

Key Words in Religion, Media and Culture

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media constitutes extensions of actual ministries. In today's media world, no religious organization can lay absolute claim to the allegiance of its registered members. The media have not only universalized religious belief and practice but have democratized access to the sacred, making it possible for the use of media to deepen, advertise, and even hype the formation of communities.

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Culture

Angela Zito

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"...The project of the Enlightenment philosophes was radical revision of the nature of culture that would displace religion from its dominant position...The institutions and media of civil society: philosophy, literature, the arts, sciences, journalism and popular culture also gained at religion's expense and became the prime venues in which ethical and aesthetic issues are seriously engaged...the chief battlegrounds in the cultural conflicts of modernity."

Bruce Lincoln, "Culture"

"Culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language... partly because of its intricate historical development, in several European languages, but mainly because it has now come to be used for important concepts in several distinct intellectual disciplines, and in several distinct and incompatible systems of thought."

Raymond Williams, Keywords

"The concept of culture is such a weak and evanescent notion in American social thought....This intellectual aversion to the idea of culture derives in part from our obsessive individualism, which makes psychological life the paramount reality; from our Puritanism, which leads to disdain for the significance of human activity that is not practical and work oriented; and from our isolation of science from culture: science provides culture-free truth whereas culture provides ethnocentric error."

James W. Carey, "Communication as Culture?"

What can a concept as weak and baggy, as ambiguous and conflicted, as “culture” possibly offer a new field beset by enough of its own problems? As scholars began taking up the study of religion and media in tandem in the 1970s, they were burdened by the attitude illustrated above by Lincoln: that, in modernity, religion and “the media” (as a secular institution of civil society) were in conflict. And behold, the very object of their epic struggle was over the role of arbiter of culture as a quintessential value in modernity. Yet the last decade has seen early scholarship on “religion and media,” which had assumed that the domains of “religion” and “media” were in collision and competition, give way, somewhat ironically, to an understanding of the two in terms of a larger frame, usually glossed as “culture.” The difficulty becomes apparent: are we speaking of culture as the discursively and historically specific object of fraught struggle in human communities or culture as designating an object of critical method and analysis?¹

The world today is bound in a matrix of very complex media whose infrastructure allows ever more complex global interconnections. At the same time, religious life has a larger admitted public presence than ever before in modernity. The discourses of individualism, utility, and scientific rationality that Carey points out in the excerpt above as dominating communications studies, crowding out a version of “culture” associated with meaning and religion, are, if anything, stronger than they were in 1975, the year of his seminal essay. In this quick discussion of “culture,” I deal with “several distinct and incompatible systems of thought,” as Williams notes in what must be the primordial example of a “Key Words” volume. To glean something useful from this reframing of religion and media in cultural terms, I propose that we must understand cultural analysis itself through several phases: culture as meaning, culture beyond meaning as practice, and finally, culture in terms of “mediation.” We might also see something interesting, something new, in the very invisible and unrepresentable at the edge of “meaning,” the secret that religious practitioners seem constantly to imagine themselves verging on as they seek to mediate their worlds (Meyer 2006)—something that presents a sense of limit even as it opens, organizes, and politicizes the senses in specific ways for specific, collective life-worlds.

Religion and media

As religion and media were brought into simultaneous view (from the fifties through the seventies), they were, according to Stewart Hoover, construed in conflictual opposition as a “dualism,” each half of which was considered to be “coherent, transhistorical, unchanging...independent and potentially acting independently upon one another” (Hoover 2006: 8). Lincoln notes that this perception had its grounding in precisely the version of post-

Enlightenment history in what Jeremy Stolow calls a “powerful myth about social modernization,” one that credits print media especially with the “disembedding of religion from public life and its relocation within the private walls of bourgeois domesticity, or the interior, silent universe of individual readers” (Stolow 2005: 122). Hoover has written that this historical moment has given way, empirically, to a world wherein media and religion are drawing ever nearer in terms of functions: “[T]hey occupy the same spaces, serve many of the same purposes, and invigorate the same practices in modernity” (Hoover 2006: 9; see also Hoover and Clark 2002: 3).

