JRC | Religion & Culture

Volume 28, Nos. 1 & 2

Religion, Activism, & Social Change

JRC

The JRC would like to acknowledge the support of sponsors
from within the Concordia University community:

Dean of Students
Concordia Council on Student Life Special Projects Committee (CCSL)
The Department of Religion and Culture
Graduate Student Association

We would also like to offer our special thanks to:
Dr. Carly Daniel-Hughes, our very supportive department Chair;
Tina Montandon and Munit Merid, administrators extraordinaire;
all of our referees, readers and everyone else who gave their time to
the publication of this journal.

JRC | Religion & Culture

A Peer-Reviewed Graduate Journal
2019 Volume 28, Nos. 1 & 2

Journal Committee

Executive Committee

Joseph E. Brito	*Editor-in-Chief*
Lindsey Jackson	*Article Editor*
T. Scarlet Jory	*Article Editor*
Laurel Andrew	*Book Review Editor*

Editorial Board

Maryam Amirdust
Taylor Roberts Carleton
Kelly Norah Drukker
Elyse MacLeod
Alexander Nachaj
Purna Roy
Ana Mota de Souza

Faculty Advisors

Rachel Berger
Carly Daniel-Hughes
André Gagné
Hillary Kaell
Marc Lalonde
Steven Lapidus
Leslie Orr

The Journal of Religion and Culture (JRC) is proudly produced
by the Graduate Students of the Department of Religions and Cultures
at Concordia University.

© 2019 Journal of Religion and Culture,
Concordia University, Montreal, Quebec.

ISSN 1198-6395
Journal of Religion and Culture Volume 28, no. 1 (2019)
Journal of Religion and Culture Volume 28, no. 2 (2019)

All rights reserved. No part of this journal may be used or reproduced in any matter
without the express written permission of the editors except in the case of brief quotations
embedded in critical articles and reviews.

For more information:
Journal of Religion and Culture
Department of Religions and Cultures (FA-101)
Concordia University
1455 de Maisonneuve O.,
Montreal, Quebec
H3G 1M8

JRC logo design: Christopher Burkart
Book design: Joseph E. Brito
The type face of this journal is Minion Pro,
designed by Robert Slimbach,
issued as a digital Open Type font
by Adobe Systems, Mountain View California, 2000.

JRC | Religion & Culture

Volume 28, no. 1

Content

9 ***Change and Transition:** An Introduction by the Editor*
Joseph E. Brito

Articles

15 ***Religion in the Art of Colonial Resistance: Hinduism and the Struggle for Indian Sovereignty, 1870-1920***
Katja Rieck

50 ***Twenty-First-Century Looting, Academic Ethics, and The Antiquities Market in Egypt***
Chance Bonar

81 ***Take it Like A Man: The Marriage Commissioners Reference, Masculinity, and Law's Private/Public Parts***
Connor Steele

In Conversation

105 ***Emily Suzanne Johnson, Ball State University***
By Lindsey Jackson

Book Reviews

113 ***Paranormal America: Ghost Encounters, UFO Sightings, Bigfoot Hunts, and Other Curiosities in Religion and Culture***
Alexander Nachaj, reviewer.

116 ***Practices of Selfhood***
Elliot Mason, reviewer.

JRC | Religion & Culture

Volume 28, no. 2

Content

Articles

123 ***« Se changer soi pour changer le monde », entre spiritualité et innovations sociales: Le cas des créatifs culturels***
Julia Itel

139 ***Black Femmes Black Gods: Magic as Justice***
Marcelitte Failla

156 ***Monster Theory and Anti-Judaism in the Gospel of John***
Tyler Smith

In Conversation

178 ***Melissa M. Wilcox, University of California***
Laurel Andrew

Book Reviews

186 ***Jewish Radical Feminism: Voices from the Women's Liberation Movement***
Lindsey Jackson, reviewer.

189 ***The Unbound God: Slavery and the Formation of Early Christian Thought***
Joseph E. Brito, reviewer.

related to it in growing numbers. If this is an ongoing trend, then it is one that is unlikely to be reversed any time soon, and also (if our authors' predictions come true) one that we will see in increased frequency in the coming years.

Alex Nachaj
Concordia University

Practices of Selfhood. Zygmunt Bauman and Rein Raud. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015. 153 p. $22.52 (Paperback).

Written following a productive exchange at a conference, Zygmunt Bauman and Rein Raud's *Practices of Selfhood* embraces a conversational format that allows for an accessibility not typically associated with academic works. The object of the text's inquiry, the formation of self in the contemporary digitally-saturated world, is meaningfully and skillfully articulated without recourse to disciplinary jargon. This renders the text approachable to both specialists and non-specialists alike. Individual chapters could easily serve as primary readings for upper-level undergraduate seminars in methodology and critical theory, while Philosophy and Sociology departments may find this work to be of use in undergraduate and graduate classrooms of all levels. Occasional dips into religious philosophy (particularly Eastern traditions during some of the earlier chapters) make the work a useful addition to graduate seminars in Religious Studies, while flirtations with quantum theory may also make *Practices of Selfhood* of interest to scholars of the philosophy of science.

