

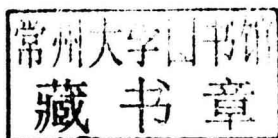
# **Practical Spiritualities in a Media Age**

Edited by  
Curtis D. Coats and Monica M. Emerich

B L O O M S B U R Y

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and Monica M. Emerich

## Contributors

**Liz Barr** is a PhD student in the Rhetoric, Politics, and Culture program in the Department of Communication Arts at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. With a background in Gender and Women's Studies, she brings queer and feminist politics and scholarship in conversation with queer and feminist rhetorical studies. She is interested in medicalization and bodies, and works on alternative constructions of mental health and illness, focusing on ways that queer politics can inform resistance to the medicalization of madness. In addition to her work on madness, she explores HIV, AIDS, and public memory, focusing on nondominant narratives of AIDS activism. Her work has been featured in *Feminist Collections*, *Rhizomes*, and will appear in a forthcoming edited collection on feminist rhetorical science studies.

**Marion Bowman** is senior lecturer in the Religious Studies department at the Open University, UK, vice-president of the European Association for the Study of Religions, and a former president of both the British Association for the Study of Religions and of The Folklore Society. Working at the interstices of religious studies and folklore/ethnology, her research interests are very much rooted in vernacular religion—the experiences, worldviews, beliefs, practices, and material culture of individuals and groups in specific locations and contexts. Her research tends to be fieldwork-based, with people within, on the margins of, and outside institutional religion. In 2012 she co-edited *Vernacular Religion in Everyday Life: Expressions of Belief* (Sheffield, Oakville, CT: Equinox, 2012) with Ülo Valk. She has conducted long-term ethnological studies of Glastonbury and also of contemporary Celtic spirituality and is currently working on a three-year project on “Pilgrimage to England's Cathedrals, Past and Present.”

**Curtis D. Coats** is a scholar whose work explores the intersections among media, religion, identity, gender, tourism, and sacred space. His work has been published in a range of disciplines, including the peer-reviewed journals: *Tourist Studies*, *Journal of Communication*, *Journal of Men, Masculinities and Spirituality*, and *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture*. Since 2009, Coats is associate professor of Communication Studies at Millsaps College where he directs the Communication Studies major and co-directs the interdisciplinary

Film Studies minor. He is co-author with Stewart M. Hoover of the forthcoming book *Does God Make the Man? Media, Religion and the Crisis of Masculinity* (NYU Press, 2015).

**Monica M. Emerich** is president of Groundwork Research and Communications, a consultancy specializing in the global Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability (LOHAS) marketplace. As a journalist, Emerich has focused on the social, political, and economic aspects of sustainable living since 1991. She teaches communication strategies in the Sustainable Practices Program at the University of Colorado. In her book, *The Gospel of Sustainability: Media, Market and LOHAS* (University of Illinois Press, 2011) she explores the spiritualization of sustainability narratives and the construction of sustainability culture. She is co-editor with Stewart M. Hoover of *Media, Spiritualities and Social Change* (Continuum, 2011).

**Jeremy Garber** is a graduate of the Religious Studies program in Theology, Philosophy, and Cultural Theory at the University of Denver and the Iliff School of Theology. Jeremy received his MDiv from Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Indiana, concentrating in theology and ethics. Dr Garber's dissertation was titled "Another Way': The Pneumatology of Deleuzean Minoritarian Communal Interpretation in Scripture, the 16th Century Radical Reformation, and Alternative 21st century Anabaptist Community." His primary research is on the idea of the Holy Spirit and the interpretation of popular culture in religious communities, using media theory and Deleuzean philosophy. Dr Garber has published articles on the perception of Anabaptism in contemporary literature, the authority of Scripture in young adults, and theology in popular culture. He has also taught courses at the undergraduate and graduate levels in constructive theology, philosophy of religion, religion and popular culture, ethics, and comparative religion. He is currently the team leader of the Academic Advising Center at the Iliff School of Theology. He and his daughter, Fiona, are members of First Mennonite Church in Denver.

