

Initiating dialogue

‘Does it ever bother you that no more than six people in the entire world actually care about anything you write?’ the young journalist Leora provocatively asks her new date, an assistant professor of history, in Dara Horn’s novel *In the Image*. Realising how inappropriate it is to be so frank, Leora anticipates a shocked and defensive response, but instead, she receives a question in return: ‘Does it ever bother you that no one in the entire world actually cares about anything you write for more than six days?’ (Dara Horn: *In the Image*. New York, 2002. p. 125.)

Researchers within the humanities and social sciences today seem to have a growing suspicion that not only the first of these limitations, but actually both of them, hamper contemporary academic publishing. The number of journals in this field is relentlessly increasing, flooding our libraries and databases with an insurmountable supply of relevant, critical and analytically refined articles. Simultaneously, the publication pace is steadily speeded up and the useful life of an article is dramatically shortened: novel interpretations and unexplored ethnographies seem always to wait just around the corner, sending previous texts off into oblivion.

So why initiate yet another journal? The answer is uncomplicated: to contribute to the plurality of voices; the fundament upon which academic research is built. The purpose of *Approaching Religion* is to offer an accessible, open and explorative forum for scholarly debate on timely issues and concepts related to the study of religion and culture. In order to fulfil the goals of availability and visibility, we have created our journal as an online, open access publication, supported by the internationally compatible Open Journal Systems (OJS) platform.

Approaching Religion is primarily a publication channel for articles presented at scholarly roundtable seminars hosted by the Donner Institute for Research in Religious and Cultural History in Åbo,

Finland. The journal addresses an international readership and our aim is to present articles of highest academic standard that approach the field of religion from a broad, theoretically and methodologically diverse perspective. The authors invited to the expert seminars at the Donner Institute and featured in this journal have been selected on the basis of previous academic accomplishments as well as suggestions from other scholars. The articles have further been reviewed under the supervision of the editorial board, consisting of the leading academic experts on religion in Finland.

This inaugural issue of the journal presents articles discussed at a roundtable seminar entitled *Interreligious Dialogue. Contemporary challenges in research, public discourse and practice*, held at the Donner Institute in December, 2010. It features articles and book reviews written by European scholars from fields such as theology, social sciences, comparative religion and philosophy, addressing theoretical, methodological, ethical and ethnographic issues currently under debate within the diverse research field of interreligious dialogue. Many of the articles draw attention to the changing faces of contemporary dialogue. Throughout history, dialogue has mainly been regarded as a positive and constructive enterprise, but as a result of critical reflections on power and representation, equality and agency, the image is becoming more ambiguous. Dialogue is losing its innocence, yet not its relevance.

The articles gathered in this issue present a highly topical and scholarly significant outlook on interreligious dialogue today. We are honoured to be able to introduce our journal with such a substantial contribution and hope it will initiate further academic dialogue and creative rethinking—conversations that will neither be limited to the interest of six persons nor to the time scope of six days.

RUTH ILLMAN
Editor