



New Directions in the Study of Prayer

# WHY PRAYER?

February 6th & 7th, 2015  
**Italian Academy**, Columbia University  
New York, New York

# NDSP

New Directions in the Study of Prayer (NDSP) is a project developed by the Social Science Research Council's program on Religion and the Public Sphere. Launched in 2011 under the leadership of former program director Jonathan VanAntwerpen and a multidisciplinary advisory committee, NDSP provided funding and fellowship opportunities to twenty-eight scholars and journalists engaged in innovative research and reporting on the social, cultural, historical, psychological, and cognitive dimensions of the practice of prayer. Grants were made possible by the John Templeton Foundation.

Now, as the project draws to a close, it is a pleasure to bring grantees and other interlocutors together for *Why Prayer? A Conference on New Directions in the Study of Prayer*. With topics ranging from examinations of religious technologies and politics to insights on language, embodiment, and psychology, this two-day gathering offers an invaluable opportunity to look back on the excellent work done as part of the NDSP project and to look ahead to new avenues of exploration in the study of prayer and its many manifestations.

— Candace E. West

PROGRAM OFFICER, RELIGION AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE

# SSRC

The Social Science Research Council (SSRC) is an independent, international, nonprofit organization founded in 1923. It fosters innovative research, nurtures new generations of social scientists, deepens how inquiry is practiced within and across disciplines, and mobilizes necessary knowledge on important public issues.

The SSRC is guided by the belief that justice, prosperity, and democracy all require better understanding of complex social, cultural, economic, and political processes. We work with practitioners, policymakers, and academic researchers in the social sciences and related professions and the humanities and natural sciences. We build interdisciplinary and international networks, working with partners around the world to link research to practice and policy, strengthen individual and institutional capacities for learning, and enhance public access to information.

## Religion and the Public Sphere

The Social Science Research Council's program on Religion and the Public Sphere seeks to elevate the quality of both academic and public discourse on religion and society; to foster engagement and cooperation among social scientists and others working on religion, secularism, and related topics; and to support new scholarship in this critical area of study.



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Grantees



## Mark Aveyard

*Prayer as an Embodied Cognitive Activity*

Mark Aveyard is an assistant professor at the American University of Sharjah, a US-accredited university in the United Arab Emirates, where he teaches courses in cognitive psychology and the psychology of religion, among others. His research investigates aspects of embodied cognition, exploring the integration of mind-body processes in cognition, and his work has been published in *Cognition*, *Cognitive Science*, and *Memory & Cognition*.



## Anderson Blanton

*The Point of Contact:  
Radio Prayers and the Apparatus of Belief*

Anderson Blanton is currently a research scholar at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity in Göttingen, Germany. During his tenure at the institute, he will be conducting ethnographic and archival research on the Far East Broadcasting Company (FEBC), the most powerful radio station ever constructed for the purpose of Christian missionization. With transmission equipment reclaimed from US military engagements in the Pacific during World War II, this station blanketed Asia with gospel broadcasts originating from the FEBC headquarters in Manila. A crucial aspect of this technology of missionization was the distribution of thousands of “portable missionaries,” or small mahogany radio sets, that were strategically engineered to receive only the missionary broadcasts.

At *Reverberations*, Dr. Blanton has curated a collection of objects and theoretical reflections on “The Materiality of Prayer.” Combining theories of technology and material culture with ethnographic description, this collection demonstrates the ways in which religious experience in the late modern world has been intensively organized and augmented by media technologies and devotional objects.

In addition to his work on technologies of missionization and the question of materiality, Dr. Blanton enjoys woodworking with traditional hand tools.



## Fenella Cannell

*What Counts as Prayer?*

Fenella Cannell teaches social anthropology at the London School of Economics (LSE) and has also taught and lectured at Johns Hopkins University, Cornell University, and the University of Michigan–Ann Arbor. She specializes in the anthropology of religion and of Christianity at all levels and was awarded a UK national prize for excellence in teaching anthropology by the Association for Social Anthropology/Centre for Sociology, Anthropology, and Politics for her teaching on the anthropology of Christianity in 2010. She published the widely read *Anthropology of Christianity* in 2006 (Duke University Press) and coedited *Vital Relations: Modernity and the Persistent Life of Kinship* with Susan McKinnon (School for Advanced Research Press, 2013).

Dr. Cannell is co-organizer with Matthew Engelke and Mathijs Pelkmans of the Programme for the Study of Religion and Non-Religion at LSE and convened an international workshop on the comparative ethnography of prayer at the London School of Economics in May 2014.



## Norris J. Chumley

*Rethinking Religion: Prayer from Antiquity to Modernity*

Norris J. Chumley is an author, lecturer, professor, and executive producer of many books, films, television movies, radio series, and documentaries on religion and spiritual practices for PBS, A&E, HBO/Cinemax, Showtime/The Movie Channel, HarperOne, and National Public Radio (PRX) and on multiple digital and social media platforms. Most recently, Dr. Chumley wrote and directed *Mysteries of the Jesus Prayer* (JesusPrayerMovie.com), a book and feature film on prayer and monasticism seen in theaters and on 249 PBS stations from American Public Television (APT). He is executive producer and host of Columbia University's *Rethinking Religion* radio series from the Institute for Religion, Culture, and Public Life.

Dr. Chumley is also chair of Manhattan Neighborhood Networks (MNN) and an adjunct instructor at New York University's Kanbar School of Film and Television.



## Thomas J. Csordas

*Prayer and the Extraordinary Action of  
Beings without Bodies*

Thomas J. Csordas is a professor of anthropology at the University of California, San Diego. His research interests include anthropological theory, comparative religion, medical and psychological anthropology, cultural phenomenology and embodiment, globalization and social change, and language and culture. He has conducted fieldwork on the Catholic Charismatic Renewal movement, funded by major grants from the National Institute of Mental Health and examining topics including healing ritual, religious language, bodily experience, and child development. In interviews with Navajo cancer patients and healers, he has explored the experience of these patients, the therapeutic process in Navajo religious healing, and language and narrative.

Professor Csordas is the author of *The Sacred Self: A Cultural Phenomenology of Charismatic Healing* (University of California Press, 1994); *Language, Charisma, and Creativity: Ritual Life in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal* (University of California Press, 1997); and *Body/Meaning/Healing* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2002). He is also the editor of *Embodiment and Experience: The Existential Ground of Culture and Self* (Cambridge University Press, 1994) and *Transnational Transcendence: Essays on Religion and Globalization* (University of California Press, 2009).



## Elizabeth Drescher

*Praying between the Lines:  
The Prayer Practices of American Nones*

Elizabeth Drescher is an educator, scholar, writer, and public speaker on the topic of spirituality in everyday life, today and in the past. Dr. Drescher teaches in the undergraduate program in religious studies and the graduate program in pastoral ministry at Santa Clara University. She has contributed to the *Washington Post*, the *San Jose Mercury News*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Salon*, and *Religion Dispatches*, where her commentary on religion, culture, and social media is enjoyed by readers across the globe, and her writing has been featured by the *Atlantic Wire*, *Utne Reader*, the *Daily Beast*, NPR, Radio Australia, and the BBC. She has also published essays and poetry in both popular magazines and academic journals, and she wrote *Tweet If You ♥ Jesus* (Morehouse, 2011) to help guide the digital-age culture of mainline Christian churches and communities. Most recently, she authored, with Keith Anderson, *Click 2 Save: The Digital Ministry Bible* (Morehouse, 2012).

