conceptions of “discourse.” Therefore, the authors agree that ideology encompasses more than conscious worldview and sectarian interests, and their attempts to move beyond false consciousness foregrounds how ideology infuses habitual behavior, is embodied in ritual performances, and is reified in the material and spatial sinews of social existence.

Nevertheless, the differing perspectives of the contributors still tend to align with one of these two traditions or with the third stream of ideology studies that perceives ideology as consisting of explicit and plural stances advancing the political interest of competing social factions. For many anthropologists, a practice becomes ideological when its iniquitous social effects are championed, challenged, or questioned, a viewpoint that differs from Engels’s original formulation that full knowledge of the relations of production would herald an end to ideology. Indeed, the more compelling chapters (Susan Alt, Susan Kus and Victor Raharijaona, Ruth Van Dyke) are those that mobilize a somewhat narrower conceptualization of the term, recognizing that not every practice is reducible to power, thus leaving room for other heuristics including culture, memory, and related structuring dispositions not directly related to the reproduction of inequalities. Thus, many of the authors treat ideology as a conscious struggle over the production of meaning, while still recognizing that the taken-for-granted contours of social life set the preconditions for political conflict (Uzi Baram, Matthew David Cochran and Paul Mullins, Christopher Matthews and Kurt Jordan). Susan Kus and Victor Raharijaona demonstrate, for instance, that the ideological valence of the traditional house of the Malagasy Highlands differed significantly within changing social contexts.

On the whole, the authors successfully demonstrate that the analytical power of ideology lies in its protean meanings and applications. Vicente Lull and colleagues argue that Colin Renfrew’s theory on the emergence of megalithic monuments in Atlantic Europe betrays the influence of capitalist ideology. However, Renfrew was unlikely conscious of the capitalist biases underlying his explanation that scarcity, competition, and demographic pressure underwrote the construction of the megaliths, revealing the difficulty of reducing the ideological simply to conscious struggles over beliefs and values. The same could be said of Reinhardt Bernbeck and Randall McGuire’s critique of post-processual archaeologists’ elevation of agency and practice as founded on neoliberal ideologies of consumer choice—a thought-provoking but perhaps not entirely fair characterization. Kathleen Sterling’s fascinating chapter on how archaeologists have tended to reduce Paleolithic hunter-gatherers to rationalizing homo economicus provides yet another example of how capitalist ideologies have compromised archaeological inference. As further intimated by Ruth Van Dyke, archaeologists obsessed with the agency of things are perhaps guilty of fetishizing commodities in the classic sense of Marx and Georg Lukács. In this vein, and to subject a few of the chapters to their own ideological critique, Susan Pollock’s argument that decorated female figurines resisted Akkadian conquest in Susiana poses the danger of essentializing past social difference in terms of present-day ideological conflicts, thus eliding the historical particulars of Mesopotamian identity politics. Bettina Arnold similarly examines Hallstatt funerary rites as expressive of competition and agonistic political contests, a viewpoint that disregards other possibilities, including cosmologies of death and sacred landscapes in Iron Age Europe. In fact, Bernbeck and McGuire’s amplification of ideology to encompass all domains of social practice demonstrates how archaeological interpretations are invariably conditioned by the historical context in which they are formulated—an overarching thesis of the collective articles. To be sure, the tremendous force of capitalist ideology should not blind us to the existence of alternate (and perhaps not so overdetermined) political worlds.

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Emerging Evangelicals: Faith, Modernity, and the Desire for Authenticity


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Emerging Evangelicals is an ethnographic portrait of a network of Christians seeking “authentic faith,” who want to avoid the pitfalls of commodification within evangelical culture. James Bielo defines an “Emerging Evangelical” as one who participates in the “cultural critique” of “mainstream” evangelicalism as overly consumerist and focused on megachurches, while preferring small communities that foster “authentic” relationships within churches, families, and neighborhoods. Recounting narratives of “deconversion” from conservative
evangelicalism, Bielo traverses a loose urban network of largely white, middle-class, urban, male clergy who moved to Cincinnati with a mission.