Regardless of whether one invests in this version of the historical Enlightenment rearrangement of culture, there remains the problem of the implicit theory grounding such dualistic approaches as *analysis*. Stolow links this powerful “myth” of Enlightenment culture to Jürgen Habermas’s work on the public sphere and rightly reminds us that, though the secularization thesis that religion will gradually disappear before various aspects of modern rationality has lost its explanatory cachet, its corollary—that modern media are inevitably agents of secularization—still carries on. In the zero-sum game notion that mass media compromised and diluted religion, we see religion privileged as an ideal matter of belief, paralleling the notion of “culture” as mental, meaningful, circulation of ideas. The implicit theoretical underpinning at work is a Parsonian isolation of culture (as meaning) from society (as function; Parsons 1966). Thus, it is not obvious that a recognition of the empirical shift in the relations of religion and media as domains of social life that increasingly interpenetrate in the world (Hoover’s point, and well taken) will automatically push forward new theorization past this notion of culture-as-meaning.

In fact, James Carey’s famous critique of 1975 staged an early intervention that, though pioneering for its time, called for exactly such inclusion of the dimension of meaning. He rightly accused communications theory of reproducing an account that was strictly functionalist, what he called a “transmission” view of communication: individualist, utilitarian, instrumental. In his prescient article “Communication as Culture,” Carey proposed instead that communication should be seen anew in a “ritual” mode, one that privileges “symbolic” production. In considering modes of theorizing culture relevant to our studies in religion and media, I begin from that point, a moment indebted—as Carey himself notes—to Clifford Geertz and an earlier version of cultural anthropology that emphasized culture as meaning (1975: 35).

Culture (and religion) as meaning

One can hardly overestimate the influence of Geertz's version of culture as symbolic on disciplines outside of anthropology proper, including history, media theory, cultural and literary studies, and various area studies far beyond his own fieldwork sites of Indonesia and Morocco. He was himself much influenced by philosopher Suzanne Langer and burst forth with his anti-functionalism meaning-centric anthropology on an era saturated with the (re)discovery of "meaning" as the key philosophical problem.² The late sixties and the seventies were an era of the "discovery" of the culture concept in this new guise—as a symbolic dimension, liberated from any taint of functional usefulness and instrumentality—and much reduced from its more holistic use by earlier social anthropologists.³

A relatively obscure essay from 1977 by theologian John Morgan strikes the celebratory tone of the era. He puts Geertz in dialogue with the "cultural theologian" Paul Tillich (as Tillich called himself) over "Religion and Culture as Meaning Systems." Morgan notes that, having "set(s) out to articulate the distinction between culture and social system... [Geertz] seeks to come to grips with dimensions of human culture, particularly of meaning which except for Weber, have too frequently gone unattended by traditional functionalism" (Morgan 1977: 367). As religion and culture are both taken to be "meaning systems," it was possible for anthropologists and theologians to embark on a conversation about analytics. Thus, we see produced a festive tangle among meaning, religion, and culture. Tillich's own contribution to this ferment was the concept of "meaning-reality," which, according to Morgan, "cannot be expressed in the raw, but rather, must be experientially expressed through *religiocultural media*, that is, *symbol systems*" (Morgan 1977: 369; italics added).

It was Geertz's beginning from the symbolic itself that seemed to offer so much promise, and indeed provides still, today, a fine pedagogical starting point for understanding the salience of the materiality of the symbolic for cultural analysis. In his famous article, "Religion as a Cultural System," first published in 1966, he applied his symbolic analysis model to religion, providing an oft-quoted definition. A religion is

(1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.

(1973: 90)

Geertz's most lasting contribution for our purposes in thinking of the nexus of religion and media comes through his emphasis on the symbol as the materially and publicly available means of discerning thinking and the workings of mind. As he says, "Cultural acts, the construction, apprehension, and utilization of symbolic forms, are social events like any other; they are as public as marriage and as observable as agriculture" (1973: 91). Symbols were (and are) media that are susceptible to semiotic analysis and decoding. They form structures that in turn structure consciousness (Swidler 2001: 75–6). This approach clearly opens up a world of possibility for studying religious media: those material artifacts including things and performances of all sorts. It presents them as crying out for interpretation, for a hermeneutics (Masuzawa 1998: 79–82). Geertz's attention to the aesthetic dimension of human activity—which he seems to have wanted to rescue from consideration merely by literary and art historical scholars—led him, however, to slight dimensions of social life imbricated in politics and power, and for this he came under increasing attack.

