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## Preface

In 1968, the anthropologist Edmund Leach published an influential encyclopedia article titled, simply, “Ritual.” Leach observed that “there is the widest possible disagreement as to how the word ritual should be used and how the performance of ritual should be understood.” Fast forward forty years, to the second of a hefty two volume set published by the Ritual Dynamik Group in Heidelberg, we find an annotated bibliography that runs to over 560 pages, containing some 600 items published between 1968 and 2006. Most of my research and publications on ritual date from after 2006. Though I’ve tried to keep-up with developments, including co-editing the Ritual Studies Series (Oxford University Press) with colleagues Ute Hüsken and Ronald Grimes, mastering the field of ritual studies is a well-nigh impossible task, which is some measure of the field’s success, the price of which is bought with not a little unknowing. Though I should like to attempt a comprehensive history and overview of ritual studies, the present book is most certainly not that; rather, on offer is a collection of my excursions into, around, and through my favored field, gathered from work published over the past fifteen years.

Though there are attempts afoot to integrate theoretical orientations, methodological approaches, and foundational assumptions, ritual studies has not attained a tight disciplinary focus, and most of us working or playing in the ritual field have favored haunts and hangouts, defend from attack positions we have built and fortified over the years, and invoke and display preferred terms and concepts like a well-worn, comfortable pair of jeans. I am no different. The debt I owe mentor, friend and colleague Ron Grimes is incalculable, though some measure of it is found, whether explicitly or implicitly, in the essays that follow. Shaped by my studies and collaborations with Ron, I count myself among the tribe of performance scholars (with some qualifications), take an interest in matters of ritual creativity and criticism, enjoy boundary hoping—especially across the borders between ritual, religion, and the arts—and prefer the essay to the monograph, largely because I can’t seem to avoid taking a stab at whatever topics and themes happen to catch my attention. Over the years, I’ve written numerous case-study essays, along with summaries of theory and conceptual frameworks in ritual studies. It is time to gather these scattered stones into a heap, creating a cairn visible from wherever future wanderings take me, a signpost to help organize a wayward curiosity into some sort of visible trail.