The Craft of Ritual Studies deserves a place on the bookshelf of any student or scholar interested in the topic, because this book is written as a practical manual for a craft, that is, ritual studies, and because ritual studies is of vital significance for the study of religion in particular and humanities and social sciences in general. Ritual studies is a field of inquiry where multiple disciplines meet to examine our “embodied, condensed, and prescribed enactment” (196) in order to unpack the cultural assumptions this enactment presupposes and the sociopolitical consequences it generates.

I recommend Grimes’s book, the consummate work of a leading scholar’s lifetime engagement, to graduate students and junior faculty in particular. For them, as inspiring as the argument presented in the book are the author’s witty anecdotes, careful deliberations, and critical reflections. The generous spirit of the author is no less impressive than the intellectual rigor of his book, which extends an invitation to its reader and provides him/her with encouragement, provocation, and hands-on guidance. Since Grimes sees research as a ritual, in addition to his insights into this particular subject, his experience of researching rituals and teaching ritual studies prepares young academics for the field most broadly construed.

Moreover, when we focus on religious studies, the question of religion, which is not a given but always in the process of being (re)made, has gripped the attention of the world. The modern, Western, Protestant category of religion has been critically interrogated and can no longer be treated as transhistorically and cross-culturally applicable. The category of the secular has been revealed as co-emergent and interdependent with its alleged opposite, religion, and cannot be taken for granted either. The center of religious studies has shifted from belief to practices, from apolitical, privatized, interiorized piety to embodied ritual practices that are conditioned by specific context and in turn shape our individual and collective lives. Hence no one in the field of religious studies can afford to ignore the basics of and advancements in ritual studies.

A timely publication, The Craft of Ritual Studies meets the needs of beginners and offers itself as a reservoir of resources from a seasoned expert. The book consists of ten chapters, which are neatly divided into three parts: method (chaps. 1–3), cases (chaps. 4–5), and theory (chaps. 6–10). Part 1 begins with laying out the method of studying rituals. Part 2 proceeds to present a case study, that is, the Santa Fe Fiesta of New Mexico. Part 3 concludes the book by theorizing ritual in general. It is worth highlighting that the book is supplemented with online videos and other materials for the reader’s convenience.

Students getting ready to enter the field, the field of both ritual performance and ritual studies, will not be disappointed by part 1, which is an indispensable handbook. It introduces an entire set of procedures: “applying for grants, clearing ethics review boards, operating recording devices, conducting interviews, reading texts, analyzing data, writing books, editing video, and making multimedia presentations” (12). More specifically, chapter 1 tells the stories of John Bourke, a nineteenth-century forerunner of ritual studies, and of Ronald Grimes, author of the book. Chapter 2 explains how to get prepared for fieldwork and how to observe ritual actions and interview ritual actors. Chapter 3 deals with post-fieldwork, including writing, publication, presentation, and video making.

Part 2, both the two written chapters and the corresponding audiovisual materials available online, turns out to be an extremely helpful mini-textbook for religious studies courses not necessarily focused on ritual, such as “Theory and Method in Religious Studies” or “American Religions.” Chapter 4 is an expository text coupled with seven online videos that Grimes made of the 2007 Santa Fe Fiesta. Chapter 5 presents the complex interreligious, cross-cultural, and transatlantic history behind the fiesta. Grimes begins his historical survey with the geopolitics of Hispanic Catholicism in eighth-century Spain, long before the Spanish conquests of Mexico and New Mexico in the sixteenth century. He then considers the conflicts between Spanish colonizers and local Indians in New Mexico in the late seventeenth century, the enactment of the fiesta in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and how it was reinvented in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries as an American pageant.

The theory part of the book consists of five chapters, with chapter 6 theorizing theory, chapter 7 defining and classifying ritual, and chapter 8 studying the cultural location of ritual by comparing it with sports, music, and theater. According to Grimes, “method is how you operationalize theory; theory is how you rationalize method; and cases are either the basis or outcome of the interaction” (169). The three parts of the book form a full circle when chapters 9 and 10 conceptualize the elements and dynamics of ritual and propose a theory that is a “set of generalizations, key concepts, root metaphors, and determinative vocabulary that animate the characteristic moves of one’s method” (170).

The third and last part is well developed and thoughtful but least satisfying. Since the author acknowledges that the enactment of ritual is not fixed but fluid and that students usually cherry-pick multiple theories, I wonder...
whether it might be counterproductive to construct a more comprehensive and coherent theoretical model from one particular case and to explain and legitimize the method with which the case has been studied. The book, to my disappointment, is structured more as a closed circle than an open-ended process. For instance, although Grimes reads several classic scholarly definitions of ritual in chapter 7, I am curious to learn how he would evaluate the most recent scholarship on rituals practiced in non-Christian religions and non-Western cultures and assess a range of methods, cases, and theories for his reader. Last but not least, instead of classifying rituals into religious and nonreligious, Grimes could have highlighted how ritual performances have contributed to the drawing and negotiation of the boundaries between “religious” and “secular” and how these shifting boundaries have affected the enactment of rituals and affected the history of ritual studies.

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In 1973 Ronald Grimes, newly minted PhD, conducted fieldwork on the Santa Fe Fiesta in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Nearly forty years later, Grimes revisited Santa Fe to further examine the Fiesta rituals. The result of said research, coupled with knowledge garnered from four decades as a "student of ritual," is presented in The Craft of Ritual Studies. Craft is a welcome addition to Oxford University Press's Ritual Studies Series. In Craft, Grimes uses the Fiesta as the backdrop for a consideration of method and theory in ritual studies.

Part 1—Method—prepares one for fieldwork on ritual. In chapter 1, "Performing Research and Teaching," Grimes introduces the idea that method, case, and theory make up a dynamic whole, carefully crafted by the researcher (11). Grimes discusses the way the researcher and teacher of ritual is embedded in a complex process of interactions: "Academic research is not only analytical; it is also narrative and performative. By transposing ritual into data, scholars exercise ceremonial power by stepping back, then up into positions of academic authority" (22–23).

Chapter 2, "Fieldworking Ritual," provides the field-worker with practical, often overlooked, information by reflecting on the nature of participant observation: "It is almost impossible to observe without participating, especially if you observe for long or repeatedly. Researching, you are at first an outsider, but researching attentively bends the body forward" (45). The push for reflexive anthropology continues throughout Craft.

In chapter 3, "Reading, Writing, and Mediatizing Ritual," Grimes discusses the embedded nature of rituals, as it is the researcher's task to unpack and interact with the data, a process that results in the interpretations of the ritual. For Grimes, ritual criticism is informed by literary and film criticism and, as an interpretative task, approaches ritual from multiple angles (73).

Part 1 provides the necessary orientation for the reader by grounding the field-worker's task in the crafting of method. Grimes emphasizes the dynamic nature of method, theory, and ritual and thus, the need to contextualize, question, and criticize what is being studied, who is doing the studying, and how it is being studied. Part 1, in its discussion of participant observation, directs the researcher to consider the multisensory attentiveness required to fully engage in reflexive ethnography. The awareness that Grimes calls for may be second nature for the experienced ethnographer, but for the novice student of ritual, that is, the intended audience for Craft, the insights provided in part 1 are essential for success in the field.

