity's retinue. Ascetics and lay devotees, worshipping the deities through the performative arts in order to obtain extra-worldly results, make their appearance in the religious literature of early Śaivism and Tantrism (Törzsök 2016). Disguise and role-playing are a well-known theme in Purāṇic literature, and become a part of rituals and observances in the various ascetic paths.

The boundaries between theatre and ritual become even more permeable and difficult to discern in the medieval forms of devotional drama, such as the Vaiṣṇava *līlās*, where the actors actually embody the characters rather than merely representing them (Haberman 1988; Sax 2009). Embodiment, or making the gods and other beings present and alive, is also a key feature of various forms of performance involving possession, which are often carried out through a highly formalized procedure resembling a dramatic score (Freeman 1998). Sometimes, the possession itself is preceded and triggered by songs and dances connected to stories about the gods, and by assuming their ichnographical traits and costumes in a mimetic, yet not actorial-dramatic way. Today, anthropologists do not fail to notice how rituals and theatrical performances often cohabit the same religious or cultural event, and how the labelling as either theatre or ritual becomes a ground of contention in the modern politics of cultural heritage and tourist industry.

The idea of a volume on Theatrical and ritual boundaries in South Asia derives from a panel, with the same name,

organized by Elisa Ganser at the 5th Coffee Break Conference in Rome: “Space, Culture, Language and Politics in South Asia: Common Patterns and Local Distinctions”. The volumes presented here (Part I CIS XIX No. 1/2 and Part II forthcoming vol. XX No. 1) consist of a selection of the papers from the panel,²⁰ supplemented with newly written ones.²¹ Its aim is to investigate first of all the connections, intersections and ruptures between the theatrical and the ritual sphere, paying special attention to the vocabulary used with reference to them. This is done with a focus on both practices and texts, detecting areas where literary sources, religious practices and living performative arts overlap and interact with one another. Secondly, the practical and theoretical implications of either preserving, dismantling or displacing the boundaries between ritual and theatre have been tested against specific case studies, in which such boundaries reveal their crucially problematic and contested nature.

Through the use of different disciplinary approaches and methodologies, ranging from philology, anthropology, religious, cultural, literary and theatre studies, as well as history and art history, the essays in this volume aim to further our understanding of the categories of ritual and theatre in South Asia. It contributes to the task of rethinking these categories in dialogue with more recent concepts issued from their re-examination in other areas of research (for instance the concepts of liminality, framing, embodiment, performativity, ritualization, theatricality, self/role, etc.). Given the nature of the object of enquiry—stemming from the domain of performance but having its traces recorded in texts, monuments, epigraphs, as well as in the practices and

²⁰ The original participants to the panel at the Coffee Break Conference in 2014 were (in alphabetical order): Gautam Chakrabarty, Giorgio De Martino, Marianna Ferrara, Elisa Ganser, Virginie Johan, Thomas Kintaert, Natalia Lidova, Nina Mirnig and Bihani Sarkar.

²¹ In the first part: Hermina Cielas, Marianne Pasty-Abdul Wahid, David Pierdominici Leão, Anna Tosato. In the second part: Andrea Acri, Dominic Goodall, Silvia D’Intino, Irene Majo Garigliano, Anna Nitecka, S. A. S. Sarma, Aleksandra Wenta.

memories of the community of people taking part and giving meaning to the various performative events—it has been considered particularly fruitful to approach it through a multi-disciplinary approach. Besides the fact that the authors come from several different disciplines, many of the papers are themselves multidisciplinary in their methodology, combining for instance philology and art history, philology and ethnography, textual and religious studies or anthropology and theatre studies, to name just a few. Also in line with the spirit of the Coffee Break Conference, which inspired this whole enterprise, is the fact that many of the contributions, besides presenting a specific case study, provide a sort of state of the art on the question of boundaries, seen from a multiplicity of perspectives. They are therefore meant to help the reader to find orientation in a field which has become larger in recent years, by offering moreover reference to the latest studies on the topic both in the humanities and social sciences.

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