Dr. Drescher has received a number of grants, fellowships, and other honors for her work in the study of Christian spirituality and religious education. Her work focuses on the prayer practices of religious “nones” (people who answer “none” when asked which religion they follow). This research contributes to her current book project, *Choosing Our Religion: The Spiritual Lives of American Nones*, on the meaning-making and self-realization practices of people who are not affiliated with any religion.



## Shira Gabriel

*The Relationship between Automatic and Deliberate Cognitions and Prayer*

Shira Gabriel is an associate professor of psychology at SUNY, University at Buffalo. She received her PhD in social psychology from Northwestern University and is an internationally renowned expert on social surrogacy—that is, the tendency for humans to form psychological relationships with nonhuman (or physically unavailable) entities. Papers published by Professor Gabriel in prominent, peer-reviewed journals have, for example, explored the importance and nature of psychological bonds with celebrities, favorite television shows, and comfort foods. She also studies social comparison, friendship processes, and gratitude.

Professor Gabriel is an associate editor for *Social Psychological and Personality Science* and is on the editorial boards of the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* and the *European Journal of Social Psychology*.



## Parvis Ghassem-Fachandi

*An Ethnography of Religious Labor in an Indian Muslim Community*

Parvis Ghassem-Fachandi is an assistant professor in the Department of Anthropology at Rutgers University. He taught at Princeton University in 2006 and held a postdoctoral fellowship at the Center for Religion and Media at New York University in 2007. In 2012–13, he was a fellow at the Institut d'Études Avancées de Nantes, France.

Professor Ghassem-Fachandi has conducted ethnographic field research in Gibraltar, India, and the United States on topics including ritual, religious labor, violence, nationalism, and disgust. He is the author of *Muslimische Heilige in Gujarat: Sufismus, Synkretismus, und Praxis im westlichen Indien* (Editio Cortis Aquilae, 2008) and *Pogrom in Gujarat: Hindu Nationalism and Anti-Muslim Violence in India* (Princeton University Press, 2012) and the editor of *Violence: Ethnographic Encounters* (Berg Press, 2009).





## Jeremy Ginges

*Prayer and Prosocial Behavior*

Jeremy Ginges, senior fellow at ARTIS Research, is an associate professor of psychology and director of the Laboratory of Social and Political Psychology at the New School for Social Research in New York City. Previously, he was on the faculty of the Research Center for Group Dynamics at the University of Michigan (2003–6) and held a field research fellowship at the Solomon Asch Center for Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict at the University of Pennsylvania (2001–2). His work explores the role of moral reasoning in binding people together to form meaningful social groups and the ways in which moral reasoning, particularly concerning sacred values, influences the trajectory of cultural, political, and violent conflicts.



## Leor Halevi

*Pray Pray Revolution:  
The Reinvention of Islamic Rites by Engineers*

Leor Halevi, a historian of Islam, explores the interrelationship between religious laws and social practices in various contexts. He is the author of *Muhammad's Grave: Death Rites and the Making of Islamic Society* (Columbia University Press, 2007), which won the Ralph Waldo Emerson Award, given by Phi Beta Kappa for a notable scholarly contribution to the understanding of the cultural and intellectual condition of humanity; the Albert Hourani Award, given by the Middle East Studies Association for the year's best book in the field; the Medieval Academy of America's John Nicholas Brown Prize; and the American Academy of Religion's Award for Excellence in the Category of Analytical-Descriptive Studies.

Professor Halevi is currently at work on a new book that will examine Muslim attitudes toward foreign goods and world trade, looking particularly at the tension in Islamic law between an economic interest in trade and a religious interest in social exclusivity. Theological concerns about ritual obligations—and in particular prayer rites—will feature prominently as a theme.



## Nicholas Harkness

*The Intimacy of Secrecy:  
Contact and Concealment in Korean Group Prayer*

Nicholas Harkness is an assistant professor of sociocultural and linguistic anthropology at Harvard University, specializing in the ethnographic study of communication and cultural semiosis. Professor Harkness has conducted research in South Korea since 2005 and has published numerous papers on a variety of topics, such as language and religion, coded emotionality, performance and ritual, sound and the experience of sensuous qualities, and the interplay of language structure and social differentiation. His book, *Songs of Seoul: An Ethnography of Voice and Voicing in Christian South Korea* (University of California Press, 2014), is a study of the role of the human voice in South Korean Christian culture.



## Jonathan D. Lane

*Investigating the Cognitive and  
Cultural Foundations of Prayer*

Jonathan D. Lane is an assistant professor at Vanderbilt University's Peabody College of Education and Human Development. He also completed a postdoctoral fellowship at Harvard's Graduate School of Education on a National Research Service Award from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.

Professor Lane's work examines children's conceptual and social-cognitive development, especially their understanding of the extraordinary and supernatural. By studying children from different cultures and at various points in conceptual development, he aims to reveal developmental universals as well as individual differences in their understanding of the social world, science, and the supernatural.



## Sonja Luehrmann

*The Politics of Prayer Books:  
Delegated Intercession, Names, and  
Community Boundaries in the Russian Orthodox Church*

Sonja Luehrmann is an assistant professor of anthropology at Simon Fraser University. Her research concerns Orthodox Christian encounters with other religious and ideological traditions in such multiethnic settings as the Soviet and post-Soviet Volga region and nineteenth century Alaska. She is currently completing an ethnographic project on antiabortion activism, regimes of penance, and Soviet memory in the Russian Orthodox Church.

Dr. Luehrmann's publications include *Religion in Secular Archives: Soviet Atheism and Historical Knowledge* (Oxford University Press, forthcoming), *Secularism Soviet Style: Teaching Atheism and Religion in a Volga Republic* (Indiana University Press, 2011), and *Alutiiq Villages under Russian and U.S. Rule* (University of Alaska Press, 2008). Together with collaborators Daria Dubovka, Jeffers Engelhardt, Angie Heo, Jeanne Kormina, and Vlad Naumescu, she is currently preparing a volume on sensory regimes and bodily practices in Eastern Orthodox prayer.



## Tanya Marie Luhrmann

*William James in Accra and Chennai*

Tanya Marie Luhrmann is the Watkins University Professor in the Stanford University Anthropology Department. Her books include *Persuasions of the Witch's Craft* (Harvard University Press, 1989), *The Good Parsi* (Harvard University Press, 1996), *Of Two Minds* (Knopf, 2000), and *When God Talks Back* (Knopf, 2012). Before coming to Stanford, Professor Luhrmann taught at the University of California, San Diego, and was the Max Palevsky Professor and a director of the Clinical Ethnography Workshop in the Department of Comparative Human Development at the University of Chicago.

Professor Luhrmann's work explores how objects without material presence come to seem real to people and how ideas about the mind affect mental experience. These days, she is comparing the ways people in San Mateo, California; Accra, Ghana; and Chennai, India, experience God (on the one hand) and auditory psychotic voices (on the other), with the ambition of comparing unusual experiences around the world.