Part 2—Case—includes chapter 4, "Filming Fiesta," and chapter 5, "Framing Fiesta." Employing the Santa Fe Fiesta as case study, Grimes argues for the audiovisual study of ritual, namely, for methodological and theoretical reasons: "Unlike objects, events happen then evaporate, so scholars need a way to capture, slow down and replay them" (95). Grimes argues the audiovisual should lead to the written description of the ritual. Here, Grimes allows for access to his methodology and critical eye by directing the reader to his fieldwork videos. The material in part 2 will likely be skipped over in favor of the method and theory sections for a couple of reasons. First, the two chapters are meant to be read as secondary to Fiesta videos. Thus, they direct the reader/viewer from a broadly discussed topic to a very narrow point of focus—the Fiesta. And second, the insights Grimes provides in the filming and framing of the Fiesta may be taken for granted as easy skills or second nature. However, this is not the classical method of documenting a ritual, that is, traditionally the written precedes the audiovisual. But, as Grimes notes, both methods have limitations, thus the need to engage in and master both methods.

Part 3 of Craft—Theory—starts with chapter 6, "Theorizing Ritual," where Grimes's focus is on the relationship between theory and metaphor and the construction of theory as a craft (177). A ritual theory should attempt comprehensiveness, while recognizing the impossibility of such a task (174). Grimes suggests the need to recognize the "metaphoric nature of the enterprise" (179) and employs a bike metaphor to explain ritual theory. A good metaphor drives a theory and leads the researcher to query the subject matter. For Grimes, the bike
metaphor is useful, yet more importantly its use is indicative of the consequences and limits of metaphors and analogies (183).

In chapter 7, “Defining and Classifying Ritual,” Grimes reconsiders the adequacy of his often-cited “Six Ritual Modes” scheme and their various interacting layers of being, previously published in Beginnings in Ritual Studies. For Grimes, “the modes scheme is not a substitute for a taxonomy but rather a device for mining a rite” (207). This reveals the dynamic nature of ritual and theory and Grimes as a scholar who continues to craft his ideas, much like one tinkers with a malfunctioning bicycle.

Chapter 8, “Mapping Ritual,” considers ritual as a “cultural domain” and its relationship to other recognizable cultural domains: sport, music, and theater. In a discussion of the relationship between ritual and theater, Grimes highlights the need for a performative approach to ritual, as he has previously argued. Ritual as a “domain” to be mapped has its use; however, Grimes warns against mapping a ritual so that it seems flat, thus ignoring its dynamic and multidimensional nature (229).

The bike metaphor returns in chapter 9, “Elements of Ritual,” where Grimes argues, “Regardless of whether your intentions are constructive or analytical, ritual studies scholars must eventually think about forms and dynamics, as well as part-whole relations” (233). Just as the wheels, frame, pedals, and so forth function together to make the bike work, the parts or elements of a ritual function similarly.

In the final chapter of Craft, “Dynamics of Ritual,” Grimes presents his “final theoretical move”: “the need to bring dynamism into an otherwise flat theory of ritual” (294). The missing piece of the theoretical puzzle, for Grimes, is found in dramatism and performance studies. His push for a performative approach to the study of ritual is due to the inherent “bodily” nature of ritual. Grimes’s approach makes the necessary move beyond the performance studies approach of scholars like Richard Schechner and Erving Goffman to focus on the enactment and embodiment of ritual.

Craft concludes by leveling the playing field: “In fact, my argument implies that there isn’t even a logical hierarchy. The relation is recursive and interactive rather than hierarchical. Theories and methods are not superior to rituals; they are just different uses of metaphor resulting in different kinds of narratives and performances” (334). Grimes ends with the reiteration that Craft is not meant to be the method followed and/or the theory applied. Rather the hope is that Craft will be of use to those engaged in the craft of ritual studies (337). By the end of part 3 the reader has been guided through the ethnographic study of ritual in such a manner that “ritual” is no longer a trope; its nature is revealed as dynamic, embodied, and embedded.

The contributions of this book are manifold. First, worth mentioning is the experience Grimes brings to the subject matter. Grimes has the authority and experience that provides him the critical lens through which to (re)assess the field. One may critique Craft for its lack of in-depth engagement with theoretical heavy-hitters. Grimes has done this in previous publications, and it’s not the task he takes up in Craft. However, the theoretical section of the book sees Grimes playing his ideas off of many key figures. At no time does Craft claim to be an exhaustive examination of ritual method and theory. For Grimes, the focal point is in the act of crafting—both scholarship and ritual. Thus, Craft serves as a sort of manual and guidebook on how to approach ritual. And here he acknowledges that the book was written with the classroom in mind (3). Craft is of use to those with an interest in anthropology, undergraduates, and senior scholars. The undergraduate and graduate student will find great use in the material that prepares one for fieldwork, but perhaps of greater value are the appendixes on the companion website. The over fifty pages of appendixes include a summary of major claims, information about the Fiesta, as well as other useful research tools and reference material.

Craft is a window into the mind of an established scholar; one who engages with his past works, openly exposing limitations. Grimes’s reflexive approach allows the reader to connect with his material in a way other scholars are unable to achieve. His place in and contributions to the field of ritual studies and beyond are undeniable. Needless to say, the use of the book extends far beyond the field of ritual studies. Craft is a book to be put into action, not to be placed on one’s armchair.

And finally, there are areas of weakness in Craft. Having thought about why this is, I return to what is expressed above: Grimes’s reflexivity and receptivity—the willingness to think critically about his work and revealing its limitations—results in a book that shines a light on its flaws. For the student new to the study of ritual, the History of Religions scope of Craft will be overwhelming without some guidance. Additionally, Grimes’s reflections on the difficulty
in studying ritual, with its paradoxes, fluidity, and gray areas, might scare off the novice ritual studies student. This last weakness, not likely Grimes’s fault, nor one that detracts from his argument, is the lack of good proofreading. One expects high editorial standards from an Oxford University Press publication. Craft does not meet that standard. Errors aside, this book is a much-needed addition to the field of ritual studies and stands alongside other great works in ritual studies and the anthropology of religion.

2 See http://oxrit.twohornedbull.ca/volumes/craft-of-ritual-studies/.

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Response to The Craft of Ritual Studies by Ronald L. Grimes

AAR, November 23, 2014
Sarah M. Pike

Grimes’ new book may become the bible of ritual studies, but it’s a bible that doesn’t purport to be the true or absolute word. It’s also a guidebook, but a guidebook that takes us on a meandering journey without revealing the fastest route to our destination. Given the book’s title, The Craft of Ritual Studies, it’s not surprising that more than anything, this book is a how-to and how-not-to manual by Ron Grimes, a master craftsman in the field of ritual studies. But this is no straightforward step-by-step manual, it’s a messy manual in that Grimes is constantly "tinkering and crafting" reflecting back on his own guidelines and directions, where they failed him, where they need more tinkering, modeling the playful approach that he urges us readers to take in relation to the rites we study. So reading the book is an adventure, a journey in which we become participants in Grimes' own journey as he uses the fiesta to reflect on ritual studies and ritual studies to more deeply understand the fiesta.

