good or not. There *is* better work than this being done, work on Thomas's explicitly esoteric hermeneutic, work on Thomas's genre, work on Thomas's relationship to other literary forms and to the ideological currents of the Roman Empire, and work on Thomas's social history, the identity and characteristics of the people who composed and/or transmitted this text. Thomas can tell us a great deal about the role of literacy or orality in the context of Christian origins and of ancient society in general. It can teach us something about the role of intellectuals, about the prestige associated with esoteric knowledge. It seems to me that focusing on *these* kinds of discussions—questions that many scholars of Thomas really *are* addressing when they are not caught up in what amount to preliminaries—would move our discussion forward from the endless and sterile claims and counter-claims about Thomas's value. By reducing "what they are saying about the Gospel of Thomas" to the three or four still-dominant trigger-issues of date, sources, theology, and the historical Jesus, Skinner runs the risk of perpetuating the very impasse he bemoans.

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Ritual, Media, and Conflict. Edited by Ronald Grimes, Ute Hüsken, Udo Simon, and Eric Venbrux. Oxford University Press, 2011. 299 pages. $29.25.

Scholars of religion are used to dealing with ubiquitous subjects. Human life is suffused with religious activity, so researchers frequently find themselves investigating the place of the divine in the modest and everyday. Studying the everyday, however, is enormously complex. The details are often small, the dynamics hidden, and the meanings interpreted variously by scholars in different academic disciplines. This complexity is not unique to religious activities, of course. Whenever scholars set out to study the everyday, they are in for a challenge.

A great deal of credit must be given, then, to the contributors to *Ritual, Media, and Conflict* (RMC), an interdisciplinary investigation of what may be three of most ubiquitous aspects of human life. As Michael Houseman suggests in the book's conclusion, they "have taken on a humanities equivalent of the unresolved 'three-body problem' in celestial mechanics: how to compute the mutual gravitational interaction of three masses" (255). As if this was not enough, "the bodies in question, far from being well-defined physical objects, are conceptual constructs, derived from the analysis of empirical events whose very nature is subject to debate" (255). A daunting task, indeed. The project originated in collaboration between researchers at Radboud University Nijmegen (The Netherlands) and the University of Heidelberg (Germany). For the volume, the twenty-four authors set out to identify and examine "cases in

which media-driven rituals or ritually saturated media instigate, disseminate, or escalate conflict" (4). The focus here is on beginning to map some of the key dynamics in the multidimensional interplay between these three phenomena rather than developing explanatory theories.

Overcoming the challenges, the contributors to *RMC* have achieved a great deal that advances scholarly understanding of the relationship between ritual, media, and conflict. Their work unfolds over the course of nine chapters. The volume begins with an introductory essay by the co-editor Ronald L. Grimes that frames the volume by identifying many different ways of defining ritual, media, and conflict. This is a lively chapter that deftly unpacks the many theoretical issues at stake while remaining connected to real world examples. A key part of the introduction is its focus on the terms "ritualize" and "mediatize." Many of the essays in the volume investigate what might be called "emerging cases": activities that are neither established media nor ritual, per se, but that are in the process of being "rendered into media form" or transformed into rituals (21). These terms effectively focus the reader on the profound transformations that ritual is undergoing due to convergence with media.

The seven chapters that follow describe and analyze a series of cases that chronicle the dynamics of ritual, media, and conflict. The essays seem to fall loosely into three groups. The first group surveys the great variety of ways in which ritual, media, and conflict can intersect. Chapter 2 examines the conflicts that arise within religious communities when traditional rituals are placed in new media environments, taking up the use of Aboriginal ritual elements in a video installation by an Australian artist, use of Wangala dancing by members of the north Indian Garo community in national parades, and the use of rituals from the Indian state of Uttarakhand as the basis for a heritage festival theatre piece. Chapter 3 considers two cases of mediatization of religious imagery and ritual designed to instigate conflict. One involves the use of Marian imagery and practice to spur conflict during the secessionist war on the island of Bougainville in Papua New Guinea and, the other, the dying the waters of Rome's Trevi Fountain red to protest of the cost of the 2007 Rome Film Festival. Chapter 4 examines four cases that highlight conflicts over religious rituals in which mediatization has a role. The essay weaves together observations on disagreements over oath swearing by Roman Catholic Freemasons, European Muslim public calls to prayer, ritual development by Alevi Muslims, and Evangelical Christian ritual elements portrayed in the film *Jesus Camp,* revealing the complexity of ritual change in heavily mediatized societies.