Professor Luhrmann was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 2003 and received a John Guggenheim Fellowship award in 2007. *When God Talks Back* has received several honors and awards: it was named a *New York Times* Notable Book of the Year and *Kirkus Reviews* Best Book of the Year in 2012, tied for first place for the Religion Newswriters Association's Nonfiction Religion Book of the Year in 2013, won the American Psychological Association's Bier Award in Division 36 (Psychology of Religion and Spirituality) in 2014, and was awarded the 2014 Grawemeyer Award for the best book in religion by the University of Louisville and the Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary.





## Peter Manseau

*Freelance Journalist*

Peter Manseau is a journalist, novelist, and historian. He is the author of the memoir *Vows* (Simon & Schuster, 2006), the novel *Songs for the Butcher's Daughter* (Simon & Schuster, 2009), the travelogue *Rag and Bone: A Journey among the World's Holy Dead* (Powell's Books, 2009), and the history *One Nation, Under Gods: A New American History* (Little, Brown, and Company, forthcoming January 2015). He has won the National Jewish Book Award, the American Library Association's Medal for Outstanding Achievement in Jewish Literature, the Hadassah-Ribalow Prize for Fiction, and a 2012 National Endowment for the Arts Literature Fellowship.

A founding editor of *Killing the Buddha* (killingthebuddha.com) and coauthor (with Jeff Sharlet) of *Killing the Buddha: A Heretic's Bible* (Free Press, 2004), Mr. Manseau is currently a doctoral candidate in religion at Georgetown University and a scholar in residence at Washington College's C. V. Starr Center for the Study of the American Experience, where he codirects the online series "Historically Corrected" for the *New York Times*. He lives in Annapolis, Maryland.



## Ruth Marshall

*Moving Heaven and Earth:*

*Prayer as Political Praxis in Global Pentecostalism*

Ruth Marshall is an associate professor jointly appointed to the Department for the Study of Religion and the Department of Political Science at the University of Toronto. Her research is interdisciplinary, drawing on political theory, political science, continental philosophy, anthropology, and postcolonial studies. She is the author of *Political Spiritualities: The Pentecostal Revolution in Nigeria* (University of Chicago Press, 2009) and numerous scholarly articles on the political implications of Pentecostalism and postcolonial politics in West Africa.

Professor Marshall is currently interested in the contemporary nexus between religion and politics. Her NDSP research project investigates prayer as a form of political praxis—in particular, the ways in which Pentecostalism attempts to revitalize the performative power of speech. This research informs Professor Marshall's new book, *Speaking in Tongues: Religion and the Call of the Political*, which examines the renewed ethico-political force of religious language in the public sphere and the political challenge that global revivalism poses to democratic forms of life. Critically reflecting on the problematic treatment of radical religious "otherness" by contemporary political theory, the book explores the possibilities and limits of a postsecular politics of translation for articulating a new relationship between the religious and the political.



## Elizabeth McAlister

*The Politics of Aggressive Prayer:  
Evangelical Spiritual Warfare and Haitian Vodou*

Elizabeth McAlister is a professor of religion at Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut. Her research explores Afro-Caribbean religions, transnational migration, neo-Pentecostalism, and race theory, particularly in Haiti. Professor McAlister is the author of *Rara! Vodou, Power, and Performance in Haiti and Its Diaspora* (University of California Press, 2002), a book and CD that provide an ethnography of a musical, religious, and political festival. Her second book, *Race, Nation, and Religion in the Americas* (Oxford University Press, 2004), coedited with Henry Goldschmidt, theorizes race and religion as linked constructs. She has also produced albums of Afro-Haitian religious music: *Rhythms of Rapture* (Smithsonian Folkways, 1995) and *Angels in the Mirror* (Ellipsis Arts, 1997).

Professor McAlister's current research examines what she terms "negative and aggressive forms of prayer," including the "Spiritual Warfare" movement and its global networks, particularly in the circuits between the United States and Haiti. Most of her published articles can be found online at <http://emcalister.faculty.wesleyan.edu>.



## Savitri Medhatul

*And All God's People Said . . .*

Savitri Medhatul is a documentary filmmaker based in Mumbai, India; she is also actively involved in the theatre circuit in Mumbai and is both a trained Bharatnatyam dancer and a civil engineer. She directed and produced a documentary film on Lavani performers—women folk performers from Maharashtra, India—and has collaborated on various national and international film projects, including documentaries on the Jewish community in Maharashtra, the water distribution system and its politics in Mumbai, farmers' suicides in Maharashtra, and urbanization and public transportation in Mumbai. She has collaborated with such institutions as University College London, France 5 Web TV, and Nautanki.com.



## John L. Modern

*A Prayer Machine by Any Other Name*

John L. Modern teaches religious studies at Franklin & Marshall College, where he serves as chair of the department. Professor Modern is the author of two books, *Secularism in Antebellum America* (University of Chicago Press, 2011) and *The Bop Apocalypse* (University of Illinois Press, 2001). He has published in a range of venues, and his research interests include religion, technology, and aesthetics.

Professor Modern was cocurator of “Frequencies: A Collaborative Genealogy of Spirituality,” a collaboration between *Killing the Buddha* and the SSRC’s *The Immanent Frame*. He is currently writing a book that will address the relationship among religion, cognition, and culture, with the working title of *The Religion Machine, or A Particular History of Cognitive Science*.



## P. Sanal Mohan

*Prayers as Life-Affirming Practices:  
Dalit Christianity in Kerala*

P. Sanal Mohan is an associate professor in the School of Social Sciences at Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, India. Previously, he was a Charles Wallace India Fellow (history) in the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, and a fellow in history at the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta. He has also held postdoctoral fellowships at Emory University (colonial and postcolonial studies, Department of History) and the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity (Göttingen) and was a visiting faculty associate at the Center for the Advanced Study of India at the University of Pennsylvania.

Professor Mohan combines history and ethnography in his research, which covers colonial modernity, social movements and questions of identity, and Christianity in India. He has published articles on the discourses and practices of the Dalit movement and has engaged in ethnographic fieldwork among Dalit Christians to study their prayer practices. His book, *Modernity of Slavery: Struggles against Caste Inequality in Colonial Kerala*, is scheduled to be published by Oxford University Press, New Delhi, in 2015.



## Ebenezer Obadare

*The Muslim Response to the Pentecostal Surge in Nigeria*

Ebenezer Obadare is an associate professor in the Department of Sociology, University of Kansas, Lawrence. His work focuses on the interface between civil society and the state, with particular emphasis on informal strategies of resistance under changing dynamics of rule. He is also interested in, and has published extensively on, religion and politics, civic engagement, and civic service and citizenship in Africa.

Professor Obadare's essays have appeared in the *Review of African Political Economy (ROAPE)*, *African Affairs*, *Politique Africaine*, *Journal of Civil Society*, *Democratization*, *Patterns of Prejudice*, *Africa Development*, *Critical African Studies*, *Development in Practice*, *Journal of Modern African Studies*, *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, and *Journal of Church and State*, among others. He is the editor of *The Handbook of Civil Society in Africa* (Springer, 2014) and coeditor of *Civic Agency in Africa: Arts of Resistance in the 21st Century* (James Currey, 2014) and four other books.

A recipient of numerous prestigious international awards and research grants, Professor Obadare is on the editorial boards of the *Journal of Civil Society*, *Contemporary Sociology*, *Journal of Modern African Studies*, and *Review of African Political Economy*.