As a manual, the book uses metaphors to help us figure out how things work in the world of ritual studies. Grimes finds the bike metaphor to work best, but I'm going to stick with the spider web for the moment, another metaphor that he turns to several times in the book. Rituals have a power, Grimes writes "that resides in their ability to incubate symbols deeply into bone, belly, and breast, which is to say, in their capacity to establish webs of connectedness." These webs don't only connect the elements of a rite to each other but they also connect the ritual studies scholar to all the elements of the rite. And I'm not thinking here of a beautifully flat symmetrical web, but one of those three-dimensional messy webs that has depth and complexity.

So, where are the ritual studies scholar and videographer in this web? Let’s see Grimes as the spider, following a strand here, spinning a strand there. At times he moves in on his prey as his camera finds the bored and restless faces of children at Mass, or someone reading a comic book in the background, circling widely away from his prey, caught at the edges of the web. His book provides no hard and fast rules to tell us when to be more aggressive with our presence in the ritual space and when to focus our gaze from a distance as ritual actors become more deeply trapped in the sticky web of ritual objects, places, sounds, histories, etc. But Grimes is a spider who likes to play with his prey, which makes his work fascinating to read and watch. The danger of that playfulness is that the prey might escape, and at times I’ll suggest it does.

Grimes’ voice and presence in the book is conversational and dialogic, modeling for us how to approach a rite and all its component parts. He immerses us in the sensory world of the Santa Fe fiesta and then he leads us out again to see where we are, to orient ourselves through theory and reflection. He shows us as well as tells us how "ritualizing is the act of stepping in to be whereas research is the act of stepping back to know." The ritual studies scholar, like the spider, like the ritualist, is on the move, darting back and forth across the web of ritual elements, testing where strands of the web are strong and where they are tenuous.

This book self-consciously presents us with a plethora of metaphors, making ritual something three-dimensionally present in the world: a bicycle in motion, a spider web being spun. Grimes pushes us to look beyond the surface of things and works hard not to privilege the visual as so many scholars of ritual and festival have done. He wants us to "mine" the rites we study, to journey into their depths, to peel back their layers. With both his camera and words, he peers behind the scenes, travels along the edges, explores the margins and outlying areas. Grimes guides us not only to attend to the layers of meaning in the spaces of ritual but also to probe beneath the skin of ritual actors, to pay attention to interior spaces, to emotions and the
lives behind them. As he puts it, we have to work our way towards "the depths of the mind-body." He wants to be more inclusive of living, breathing, emoting bodies than he was in his earlier book on the fiesta. This all sounds so convincing, but how does it hold up in practice, in the case that forms the heart of the book? Where do these mind-bodies whose depths we are to plumb appear in the book and films and how do they appear? What do we get to know of them and their ritual lives? Since this manual for the craft of ritual studies models as well as tells us what to do, what does Grimes model in this regard? Moving, acting bodies are everywhere in the ritual field, but persons, individuals with memories and desires and dreams seem missing. The people we do encounter in the book and videos sometimes feel flat and two-dimensional. We often get little sense of the inner histories that participants bring with them to rites and festivals: their memories of childhood experiences, the traumas embedded in their bodies, their repressed and spectral selves.

So I want to point to what I found to be a powerful moment of rupture that Grimes identifies in the video and in the book in order to push a bit more on this notion of interiority, where the interior spaces of individuals might be illuminated. The moment is from a controversial documentary film, "Gathering Up Again: Fiesta in Santa Fe," that was released in 1992. Randy, a Pueblo Indian who has been living in L.A. returns to Santa Fe one summer and is invited by one of his Hispanic friends to play Chief Domingo, a Pueblo Indian. We see him arrive at the performance of the Entrada (Don Diego de Vargas is the reconquistador), a reenactment of the conquest of the pueblos, that Grimes identifies as the "ideological heart of the fiesta." Randy's Hispanic friends make Indian jokes and some are dressed in stereotypical headdresses. He begins to realize what he is playing at, reenacting the defeat of his people at the hands of the Spanish conquerors, and the camera captures him offstage crying and humiliated. We learn from Grimes that this scene and other aspects of that film ignited controversy, but we learn nothing of Randy as a ritual subject. What are the aftershocks of a ritual experience like this? Is there a post-ritual stress syndrome where trauma is embodied and carried into other spaces, affecting other lives? What happens to Randy later, what does he tell his family? his friends? What do they tell him? How does he feel? How does he feel watching the video? Although Grimes uses this moment as an opportunity to talk about conflicting views of history, community self-representations and ethnic tensions that have emerged and been expressed and negotiated in the spaces of the fiesta, I am wondering what more we could learn here about the person behind the tears and what this ritual means to him. What is the role of memory here? Memory doesn't get much attention in this book and yet I wonder what past fiestas live in Randy's body, how his memories of going to the fiesta as a child or hearing about it from friends shapes his experience. Here the depths of the mind-body that Grimes draws our attention to are glimpsed but not explored what more can Randy's weeping tell us?

Because Grimes is so self-reflexive as an author and his conversational tone with readers suggest that he is aware of his omissions, it's hard to pick on him for leaving out these things. He says interiority is important, that he wishes he had asked more questions, but does that get him off the hook?

The second moment I want to point to where I think Grimes is on to something really important but steps back when he should step in, is the video "Aaron's Zozobra." Here Grimes takes our attention away from the popular event at center stage into the home of a local family where the teenage son Aaron has created his own Zozobra burning. He writes: "Aaron's burning gives us a glimpse of an adolescent's experience of fiesta, but like most research on rituals and festivals, mine shortchanges both the young and the elderly." But I don't think we even get a glimpse here. It's an awkward and puzzling scene, but ripe with possibilities for understanding how a public event orchestrated by adults changes when it's brought into private space by a teenager. But again, Aaron is just a teenage son, we learn nothing about his memories of festival, his desires around this ritual he has created. Grimes hands him the camera at one point which seems to open possibilities, but we get no analysis in the book of what might be learned from this. The section on "Aaron's Zozobra" in the book is only a page long. Where are Aaron's friends? Only his brother is there? It seems more an occasion for the adult family members who
have arrived to celebrate with him. They become the focus, the camera on them and so Aaron himself disappears at the same time that Grimes has made him visible, has made us notice that we don't know what young people, teenagers and children think about and experience of the fiesta. Grimes acknowledges the absence of children's voices, but I think we scholars continue to notice their absence and yet still don't try to being their voices, memories and experiences into the stories we tell about the rites we study.

Annual festivals offer particularly ripe moments for this because they give us a sense of how children and families change from one year to the next as their relationship to the Fiesta evolves and they grow older. How do values get inculcated by the fiesta, how does the fiesta shape the process of moral formation in young people? One of my favorite scenes in the video of the Zozobra rehearsal is when Grimes interviews a group of children about what the burning of the Zozobra means to them. There are children and teenagers participating in every aspect of the fiesta and I want to know so much more here: what they do at home to get ready, how they enter and move through and experience the ritual space differently than their parents and grandparents, what children resist and stay home and why.