Indeed, the 1970s also saw the beginnings of the critique of the hermeneutics of culture as meaning read as though it were a text. This critique proceeded in at least two interrelated directions: from within literary studies, attack was mounted on structuralism and semiotics as too fetishizing of the interior of textual meaning—as though it were given once and for all and thus was ahistorical. Pierre Macherey's *A Theory of Literary Production* appeared in English in 1978 (having been published in French in 1966). Because of Macherey's close ties with the Marxist cultural theorist Althusser, his critique opened up "culture" to even closer susceptibility to study as "ideology" and thus to questions of power and politics. From another angle, this overemphasis on "interiority" and the decoding of meaning was felt to lead to neglect of analyzing the *processes of the production* themselves of the text or artifact or ritual—for understanding the material, institutional, or indeed "social" production of these symbols that had come to loom so large in the landscape of the human sciences as to have hijacked the entirety of "culture" as an analytic. Both angles of critique were affected by Marxist scholarship on ideological production.⁴

Talal Asad has twice critiqued Geertz's work on the religious as symbolic (1983, 1993). In the first essay, Asad faults Geertz for neglecting religion and power

in the sense in which power constructs religious ideology, establishes the preconditions for distinctive kinds of religious personalities, authorizes specifiable religious practices and utterances, produces religiously defined knowledge.

(1983: 237)

It is not only Geertz's attempt to construct a "universal, a-historical definition of religion" that annoys Asad; his very definition of culture seems to Asad to suggest a "distranced spectator-role" for those living within it as they "use symbols" to "develop their knowledge *about* and attitudes *toward* life." This leads to imagining a cultural form like religion as isolated from "material conditions and social activities" and reduced to consciousness (1983: 238–9). Asad instead proposes that we break down the (false) distinction between technical and expressive action (1983: 251) so key to the version of "culture-as-meaning" to which James Carey invited communications study. Asad regrets that:

Religion itself is rarely approached in terms of "technical action"—the disciplining of the body, of speech, which is used to produce religion in its variety. Such disciplines are preconditions for specific forms of thought and action, but they must be taught and learnt, and are therefore themselves dependent on a range of social institutions and material conditions. (1983: 251)

Whapped up in that statement is a new approach to culture, growing out of the post-structuralist critique; that is, that culture must be approached as process and not as thing; that it is produced through the social organization of material life, in time, and through human efforts; that this is all accomplished through the agency of persons whose very subjectivities are one of the products of this process. In short, that cultural life is conducted through "practice," another idea with a Marxist pedigree.

Culture (and religion, and media) as practice

If the first round of the critique of meaning, which cast it as ideological production, emphasized the "ideological," this round raced toward "production." By the time Asad's second critique of Geertz appears in 1993, in his *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and the Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*, the "practice turn" in theory had overtaken the old paradigm. As Asad puts it:

...the formation of what we have here called "symbols" (complexes, concepts) is conditioned by the social relations in which the growing child is involved in which other symbols (speech and significant movements) are crucial. The conditions (discursive and nondiscursive) that explain how symbols come to be constructed, and how some of them are established as natural or authoritative as opposed to others, then become an important object of anthropological inquiry.

(1993: 31)

Asad cites Marxist theorist of language L.S. Vygotksy on how "symbols organize practice," and are intrinsic to "signifying and organizing practices" of all kinds (1993: 31–2).

The translation of Pierre Bourdieu's *Outline of a Theory of Practice* into English in 1977 became a touchstone for practice theory generally. Sociologist Bourdieu inveighed against the reification of society as a series of structures that overwhelmed actors, turning them into prisoners of a previously ordained, always already written "script." Accordingly, his sense of practice emphasized the strategic, constantly changing ways in which people seized a symbolic repertoire and constantly remade it. Emphasizing embodiment itself as the site of discipline and practice, Bourdieu held out the promise that his models could deliver us from that split between mind and body. In terms of the study of religion, it could free us from the trap of thinking that a theory of practice was reducible to its understanding as "ritual" in the older sense of how "belief" leads to "practice," which would be tantamount to treating religious life as merely the expression of a timeless set of cultural assumptions.⁵ This would still enshrine a split between belief-doctrine-text and action-ritual-performance, between thinking and doing.