## Robert A. Orsi

*When Survivors of Clerical Sexual Abuse Learned that Maybe God Spoke Their Language and So Perhaps Might Hear and Understand Them*

Robert A. Orsi is a professor of religious studies and history and inaugural holder of the Grace Craddock Nagle Chair in Catholic Studies at Northwestern University. He has taught at Fordham University, Indiana University, and Harvard Divinity School/Harvard University, where he was the Charles Warren Professor of American Religious History and chair of the Committee on the Study of Religion in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences.

Professor Orsi is the author of several prizewinning volumes concerned with questions of prayer and devotional practice, including most recently *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them* (Princeton University Press, 2005), which was awarded the American Academy of Religion's Award for Excellence in the Study of Religion in the Constructive-Reflective Studies Category in 2005. He has held fellowships from the Watson, Danforth, and Fulbright Foundations and the National Endowment for the Humanities and was a 2000–2001 Guggenheim Fellow. He is completing a book on how critical scholars of religion and history may approach the real presence of supernatural figures in the lives of religious practitioners and is coediting a volume on the "lived history of Vatican II" that involves scholars from around the Catholic globe.





## Z. Fareen Parvez

*Prayers of Purification among Muslim Women in France*

Z. Fareen Parvez is an assistant professor of sociology at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. She received her PhD in sociology from the University of California at Berkeley and a master's in public policy from the University of Michigan.

Professor Parvez's comparative and ethnographic work explores the relationship between Islam and politics. Funded by several University of California grants and the National Science Foundation, she has conducted extensive participant observation among religious communities in the working-class suburbs of Lyon, France, and in poor neighborhoods and slums in Hyderabad, India. In 2011, her lead article in the journal *Qualitative Sociology*, "Debating the Burqa in France," received an award from the American Sociological Association, and it has been translated for publication in France. Her book, *Politicizing Islam*, is to be published by Oxford University Press.



## Rebekah Richert

*The Role of Prayer in the Development of Religious Cognitions*

Rebekah Richert is an associate professor in the Psychology Department at the University of California, Riverside. Dr. Richert received an International Research Postdoctoral Fellowship from the National Science Foundation (2006–11) to examine children's developing understanding of religious rituals.

Dr. Richert's research into the development of religious cognition has been published in leading journals in developmental psychology and cognitive science of religion and has been presented nationally and internationally. Her current research is on children's and adults' concepts of the soul.



## Don Seeman

*Existential Chabad:*

*Contemplative Prayer and Everyday Transcendence*

Don Seeman is an associate professor in the Department of Religion and the Tam Institute for Jewish Studies at Emory University. He is the author of *One People, One Blood: Ethiopian-Israelis and the Return to Judaism* (Rutgers University Press, 2009) and of numerous articles in the areas of ritual theory, phenomenological anthropology, and Jewish thought.

Professor Seeman is coeditor of the Contemporary Anthropology of Religion book series at Palgrave-Macmillan, and he convenes the Forum for the Ethnographic Study of Religion at Emory. His current book project, *Neighborhood Mystics: The Ethnography of Everyday Transcendence in Chabad-Lubavitch*, is supported by the Mind and Life Foundation and the Social Science Research Council's NDSP project. This spring he will host an international workshop at Emory on Ethnography and Textuality in Jewish Life.



## Emma-Kate Symons

*Freelance Journalist*

Emma-Kate Symons is an Australian journalist and opinion columnist who has reported from Sydney, New York, Washington, London, Paris, Bangkok, Manila, Jolo Island, Hanoi, and Karen State, Myanmar.

Ms. Symons's work on politics, economics, religion, and culture has been published in the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Australian*, the *Financial Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Atlantic*, *Quartz*, and *GlobalPost*. A fluent French speaker, she is writing a book on contemporary France. Her journalism has been translated in the French press, notably in *Le Monde's Courier International*.

Ms. Symons is also a regular radio and TV commentator (ABC, France 24, and Sky News). After two years of reporting from Paris, including as senior columnist and correspondent for the *Financial Review*, she moved to Washington, DC, but returns regularly to France for research and reporting.



## Stephen F. Teiser

*The Category of Prayer and the Study of Buddhism*

Stephen F. Teiser is D. T. Suzuki Professor in Buddhist Studies and a professor of religion and director of the interdepartmental Program in East Asian Studies at Princeton University. He is interested in the interaction between Buddhism as a pan-Asian tradition and the religions of China.

Professor Teiser's books include *The Ghost Festival in Medieval China* (Princeton University Press, 1988), *The Scripture on the Ten Kings and the Making of Purgatory in Medieval Chinese Buddhism* (University of Hawai'i Press, 1994), and *Reinventing the Wheel: Paintings of Rebirth in Medieval Buddhist Temples* (University of Washington Press, 2007). His current research focuses on the liturgical materials in a cache of early manuscripts written in Chinese and other Asian languages recovered from the town of Dunhuang (Gansu Province, China) on the edge of the Taklamakan Desert.




## Christine Wicker

*Freelance Journalist*

Christine Wicker is the author of six books, including *Lily Dale: The True Story of the Town That Talks to the Dead*, which was a Barnes & Noble Discover New Writers feature and a *New York Times* bestseller. A former reporter and columnist for the *Dallas Morning News*, she was a founding member of the newspaper's award-winning and much copied religion section in the 1990s. The Wilbur Award from the Religion Communicators Council is one of many awards she won for her reporting. Her blog for *Psychology Today—Pray for Me*—features posts of many different sorts on prayer.