These questions about home and family lead to the final point I want to make and that is about the dynamic relationships between home, place and ritual space. On p. 256, Grimes says this about ritual space "These spaces are made ritual spaces by the actions occurring in them. Once the actions stop, the spaces are no longer ritualistic." Where does ritual go when the spaces it occupied are no longer ritual space? Is it really simply that the space stops being ritualistic? I want to better understand what Grimes means here. What about the traces ritual leaves, don’t they also act on the space? There’s a great shot in one of the videos of the trash in the streets, the food and drinks that were consumed, the detritus that lingers. What other traces linger when the fiesta is over? that extend the ritual space? What ways are the spaces still ritual spaces in the memories of participants: do they walk through the square or park where some part of the fiesta was held without remembering what they felt and saw and smelled there? They may have images: films and photos that capture and hold the images of those ritual spaces in their lives, in their homes. What happens when the home becomes the ritual space as in Aaron’s Zozobra? How does this teenage boy feel about his home after the burning of his Zozobra? Is it only when visible actions stop that the ritual stops? What about the workings of the brain and body that have been in the ritual space?

Grimes encourages us to think about how place can be an actor "to whom (yes, whom) human actions are but a response." How do space and place "speak" and act on us and other ritual participants before, during and after the rituals we study? How do our sensual experiences of ritual spaces continue on after the ritual has ended? When Grimes is editing video of a rite in his home and office how does the ritual space act on him through the images? How is the space no longer ritualistic?

In his discussion of ritual as a domain, Grimes writes, "even if a ritual can be said to have a boundary, it may be more like a membrane than a wall. A ritual's "skin" filters input and output." I like this creaturely metaphoric language and I think it describes something important about the inner lives of participants, the homes they come from, the spaces where rites take place, the experiences participants take home, the homes that ritual studies scholars come from and go back to write and edit their films, the images and stories of a festival or ritual these scholars and others circulate online and face to face to students, children, friends and colleagues.
At the start of the first chapter of *The Craft of Ritual Studies*, titled, “Performing Research and Teaching,” Ronald Grimes introduces a distinction between *methodological narrative* and *methodological advice*. Methodology can be a story or a prescription. Grimes waffles for a moment about this distinction, noting how narrative can “over time” turn into prescription. And while he largely pursues the narrative mode in the first chapter, which includes a considerable piece of intellectual autobiography, by the second he takes up the genre of the manual more explicitly. It is Grimes’ methodological voice (in the prescriptive mode) that makes the most productive gains in this book. Research, he suggests, is a ritualized activity. It is performed, embodied, processual: “stylized, formalized, and prescribed.” Like ritual, it has a structure—decisive links that coordinate its constituent elements of research, teaching, proposal, fieldwork, description, mediation, writing, publishing. What we need more than anything, Grimes suggests, are rules to guide this coordination.

I admit to finding the first section of the book (“Method”) at first tedious. As a textualist, and not a field scholar, I thought: I don’t need to know how to operate a camera! Get to the goods, Grimes: What do you think about RITUAL? How do you define it? What are you going to say about Bell after all these years? How shall you defend the Study of Ritual after Asad? Is cognitive science just a flash in the pan? Impatiently, I considered jumping to the second section (“Case”), the raw data of the Santa Fe Fiesta itself; more than once I flipped ahead to the third (“Theory”) before returning to my place, where Grimes was reviewing such seemingly quotidian activities as reading and writing. When I at last came to the theory section of the book I was again frustrated: rather than favor one definition of ritual, Grimes catalogues definitions; rather than specifying clear parameters for Ritual Studies, he maps ritual in relation to sports, music, and theatre; rather than analyzing ritual grammar he merely describes its basic elements. In the final chapter we come no closer to a fully delineated “Theory of Ritual;” instead, we find a series of paradoxical statements: ritual empowers and disempowers groups, attunes and disattunes bodies, reinforces the status quo and enacts transformation, makes and unmakes meaning.

This would all seem to amount to a rather tepid form of theorizing were it not for the slowly dawning impression that the voice of the manual—the methodological prescription—governs the culminating section on theory as well. Grimes’ theoretical reflection in *The Craft* is best read as a prescription for the act of theorizing: a *model* for theory as part of the highly embedded process of research. While he certainly gives us ample direction as to the “what” of ritual theory, he is perhaps more committed to the “how.” This commitment appears most explicit in the final pages of the book, where he describes his “theory” as follows:

> The theory is antiessentialist inasmuch as it resists the identification of ritual with some single quality or dynamic. It is antifunctionalist in its refusal to assume that ritual has either a single or unparadoxical social role such as that of maintaining social equilibrium. The theory is a middle-range theory (336).

A term borrowed from the sociologist Robert Merton, “middle-range” theorizing is an important key to Grimes’ thought. Merton defines middle range theories as those that...lie between the minor but necessary working hypotheses that evolve in abundance during day-to-day research and the all-inclusive systematic efforts to develop a unified theory...Middle range theory is principally used...to guide empirical inquiry. It is intermediate to general theories...which are too remote from particular[s]...to account for what is observed and to those detailed orderly descriptions of particulars that are not generalized at all (39).

As a most simple example, Merton nominates the early chemist Robert Boyle, who,
investigating the problem of atmospheric pressure, proposed to think of the atmosphere as a “sea of air.” In its simplicity, this image provokes inference and testable hypothesis. For as Merton explains, “if the atmosphere is thought of as a sea of air, then, as Pascal inferred, there should be less air pressure on a mountain top than at its base” (40). Middle range theories are thus simple, conceptual, testable, and modeled on specific problems and data sets. As a methodological statement, then, The Craft is best understood as an argument for middle range theorizing in the study of ritual. Like Merton in sociology, Grimes seeks to forestall grand theorizing about “Ritual,” and to promote theories that mediate descriptions of specific ritual data and broader theoretical claims (ritual is drama, ritual is meaningful, ritual is functional). This seems to be a prudent, and necessary disciplining of our expectations. As Merton says, “The quest for theories of the middle range exacts a distinctly different commitment….than does the quest for an all-embracing, unified theory” (45).

The middle-range concept helps us to understand Grimes’ unique style of theorizing, characterized by an abiding engagement with his peers. Considering the early and formative relationship with Turner disclosed in chapter one, we must be impressed by the commitment—truly, the discipline—with which Grimes has deliberated over the subsequent revolutions in the Study of Ritual, including its inception in the late 70s and early 80s, its fruitful relationship with performance studies, its recasting as practice, its categorical deconstruction, and even its recent rendering in terms of the “hard-wiring” of cognition. The central work of this book is, simply, to keep this heterogeneous conversation alive in all its breadth. Thus he responds to Lawson and McCauley, Asad and Buc, while frequently recalling Turner, Goffman, and Rappaport; he pursues questions of ritual competence and embodiment while holding ajar the door to ritual symbolism and interpretation. The book reads like a state-of-the-field rather than a single unified theory.