**Jenna Gray-Hildenbrand** is assistant professor of Religious Studies at Middle Tennessee State University and serves as co-director of the Religious Studies program. Her doctoral research focused on religion and law in the United States with a particular interest in the criminalization of religious practice. Gray-Hildenbrand's current research and teaching interests include indigenous religions, new religious movements, and alternative spiritualities, religion and media, gender and religion, race and religion, and theory and method

in religious studies. Gray-Hildenbrand is presently working on two projects. The first investigates the history of the criminalization of serpent-handling in Appalachian Christian churches from the 1940s to the present. The second, in collaboration with Martha Smith Roberts, analyzes the various spiritualities emerging within the hula hooping subculture.

**Florence Pasche Guignard** was a postdoctoral researcher in the Department for the Study of Religion at the University of Toronto after completing her doctorate in the comparative study of religions from the University of Lausanne. Her work engages issues at the intersection of religion and gender, embodiment, ritual, media, and material culture. Method and theory in the study of religions, in particular comparative research designs, also count among her research interests. Pasche Guignard's publications have focused on religion and ornaments in devotional Hindu poetry, religion and toys, games and dolls, and religious rituals and representations on video-sharing websites. Her current research project, titled "Natural Parenting in the Digital Age: At the Confluence of Mothering, Religion, Environmentalism and Technology" is supported through a fellowship of the Swiss National Science Foundation. Her forthcoming publications focus on the intersection of religious discourses with motherhood, pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding, with a particular focus on ritual and media.

**Graham Harvey** is Reader and Head of Department of Religious Studies at the Open University, UK. His research and publications primarily engage with Jews, Pagans, and indigenous peoples. He is particularly interested in "animism" and is author of *Animism: Respecting the Living World* (Columbia University Press, 2005) and editor of *The Handbook of Contemporary Animism* (Routledge, 2013). In 2013 he also published *Food, Sex and Strangers: Understanding religion as everyday life* (Routledge) in which he argued for a thoroughly relational, material, performative, and this-worldly definition of and approach to religion, rooted in fieldwork among Anishinaabeg, Jews, Maori, Pagans, Yoruba, and others. He is president of the British Association for the Study of Religions.

**Stewart M. Hoover** is a professor in the Department of Media Studies and Professor Adjunct in the Department of Religious Studies and is director of the Center for Media, Religion and Culture, all at the University of Colorado, Boulder. A specialist in media audience studies, Hoover is an internationally recognized expert on media and religion and has consulted, lectured, or conducted research in eleven foreign countries. His research ranges from legacy to digital media



and across a wide range of cultural and social effects and uses of contemporary media. He is author or editor of twelve books and numerous articles and has taught graduate and undergraduate courses on contemporary media cultures, media history, theory, and research. He holds the Master's and PhD degrees from the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania, and has received awards for his scholarship, service, and teaching.

**Anne Maija Huffman** is an assistant professor at Sofia University in Palo Alto, California. Her research interests include spirituality, psychology, transpersonal studies, culture, LGBT studies, and generational research. She teaches both online and in-person. She maintains a private practice in spiritual guidance. She is currently the chair of the MA in Spiritual Guidance program at Sofia University. Her publications include the co-written chapter: "Feminist and Cultural Contributions to Transpersonal Psychology," in *The Wiley-Blackwell Handbook of Transpersonal Psychology* and her dissertation *Eternal Youths: A Narrative Inquiry into the Buffering Effects of a Generational Cultural Complex against the Anxiety of Aging and death in the American Baby Boom Generation*. Her research has included work with the Institute of Noetic Sciences (IONS) where she collaborated on curriculum and course development for conscious aging. Additionally she has presented on the "Wisdom of the Aging: Fostering Spirituality and Meaning-Making for the Older LGBT Adult" for the Institute on Aging and UCSF Division of Geriatrics.

