

BOOK REVIEW

GRIMES, RONALD L. *The Craft of Ritual Studies*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. xviii+414 p. ISBN 978-0-19-530142-7 (hardcover).

The Craft of Ritual Studies is a book in which Ronald L. Grimes, one of the most original and pioneering thinkers in the cross-disciplinary field of ritual studies, synthesizes his thinking on the subject matter. The choice of the word in the book title the 'craft' of ritual studies is telling. Grimes explains his approach to the reader:

Some who study ritual consider their labor a science; others regard it as an art. However, I've come to consider ritual studies a craft. Craft is art's practical-minded, hands-on, manual-labourer cousin. (...) To treat ritual studies as a manual art, an activity of the hands, arises from a conviction that theorizing, like ritualizing, is inescapably embodied (pp. 4–5).

Following this ethos, Grimes takes his reader to a journey to the world of the study of ritual. And his order is not the most typical in the genre of handbook. He starts with the method of fieldwork, then moves to describe his case, the Santa Fe Fiesta in New Mexico, and finally ends with theory and an autobiographical note.

Each of the three parts is rich in detail, yet written in an accessible manner. This said, *The Craft of Ritual Studies* is a highly recommendable book for any junior or senior student of ritual regardless of the disciplinary background. Grimes walks the reader through the different phases of the study of ritual starting with preparing to enter the field and

ending with issues of publishing and presenting one's empirical work for the academic and wider public audience. The book invites students to think about their basic assumptions of fieldwork and the role of theory and method in research. For a scholar and teacher of ritual, Grimes' book offers important and valuable material to refresh and rethink one's own view of the state of the art in the field of ritual studies.

I personally most enjoyed Part III on theory, in which Grimes discusses the many meanings and functions of theory in ritual studies by taking the reader into the fundamental basics of the study of ritual. In line with the hands-on ethos of the book his theory section provides numerous useful analytical distinctions (e.g. classifications, components, modes, actors, time, place, dynamics) that help students of ritual to advance their theoretical thinking about the subject matter: its elements, meanings and workings in a given context. By doing this work, the book also reminds the reader about the blind spots and limitations every approach conveys, hence it encourages the maintenance of a reflective and a critical position towards any approach or school of thought.

As in many handbook-style written academic texts, *The Craft of Ritual Studies* does not go very deeply into specifics in explaining historical and contemporary academic debates on ritual form and function and the competing schools of thought around these key issues. This is not the book for advanced scholars. But

it is certainly one that helps beginners as well as more senior students of ritual to navigate the field in a highly useful manner. *The Craft of Ritual Studies* is, indeed, a book written by a scholar that has left a mark in the field of ritual studies. It is a legacy with which one can agree or disagree, but it is certainly a heritage not to be treated with indifference.

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