The second group of cases in *RMC* engages issues surrounding religious rituals in digital environments. Chapter 5 explores dynamics involved in mediatizing new or existing religious rituals on the web, studying online implementations of Australian Aboriginal smoking ceremonies, devotional practices on the web site for the Roman Catholic shrine at Lourdes, and emerging blog-based funeral and mourning rituals in the Netherlands. Chapter 6 takes up ritualization in virtual-reality spaces, examining Christian worship in the Church of Fools' "self-contained, multiuser environment modeled after a real-

life church," a wedding in Second Life, and a funeral in World of Warcraft (166). These became sources of conflict between those who wanted to ritualize in their new virtual communities and those who believed "serious" activities have no place in ostensibly gaming environments.

The third group of cases examines the complex relationship between ritual, media, and conflict in wartime. Chapter 7 unpacks the use of media and ritual during military conflicts to achieve political ends as seen in the wars in Iraq in 2003 and Myanmar in 2007. Chapter 8 examines torture as a ritual activity designed to assert absolute power in conflict situations. When mediatized (e.g., Abu Ghraib), torture emerges as a profound threat to human well-being that can only be resisted by equally powerful counter-ritualization. The volume then closes with a concluding essay that returns to the question of definitions, drawing together the many cases by way of offering new interpretations of the primary categories.

Overall, *RMC* makes an important contribution to the study of religion, particularly in the emerging field of religion and media. Each essay breaks open a segment of the complex processes of mediatization that characterize our age of ubiquitous media. A number of chapters, however, stand out. Chapter 3 on moving rituals onto new stages deftly explores several fascinating cases, and in doing so, probes the pressure points that exist within communities when mediatizing their own rituals. Chapter 6 on contested rituals in virtual worlds helpfully highlights the critical role of users' preexisting expectations of a given medium. I found it somehow simultaneously shocking and unsurprising that the first thought of a five-year-old boy who viewed a ritual enacted by avatars online was to ask, "who's on your team and which ones do you kill" (169)? Chapter 8 on torture eloquently argues that not all ritual practices enable human development or social cohesion; at times, they are exercises of power designed to facilitate domination. Some readers may find that this chapter strays too far beyond description into normative claims. However, power is an important theme throughout the book. Thus, the authors' analysis of its impact when pushed to the extreme feels like a natural endpoint to the inquiries.

Throughout, the essays succeed in providing rich and detailed accounts of the contours of contemporary mediatized ritual and the conflicts that surround it. There are, however, places where the essays gloss over important distinctions and might have benefited from deeper engagement with communications and media scholarship. These resources might have been useful, for instance, in providing incisive categories to help readers understand the different factors at work in mediatization of rituals by participants, mediatization of rituals by nonparticipant documentary filmmakers, and reporting on religious rituals by mainstream news media (106–120). The fascinating work done on online memorials would have been enriched by discussion of the differing dynamics of expression and dialogue in blogs as well as working definitions of terms like community and audience (147–154). And given studies that have shown—at least in the United States—that fewer and fewer people trust mainstream news outlets or believe that journalistic objectivity exists, the claim that "news is considered reliable because of its

imputed objectivity" comes off sounding somewhat quaint (210). It is true that too many cooks can spoil the broth. Yet, a few ingredients from a neighbor's pantry sometimes make a satisfying dish that much better.

In the end, though, I have a feeling that readers' satisfaction with *RMC* is likely to depend largely upon how comfortable they are with broad definitions. The emphasis on emerging "mediatizations" and "ritualizations" means that the cases are quite varied, even unexpected. What counts as ritual? Here, it includes dance, oath swearing, preaching, calling to prayer, manipulating an online avatar, torturing, and creating televised news stories. What counts as media? Here, it includes theatre, news, film, pamphlets, virtual reality, a fountain, and the miraculous appearance of animals (205). Some readers will find this breadth appropriate. When we try to define media or ritual tightly, or try to harmonize away the tensions, we are bound to get it wrong. Others, however, find that by defining terms too broadly, we lose our ability to analyze effectively. Readers who are looking for tight definitions, familiar topics, and comprehensive syntheses may well find a few of the chapters unsatisfying.