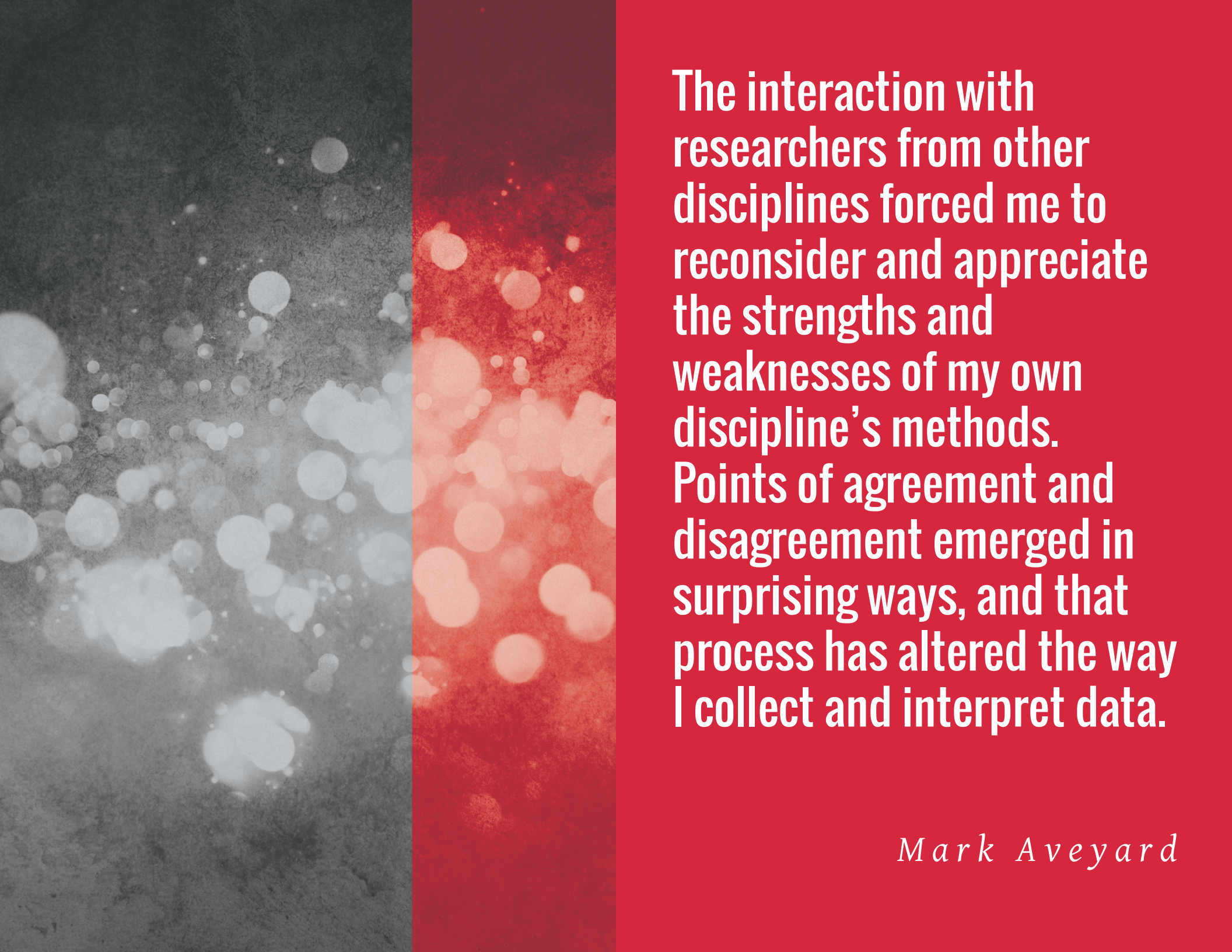




The range, experience, and insight of participants in the NDSP project profoundly enriched my work as a journalism fellow. Engaging thinkers and writers outside of my usual religious studies circles—psychologists, anthropologists, sociologists, et cetera—informed and challenged my own thinking and writing in ways I suspect I am only beginning to understand, but which I already value tremendously. I am grateful to have been part of such a robust and congenial community.

*Elizabeth Drescher*





The interaction with researchers from other disciplines forced me to reconsider and appreciate the strengths and weaknesses of my own discipline's methods. Points of agreement and disagreement emerged in surprising ways, and that process has altered the way I collect and interpret data.

*Mark Aveyard*

Reverberations

**Reverberations**, the digital presence of the NDSP project, was introduced in February 2013. The website was envisioned at the outset primarily as a place for NDSP grantees to share their work with a wider audience. But, with the help of former editorial consultant Steven Barrie-Anthony, it quickly grew into something broader, hosting thoughtful essays—written both by grantees and members of a larger scholarly community—on a wide range of topics. The following excerpts offer just a glimpse of the varied topics and approaches featured on the site.

## from “The Prayer Blog”

For different faith groups and individual believers, “prexting” [*praying* + *texting*] serves various purposes, and its mobilization is dictated by different contingencies. For example, among US-based African Pentecostals, with whom I enjoy some familiarity, prexting is sometimes necessitated by a desire to stay in touch with religious mentors with whom a trusting relationship has been established. In such cases, requests for prayer are often—and continuously—made and received through texting, whether as complement or alternative to oral communication. Of specific interest here are immigrants who trace their success in gaining travel visas to leave their countries of origin to the “special prayers” said by their pastors. . . . Prexting allows such individuals to nurture and lend solidity and immediacy to spiritual relationships whose quality might otherwise be attenuated by the constraints of space and time.

— **Ebenezer Obadare**, in “Prexting: Deepening and Extending Prayer Circuits via SMS”

## from “Essays and Exchanges”

**Dear Ms. Social-Cultural, dear Mr. Cognitive:**

We were intrigued to learn about your quarrel, and it reminded us of arguments we’ve had since we got involved in a new pursuit called the “History of Emotions.” . . . We love finding texts and images in archives and libraries and inferring structures of feeling from them.

But, once in a while, one of us catches what we call the “cognition bug.” He or she asks why we bother to write about different regions and epochs when human emotions are all based in physiology and neurology, and best studied through brain scans and controlled clinical trials. Old married couple that we are, this bug alternates between us. Whichever one of us doesn’t have it at a given moment tries to cheer up the one who does. Lately, we have found solace in a 2013 book on the history of emotions by German historian Ute Frevert, entitled *Vergängliche Gefühle* (Fleeting Feelings). The main thesis of the book is that . . . as Frevert puts it: “It is one thing to localize feelings in particular regions of the brain and to measure them, another to experience them consciously. Experience requires naming and designating.”

— **Sonja Luehrmann**, in “A Letter from Mr. and Mrs. Historian” (part of the discussion “Cognition and Culture, at It Again!”)

*In addition to essays, **Reverberations** also includes “Prayer in Wider Perspective,” a series of interviews in which NDSP grantees offer a glimpse into both their experiences and their wider research agendas.*

## from “Prayer in Wider Perspective”


*Steven Barrie-Anthony:* You run the childhood cognition lab at UC Riverside. I wonder what you’ve come across in your past research there that frames the research you’re doing right now for the SSRC’s New Directions in the Study of Prayer initiative?

*Rebekah Richert:* Two aspects of my other work inform the current study. The first deals with how children think about and learn to understand people’s intentions, what people mean to do by the way that they’re acting. As a graduate student, I worked with Angeline Lillard, who is an expert in how children interpret early pretending—how children learn about pretending, learn that a person is pretending, and come to engage in pretending interactions with people. That led to me being interested in how children understand religious ritual actions. These are not pretending actions, because they serve a particular function. Many are intended to cause some kind of supernatural effect on the world. But ritual actions also have characteristics that, on the surface, make them appear like they’re pretend. They’re more symbolic; they tend to carry more meaning than would a regular functional action, like, say, picking up a pen.

So, on the one hand, you can look at how children think about people’s intention behind ritual actions. But then, from the opposite end of the developmental process, these are also actions in which children themselves are actively engaged. And a lot of research on children’s pretending suggests that their engaging in pretending, particularly if it involves thinking abstractly and engaging in different types of social relationships, helps structure their cognitive development. Pretending helps us learn how to develop our imagination, to imagine abstractly, to move beyond being limited to thinking about the physical present reality. And I thought it might be interesting to research not only how children think about religious rituals, but how their actively engaging in these rituals structures their religious thinking.