This sustained engagement with his peers, marked by depth of reading but also open playfulness, has been a hallmark of Grimes’ work for some time. In an earlier (2004), extended discussion of Catherine Bell’s work, he wrote, “unlike Bell, I do not find practice theories any more precise or coherent than performance theories; they too are fragmentary. They add an increased awareness of strategic bids for power that co-opt rituals into service, but there is no inherent incompatibility between the two kinds of theory” (135). Whether or not one agrees with this theoretical stance, then—as now—Grimes resisted the codification of competing “schools” of Ritual Studies. For, as Merton might remind us, theories of the middle range are not, by definition, mutually incompatible, but rather are open to convergence and assimilation to more encompassing theories.

As an outgrowth of this middle range thinking, Grimes also displays welcome virtues of semantic precision and sensitivity to metaphor. Those who teach and write about ritual may find these to be the most immediately applicable aspects of his work. In the first place he prescribes a number of useful terminological distinctions: a rite (or a ritual) vs. the ritual; ritual “enactment” vs. dramatic “performance”; (synchronic) ritual system vs. (diachronic) ritual tradition. These linguistic conventions should be highly useful for unifying discourse on the page and in the classroom without privileging specific definitions of ritual. Second, he applies metaphors rigorously, but heuristically and interchangeably. Exemplary is his discussion of ritual elements (chapter 9), where he considers aloud a number of metaphors for Ritual—molecule (chemical), as bike (mechanistic), as container (spatial), as body (organic)—before settling on the mechanistic (ritual as a bike). He adds this methodological reflection: Like all metaphors, mechanical and organic ones are enlightening in some ways and blinding in others. Even if one prefers to imagine a ritual as an organic, collective body, there is no good reason to avoid also thinking of it mechanically. In fact, playing organic and mechanical conceptions off each other can prevent us from literalizing either. A rite is not a body or spider’s web any more than it is a bike or pressure cooker. Either way, a ritual, if it works, is a set of
interconnected processes working in an integrated, dynamic fashion (234). In all of this Grimes defangs the theoretical enterprise with simple, methodical practices of reading and writing, enlivening the canon of the field while maintaining its open-ended orientation.

As both a prospectus for the field and a reflection of its current state, however, there remain some issues to be clarified. First, Grimes’ explicit preference for field research got me wondering: after a generation of performance and embodiment, and in light of Grimes’ proposition here (12), that field observation—if not full blown ethnography—should be the ideal mode of research: what exactly should be the role of text and history in the Study of Ritual? Grimes’ repeated emphasis on ritual as enacted and embodied would seem somewhat insulated from the data and theory of ritual in pre-modernity. What I mean is not simply that the history of a given ritual tradition is relevant for contextualizing an enacted rite, as Grimes aptly shows us in his history of the *Entrada* at the Santa Fe Fiesta. Instead, I note that we have hardly begun to tap the wealth of premodern ritual texts, in their various genres, in light of the problems of ritual studies. Though Phillipe Buc has begun this work in *The Dangers of Ritual*, he focuses on politicized, narrative accounts of specific rites (discrete ritual performances).

There are other relevant types of texts. In particular I want to highlight as relevant the ritual manual. If ritual entails a planned or structured set of actions—note that the word “design” appears repeatedly in this book and elsewhere in discussions of ritual—whether mechanical or architectural, what are the basic principles that govern this design? For their part, the religious traditions of South Asia preserve a wealth of ritual manuals, and parallels exist cross culturally. Though he was criticized for lacking ethnographic sensitivity, one of the virtues of Frits Staal’s work is that it was based on the ancient ritual manuals (the śrautasūtras) outlining the organization of the Vedic ritual system. Staal was concerned most of all with the rules and meta-rules that produced structures of action in these texts. While he is often taken to task for his negative definition—ritual is meaningless—he is not sufficiently appreciated for his positive claim, based on these ritual rules: whatever their meaning, rituals for Staal are primarily structures of actions, a *kriyākrama* (sequence of actions), or—in the words of the *mīmāṃsa*, the ritualist school of philosophy and exegesis (an untapped, premodern source of ritual “theory”), an *itikartavyatā* (“how-to”; method). This way of thinking, it seems to me, has much to contribute to discussions such as Grimes’ chapter on ritual elements (chapter 9).

In presenting the operation of the Vedic ritual system—without attending to the diachronic changes of the ritual tradition over time—Staal’s work was, however, just a beginning. Subsequent ritual manuals show how originally Vedic structures both survived over time and were redesigned by ritual authors. This is not just an area-specific, historical problem (how one ritual tradition changed over time), but also theoretical. We can see in such texts how individual ritual designers or “authors” (vs. performers) tinkered with ritual structures according to different “theoretical” concerns—functional, symbolic, technological, etc. For example, Koichi Shinohara’s recent (2014) work on early Buddhist esoteric or “tantric” rituals—which are in part inheritors of the Vedic tradition—shows how one ritual system (of maṇḍala initiation) was formed out of preexisting elements, and how the ensuing tradition changed over time to incorporate new elements (such as images or visualization). This tells us something about ritual change. Change here is characterized both by deliberate innovation in the organization of ritual elements, but also by the survival of inherited structures and methods. If ritual is (metaphorically) a structure, as Frits Staal says, that does not automatically make it unchanging (as Grimes [178] suggests). As structure, ritual changes in peculiar combination of gradual and punctual ways, as structures inherited by designers are selectively readapted and redesigned.8 The choices made in ritual manuals help us to see how premodern ritualists understood what Grimes calls the “dynamics” of ritual.

Ritual manuals and other types of premodern texts remind us that contemporary
scholars are not the only ones to theorize, mediate, or model rituals, and I worry that we cut ourselves off from such sources to the extent that we emphasize ritual as event, performance, or embodiment. As a “designed” structure, the ritual may also exist in the form of one or more manual “blueprints.” Grimes suggests that even a scholar of ancient ritual texts should be eager to go back in time and observe a ritual (12). A field scholar would, I hope, also want to study the blueprint of a ritual if it were available. So as much as we may want to eschew textual metaphors, I still think we should reserve a space for these and other genres of ritual texts, while considering the notion of ritual authorship. Ritual Studies—and Grimes himself—has tended to distance itself from liturgical studies, maintaining that ritual is something more than simply liturgy, beyond the sphere of the strictly religious. Nonetheless, a cross-cultural, comparative study of premodern ritual manuals would still seem to present an important contribution to Ritual Studies at large.