That being said, to borrow a phrase from the software industry, I do not think that this breadth is a bug; it is a feature. Scholars of religion will be well served by this thought-provoking volume, no matter how much experience they have with these issues. The wide ranging and engaging case studies provide ample insights into what will likely be the next chapter in religious practice. Readers will come away with curiosity piqued, ready to reflect more on the interplay of ritual, media, and conflict.

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Apocalypse against Empire: Theologies of Resistance in Early Judaism. By Anathea Portier-Young. William B. Eerdmans, 2011. 462 pages. $50.00.

Portier-Young's monograph argues that "the first Jewish apocalypses emerged as a literature of resistance to empire" (xxii). The Seleucid Empire attempted to impose its values and cosmology through force, propaganda, and ideology, but the apocalyptic writers pushed back, "challenging not only the physical means of coercion, but also empire's claims about knowledge and the world" (xxii). The book makes its case in three sections: a chapter on theory; five chapters of historical analysis about Seleucid domination of Judea in the first half of the second century BCE; and four chapters of literary analysis on the earliest known Jewish historical apocalypses.

The theory chapter outlines an eclectic approach in which the three primary concepts that frame the study—domination, hegemony, and resistance —are gleaned from various sources: Gramsci, Foucault, Bourdieu, Timothy

Ronald L. Grimes, Ute Husken, Udo Simon, and Eric Venbrux, ed. *Ritual, Media and Conflict.*

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In mid-November 2012, as Israel and Hamas exchanged rockets in an eight-day conflict that reportedly killed at least 158 Palestinians and four Israelis, a parallel firefight was raging online.[1] Through a barrage of threats, claims and counter-claims uploaded to Twitter and YouTube, the two sides wrestled for control over an increasingly contested virtual battlefield. Almost two years on from the so-called Twitter Revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt—which were said to mark the start of Arab Spring —observers were again prompted to question the role of social media in sparking, fuelling and mediating conflict.

They would do well to turn to the current title for some answers. In *Ritual, Media and Conflict*, twenty-four scholars assign themselves the task of approaching the following problem: "When ritual and media interact (either by the mediatizing of ritual or by the ritualizing of media), how do the patterns of conflict change?" (p. 6). It is an ambitious project and the responses are genuinely interdisciplinary – bringing together historians, anthropologists, sociologists, area specialists and others. As one of the authors, Michael Houseman, acknowledges, "In tackling the interplay of ritual, media and conflict, they have taken on a humanities equivalent of the unresolved 'three-body problem' in celestial mechanics: how to compute the mutual gravitational interaction of three masses" (p. 255).

Mindful of the weightiness of this endeavour, Robert L. Grimes elegantly draws together these various interdisciplinary strands in his introduction. He observes that ritual and media can both escalate conflict —as did the "suicide attacks, beheadings and [televised] so-called surgi-

cal bombings" that marked the most recent US-led war in Iraq (p. 3)—
but they can also mediate it. He offers truth and reconciliation processes,
such as those in South Africa, as an example of the latter. Provisional
definitions of the three central concepts are mooted, but never fixed.
Arriving at the end of this first chapter, the reader might be excused for
feeling that he or she has been left with more questions than answers.

But this openness is also part of the book's appeal. It allows for the
discussion of an expansive range of case studies in the seven chapters
that follow. From public debates about the Muslim call to prayer in Eu-
ropean cities, to the incorporation of traditional folk dancing in India's
Republic Day parades, through to the impact of the publication of the
infamous photographs from Abu Ghraib, in-depth case studies showcase
the varied ways in which the conflict can be sparked, escalated or medi-
ated when either "ritual is mediatized" or "media is ritualized" (p. 20).