Meanwhile, the last twenty years have seen a slow shift in religious studies itself, which parallels the shift from meaning to practice in cultural theory. Scholars have criticized the Enlightenment emphasis on cognitive and intellectual aspects of religious life (belief in ideas and doctrine) and moved toward an interest in wider applications. One of the primary figures in this critique has been Donald Lopez, a scholar of Buddhism, whose essay on "Belief" in the volume *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* (1998) makes the point that the expectation that religion is based primarily in "belief" is Christian. To be even more specific, it is Protestant, as Eric Reinders notes in his article on Protestant missionary attitudes toward ritual and bowing in China. Their criticisms of the Chinese reiterated their criticisms of Catholic piety and ritual-obsessiveness (Reinders 1997).

Lopez's series of "Religions in Practice" published by Princeton University Press, whose first volume on Buddhism appeared in 1995, stands as a serious corrective to the "belief" paradigm. These books act as emblems of the trend in the study of religions of turning away from philosophy, with its attention to scriptural sources of a literate elite and toward examining the things that many different sorts of people did. Overwhelmingly historical in scope, the collections present many sorts of text-media: hagiographies, gazetteer stories, stela inscriptions, merit books, folk legends, fictions, economic contracts, writings of spirit mediums, and ritual handbooks and texts.⁶ Though Lopez led the editorial charge in promoting practice through Asian materials, David Morgan's work on popular visual media as objects and organizers of Christian devotion in the United States grows from similar theoretical insights (Morgan 1998; Morgan and Promey 2001).

The orientation to practice theory in religious studies also lined up with a growing interest in embodiment, a trend whose first era culminated with the publication in 1989 of the three volume collection in the Zone series, *Fragments for a History of the Human Body* (Feher et al. 1989).⁷

In media studies, Nick Couldry has recently called openly for “Theorising Media as Practice,” finding it necessary to demand a project to “decentre media research from the study of media texts or production structures (important though these are) and to redirect it on the study of the open-ended range of practices focused directly or indirectly on media” (2004: 117). By now, this wish to move a field away from such dualisms as text-structure should seem quite familiar. That Couldry published this piece in the journal of *Social Semiotics* is telling. He feels that a turn to practice will encourage focus on “what people are doing in relation to media across a whole range of situations and contexts” (2004: 119). He rehearses, as we have here, the promise of rescue from an “older notion of culture as internal ideas or meanings” but draws our attention to the routine and unconscious dimension of practice, its embeddedness in discursive systems that regulate the do-able, and the fact that certain practices anchor others, creating a hierarchy.⁸

Coming as it did at the end of a thirty-year period in the social sciences of devotion to structure and symbol as the centerpiece of cultural analysis, the new emphasis on practice allowed a less refined, more dynamic understanding of social life as produced in time. Humans engage as social actors, become persons, in the materiality of communication itself, a ceaseless process of linguistic and physical labor that produces themselves and the world in simultaneity. They become subjects in those socially material worlds through the forms of language and gesture—a process intimately connected to how bodies have been imagined and lived (Zito and Barlow 1994: 9). This approach even more importantly moves cultural theory to a frontal engagement with subjectivity and personhood, one moment in the process of “mediation” in the theoretically most expansive sense of that term. It allows more sustained and theoretically informed attention to other moments such as reification and objectification itself.

Culture as mediation

As analysis of culture have restlessly propounded theories ranging from functioning holism, to culture as specifically about meaning and from there to culture as practice, the fields of religious and media studies have likewise been shaped by insights that have benefited from cultural theory’s peregrinations. The study of religion has critiqued belief as a starting point, widening the field of inquiry beyond texts and beyond the elites who have

historically controlled them. Media studies has benefited from a turning away from reified ideas of “the” media toward understanding it as a particularly volatile and reflexively powerful product of cultural practices. I press this trend farther: The particular nexus of religion and media can especially benefit from a deepening and widening of the notion of practice as occurring as part of the *mediation* of social life.

