



Ritual Criticism: Case Studies in Its Practice, Essays on Its Theory

Ronald L. Grimes

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This book takes an interdisciplinary approach to a topic seldom written about: the evaluation of rites. Enacting ritual and thinking critically are often imagined as mutually exclusive activities, but *Ritual Criticism* demonstrates their complementarity by presenting case studies in which ritual and criticism require one another. The cases are drawn from contemporary, urban, North American social contexts in which specific rites are undergoing evaluation, interpretation, or revision. The cases eventuate in essays, more theoretical treatments of critical issues in ritual studies. The rituals studied are as varied as the strategies utilized. The diversity of approaches illustrates the ways criticism shifts as types of ritual vary. One rite is a traditional liturgy; another is invented rather than traditional; a third is a hybrid ritual drama; and in a fourth instance the ritualization is so tacit that some would deny that it is ritual at all. Many of the contexts that provide data for the chapters are typified by syncretism, the eclectic mixing and matching of ritual elements from diverse traditions. Other examples involve attempts to engage in ritual invention and experimentation. The essays are likewise diverse, taking readers into territories traditionally the purview of several disciplines. Drama, literature, education, psychology, medicine, archaeology, anthropology, philosophy, and theology are traversed in this effort to understand ritual, an unusually complex genre of human activity.

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