The rich case studies in Chapter seven are particularly effective.
Its authors compare two moments of violent conflict that closely in-
tertwine ritual and media: the toppling of Saddam Hussein's statue in
Baghdad in April 2003, and the monks' protests in Burma in Septem-
ber 2007. They demonstrate convincingly the multiple ways in which
both moments were embedded in complex power relations and served
— through ritual and media — to include some people while exclud-
ing others. Taken alongside the other chapters, these case studies lend
strength to the position that, "contesting a ritual, as well as using a ritual
to contest something else, are means of challenging authority, establish-
ing agency, and negotiating power" (p. 121).

Aside from these kinds of statements, however, the reader is left with-
out any overarching concrete conclusions about the relationship between
ritual, media and conflict. The great breadth of case studies and the open-
ness of definitions offered might render this difficult, though Michael
Houseman deserves credit for attempting to draw some of the strings
back together in his concluding chapter. Yet as Grimes cautions early on,
"initial exploration rather than either sustained comparison or formal
theory-building" is what the authors are after (p. 4). The practical mat-
ters at hand are also far from black and white. The social media space that
constituted a virtual battlefield during the recent conflict between Israel
and Hamas was the same fertile ground partly credited for the uprisings
that swept the Middle East during the preceding two years. This original
book is a timely reminder against drawing any quick and easy conclusions
about ritual, media and conflict. But in a world where our "perception of
the world is media based; [our] reality is media fed ... [and] the intensity
of conflict is perceived and evaluated by the extent of media coverage" (p.
95), the temptation to do so will no doubt remain. ∎

[1] "Israel and Hamas begin indirect Gaza ceasefire talks," BBC, November 26, 2012 Accessed 27 November. http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-20501144.

Tom Head. *It's Your World, So Change It: Using the Power of the Internet to Create Social Change.*

AYLON ASSAEL COHEN (St. Antony's College, Oxford)

The emergence of the Internet has demanded a shift in traditional forms of activism, ranging from the reorganization of zones of protest to the reconfiguration of organizational tactics. While the last decade witnessed an explosion in literature examining the theoretical and practical implications of cyberactivism,[1] activists already convinced of the Internet's strategic necessity may find themselves still asking the seemingly perennial question of politics: what is to be done?[2] In Tom Head's *It's Your World, So Change It: Using the Power of the Internet to Create Social Change* they may find an answer.

Head seeks to provide activists with the practical tools they need to make use of the Internet, providing an articulate step-by-step guide from one's first encounter with the Internet to its use as an institutionalized medium for change. The book's chapters cover researching a problem using the Internet, creating a website, using social networking for the purposes of information sharing, raising funds, using multimedia, building coalitions and alliances, and finally creating social actions such as petitions or spreading information regarding actions taking place offline. Head writes with a modesty that recognizes his book's temporality, noting that the Internet's timeless integration into the daily work of social justice will render his work "outdated" and even "silly" (p. 7).

Throughout the text, Head guides his readers with practical advice by analyzing both the imagery and text of successful instances of cyberactivism—for example, he surveys various layouts of methodical and persua-

SOCIAL & BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES

Anthropology

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The following review appeared in the December 2011 issue of CHOICE:

The word "ritual" invokes life-changing passages: christenings, Bath Mitzvahs, age-grade celebrations among remote pastoralists, boot camps, commencements, weddings, funerals, stockings on a hearth, festivals of light, pilgrimages to holy places. Moments of transition and transformation are assured by and endowed with sacred powers. Community is confirmed and faith affirmed, often through elaborate performance. "Ritual" is the "glue" holding us together, giving us identity, mediating our conflicts, healing the wounds of our souls. The problematic "us" is where the Grimes team begins study of mediatized ritual as divisive, promoting harmful conflicts as often as felicitous outcomes. Televangelism wins worlds and presidential elections while branding a great many "others" as satanic. Ritualized social networking topples governments. Ritual aims of war are exacerbated by iconic snippets gone viral. Torture is sacred for some, as good overcomes evil, whatever the cost. But what about British Methodists' Saint Pixels initiative, launched to see if one can "do church" on the Internet? Or hacked cyberfunerals intended to mourn real-time deaths of *World of Warcraft* gamers? These case studies suggest how scholars can keep pace with social practices evolving by the nanosecond. **Summing Up**: Recommended. Most levels/libraries. -- *A. F. Roberts, University of California, Los Angeles*