— **Rebekah Richert**, “Children, Social Cognition, and the Divine”





*Like the NDSP project itself, **Reverberations** has encouraged innovative approaches to the study of prayer, examining it through a variety of disciplinary lenses. This is nowhere more apparent than in its “Prayer Portals” section, where visitors can find collections of resources and reflections curated by individual scholars, each providing an intellectually distinct entry into the study of prayer. NDSP grantee and curator of “The Materiality of Prayer” Anderson Blanton had this to say about the genre:*


**In many religious traditions, prayer is like a portal that opens a space of physical and spiritual communication between the sacred and the everyday. In similar ways, the prayer portals featured within *Reverberations* have organized productive new scholarly spaces to think about prayer and its relation to media technologies, sensory organizations, architectural environments, and devotional objects. As a postdoctoral fellow, the portals have not only given me the opportunity to interact with some of the most influential scholars in the field of religious studies, but they have generated a remarkable amount of publicity and public presence around my “Materiality of Prayer” project. The public exposure generated through these portals over the last two years has been crucial to my success as a young academic, and I am excited about the possibility of continuing these creative scholarly “openings” in the future.**

# from “The Prayer Portals”

To make spirit tangible is an audacious act, which perhaps speaks to how the prayerful play of transgression and transcendence may have less to do with longings for the real than for its opposite. Consequently, as a way of thinking more capaciously about prayer, I want to think more critically about the self-consciousness of sound’s deferred reality in the act of listening to vinyl. I want to consider the consideration of the medium of this particular sound—frequencies emanating forth from speakers, from the amplifier that has received electrical signals from the cartridge that has converted them from vibrations picked up by the stylus at the end of the tone arm, from the grooves in the shiny polyvinyl chloride disc that produce those vibrations, from the stamper that makes those grooves by way of a hydraulic press, from the grooved metal record known as the “mother” that is used to make the stamper, from the ridged, nickel-coated metal master that is used to make the metal record, from the lacquer placed on a cutting machine and cut according to the electric signals traveling to the cutting head from the master recording, from the mikes in the studio and the breath from the body, and so on.

I want to consider how this consideration might inspire a difference in how one studies prayer. Vinyl’s invitation (or is it a demand?) to experience the mediated expanse of sound while you listen shifts the burden of studying prayer, or anything else for that matter, from the analysis of objects or sources to the encounter with processes of rather hazy origin.

— John L. Modern, “Vinyl Prayers”

An abstract background featuring a grid of squares in various shades of gray, black, and red. The squares are arranged in a way that creates a sense of depth and texture, with some squares appearing more prominent than others. The overall effect is a complex, layered composition.

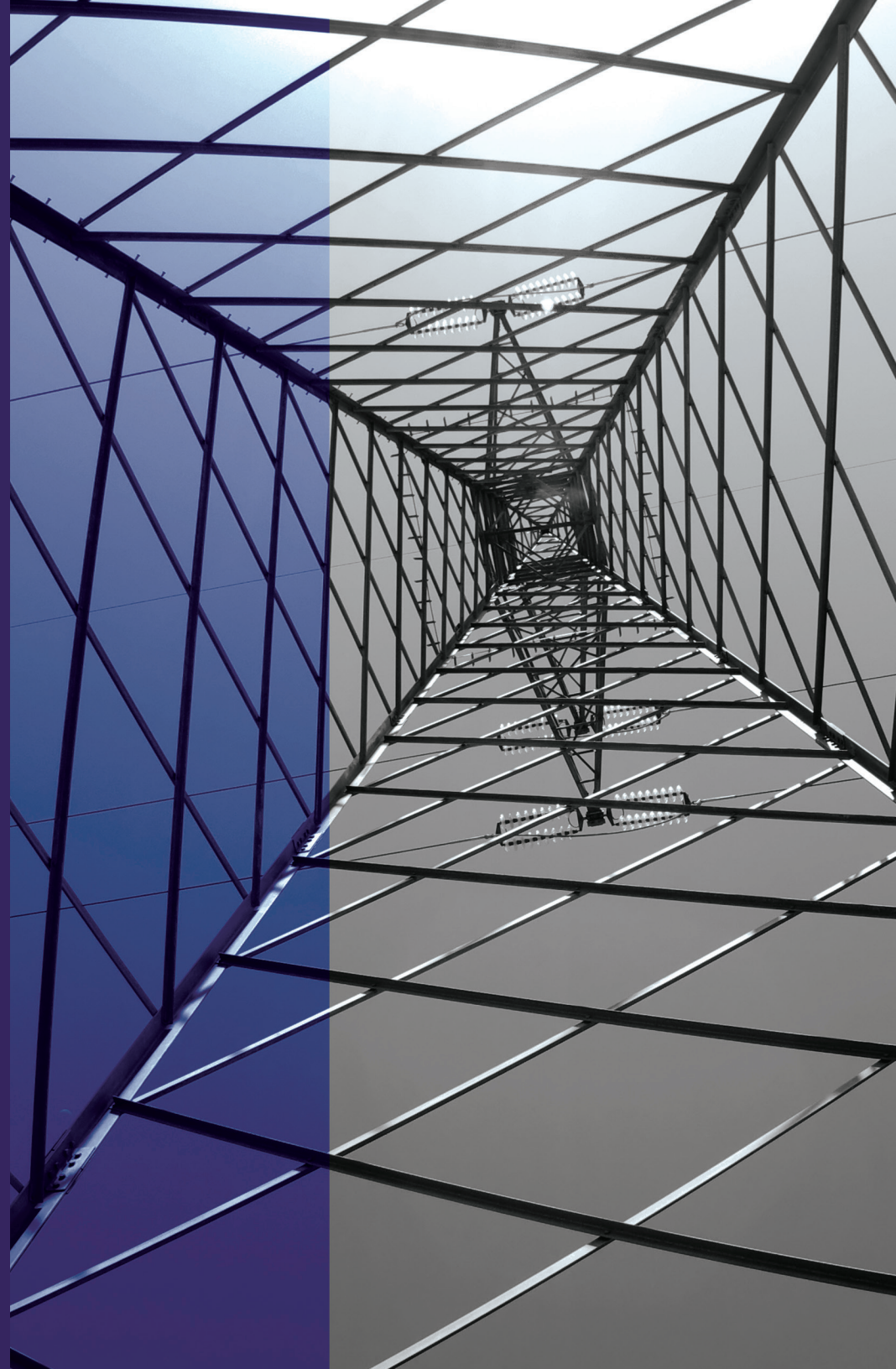
One of the most rewarding aspects of the NDSP project was the opportunity to interact closely with scholars from different disciplines within my working group. The cross-disciplinary synergy generated during these meetings expanded my conceptual horizons on the topic of prayer and also inspired me to explore other collaborative possibilities with scholars in such fields as psychology.

*Anderson Blanton*



For me, one of the most rewarding things about working with the NDSP project has been the interdisciplinary group discussion sessions. It has been a privilege to see colleagues' arguments developing from their material over the course of several meetings and learn from the way their analyses are shaped over time. It has also been very stimulating to engage in comparisons across the usual disciplinary boundaries. Both these aspects of our meetings have been uniquely helpful to me as I have worked on my own research project for the grant.

*Fenella Cannell*



Advisory  
Committee

# Courtney Bender

Courtney Bender is a professor of religion at Columbia University. Her research centers on the social and cultural processes that shape religious practice, experience, and interaction in contemporary American life. She is the author of *Heaven's Kitchen: Living Religion at God's Love We Deliver* (University of Chicago Press, 2003) and *The New Metaphysicals: Spirituality and the American Religious Imagination* (University of Chicago Press, 2010), as well as coeditor of several volumes, including *After Pluralism: Reimagining Models of Interreligious Engagement*, with Pamela Klassen (Columbia University Press, 2010), and *What Matters? Ethnographies of Value in a Not So Secular Age*, with Ann Taves (Columbia University Press, 2012).