Here I use *mediation* not in the sense of reconciling two conflicting things because that would return us willy-nilly to the dualisms that the turn to practice, rooted in the production of self and social world in simultaneity, supposedly delivered us from. It would take us right back to media and religion as conflicting forces that needed somehow to be bridged. That is not the sense in which I propose to use *mediation*. Theodore Schatzki emphasizes the push to overcome such dualisms in his introduction to *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory*. He offers this useful formulation of “practices as embodied materially mediated arrays of human activity centrally organized around shared practical understanding” (Schatzki et al. 2001: 2; italics added). Practice theory delivers us to the doorstep, and we arrive, arms full of a grab-bag of concepts: agency, subjectivity, personhood, material things and, most important for me, process. If we take seriously the notion that culture is not a *thing* but a *process*—even though it may seem like a congeries of things, and even though we can analyze only through the materiality of things—we must get it in analytic motion. Much in human life—including “the social”—remains empirically directly unavailable. Yet we know it is “there”—in fact, a good deal of human life is about making the invisible visible, that is, *mediating* it.

I have discussed mediation elsewhere as the construction of social reality where people are constantly engaged in producing the material world around them, even as they are, in turn, produced by it. Every social practice moves through and is carried upon a material framework or vehicle.

(Zito 2007: 726)

Marx’s own dialectical vocabulary consistently “views things as moments in their own development in, with and through other things” (Ollman 1976: 52), leading to the Frankfurt School’s view of culture as that which “mediates the interaction between the material and the mental, the economic and the socio-political” (Mendietta 2006: 5). By emphasizing the marvelous slippage between “media” and “mediation,” I want to focus our attention upon the paradox of *materializing process* (Zito 2008). For analysis, this comes down to grasping the importance of the choices we make of which moments we focus on in the general dialectical construction of social reality.

Shall it be the moment of subjectification, when embodied persons are disciplined, formed, and interpellated in their social locations? The moment of agency, when people self-reflexively take initiative? The moment of production, often contested, over what shall be the proper mode of creation of material things, social relations, and the connections among them? The moment of reification, of things themselves perceived as commodities or as bearers of meaning in precious fullness in the eyes of their users? The moments of language and gesture, which are the microbuilders—*as practices*—of these other moments? How, especially at the level of everyday life, such practices are unnoticed and naturalized and thus hide the production of social life from its makers? That all of these moments are saturated with contestation, conflict, hierarchy making, and the microfilaments of power? Finally, we must ask how do these mediated moments of social life relate and intertwine? The possibility for connections will vary depending on what one's analytic objective might be and how the social domains of the life-worlds at issue are themselves arranged.

Each of these moments in cultural production that provide foci for cultural analysis illustrate how viewing culture as the process of mediation is vastly different from seeing culture as thing-like. Providing "culture" itself with some intrinsic content—like meaning or practice—perpetuates a similar reification of one of its mediating moments, a stoppage of the circulation of its powerful force. Though this is precisely what we do unconsciously every day, to live, it should not be the (unconscious) stuff of our analytics.

Social science categories such as "culture" are products of European practices themselves, and so we must ask how it is that they are produced, how mediated in material processes that mobilize things and people.⁹ The concept of culture is most useful when we pay precise attention to its intricate mediations as processes of achieving "truth effects"—the myriad practices that generate a ground of commonsense and normal everydayness—and how they are controlled and subverted. I would venture that this is a process of gradual forgetting and reification. This "forgetting" is very important in creating the "reifications" that we then live with as *the real*—because they seem natural and, most important, beyond the reach of human agency.

To take any concept such as "body" or "religion" or "media" or "culture" backward in time or abroad to another society not only risks naming reality wrongly, it covers over the most important and interesting aspect of studying society—this very process whereby the power of truth effects, good descriptions, reifications and normativity are produced and felt. Religious life plays a profoundly important role in social life in fixing these horizons of agency, as does the production and circulation of mass media. However, one never finds the productive, working reifications of others if one enters armed with one's own.

Some examples

Two projects show what can be accomplished by situating the nexus of religion and media within the field of culture as mediation: the work of Faye Ginsburg and other anthropologists of media, and Birgit Meyer's project in Ghana on Pentecostal uses of media technologies.

Cultural anthropologists have done the most to theorize media studies as culture closest to the terms I am after here. Deborah Spitulnick (1993), Sarah Dickey (1997), and especially Faye Ginsburg (1999) have founded the field of "ethnography of culture and media." Ginsburg's goal has been:

To resituate ethnographic film as part of a continuum of representational practices [which] aligns our project with a more general revision in a number of fields...that are concerned with the contested and complex nature of cultural production.