**Lucas F. Johnston** is assistant professor of Religion and Environmental Studies, and Faculty Affiliate of the Center for Energy, Environment, and Sustainability (CEES) at Wake Forest University. He is the director of the university's Religion and Public Engagement Concentration, and Ollen R. Nalley Faculty Fellow. Johnston has authored *Religion and Sustainability: Social Movements and the Politics of the Environment* (2013), co-edited *Science and Religion: One Planet, Many Possibilities* (2014), and edited *Higher Education for Sustainability: Cases, Challenges, and Opportunities Across the Curriculum* (2012).

**Rachael Liberman** teaches media studies courses in the Department of Media, Film & Journalism Studies at University of Denver. She earned her PhD in Communication from the University of Colorado, Boulder, where she served as the senior fellow of the Center for Media, Religion and Culture. Her research tracks the construction, proliferation, and circulation of discourses on gender and sexuality in contemporary media culture; and in particular, the mediation

of female sexual subjectivity. Other research interests include: negotiations of agency within cultural production, feminist interventions in media studies, the pornography industry, and the politics of media and memory. Her work has been published *Porn Studies*, *Women's Psychology Quarterly*, and *Media/Cultural Studies: Critical Approaches*.

**Jeffrey H. Mahan** holds the Ralph E. and Norma E. Peck Chair in Religion and Public Communication at the Iliff School of Theology in Denver, Colorado. His research and teaching interests focus on religion as it is embedded in mass media and popular culture. He has served on film festival juries at the Berlin, Cannes, and Montreal International Film Festivals. Mahan is affiliate faculty at the Center for Media, Religion and Culture at the University of Colorado, Boulder. He was the founding co-chair of the Religion and Popular Culture Group at the American Academy of Religion. His authored or edited books include: *Media, Religion and Culture: An Introduction* (Routledge, 2014); *Religion and Popular Culture in America* (University of California, revised edition 2005); *Shared Wisdom* (Abingdon, 1993); and *American Television Genres* (Nelson Hall, 1983).

**RuthAnn Ritter** is a consultant and educator pursuing doctoral work in Organizational Change and Leadership at the University of Southern California. She holds Master's degrees in Theology from the Iliff School of Theology in Denver, Colorado and in Education from University of California, Santa Barbara. Her publications and presentations focus on how spiritual practices such as mindfulness and meditation are appropriated from Eastern contemplative traditions and used in secular settings such as the Western workplace. The workshops and trainings she delivers to businesses focus on practical ways to marry spiritual wisdom with organizational leadership and performance management.

**Martha Smith Roberts** is a PhD candidate in American Religions at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Her current research and teaching interests include American religious diversity and pluralism, race and ethnicity studies, diversity and social justice, embodiment studies, Asian American religions, new religious movements, and material culture. Her doctoral research project is a critical analysis of post-racial and post-ethnic theories of American religious pluralism, with particular attention to the human body on display at public exhibitions promoting tolerance in twentieth-century US history, including World's Fairs, Holocaust Memorial museums, and Body Worlds exhibitions. In addition, she is

working on a research project with Dr Jenna Gray-Hildenbrand, which analyzes the various spiritualities emerging within the hula hooping subculture. She also serves on the Board of Directors for the Institute for Diversity and Civic Life in Austin, Texas.

**Garry Tregidga** is director of the Institute of Cornish Studies at the University of Exeter at Penryn in Cornwall. His research interests include the regional politics of Britain and Western Europe, the use of cultural memory and oral history in studying indigenous communities and the global connections between Cornwall and countries such as Australia, New Zealand, and the United States as a result of emigration in the nineteenth century. In 2000 he established the Cornish Audio Visual Archive and is a regional networker of the oral History Society. Garry is author of *The Liberal Party in South West Britain: Decline, Dormancy and Rebirth* (University of Exeter Press, 2000), editor of *Memory, Place and Identity: The Cultural Landscapes of Cornwall* (Francis Boutle Publications, London, 2012) and co-editor (with Marion Gibson and Shelley Trower) of *Mysticism, Myth and Celtic Identity* (Routledge, 2012). He has recently become the editor of *Cornish Studies* and is currently preparing a monograph on the Celtic Revival in Cornwall in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and an edited collection on Celtic politics in Britain since the 1880s.

