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*Architects of Buddhist Leisure: Socially Disengaged Buddhism
in Asia's Museums, Monuments, and Amusement Parks* by Justin
Thomas McDaniel (review)

Manuel Lopez

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Grieve's claim that deficits in personal relationships seemed to lead residents to participate in Second Life.

Innovative virtual world spiritualities are likely to increase. With his deep understanding of traditional Buddhism and cybernetics, Grieve is well equipped as a guide through this dynamic intersection of Zen and digital media. We need more studies like this one to understand digital spirituality both in terms of contemporary culture and the evolution of religion.

Calvin Mercer, East Carolina University

Architects of Buddhist Leisure: Socially Disengaged Buddhism in Asia's Museums, Monuments, and Amusement Parks. By Justin Thomas McDaniel. University of Hawai'i Press, 2017. 240 pages. \$68.00 cloth; \$28.00 paper; ebook available.

Justin McDaniel's book *Architects of Buddhist Leisure*, the first in the new Contemporary Buddhism series from University of Hawai'i Press, is a study of the often overlooked daily leisure activities that take place at certain monuments, parks, and museums all across the Buddhist world, as part of what the author cleverly calls "socially disengaged Buddhism." Sites such as the Suôi Tiên Amusement Park in Vietnam, or the Sendai Daikannon in Japan, are not what scholars have traditionally considered religious spaces, since they are neither temples nor monasteries; but they are not entirely secular either, despite the fact that many of these sites include restaurants, as well as shopping and entertainment opportunities, such as amusement parks and karaoke bars.

One of the main goals of McDaniel's book is, in fact, to make the case for a reexamination of what he argues is the traditional (and often artificial) scholarly distinction between the secular and the sacred. Most studies of contemporary Buddhism focus on what academics deem "important" or "serious" religious topics, such as doctrine, scripture, or ritual practice, which have a tendency to present Buddhism as a religion that rejects desire and pleasure, and that is more concerned with the karmic consequences of actions than in their enjoyment. McDaniel makes a convincing argument for the importance of introducing leisure studies as part of a broader understanding of how Buddhists actually live and practice religion in their daily lives. In his own words, he wants to reclaim "the joy of Buddhists—the sensuous, the entertaining, and beautiful aspects of Buddhist life that can be overlooked in attempts to get at 'actual Buddhism'" (ix).

In order to make his case, McDaniel offers three main arguments, that will also be the lenses through which he will explore three different Buddhist leisure sites. First, McDaniel argues that the locations

researched in his book highlight the importance of public religious culture, as well as the relevance of leisure and spectacle in contemporary Buddhist countries. Visitors go to these sites not to pray (although they might), but to enjoy Buddhist culture. One of the main characteristics of these places is that they are “fun,” a word we do not usually see in religious studies books, and a term that McDaniel wants to reclaim in our study of Buddhism.

Second, the sites discussed in the book reflect the needs of a growing Buddhist ecumenical movement that is the result of globalization. As part of this ecumenical culture, these sites attract Buddhists as well as non-Buddhists, and are “designed to delight.” These are pleasant spaces that appeal more to the emotions than to the intellect. For McDaniel, and for anyone who takes a look at recent publications on contemporary Buddhism, these

affective encounters at Buddhist ecumenical leisure places are a neglected part of Buddhist daily life that have been excised from scholarly studies because they fall on the wrong side of the secular-religious divide. These affective encounters are a type of Buddhist learning, more accessible and common than ethical arguments, philosophical treatises, and doctrinal formulations (24).

Finally, McDaniel argues for what he calls the “local optima,” or the complex set of interactions and intersections between the original designs and ideas for these places as envisioned by their creators, and the ways in which they are actually enjoyed and lived by their visitors. McDaniel’s conclusion is that these sites have a natural tendency to settle for “small goods,” instead of “optimal perfects” as originally envisioned, and he sees that as the strength and power of these sites, and not as a weakness.

McDaniel explores these arguments in three different chapters, each of them focused on a particular type of leisure place. The first one explores monuments and memorials, paying special attention to the Lumbini Memorial Park in Nepal, designed by Japanese architect Kenzo Tange in the 1970s. Although the park was originally intended to be a monument to celebrate Buddhism as one of the great world religions, the site has been taken over and enjoyed by people in ways that are very different from those originally planned, becoming a venue for leisure and family activities more than a place of worship.

The second chapter focuses on historical and amusement parks, highlighting the work of Lek and Braphai Wiriyaphan, a wealthy married Thai couple who created the Sanctuary of Truth and the Ancient City in central Thailand. These are both examples of leisure spaces designed by and for laypeople that employ spectacle and entertainment in their quest to attract and delight visitors.

Finally, the third chapter deals with museums, paying close attention to the Venerable Shi Fa Zhao's efforts to build a museum (the Nagapusa Buddhist Culture Museum) as part of a multipurpose temple in Singapore that hosts a tooth relic of the Buddha. For McDaniel, this museum is a perfect example of his "local optima" concept, a place in which Shi Fa Zhao and the architects and curators responsible for the museum had to "sacrifice the instructive power of religious art to the affective experience of visiting a museum." They eschewed "explicit agendas and allow visitors to leisurely experience Buddhist distraction" (161).

Overall, the book operates, as McDaniel himself acknowledges, as an introductory work to leisure within the contemporary Buddhist world, filled with suggestions and examples of how these types of studies can reframe traditional understandings in the religious studies field of the relationship between the religious and the secular, the public and the private. Not a bad place to get started.

Manuel Lopez, New College of Florida

Alan Watts—In the Academy: Essays and Lectures. Edited and with an Introduction by Peter J. Columbus and Donadrian L. Rice. State University of New York Press, 2017. xii + 378 pages. \$95.00 cloth; \$31.95 paper; ebook available.

Alan Watts (1915–1973) was one of the earliest western promoters of Zen Buddhism, Taoism, consciousness expansion, and the perennial philosophy. His groundbreaking, idiosyncratic books, articles, radio broadcasts, and public appearances made him a leading figure in the emerging U.S. counterculture of the 1950s and 1960s. He was on the cutting edge of nearly every spiritual development—from the popular embrace of Asian philosophical thought to LSD mysticism to the human potential movement, transpersonal psychology and beyond. Whatever the movement, Watts was there first, as a participant, advocate, and often critic. He appeared to know and interact with every leading figure in the alternative spirituality milieu and, as this book demonstrates, he cut a larger-than-life figure on university campuses as well. Many impressionable young seekers embraced Watts as a reliable guide in the quest for expanded consciousness and greater awareness, trusting his analysis and swayed by his persuasive, accessible style. His influence was extraordinary.

Watts styled himself a "philosophical entertainer," a term he invented for his own career path. Though "serious" Asian scholars dismissed him as a popularizer, with a weak grasp of Asian languages and a flexible concern for historical accuracy, Watts was nonetheless extremely erudite and something of a polymath, as this book of collected talks and essays demonstrates.