(1999: 295)

Key to their contribution to media studies is the insight that media, in their modern, mass forms such as newspapers, film, television, radio, are themselves important cultural artifacts—not transparent utilitarian representations of other aspects of social life but important moments of mediation that actually impact the very life they are commenting on.

If we recognize the cinematic or video text as a mediating object—as we might look at a ritual or a commodity—then its formal qualities cannot be considered apart from the complex contexts of production and interpretation that shape its construction.

(Ginsburg 1999: 296)¹⁰

Ginsburg places actors at the center of the politics of media engagement—including the producers and consumers, as well as the analysts who wish to understand their forms of self-fashioning. Thus, choosing the emphasis of the analysis, deciding where one's analytic intervention should be staged, is now more than ever part and parcel of cultural analysis.

One can see a trajectory in the theorizing of the relationship between culture and media over the last half century as the objectification of the category of culture becomes ever more widespread and the observer becomes increasingly implicated as a participant.

(1999: 313)

Ginsburg's own project on indigenous media as it has enabled the formation of new forms of community and subjectivity provides a fine example of such intervention. Her essay, "Re-thinking the 'Voice of God' in Indigenous Australia: Secrecy, Exposure and the Efficacy of Media," analyzes the shift in documenting (on film and then video) that has occurred in aborigine communities in post-war Australia. This work moved from the hands of outsiders who captured native religious life "on film primarily as texts for Anglo-Euro consumption and study" to aboriginal activists' own media-making activities (2005: 193). She analyzes the filming of the important Walpiri fire ceremony on several occasions: the first film by anthropologist Roger Sandall in 1977 was viewed by Walpiri male elders and "unexpectedly re-signified and actively appropriated as authoritative" (2005: 194). The elders decided to perform the ceremony again, filming it themselves. It was then shot a third time, in 1991. Each of these films circulated in fits and starts, moving in and out of visibility. In contradistinction to Euro-American expectations of informational transparency and flow, the Walpiri are compelled to balance need for religious ritual secrecy with authoritative transmission of cultural knowledge.

Because Ginsburg so carefully and flexibly follows several moments of mediation, charting the agencies at work *through* the moments of *practices* of objectification in film of other cultural practices like ritual, she can show "that moving image media technologies carry within them contradictory potentialities..." and raise "key questions for us regarding religion, media, and the public sphere, and offer a cautionary tale regarding the profound ethnocentrism that too often blinds the ways in which we understand media and its relationship to collective religious expression" (2005: 200-1).

Birgit Meyer's ongoing work in Ghana likewise approaches culture (and religion) as practices of mediation in the broad sense I am encouraging.¹¹ In her early fieldwork among Ewe Pentecostals, she noted how their appropriation of Christianity depended heavily on the mediating figure of the Devil. His centrality paradoxically allows for the ongoing tangible presence of Ewe traditional gods and spirits, now considered demonic but existent and formidable nonetheless (Meyer 1999, 2005, 2006a). In her later work on Pentecostalist videos that intersect with the rising market for entertainment and broadcast media, wide open since state monopoly was relaxed, she writes of

taking as a point of departure an understanding of religion as a practice of mediation, creating and maintaining links between religious practitioners as well as between them and the invisible, inaudible, untouchable, or simply, spiritual world which forms the center of religious attention. This realm is constructed by mediation, yet—and here lies the power of

religion—tends to assume a reality of its own which renders problematic its very representability. (2003: 1)¹²

In her inaugural lecture at The Free University in 2006, Meyer pursued further the rich contradiction in cultural production that the mediation of religious life makes particularly apparent—that much of what is most human about being human (i.e., thinking and the imagination, the "social" itself as relations *between* people) must be concretized through material mediation: what I have called above "materializing process." Indeed, Meyer calls it a "materiality that is not opposed to, but rather a condition for, spirituality" (2006a: 32). Possibly the study of the religion-media nexus can, in fact, offer something back to cultural theory itself, speaking to this central problematic of its processual dynamics that involve us inevitably in mediation of all kinds.