As a closely related point, the semantic history of the term “Ritual” and its related terms needs to be expanded. Grimes discusses Talal Asad and Phillipe Buc in the chapter “Defining and Classifying Ritual,” concluding that their practical implications are largely “cautionary:” ritual is not an obvious or given category, and ritual texts should be read in light of their genres and historical contexts. I would frame the issue somewhat differently: what is needed is a clearer topography of the semantic distance between contemporary usage of “Ritual” and comparable terms used in premodernity. For instance, as much as Asad critiques the term, his problem is largely with Geertz’ notion of ritual as mediator of religious symbols. In positive terms, however, Asad names a decisive link between ritual and—one to return to our theme—medieval Christian manuals for monastic discipline. (The word was also used to describe texts that prescribe Church ceremonies, though Asad lays more weight on the disciplinary than the ceremonial aspect of these “ritual books.”) To my mind, this simply poses the question, to be answered in any lexicon: what precisely is the relationship between ceremony and discipline? Here again, Grimes’ attention to language should be exemplary: The kind of conceptual mapping that he carries out in chapter 8 (charting ritual in relation to sports, music, and theatre) could be a useful model for mapping the semantic terrain of premodern ritual cultures, European and otherwise. Again, a cross cultural study of these maps could only aid in the semantic precision of the middle-range theorizing of ritual so ably executed in this book. To be clear, Grimes acknowledges the disjuncture between his preferred, field-centric approach and textual-historical models. But, despite numerous forays into historical anthropology, the rules of engagement needed to link both approaches to ritual have not been established with the kind of clarity that Grimes deploys in The Craft.

I have repeatedly highlighted the genre of the manual as the appropriate model for The Craft, which understands research in the field of Ritual Studies as a process that is itself at least partially ritualized. In the medieval Hindu tradition, one crucial term for the ritual manual was \( \text{vidhi} \), the grammatical term for the sanskrit “optative” voice, which governs the sense of optionality or possibility, but also the sense of prescription. Verbal statements in these ritual manuals usually take this form. For the ritualists, there was no question of the implication: \( \text{vidhi} \) is prescription, injunction. (The word thus presents a neat parallel to Asad’s medieval notion of “ritual” as “rule-book.”) My view here is that Grimes is at his best when fully embodying this voice of prescription.

 Might we, then, understand The Craft as the consolidation of a new orthopraxy in Ritual Studies? I wonder if Grimes would agree. At times, however, I sensed a basic tension between the gravitas of one of our most colorful and experienced scholars of ritual on the one hand, and—on the other hand—a compulsion to accountability—not just to other scholars, but especially to our informants. One of Grimes’ more questionable prescriptions follows from an ethic of public scholarship, that is, scholars should make their “implicit critiques” explicit, available to their “subjects,” who might—and should have the opportunity to—disagree. In my view, the invitation to participate in the criticism, explanation, or interpretation of any
ritual—whether one’s own or not—is an invitation into the Study of Ritual, not merely an exercise in self-defense or self-representation. It is an invitation to play a game for which Grimes himself—as we have seen—is writing the rules. The result may look a little bit like Lebron James inviting a high-schooler to a pick up game of basketball. Or, conversely, Bob Costas inviting Lebron into the broadcaster’s booth. As much as research may be “ritualized,” this metaphor only implies a partial similarity. If, as Grimes himself claims, ritualizing is “stepping in to be” and research is “stepping back to know,” we may at some point have to accept their basic incommensurability. Two different games; two separate disciplines. I have suggested that premoderns, like modern scholars, could play both. Grimes, I think, is arguing the same for his informants, in which case we hardly have to be careful to make our interpretations available to “the people we study,” we simply have to make them available to other scholars.

In closing, I want to take note, once more, of the prescience that Grimes has displayed throughout his career, as a tireless consumer and promoter of Ritual Studies. I first encountered his work as an undergraduate at McMaster University in the early 2000s, in a characteristically thoughtful review of JZ Smith’s writing on ritual, written in 1999. Even then, he strained against what he diagnosed as…the tendency in ritual studies for theorists to talk past one another, or worse, never to engage one another’s ideas in public or in print. Anthropologists who write about ritual read and argue with one another…In religious studies we read anthropologists on ritual, seldom taking one another’s theorising with sufficient seriousness to write about its nuances. As a result, we are interdisciplinary without being disciplinary (271).

He concluded with the following prescription: “We will overcome this deficiency only when we press our own theories against hard texts, performances and other theories of ritual.” With The Craft of Ritual Studies, Grimes certainly follows his own advice, and I am happy to recommend that the field of Ritual Studies—for which he has long supplied a critical and steadying presence—should do so as well.

References

Notes

1 This is an extended version of the talk that I will present at the AAR meeting, November 2014.
2 “The distinction between prescribing and narrating is less clean than it might appear. Storytelling can readily be heard as covert advice…Like dictionary definitions that start out as descriptions of usage, fieldwork narratives can, over time, become prescriptions. ‘How I conducted fieldwork’ stories can be delivered or heard as cautionary tales implying, “This is how you should behave in the field.” Whereas methodological narrative is often in the service of how not to do things, methodological prescription is largely about how to do things. In any case, the goal of methodological reflection, of whatever ilk, is orientation in the field…” (11-12).
3 “Even though there are many theory books in both performance studies and religious studies, there are few, if any, method books in either field” (37). Nonetheless, Grimes continues to hesitate: “One reason writers avoid how-to approaches to the study of ritual is that prescriptive advice written in books is necessarily generic, whereas conducting fieldwork is radically particular” (37).
4 “Even if you don’t wish to call this set of formalized expectations a narrative or performance, there is little question that most scholars mount repetitive, seasonal, highly stylized performances in which the academic community exercises its collective wisdom through forms designed to instill its virtues and to deter what it deems intellectual vices. The process requires that one’s own little (autobiographical) story be submerged or shaped to fit the big (mythic) academic story. One’s pay and promotions, which is to say, much of what scholars treat as sacred, depend on these evaluations. Maybe you don’t want to call this process a ritual, but it is stylized, formalized, and prescribed….The reason for hinting that research might be ritualized is not to demean it. Rather, it is to say that the usual ways of discussing theories and methods include not only arguments, definitions, and demonstrations but also storytelling and performing” (15).
5 Discussing the sociological example of “role-set theory,” Merton maintains that such theories of the middle range “are frequently consistent with a variety of so-called systems of sociological theory. So far as one can tell, the theory of role-sets is not inconsistent with such broad theoretical orientations as Marxist theory, functional analysis, social behaviorism, Sorokin’s integral sociology or Parsons’ theory of action. This may be a horrendous observation for those of us who have been trained to believe that systems of sociological thought are logically close-knit and mutually exclusive sets of doctrine. But, in fact…comprehensive sociological theories are sufficiently loose-knit, internally diversified, and mutually overlapping that a given theory of the middle range, which has a measure of empirical confirmation, can often be subsumed under comprehensive theories which are themselves discrepant in certain respects” (43). Cf. Grimes (2004): “Mainly, ritual studies needs consolidation and critique—consolidation of fragmentary theories and critique of major and emergent ones” (135).
6 For example, to say that a rite is enacted rather than performed saves us from assuming too close a link between drama and ritual, or suggesting that the rite necessarily has an audience.
7 Grimes suggests, “The preponderance of scholarly writing about ritual is based on ancient and historical texts” (12). Whether or not one agrees with this assessment, the major movements in Ritual Studies of the second half of the twentieth century (performance, practice, cognition)—at least since turner Turner—have been more heavily inspired by ethnography. Frits Staal is the major exception.
8 Grimes’ distinction between “core” and “secondary” ritual elements (chapter 9) is applicable here.
9 This approach to premodern ritual texts might also be complemented by ethnographic studies of ritual authorship and textual production.
10 Consider recent work on the prehistory of the term “Religion,” for example, Campany (2003), Nongbri (2013).
11 “Those wanting to study historical, virtual, or fictive rituals will want to make modifications to the method…” (12).
12 As I have noted (n.2 above), Grimes often expresses ambivalence about prescription. He seems especially worried that local descriptions of rites become prescriptions for the ritual (331).
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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With The Craft of Ritual Studies, Ronald Grimes has written a legacy statement that will surely play a central role in the field for decades to come. As a scholar who has worked on ritual for over four decades, Grimes could rightly be credited with creating its field of study, or at minimum, shaping it in significant ways. The book is a concerted effort to continue the scholar’s intellectual agenda, while being an informed treatise on how to participate in a field of scholarly inquiry and how to ensure that our interpretations and conclusions are multifaceted, self-reflexive, and ethically responsible. As a handbook, it overflows with ethnographic, methodological, and theoretical insights, reflections, and prescriptions. Its seventeen lists, expanded tables, and extensive glossary summarize key questions, qualifications, and theoretical terminology. In addition, the book is a multimedia resource, as the author has published online seven primary videos that document his case study on the Santa Fe Fiesta, various secondary clips, and also extensive online appendices that accompany the author’s many arguments. All of these resources are designed as shorthand references to which, I am sure, students, teachers, and researchers will return to with high frequency.