Bielo focuses on three characteristics of emerging evangelicalism: (1) drawing from the Christian past to create an “ancient-future” approach to ritual and worship; (2) a “missional” mapping and inhabiting of local neighborhoods as spaces of everyday labor for Christ’s “Kingdom”; and (3) “church planting” based on a model of a young, married man who, with his wife’s help, settles into a neighborhood to lead a house church, an after-school program, or a conventional church. Bielo offers fine-grained descriptions of several emerging evangelicals, arguing that their cultural critique is part of a deep-rooted “dialogic” Christianity.

Bielo describes his approach as “person-centered ethnography,” in which he avoids granting agency to concepts such as habitus or ideology in a commitment to the premise that “cultures do not act; people, individually and collectively, do” (p. 27). Granting autonomy to the people one is studying makes sense, but too much of a theoretical commitment to individual agency could be read as an evangelical Protestant conviction in itself. Evangelicals such as Billy Graham and Martin Luther King Jr. advanced bold cultural critiques; however, their theological arguments, rhetorical gifts, and communal dreams were never external to formations that one might call ideology, gender, or habitus.

Bielo depicts emerging evangelicals as critics focused on megachurch evangelicalism as their Other; their critical targets also include capitalist consumerism, cities versus suburbs, white privilege, and liturgical memory. Showing their engagement with these cultural and theological critiques, Bielo pays less attention to their critical disinterest in other cultural formations, such as masculine heterosexual authority and the missiological conviction to convert Cincinnati to the reign of Christ. To balance his interest in agency above cultural formations, Bielo might have drawn on literature on religion and subject formation to set the critical choices of the “evangelical person” within particular prescriptive regimes.

Bielo shows that emerging evangelicals hope to bring the “Kingdom of God” to Cincinnati by mapping, walking, and inhabiting the local. Many had taken a “vow of stability” under which they committed to stay in Cincinnati for the duration of their lives, hoping that this commitment would help challenge the “racial dystopia” of the urban United States (p. 155). According to one church planter: “My job is to find out what these people’s deepest fears are. And my job is to find out what their greatest hopes are. And then I need to show them why Christ is more that either one of those” (p. 187). Interestingly, the entrepreneurial mapping these church planters do when writing “proposals” for mission funding from national organizations echoes 19th-century Christian missions to Ohio discussed by Amy DeRogatis in Moral Geography (2003). In both cases, maps were at once imperial and evangelical, providing a blueprint for why the previous inhabitants needed to change or move aside.

Bielo paints an image of emerging evangelicals as white men with neat beards, gentle voices, and “tattoos displayed conspicuously on muscular arms” (pp. 144, 159). Some embody a “hyper-masculinity” (p. 158) that reflects their theology of gender “complementarianism” in which the New Testament ordains men as leaders in church and home. Bielo suggests that their conservative view of gender is softened by their perpetual state of “ironic” emerging, as their hypermasculinity “becomes a resource for reflexive, self-deprecating humor” (p. 159). Exploring the limits of this self-deprecation would be revealing. For example, detailing the “incarnational” approach to monastic-inspired community of Kevin, a house church pastor, Bielo discusses Kevin’s blog, subtitled “Unpimp and remonk.” Left unremarked is that Kevin, a married man, has chosen two extremes of masculine sexuality—the pimp who sells access to women’s sexuality and the monk who forbids all access to his own sexual pleasure—to represent his “authentic” faith.

Emerging Evangelicals provoked this question for me: What is cultural critique? Defining emerging evangelicals via their commitment to critique the conservative evangelicalism that bore them, Bielo shows this is a complicated family drama. He might have gone further in setting these family battles in a wider historical and cultural compass. Gaining anthropological perspective on the tensions and contradictions within any cultural critique requires a willingness to go beyond the immanent critique that one’s interlocutors practice without forgetting one’s own critical limits. Bielo goes partway to acknowledging his proximity to his subjects (p. 139), and it would have been helpful to learn more. That said, Emerging Evangelicals demonstrates how understanding particular Christianities as traditions of cultural critique can clarify their fraught relations with “worldliness” both within and without the church. Accessibly written and relatively compact, the book would be appropriate for undergraduate classes focused on anthropological approaches to Christianity in North America.

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