
BOOK REVIEW

Stewart, Pamela J. and Andrew Strathern. 2014. *Ritual: Key Concepts in Religion*. London: Bloomsbury. x + 171pp. ISBN: 9781441137296 £79.00 (hbk); ISBN: 9781441185693 £18.99 (pbk); ISBN: 9781623568467 £18.99 (e-pub).

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Ritual: Key Concepts in Religion is a comprehensive reader concerned with ritual studies from a variety of disciplines, yet privileging anthropological approaches, which have in turn been some of the most influential to this field of study. Pamela Stewart and Andrew Strathern, who set out to offer a review of essential literature in the study of ritual, take a helpful diachronic perspective and skilfully present some of the main developments and debates that have shaped the field of ritual studies and religious studies more generally.

In their Introduction, the authors discuss Roy Rappaport and Catherine Bell's approaches to ritual and identify some of the key concepts in this area of study, such as meaning, tradition, innovation, performance and embodiment. They refer to Rappaport's discussion of rituals as aesthetic acts or as a special, stylized, form of communication. The authors then present some key points from Catherine Bell's work, particularly her concept of "ritualization," as a way of acting and exerting or expressing power. This exposition includes an in-depth discussion of Rappaport's fieldwork among the Tsembaga, a small group of people living in Papua New Guinea. However, the choice of the two approaches to set the scene for the book is not fully justified until the end of the book when the authors return to Rappaport and his bold claim that ritual and religion "played a key role in humanity's evolutionary adaptiveness" (p. 118).

The study follows with a review of some of the key theorists in the field of anthropology such as James Frazer, Arnold van Gennep, Emile Durkheim, Bronislaw Malinowski, Alfred Radcliffe-Brown and Franz Boas. The authors highlight important aspects of the theories they present, pointing to the broader intellectual context of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, that of cultural and social evolution. They discuss some key criticisms to the cultural evolution model, including critiques from contemporaries like Franz Boas. Whilst they focus on ritual, they also cover other important debates and concepts which are integral to the discussion, such as magic and religion. This is an ambitious section of the book, in which the authors manage to illuminate different layers of the debate as well as the relevance of these theories for future understandings of primitive vs. modern mentalities, or literate and pre-literate societies.

The following two chapters cover Victor Turner and Meyer Fortes, both key theorists in ritual studies. Turner's "structure and process" ritual model is explained through the lens

of his fieldwork among the Ndembu people. The authors show how an analysis of Ndembu's complex social structure helped Turner observe that "rituals knit together what was torn asunder by the contradictions inherent in the kinship field of relations" (p. 52). Among other theoretical insights, his development of the concept of liminality and his understanding of ritual as a means of resolving conflicts are examined in depth. The authors insightfully point to other influential concepts in Turner's work, such as Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's notion of "flow" as "a harmonious stream of action that is autotelic," meaning that "it does not need goals outside of itself" (p. 56). Meyer Fortes's functionalist approach, of ritual as a means of controlling hostility and aggression, is discussed in the context of scholarly work on ancestor worship and sacrifice. This section ends with a discussion of other approaches to animal sacrifices and sacrificial offerings, such as those of René Girard, E. E. Evans-Pritchard, Walter Burkert and Kathryn McClymond.

Having established a solid platform for their incursion in ritual studies, Stewart and Strathern follow with three important chapters concerned with an examination of contemporary approaches to ritual analysis; debates concerned with performance and performativity; and, finally, cognitive approaches in ritual explorations. They propose "secrecy in ritual practices" as an important aspect in this field and discuss this theme in the scholarship of Bernard Juillerat, Alfred Gell and Donald Tuzin. The authors observe that "secrecy is a way of producing and storing power" (p. 80) which can be made "operational" through the actions of ritual itself. Next, the authors turn to the concepts of performance and performativity, beginning with Ronald Grimes's application of J. L. Austin's concept of speech acts and his typology of ritual acts, which can fail and include "hitches, insincerities, violations, breaches, glosses and flops" (p. 92). This is perhaps cognate with Bourdieu's concept of misrecognition in ritual, discussed further in the book, by which ritual becomes "a collective act of self-deception" (p. 98). The authors draw on Susanna Rostas's distinction between performativity and ritualization, showing that the concept of performativity is related to Catherine Bell's ritualization, yet whilst the latter "is the process of embodiment that produces ritual action," performativity has to do with effects, as Rostas emphasizes, "strong aesthetic effects" (p. 93).

Throughout the book the authors discuss many other important texts and contributors to ritual studies, such as Jonathan Z. Smith, Tim Ingold, Bruno Latour, and many others. Stewart and Strathern discuss some of their own work, such as their analysis of the "moka" exchanges in the Papua New Guinea Highlands and their research into rituals in Taiwan on temple renewal rituals and disaster rituals. In their concluding remarks Stewart and Strathern offer a model which sees ritual as a means of framing (new) values. They robustly claim that it is not that "rituals express social values but rather that they are instrumental in making them, bringing them about. Initiations do not express a value of gendered maturity, they create that value with the ritual" (p. 126). Quite simply Stewart and Strathern's *Ritual: Key Concepts in Religion* is an indispensable review in ritual studies, richly illustrated and enhanced by new theoretical insights.