PART TWO

EMPIRICAL PERSPECTIVES
CHAPTER FIVE

RITUAL, PERFORMANCE, AND THE SEQUESTERING SACRED SPACE1

Ronald L. Grimes

In 2001, consulting on several WordBridge plays suffused with ritual motifs, I encountered Jeff Wirth, an improv artist. He and I met for the first time a few minutes before taking on our first play together.

“Have you read it?” Jeff whispered.

“Sure,” I said. “Several times. Have you?”

“Nope,” he replied, without a trace of shame.

The crowd of theater professionals began to move inside the studio. Jeff entered, hesitated, then turned on his heels.

“Where are you going?” I asked.

“Outside,” he replied.

I assumed he was embarrassed about not having read the play manuscript.

Now seated at a table, ready to read it aloud for the first time, were the actors. Behind them was a large set of sliding glass doors partially obscured by a black curtain. As the actors began to read the play, *Polar Bears on U.S. 41*,2 Jeff’s thick glasses gradually became visible. From behind the sliding glass barrier, he was peering in at the play from outside. Occasionally, his antics would evoke audience laughter, leaving the actors puzzled, wondering what was funny in the lines they had just read.

---


2 The script was written by Marisa B. Wegrzyn.