JSRNC
https://doi.org/10.1558/jsrnc.26571

Book Review

Sigurd Bergmann, Kate Rigby and Peter Manley Scott (eds.), *Religion, Materialism and Ecology* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2023), xii + 210 pp., £34.99 (pbk), ISBN: 9781032341408.

This co-edited volume by Sigurd Bergman, Kate Rigby, and Peter Manley Scott is an exciting collection of essays that brings together diverse voices from a variety of religious and philosophical backgrounds. The collection engages a conversation angled at enabling integrated and nuanced understandings of where and how new materialisms might overlap with established theologies and emerging spiritual practices. Indeed, in the book's front note the editors describe the volume as an exploration of how 'the debates concerning new materialism impinge on religious traditions, and to the extent of which religions...can make a creative contribution to debates about ecological materialisms' (p. iii). The collection is composed of eleven essays, each providing intellectual nuance from a different subfield in the environmental humanities. The individual authors connect new materialist philosophies and religious practices to disciplines as diverse as queer studies, architecture, disability studies, cultural anthropology, and critical literary theory.

The collection is divided into two sections. The first section includes five chapters presenting different theoretical frameworks for integrating materialism through religious perspectives; each chapter presents a new lexicon for thinking about spiritual materialisms in our changing world. The six chapters in the second section take similar theoretical engagement with the materiality of faiths but apply it to specific case studies. For example, Whitney A. Bauman suggests, through his concept of re-attunement, that religious practices might be a way of promoting 'greater planetary flourishing' (p. 24). Rachel Armstrong then introduces her idea of 'haunting' as a sacred process focused on 'agency and the contributions of an actor to a place' and the intangibility of experience (p. 35). Other authors in this section offer their frameworks through the language of 'planetary technics', 'panexperientialism', and 'animisms.' Throughout the diverse terminologies, however, there are recurrent themes, that a number of the chapters touch on, in a way that greatly enhances how we might consider agency and belief in the Anthropocene.

One starting point that returns throughout the chapters is the problem of the so-called 'modern western mindset' (p. 14). Combined with reflections on the seminal thoughts of Lynn White Jr., the book as a whole strives to find new ways of navigating belief beyond the harms of colonial Western Christianity. While each chapter offers a different possibility or form of relating to the current global state, they seem to all arrive at a similar conclusion that some form of embodied ritual is an essential part of recuperating relation to both spirit and matter. For Nigel Clark and Bronislaw Szerszynski, it is only through 'a-modern ritual' (p. 58) that we can conceptualize the relationships between 'this Earth and Earths to come' (p. 62). Similarly, Mark I. Wallace enacts a ritual form as he ends his chapter on Christian

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animism with a collective 5-point liturgical refrain meant to be sung 'in unison' by the 'common personhood of all living things' (p. 94). This focus on embodied ritual as a way of relating to both the self and more-than-human is further explored in the case studies presented in the second half of the book.

These case studies range from critical reflections on the practice of spirit possession in Cambodia to literary analyses of canonical literary texts by Charles Dickens. In this section, Yianna Liatsos offers insight into the memoir narrative's role in temporally relocating death in the Anthropocene as a way to 'summon our social attentiveness' (p. 129). Analyzing the poetry of twentieth and twenty-first-century writers such as Annie Dillard and Mary Oliver, Carol Wayne White then suggests that the 'human awareness and appreciation of our connection to "all that is"' is an expression of the sacred, or what we perceive to be ultimately important' (p. 137). White goes on to explore how 'tentative uncertainty' (p. 146) is a necessary spiritual position in the Anthropocene. Indeed, a number of the chapters return to this idea of attentive uncertainty, or mystery, as a defining feature of both the climate crisis era and spiritual practice. While many of the chapters argue for the necessity of re-animating and re-enchanting the more-than-human landscape, one chapter in particular, by Terra Schwerin Rowe, highlights an essential complication to the matter. By tracking the narratives of big oil, Rowe offers a fascinating counter-case study to the idea of necessary re-enchantment. Drawing on Jason Josephson Storm, she argues, with the support of Latourian thought, that the assumption of a modern Western mindset, associated with the 'myth of disenchanted' (p. 180), is erroneous. What the climate crisis necessitates is not necessarily a process of re-enchantment, but a redirection of our capacities of enchantment, or what she calls a 'critical and publicly accountable reflection...to exchange some myths for others' that might allow us to imagine the 'worlds we'd like to see materialized' (p. 180).

Emphasizing the ways in which investigations into religion and spirituality have been side-lined in the fields of environmental humanities, this book offers new ways of imagining how earth systems harbor spiritual nourishment and connection in the Anthropocene. While the book primarily uses Western Christianity as a starting point to argue against, there is also a consideration for other practices, such as the chapter on Spirit possession in Cambodia and references to the work of Potawatomi author Robin Wall Kimmerer, or the Dreaming of Aboriginal peoples in Australia. Perhaps though, in a collection with such a strong focus on spirituality, it may have been even more stimulating to also include perspectives from completely outside the Western thought system, rather than through comparative analyses primarily authored by those within Western academia. Still, the book's central concern with the materiality of spirituality in an era of ecological destruction is an essential and too-neglected topic. Each chapter proposes a different way of being and becoming with the world today. Even as the collection offers new ideas it ultimately, and intentionally, avoids conclusions. In some essays, this avoidance seems to be a positive embrace of the unknowability of our changing world, while in others it appears as an incomplete argument for an impossible global consciousness shift. Despite these critiques, *Religion, Materialism and Ecology* is a timely and innovative collection that does the essential work of re-introducing the study of religion into the larger discourses of the environmental humanities. For anyone who may or may

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not have previously observed overlaps between new materialism and spiritual discourses, *Religion, Materialism and Ecology* will certainly be an illuminating read.

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