

This book provides a new sociological account of contemporary religious phenomena such as channelling, holistic healing, meditation and divination, which are usually classed as part of a New Age Movement. Drawing on his extensive ethnography carried out in the UK, alongside comparative studies in America and Europe, Matthew Wood criticises the view that such phenomena represent spirituality in which self-authority is paramount. Instead, he emphasises the role of social authority and the centrality of spirit possession, linking these to participants' class positions and experiences of secularisation.

Informed by sociological and anthropological approaches to social power and practice, especially the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault, Wood's study explores what he calls the nonformative regions of the religious field, and charts similarities and differences with pagan, spiritualist and Theosophical traditions.

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