Professor Bender's current research looks historically at the development of New York's modern art museums—or, as many put it, “secular temples”—and ethnographically at the messy and hiccupping articulation of modern aesthetic actors that take shape within them. She tweets at @achtungbender.

# Paul Bloom

Paul Bloom is the Brooks and Suzanne Ragen Professor of Psychology at Yale University. His research explores how children and adults understand the physical and social worlds, focusing especially on morality, religion, fiction, and art. Dr. Bloom has written for scientific journals such as *Nature* and *Science* and for popular outlets such as the *New York Times*, the *New Yorker*, and the *Atlantic*. He is the coeditor of *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, one of the major journals in biobehavioral and cognitive sciences, and the author of *Descartes' Baby* (Basic Books, 2004), *How Pleasure Works* (W. W. Norton and Company, 2010), and, most recently, *Just Babies: The Origins of Good and Evil* (Crown Publishers, 2013). He tweets at @paulbloomatyale.

## Anna M. Gade

Anna M. Gade is Vilas Distinguished Achievement Professor in the Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, where she is also a faculty affiliate of Religious Studies and Asian Studies. Her areas of study include traditions of global Islam, trends in religious revitalization in Muslim Southeast Asia, theory and method in the academic study of religion, and humanistic approaches to environmental studies. She is author of the books *Perfection Makes Practice: Learning, Emotion, and the Recited Qur'an in Indonesia* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2004) and *The Qur'an: An Introduction* (Oneworld Publications, 2010). Her current research and publications treat Islam and ecology and comparative Muslim religious environmentalism in Asian perspective. She is presently completing a book manuscript under the working title “Islam and the Environment.”

## Charles Hirschkind

Charles Hirschkind is an associate professor of anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley. His research interests include religious practice, media technologies, and emergent forms of political community in the urban Middle East and Europe. His book *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics* (Columbia University Press, 2006) was awarded the 2007–8 Sharon Stevens First Book Prize by the American Ethnological Society. He is also the coeditor (with David Scott) of *Powers of the Secular Modern: Talal Asad and His Interlocutors* (Stanford University Press, 2005). Other recent publications include the articles “Beyond Secular and Religious: An Intellectual Genealogy of Tahrir Square” (*American Ethnologist*, 2012), “Is There a Secular Body?” (*Cultural Anthropology*, 2011), and “Media, Mediation, Religion” (*Social Anthropology*, 2011).

Professor Hirschkind's current project is based in southern Spain and explores some of the different ways in which Europe's Islamic past inhabits its present, unsettling contemporary efforts to secure its Christian civilizational identity.

## Kevin L. Ladd

Kevin L. Ladd is an associate professor of psychology at Indiana University South Bend. His research mainly concerns the psychology of prayer and is outlined in the text *The Psychology of Prayer: A Scientific Approach* (Guilford, 2013), coauthored with Dr. Bernard Spilka. Professor Ladd's other projects explore the interface of science and religion with art, music, ritual, and magic.

## Hazel Rose Markus

Hazel Rose Markus is the Davis-Brack Professor in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford University. Her research examines how the self is shaped by the social world and how it organizes thought, feeling, and action.

Professor Markus is the author of many articles and coauthor of *Clash! 8 Cultural Conflicts that Make Us Who We Are* (Hudson Street Press, 2013), as well as a coeditor of *Emotion and Culture: Empirical Studies of Mutual Influence* (American Psychological Association, 1997), *Engaging Cultural Differences: The Multicultural Challenge in Liberal Democracies* (Russell Sage Foundation, 2002), *Just Schools: Pursuing Equality in Societies of Difference* (Russell Sage Foundation, 2008), *Doing Race: 21 Essays for the 21st Century* (W. W. Norton and Company, 2010), and *Facing Social Class: The Role of Societal Rank in Social Interaction* (Russell Sage Foundation, 2008). She was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1994 and in 2008 received the American Psychological Association's award for distinguished scientific contribution.

## Birgit Meyer

Birgit Meyer is a professor of religious studies in the Department of Religious Studies and Theology at Utrecht University, Germany. Her research focuses on the transformation of religion in our time and how scholarly work in religion is of eminent concern to understanding the shape of our world in the twenty-first century. Her publications include *Translating the Devil: Religion and Modernity among the Ewe in Ghana* (Edinburgh University Press, 1999) and the edited volumes *Religion, Media, and the Public Sphere*, with Annelies Moors (Indiana University Press, 2006); *Aesthetic Formations: Media, Religion, and the Senses* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); and *Things: Religion and the Question of Materiality*, with Dick Houtman (Fordham University Press, 2012).

Professor Meyer is vice chair of the International African Institute, London, a member of the Royal Dutch Academy of Arts and Sciences, and an editor of the journal *Material Religion: The Journal of Objects, Art, and Belief*. In 2010–11 she was a fellow at the Institute for Advanced Study (Wissenschaftskolleg), Berlin. In 2011 she received an Anneliese Maier research award from the Humboldt Foundation.

## Peter van der Veer

Peter van der Veer is director of the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity at Göttingen, Germany, and a university professor at large at Utrecht University. Professor van der Veer's research focuses on religion and nationalism in Asia and Europe. His major publications include *Gods on Earth* (LSE Monographs, 1988), *Religious Nationalism* (University of California Press, 1994), *Imperial Encounters* (Princeton University Press, 2001), and *The Modern Spirit of Asia* (Princeton University Press, 2013).

Professor van der Veer serves on the editorial boards of many journals, including *Public Culture*, *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, *Nations and Nationalism*, *Culture and Religion*, *Domains*, *Cultural Dynamics*, and *China in Comparative Perspective*.



# Diane Winston

Diane Winston holds the Knight Chair in Media and Religion at the Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism at the University of Southern California. Her expertise includes religion, politics, and news and entertainment media. Her current research interests are media coverage of non-Western religions and the role of the news media in shaping American identity and ideology. Her recent books are *The Oxford Handbook on Religion and the American News Media* (Oxford University Press, 2012) and *Small Screen, Big Picture: Television and Lived Religion* (Baylor University Press, 2009). She is currently working on *Heartland Religion: The American News Media and the Reagan Revolution* for Oxford University Press.

Between 1983 and 1995, Professor Winston covered religion for the *Raleigh News and Observer*, the *Dallas Times Herald*, the *Baltimore Sun*, and the *Dallas Morning News*. Her work has more recently appeared in the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Washington Post*, and *Religion Dispatches*. Professor Winston posts on religion and media on her website at [www.trans-missions.org](http://www.trans-missions.org).





The NDSP workshop meetings were a fantastic intellectual experience where we dialogued about some of the fundamental issues at stake in our research and learned about the disciplinary perspectives that both separated and united us. Thanks to the program, I revisited my field site in the working-class periphery in France and saw how some women there have fared in the aftermath of the ban on the burqa. Prayer and religious solidarity have given them great peace and solace.

*Z. Fareen Parvez*



One of the more heartening discoveries I made recently came from a group of Pentecostal theologians and practitioners from the United States and Latin America, working together as part of a global evangelical network. Their approach to prayer and the Spirit-filled life showed a deep engagement with global problems of exclusion and inequality and a clear sense that Pentecostalism needs an “integral mission” that addresses social justice and political inclusion. These voices stand in stark contrast to the exclusionary, and at times hate-filled, politics of malediction that “spiritual warfare prayer” can give rise to in the United States and elsewhere. Prayer, as both blessing and curse, reveals the enormous political potential of human speech, as well as its destructive vanity.