Notes

- 1 Tomoko Masuzawa, in yet another "Critical Terms" book, notes that "the categories religion and culture...are both historically specific, fairly recent formations, and our daily employment of these terms...is in fact mobilizing and energizing a powerful ideology of modernity..." (1998: 71).
- 2 In texts such as *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art*, published in 1942 and *Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art* (1953), Langer linked new work in symbolic logic based in mathematical and linguistic forms to aesthetics and drama.
- 3 E.B. Tylor in *Primitive Cultures* (1874: 1) is credited with that first definition: "...that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society." This anthropologically inclusive notion of culture emerged into wider social circulation after World War II, with Ruth Benedict's work (1934/1959; Masuzawa 1998: 79). When I first came to graduate school in the mid-seventies, I recall being given Geertz's essays by a fellow student who was, of all things, a geographer! This was part of my own motivation for pursuing an education in anthropological theory.
- 4 In England, the Birmingham School of cultural studies, in many respects, picked up where Frankfurt School critical theory left off (Agger 1992: 1-23) and was deeply influenced by the writings of Raymond Williams (e.g., 1981) and Stuart Hall (e.g., 1985).
- 5 See Catherine Bell's book, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, indebted to Bourdieu and influential in religious studies (Bell 1992).
- 6 These titles include *Religions of India in Practice* (1995), *Buddhism in Practice* (1995), *Religions of China in Practice* (1996), *Religions of Tibet in Practice*

- (1997), *Religions of Japan in Practice* (1999), and finally *Religions of Korea in Practice* (2002).
- 7 Of the forty-eight essays spanning several disciplines, at least twenty-four explicitly reference obvious religion material in their titles (terms such as God, soul, sacrifice, Upanishad, religious, Christ, Hungry Ghost, Heaven, Bible, divine, consecrated etc.). In their substance, however, virtually all of them discuss matters from the archive designated as “religious.” The field of embodiment studies is vast: for overviews pertaining to religious studies, see Coakley 1997 and LaFleur 1998.
- 8 He relies heavily on Swidler 2001.
- 9 A very powerful and concise essay that tries to accomplish this for the concept “culture” is Masuzawa 1998.
- 10 She notes the debt to Bourdieu’s notion of “the field of cultural production” (2002: 3; 1999: 296) and calls this “the social life of media” (1999: 295). “One might think of these linked processes of the cultural production of media, its circulation as social technology and the relationship of mediated worlds to self-fabrication as existing on a continuum” (1999: 299). This continuum ranges from self-conscious activism, to reflexive but less strategic engagements of self-fashioning to institutionalized mass media. Ginsburg and I cofounded the Center for Religion and Media at New York University in 2003, and her influence is obvious in our shared work <http://www.nyu.edu/fas/center/religionandmedia/>
- 11 In 2000, Meyer opened a collaborative project on “Modern Mass Media, Religion and the Imagination of Communities.” Visit <http://www2.fmg.uva.nl/media-religion/>
- 12 For an excellent discussion of this problem through its philosophical genealogy, see De Vries 2001: 4–32.

6

Economy

David Chidester

Expanding economy

Secret, sacred

The political economy of the sacred

Modern economists, who claim specialized expertise in the scientific study of the capitalist economy, have no privileged role in defining or deploying the key word *economy* in the study of religion, media, and culture. So, if we cannot rely on economists for our understanding the economy, what can we do?

Within cultural studies, economy has been integrated into a wider field of practices that are simultaneously material and symbolic. In his *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, the influential French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu insisted that we must “abandon the dichotomy of the economic and the non-economic,” because the conventional assumption that the economy can be distinguished from its wider field of symbolic, material, and social relations “stands in the way of seeing the science of economic practices as a particular case of a general science of the economy of practices.” Dissolving this dichotomy promised radical results. Modern economic science, with its laws of supply and demand, financial interest, exchange value, market competition, and so on, could be recast as a particular set of symbolic practices in a social field. Social practices, including religion, the arts, and media, could be recast as “economic practices directed towards the maximization of material or symbolic profit” (Bourdieu 1977: 183). This notion of symbolic profit, which could be produced by symbolic labor and realized as symbolic capital, effectively integrated economic practices into the entire field of meaningful cultural productions (Urban 2003).

At the same time, cultural practices, including the practices of cultural media for the storage, transmission, and reception of information, could be incorporated within this expanded understanding of economy. Meaning-making enterprises, such as religion and media, emerged as economic practices of production, circulation, and consumption. Though modern economic theories, such as rational-choice theory, might seek to explain