



Cyber Zen: Imagining Authentic Buddhist Identity, Community, and Practices in the Virtual World of Second Life (Media, Religion and Culture)

By Gregory Price Grieve

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Cyber Zen ethnographically explores Buddhist practices in the online virtual world of Second Life. Does typing at a keyboard and moving avatars around the screen, however, count as real Buddhism? If authentic practices must mimic the actual world, then Second Life Buddhism does not. In fact, a critical investigation reveals that online Buddhist practices have at best only a family resemblance to canonical Asian traditions and owe much of their methods to the late twentieth-century field of cybernetics. If, however, they are judged existentially, by how they enable users to respond to the suffering generated by living in a highly mediated consumer society, then Second Life Buddhism consists of authentic spiritual practices.

Cyber Zen explores how Second Life Buddhist enthusiasts form communities, identities, locations, and practices that are both products of and authentic responses to contemporary Network Consumer Society. Gregory Price Grieve illustrates that to some extent all religion has always been virtual and gives a glimpse of possible future alternative forms of religion.

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- Sales Rank: #5553869 in Books
- Published on: 2016-12-19
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.90" h x .70" w x 6.00" l, .0 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 278 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

Cyber Zen is the first book-length ethnography of Buddhism practice in a virtual world. Grieve's book offers an innovative theoretical approach and a fascinating exploration of the intersection of digital media, Buddhism, and popular culture. This is a valuable study of importance to anyone interested in digital religion, religion and media, Buddhism, and contemporary religion. Erica Baffelli, University of Manchester, UK

About the Author

Gregory Price Grieve is Professor and Head of the Department of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. He researches and teaches at the intersection of digital media, Buddhism, and the theories and methods for the study of religion.

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