Throughout the book, Grimes clarifies and refines the methods and theoretical approaches to ritual and ritualized practices, while constantly being aware of the pitfalls of language (particularly our use of naturalized metaphors), theoretical absolutes, and myopic lenses (whether through a camera or through theorizing). The book is written as an open meditation on what works and what can go wrong, from nitty-gritty ethnography to argumentative writing, from presenting and publishing to critical thinking. Such advice and ruminations are not merely intended to help budding scholars gain career traction, they are also ethical since sympathetic cross-cultural understanding is crucial; without it, our chances of working together to build inclusive, empathic communities is high impossible. The author is deeply aware of the dangers of ethnocentric judgments and the various forms of epistemic violence that academic work can inflict on local communities and peoples. Furthermore, he eschews binary oppositions such as insider/outside, subjective/objective, participant/observer, etc., in favor of manifold dialogical perspectives that are embedded in lived realities. He rightly observes that when individuals and groups ritualize their values, identities, and histories they perform “the act of stepping in to be,” whereas researchers perform “the act of stepping back to know” (23; 334). Hence, “… theories and methods no longer seem superior to rituals; the two are just different kinds of enactment” (24).

The book is divided into three sections. “Part I: Method” is a wide-ranging pedagogical and methodological survey of questions and procedures that frequently arise when studying, documenting, and writing papers on ritual events. Grimes offers a lifetime of insights into the dos and don’ts, what works and does not in ethnographic fieldwork (especially videography), while giving pointed suggestions on how to formulate argumentative papers and presentations. It is full of thick descriptions of fieldwork protocol and on-the-ground research guidance. Grimes rightly insists that any interpretation of ritualized practices or traditions must be embedded in a complex social and historical context, and that no thing—act, thought, word, or object—is too small or too large to be considered, whether it is central to the defined ritual proceedings or peripheral. What is more, Grimes argues that scholarly interpretations should not generalize ritual traditions or entertain a reified notion of ritual. Rather, “The staple of ritual studies should be descriptions of single ritual performances by named actors in actual places at specific times” (63). And, “We need macro-level analyses of whole
ritual systems and micro-level studies of actions, phases, objects, and spaces. In addition, we need to study what is ‘around’ or ‘below’ a ritual, namely, its infrastructure, the biological, psychological, and social processes that make all human activity possible” (65).

“Part II: Case” presents the author’s expanded study on the Santa Fe Fiesta, especially an examination of how the modern fiesta is deeply shaped by its history in a violent colonial past and how this impacts current participation and appreciation of the festival, particularly in ethnic, class, and gendered terms. Grimes implements his methodological prescriptions from the initial section by demonstrating how in-depth historicizing of any ritual event can sympathetically document the rich experiences, interpretations, and values of its various participants and stakeholders, then and now.

“Part III: Theory” is a broad critique and clarification of the terminology and categories employed in ritual theory. For scholars who teach ritual theory courses, the third section and all the book’s lists, tables, and glossary will be invaluable sources for undergraduate and graduate students, as well as PhDs. For students who conduct ethnographic work, “Part I: Method” presents numerous insights, suggestions, and professional prescriptions. “Part II: Case” bridges the first and third sections by putting into practice the methodological and theoretical assessments advocated by the author.

Key to Grimes’ overall argument is his proposition that the study of ritual should be undertaken as a craft (hence, the book’s title). His use of this term is intended to signal an intellectual and physical practice that negotiates hard science evidence and the untestable ideas and theories of the humanities and fine arts. The choice of the term “craft” is a specific example of the author’s acute awareness of the language trap and his attempt to constantly resist being pinned down by taking a specific position (in the end, most positions have some validity but should not become reified, oversimplified, or overriding). In this vein, he constantly reminds the reader that in any given ritualized situation, there are as many different interpretations of what is going on as there are interpreters, who most likely have diverse, even contradictory, understandings and explanations. This robust check undercuts any uniform theory of ritual. Grimes thus destabilizes his reader’s certainty, even arrogance, about any absolute conclusion as to what exactly “ritual” is or may be. Of course, the danger in taking a definite position in academic writing often means that critics can easily point out blind-spots or the possibilities of otherwise. Nevertheless, the problem with this kind of open-ended, even whimsical, intellectual move is that despite being deeply rooted in critical semiotic theory and a kind of ethical irony befitting philosophical pragmatism or literary criticism, it may dissuade students from internalizing Grimes’ many lessons. Such individuals will need to invest an enormous amount of energy and time into processing and implementing the author’s countless qualifying declarations, speculative feints, and “ritual is...” statements.

It is a little disconcerting that Grimes never fully engages his theoretical interlocutors such as Catherine Bell, particularly her groundbreaking Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice (Oxford University Press, 1992). The late scholar has given us a cogent political theory of ritualization that goes a long way to explaining the complex micro-practices which people continuously embody and strategically deploy to distinguish themselves from other ways of acting, and which thereby serve to redeem and reproduce their empowered positions. Bell also convincingly asks us to stop talking about ritual as if such an abstraction exists. It is not that Grimes fails to recognize these points, albeit in passing. His wide-ranging survey of numerous ritual theories has done an excellent job of sifting over a century of chaff so as to leave us much refined terminological wheat. With this said, the book simply does not take us into new theoretical territory by providing new ways to talk and think about human interactions, agency, and the degrees to which learned and performed predictability is embedded in group ideologies and institutions that seek to constrain choice or to open it up for social, economic, and political advantages. In a postmodern vein, the author recognizes that power is for the most part the ability to define the quality of relationships. However, Grimes never quite gives us a way to shine light on institutionalized inequality and the ways it can be embedded in ritualized practices and bodies. Grimes has thus brought us to a point that soundly surveys and hones the field, while putting in place sensible checks and balances. It will be up to others to take us into new territory. For example, ritual studies scholars could benefit greatly from other sociological fields of inquiry, such as the microsociology of Randall Collins (Interaction Ritual Chains, Princeton University Press, 2004) or the actor-network theory of Bruno Latour (Reassembling the Social, Oxford University Press,
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icons
2005)
Grimes’ explanation of the life of things, particularly ritualized instruments, icons, and places, might be enriched with a Latourian account of agency and associations.

