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# Editors' Introduction

**Carole M. Cusack** is Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Sydney. She trained as a medievalist and her doctorate was published as *Conversion Among the Germanic Peoples* (Cassell, 1998). Since the late 1990s she has taught in contemporary religious trends. She is the author of *Invented Religions: Imagination, Fiction and Faith* (Ashgate, 2010).

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The second issue of *Fieldwork in Religion* for 2019 contains five research articles that are all highly contemporary in both subject matter and approaches. The authors have engaged with emergent fieldwork contexts including fan conventions and the psychedelics subculture, the social media phenomenon of Twitter, and insights from the French Marxist group Situationist International (SI) in the exploration of the sacred in twenty-first-century urban environments.

The first article is by Anna Lutkajtis (University of Sydney), and is titled "Lost Saints: Desacralization, Spiritual Abuse and Magic Mushrooms". It is an historical study of Western spiritual seekers' exposure to, and uptake of, psilocybin mushrooms from the mid-1950s onward. Lutkajtis explores the negative impact of tourism in Huautla de Jiménez, Mexico resulting from Robert Gordon Wasson's publication of his experiences with the *curandera* (healer) María Sabina and the mushrooms called "little saints" or "children" used in healing rituals (*velada*). Sabina was harshly criticized for allowing Wasson to participate in a mushroom *velada* and the subsequent desacralization of the rite by Westerners seeking

hallucinogenic thrills. Lutkajtis views this fascinating sequence of events through the lens of spiritual abuse, arguing that this recently-developed concept is useful in assessing the negative impact of Western appropriation of Indigenous spiritual phenomena on the traditional owners and practitioners, and that it may contribute to productive dialogue towards the healing of historical traumas.

The second contribution, "Exploring the Use of Machine Learning to Automate the Qualitative Coding of Church-related Tweets", is by Anthony-Paul Cooper (Durham University), Emmanuel Awuni Kolog (University of Ghana) and Erkki Sutinen (University of Turku). The research area of digital theology has existed for approximately a decade, and this article explores the use of algorithmic analysis of the content of tweets, given that the vast size of the body of data now makes comprehensive analysis by individual human scholars difficult, if not impossible. Cooper, Kolog and Sutinen offer an explanation of the process of coding tweets via algorithms and examples of the results that are obtained using this method. The benefits of this method are chiefly speed and scale, and the authors suggest that these gains will facilitate longitudinal and geographical studies on church-related tweets and other large digital datasets.

The next article, "Walter Day: The First Video Game Religious Pilgrim", is by Benjamin Jozef Banasik (University of Sydney) and has interesting synergies with the contributions of both Lutkajtis (because a psychedelic experience in the 1960s triggered Day's joining of Transcendental Meditation and influenced his spiritual journeying through video gaming) and Vivian Asimos (in that Banasik met Day at the Brisbane Pinball and Arcade Collective [BPAC] Showcase in 2019). The originality of Banasik's article is that he is not focused on religious content in or of video games but is interested in gaming as a religious experience, a phenomenon that to date is significantly under-researched. Day began playing video games in 1972 with *Pong*, which he was unimpressed with, and by 1981 he had opened the Twin Galaxies arcade with John David Block in Ottumwa, Iowa and had begun to develop his influential International Scoreboard. Banasik's characterization of Day as a "pilgrim" is well-supported by the insights gained into Day's life and spiritual journey during a lengthy interview in 2019.

The fourth article, "Navigating through Space Butterflies: CoxCon 2017 and Fieldwork Presentation of Contemporary Movements", is by Vivian Asimos (Durham University). Asimos addresses the phenomenon of fan conventions as a novel fieldwork site, interrogating how scholars can move beyond merely describing or defending the convention as a legitimate site for research, and critically analyse it in productive ways. CoxCon is a convention for fans of gaming YouTuber Jesse Cox, who is famous for playing video games and recording and uploading his gameplay to sites such as YouTube. Asimos insists that she does not wish to prove

CoxCon is "religious", but she demonstrates that attendance can be a form of pilgrimage or ritualized journey for fans, and that CoxCon definitely possesses religious dimensions. Fieldwork techniques including participant observation and unstructured interviews are described, but the strength of the article is in Asimos's determined admission that her fieldwork was improvisatory and that the research site was short-term, highly unstable and likely to change.

The final article is by Raymond Radford (University of Sydney), and is titled "Psychogeography: An (Old) New Method for Viewing the Religious in the Urban and the Sacred". Radford takes his cues from Guy Debord, the theorist of the Situationist International (SI), in a piece that took shape in 2018, the fiftieth anniversary of the Paris riots of 1968. The SI resisted the spectacle, a type of advanced consumer capitalism, and advocated *détournement* ("re-routing" or "hijacking"), the *dérive* ("drift") and psychogeography to repurpose capitalism for subversive ends. Radford posits that psychogeography, somewhat differently conceived to the classic formulation of the SI, is a method that is absent in the academic study of religion, but which is definitely needed. He examines sites in Australia with Indigenous and colonial significance (Barangaroo and the Quarantine Station, both in Sydney) and the conspiracist mecca Rennes-le-Château in France through the lens of psychogeography, and picks up on a theme that resonates with Banasik and Asimos—pilgrimage—as a way to describe visitors to these sites who seek new meanings.

It is a delight to me to have articles published from three doctoral students at my home institution, the University of Sydney, and also to publish a piece by Vivian Asimos, whom I met in 2014 during her Masters candidature at the University of Edinburgh. That I am grateful to Anthony-Paul Cooper, Emmanuel Awuni Kolog and Erkki Sutinen almost goes without saying; these fine scholars relieve me of the anxiety that *Fieldwork in Religion* might have been hijacked by my friends and fellow travellers! My co-editor Rachelle and I thank the referees who provided feedback on the five original articles. We are grateful also to George Chryssides, the journal's review editor, for the book reviews. We acknowledge the invaluable assistance of the staff at Equinox Publishing, and also of Sarah Norman, *Fieldwork in Religion*'s fabulous production editor.