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## Introduction: The Webs We Spin— Relational, Mediated, Spiritual

Curtis D. Coats  
Millsaps College

Monica M. Emerich  
University of Colorado

7:00 a.m., January 26, 2015

*This day is like most other days, following a night like most other nights. In a small town in the central United States, a woman hits the “off” button on her alarm as she rises. Instead of coffee, she grabs her Hula Hoop, opens up a YouTube video on her smart phone and begins her ritual of hooping. Elsewhere, another woman swaddles her baby in a wrap before running out to complete her morning errands. A thousand miles away, a group of young men stock their van for their pilgrimage to an improvisational rock music festival. Across town, a group of executives get together for yoga before the day’s work begins. Some in this group are physically proximate. Others telecommute to the yoga session.*

3:00 p.m., January 26, 2015

*A group of women and men meet online to discuss their mental illnesses, not as “madness” as society defines it, but as gifts to their identity and their community. Across the Atlantic, a young woman, while touring Glastonbury, Snapchats to her friends back home. A little later, she buys a crystal in a shop to commemorate her trip. Elsewhere, a group of local community members strategize how best to promote the spirituality embedded in their Cornish identity, a promotion that engages their Cornish Methodist and pagan heritages.*

11:00 p.m., January 26, 2015

*A young woman reads confessions on PostSecret. Emboldened and inspired, she posts her own confession—something she had never told her priest. Across town,*



*a group of Cultural Creatives<sup>1</sup> meets to discuss the spiritual power of their art and their desire for spiritual community. Some hesitate to commit to the group and begin to distance themselves. Others embrace this group and, thus, further entwine their identity with this emerging community. As the day, January 26, turns to a new day, a Baby Boomer couple reaches sexual climax, embracing the youthful vitality experienced in the “little death.” Then they ponder their own mortality as the climax wanes.*

What these banal practices—parenting, sex, leisure, work—have in common is the extraordinary, spiritual meaning attached to them by practitioners. According to McKian, “[S]pirituality does not always sit outside the everyday, suspended in particular moments and spaces; it is also witnessed across the banality of everyday life.”<sup>2</sup> At its core this book is about these people and their practices.

Of course, this book is also about concepts related to “spirituality” and “the media.” Our hope is that engagement with these concepts will enliven the practitioners, enrich the concepts, and generate productive debate within studies of media, religion, and culture about spiritual, mediated practice.

Our aims in this book are threefold. First, we wish to resurrect the exploration of spiritual practices and beliefs, products, and places within media, religion, and culture studies. We hope this book encourages conversations about spirituality *versus* religion, spirituality *and* religion, or spirituality *as* religion—as productive as the conversations about media *and* religion, media *as* religion, or mediation *versus* mediatization of religion. Second, we explore how and why the ordinary is made extraordinary, yet practical to the life of the participant at the same time. Third, we argue that these “practical” spiritualities, in capitalist societies at least, occur in a Media Age. We will elucidate the contours and boundaries of the media in this age in an effort to situate contemporary spiritualities within media technologies, mediated relationships, and media spaces. We hope to accomplish these aims by engaging the culturalist, relational, and spatial “turns” in media studies; religious studies; and media, religion, and culture studies.

## Practical spirituality . . .

The idea and the name for this book came to us organically, in all senses of that term’s usage. We were discussing our own research on the organic foods industry and sustainability and the expression among those workers about viewing their occupations as a sacred journey. We were interested in the genealogy of