An interest in the ways in which technology, particularly social media and the internet, have come to dominate our time and our self-understandings forms a thematic thread throughout *Practices of Selfhood*. The authors' discussion of this theme is a particular strength of the work, anchoring Bauman's description of modern life as "liquid modernity" in an understanding of that modernity as simultaneously digital (10). Along these lines, Raud and Bauman

ask in their preface: "Does contemporary technology allow us more autonomy - or does it tempt us to give up the freedoms we have?" (vii-viii). More broadly, the authors demonstrate a keen interest in questioning what is gained through the development of self through digital media, and what is lost. Thus, while individual chapters are organized according to specific themes (e.g. "Selves in Language," "Connected Selves," and "The Composition of Selves"), the authors frequently return to these overarching questions. Similarly influential to the text as a whole is the authors' use of the work of Ilya Prigogine and his arguments on the uncertainty of modern selfhood. Emphasis is placed, therefore, not only on Bauman's liquid interpretation of modernity, but equally on the subject of ontology itself as fluid, unpredictable, and constantly in a state of "becoming" rather than "being" (ix). This fluid, mutating selfhood forms the basis of Bauman and Raud's conversations, influencing and enlivening their discussions of topics as diverse as immortality, posthumanism, consumerism, labour, and LEGO.

Bauman and Raud's first chapter, "Starting Out," begins the book with a discussion of the history of selfhood and the emergence of the study of the self as a feature of modernity. It is in this chapter that the authors tackle the subject of immortality, mortality, the search for everlasting life (whether through religious means, or technological modifications), and the necessity of death to human selfhood. Four main types of attempts to transcend mortality are discussed in the chapter: 1) literal immortality, 2) immortality through legacy/achievement, 3) escape from rebirth, and 4) immortality through digitization/transformation into cyborg selves. Of notable weight and insight are Raud and Bauman's comments on human fallibility and flaws, and the necessary role that the inadequacy of the biological human self plays in human creativity and diversity. The fear, from Raud's perspective, is that in digitizing the self, the parts of the brain which do not resemble a computer in their operation, will be discarded (14). To shift, therefore, into the realm of pure mechanization (a perfected, computerized human self), would arguably mean the loss of creative potential, and the complexity and variation of human poetic language (15). Digitized, or mechanized immortality may represent

emerging responses to the call to immortality, but as Bauman points out, legacy and achievement remain the central means of attaining "immortality" in a postmodern (or "liquid modern") context (10). Yet this rendering of immortality is itself unpredictable—we cannot know, for certain, that the achievements we work for during our lifetimes will be remembered after our deaths, and perhaps more significantly, even if they are remembered it is impossible to know for how long this will be the case. Nevertheless, the impulse toward attaining some form of immortality through legacy plays a significant part in our construction and understanding of our selves, as we construct, de-construct, and rebuild our selves according to the criteria perceived as necessary in the formation of legacy.

Working from their discussion of poetic language as introduced in the preface and first chapter, Bauman and Raud next consider how self and other are created (and re-created) through language and exchange. The inexpressibility of our interiority is of particular concern, as are the speaker-positions we inhabit during dialogue. Ultimately, in Raud and Bauman's rendering, our own interiorities are multi-faceted and multi-vocal (37). Though the authors do not use the term "hybridized" to describe this understanding of the self, the word seems applicable.

The formation of self through interrelationships and the performance of self before an audience is the focus of the third chapter. Self, as Raud and Bauman suggest, is constructed and understood to exist only because an "other" stands in contrast to it (55). Here again, Raud and Bauman invoke our digitized culture, coupling their discussion of celebrity culture and our desire to be witnessed by an audience with how our performance of self extends into a digitized world. On social media platforms like Twitter and Instagram, everyone has a shot at achieving fame, even if that fame is only fleeting. While Bauman is quick to suggest the potential conflicts that arise through a dual existence in two universes (offline and online), Raud questions whether these realms can still be said to form two distinct universes at all (47). Nonetheless, Raud acknowledges the dangers of privileging one's online self over the offline. As Raud puts it, it is

not simply that one is able to construct echo chambers in the digital realm, safely ensconcing oneself from divergent perspectives and ideologies, but that one can continuously dismantle these chambers, creating new ones on a whim. Problems and challenges can easily be avoided through this process of continuous re-construction of the chamber, so that difficult and potentially meaningful existential questions are actively avoided in favour of an idealized self (a self perfected through one's curated online persona) (47-48).

Chapters four, five, and six consider the role that education and the workforce play in the formation of the self. Bauman and Raud emphasize the ways in which this formation is interrupted through physical displacement, including the temporary nature of many contemporary jobs and positions, as well as the modern tendency (whether through necessity or free choice) to move about from city to city, or even to other countries. In these chapters, the consideration of the role of internet culture today is broadened to more deeply question how the internet functions to empower and disempower. This leads into a wider conversation around power and how power is manufactured, circulated, and maintained. The role of consumerism in the construction of the self makes up the majority of chapter six, including how consumerism traps us through its promise of a fulfillment and happiness that can never be reached. There is, according to the authors, some room to push back against the consumerist system, including choosing to contribute to smaller start-ups that emphasize community over competition and capitalism. Yet even these movements, the authors somewhat pessimistically argue, often become absorbed into the larger capitalist system, and are eventually leeched of the values and potential they possessed at initiation.

Practices of Selfhood is an eminently readable exploration of the theme of selfhood in a postmodern (or "liquid modern") world. While at times the unconventional style of the book means that certain chapters depart from their promised themes with some frequency, the benefits of its dialogue format far outweigh the shortcomings. The result is a considered, textured, and all too human rendering of

complex arguments in plain terms. Insightful, though occasionally discouraging in its pessimism, *Practices of Selfhood* lingers in the memory in the way only the most thoughtful books can.

Elliot Mason
Concordia University