*Ruth Marshall*

SSRC  
Program  
Staff

## Current Staff

**Candace E. West** joined the SSRC in 2013 as program officer for Religion and the Public Sphere; she is also the managing editor of the religion program's digital projects, *Reverberations* and *The Immanent Frame*. Dr. West holds a PhD in religious studies from Stanford University, where her research and writing centered on religious ethics and storytelling.

Before joining the SSRC, West taught at Stanford, leading seminar courses on religion, ethics, literature, and cultural history. She has contributed to two volumes on popular media and continues to write on kyriarchy (a system of interconnected and overlapping relationships shaped by privilege and disadvantage) and representation in popular culture and public discourse.

**Taline Cox** is a program associate for Religion and the Public Sphere and an editorial associate for *Reverberations*. She graduated from Bryn Mawr College in 2010 with a BA in history and a minor in Growth and Structure of Cities, an urban studies program. She spent several months after graduation working with UNESCO in Dakar, Senegal, before coming to work at the SSRC.

**Wei Zhu** is a program associate for Religion and the Public Sphere and an editorial associate for *The Immanent Frame*. He graduated from Brown University with a BA in economics and international relations.

## Former Staff

**Jonathan VanAntwerpen** was the founding director of the SSRC's program on Religion and the Public Sphere. He is also the former editorial director for *Reverberations* and a founder and former editor in chief of *The Immanent Frame*.

Originally trained as a philosopher, Dr. VanAntwerpen received his doctorate in sociology from the University of California, Berkeley. He is coeditor of a number of books on secularism, religion, and public life, including *Habermas and Religion* (Polity, 2013), *The Post-Secular in Question* (NYU Press/SSRC, 2012), and *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere* (Columbia University Press/SSRC, 2011).

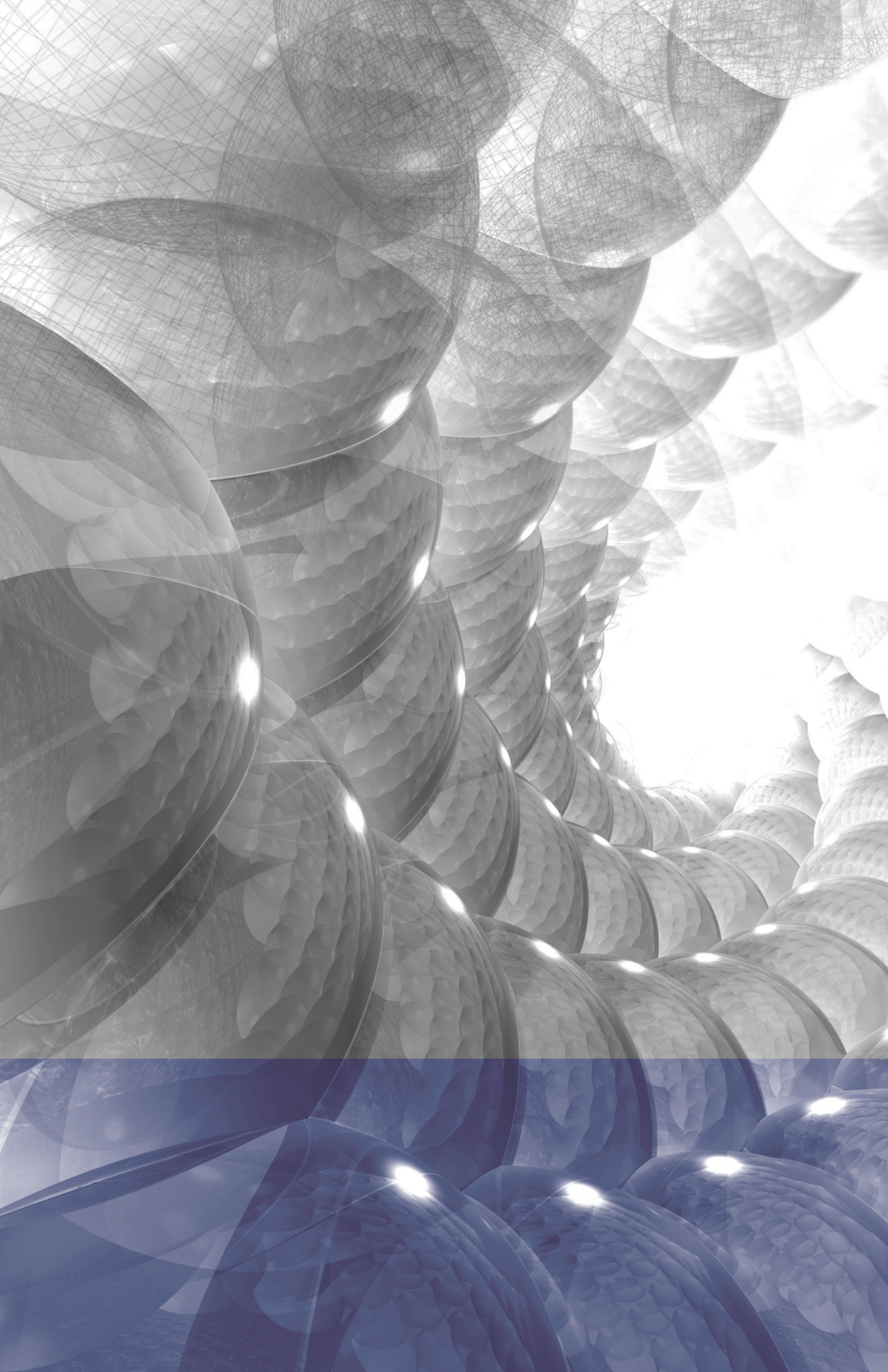
**Steven Barrie-Anthony** is a doctoral candidate in religious studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and a commentator on religion and spirituality. At the SSRC, Barrie-Anthony was a research associate for the program on Religion and the Public Sphere, a founding senior editor of *Reverberations*, and a contributing editor for *The Immanent Frame*. His research exploring creative spiritualities among the “spiritual but not religious,” religion and healing, and religion and the media has been published in several scholarly volumes, and his essays have run in such venues as *TheAtlantic.com* and *The Huffington Post*. He was formerly a staff writer with the *Los Angeles Times*.



Not only was this program about new directions in the study of prayer; to me it was about new kinds of prayer. It was extremely interesting to hear what my fellow grantees were researching. Particularly of interest was how prayer can be embodied and made physical, not just verbal. Perhaps most surprising was the prayer machine being studied by John Modern.

*Norris J. Chumley*





The project defined prayer in broader ways than I had previously thought of it. As exorcism. As dance. As imprecation. As song. As speaking in tongues. I noticed that people—traditional believers and not—pray, ask for prayer, and credit prayer far more frequently than I'd realized. Surprisingly, the great decline in formal belief may not have decreased the amount of private prayer nearly as much as might be assumed.

*Christine Wicker*



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**Social Science Research Council**

One Pierrepont Plaza, 15th Floor

300 Cadman Plaza West

Brooklyn, NY 11201 USA

P: 212-377-2700

F: 212-377-2727

E: [info@ssrc.org](mailto:info@ssrc.org)