In sum, The Craft of Ritual Studies will be an inescapable text from a senior scholar, who in a conversational tone offers invaluable instruction to younger scholars entering the field of ritual studies or to older scholars looking for systematic guidance, suggestions, and a healthy set of intellectual reminders. The book is full of pragmatic quips, witty metaphorical allusions, and intellectual gut checks targeted at ivory-tower academics. In one sense, it is an exercise in antitheory, particularly antiessentialism, yet at the same time, it is richly theoretical. This kind of irony is central to Grimes’ intellectual agenda, as scholars should never feel as if they are on solid ground methodologically or theoretically. In Grimes’ own parting words “Repeatedly, I’ve reined in the incipient grandiosity of theorizing by cautioning: It’s a matter that can’t be settled by theory but only by examining specific instances. In this way I’ve sometimes traded in budding universalism for studied localism” (336). To extend one of Grimes’ repeated velocipedic metaphors, we should constantly foster an attitude of intellectual modesty and playful creativity that perhaps feels like riding a bike for the first wobbly, yet thrilling time. Lucky for us, Grimes provides training wheels and might just be there to catch us if we fall. Perhaps the final lesson is: when this happens, pick yourself up and get back on your bike!

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Ron Grimes anticipates our first question about his “most complete statement of what he has to say about the study of ritual” to date, spending a few pages in the introduction explaining what he means by craft. It is, he says, a manual art.

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-laborer cousin ... As a manual art, or craft, ritual studies may lack the clout of science, ... and the elevation of fine art, but it should not lack utility. If you can’t put your hand to this book and use it, something has gone awry. (4)

Grimes divides the book into three parts – method, case and theory – whose “relationship is circular and interactive rather than linear or hierarchical” (3). From Grimes’ point of view these three dance together whenever we try to understand the ways ritual works, what happens when it doesn’t, and how ritual does the work it does.

The Craft of Ritual Studies begins with a section on Method with how-to chapters on “Performing Research and Teaching,” “Fieldworking Ritual,” and “Reading, Writing, and Mediatizing Ritual.” Like any good teaching craftsperson, Grimes not only tells us how to carry out a practical study of ritual, but also why it is important to engage with rituals in these ways. That he leads with method instead of theory may strike some as odd, but Grimes makes a strong case for such an approach.

In The Craft of Ritual Studies, the illustrative case is the 2007 Santa Fe Fiesta. Grimes returns to the site of some of his first ritual studies work undertaken thirty years before, published as Symbol and Conquest: Public Ritual and Drama in Santa Fe, New Mexico. This time, however, he is practicing the craft differently. Mediatizing ritual here means making audiovisual recordings of the 2007 Fiesta edited into videos, drawing the reader from text to recorded sounds and images and back to text. Grimes knows this is both essential to his understanding of ritual studies and fraught with hazards. “Most of us,” he says, “are not adept at tacking back and forth between online videos and words on a printed page, which is exactly what I am about to ask you to do.” (95).

The introduction to the first chapter, “Filming Fiesta,” makes it clear that we are to begin with a video then move to the written text, then back to a video and so on. “The videos are the leading edge of the case; the chapters are its trailing edge” (96). I have read the Case section without and with the videos. Skipping the videos detracted from my understanding of the case study and thus of the craft of ritual studies. “A ritual is an event. Since an event is not a stone or a building, it persists for a moment, and then disappears” (96). The videoed and written texts represent the 2007 Santa Fe Fiesta, which because the original event has disappeared are both important when we attempt to understand it. The second chapter, “Framing Fiesta,” sets the 2007 Santa Fe Fiesta in lush historical context.

In the Theory section of his book, Grimes addresses one of his core metaphors, craft.

In the view I am proposing here, theory construction is a craft, which is to say, a hybrid—partly art, partly science. One has to observe, critique, and test, but one also has to imagine. Imaginative labor is undergirded with data and inferences from data, but in the final analysis, a theory is a piece of intellectual handiwork, with no more (or less) status than pottery-making. (177)

Five chapters make up the Theory part of The Craft of Ritual Studies: “Theorizing Ritual,”
“Defining and Classifying Ritual,” “Mapping Ritual,” “Elements of Ritual,” and “Dynamics of Ritual.” While some readers may be tempted to skim over the first two parts on Method and Case, Grimes is clear that these sections are the ground of his theory chapters, which rest on those earlier sections and loop back to change them.

The craft metaphor does other work as well.

... Thinking of theory construction as a craft reminds us not to romanticize or elevate the activity, and it encourages us to judge it by its fruit. Craftspeople are supposed to have fewer pretensions than artists or scientists about their work. They are supposed to be humble, thinking of what they do as useful labor, not as a calling or expression of genius. (177)

By moving carefully between the Scylla of Romantic art and the Charybdis of venerated science, Grimes’ craft attempts to find a middle way for ritual studies.

Grimes intends the The Craft of Ritual Studies to be used in teaching: “the book and its accompanying online videos are designed with classrooms in mind” (3). Graduate students in any discipline or area where rituals occur will want to study this book. Its use in undergraduate teaching will need to be carefully thought out, but I have no doubt that those of us teaching undergraduates about religions will want to read The Craft with an eye to considering how it might best be used. Grimes offers us caution and reassurance, “Aimed at enhancing the dexterity of ritual studies researchers, the book may nevertheless induce disorientation, awkwardness, and self-consciousness, but students of ritual shouldn’t worry too much about these feelings, since they usually evaporate quickly” (3).

Studies in Religion / Sciences Religieuses 45(2)

For anyone interested in the study of the ways ritual works and doesn’t work, as well as how rituals do the work they do, this book is essential.

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On the back cover of this book the American founding father of ritual studies, Ronald Grimes, writes: “In religious studies, theory and method research has long been embroiled in a polarized debate over scientific versus theological perspectives.” Often there seems to be a sharp contrast between inside and outside perspectives. Whereas in the past theology claimed to articulate the inside perspective, present-day religious research sees its duty as presenting an objective outside perspective. Of course, such polarizations are one-sided and do not do justice to much of contemporary research, but there is some truth in the distinction. This applies to both theologians and other scholars of religion.

For Grimes one way of gaining a more holistic research perspective is to study concrete practices. Being a leading figure in the field of ‘ritual studies’, a phrase he coined at the American Academy of Religion in 1977, his book incorporates the experience of decades of work in that field. It is actually his most programmatic work so far, sketching method and theory that might be useful for contemporary scholars of ritual. An important premise of Grimes’s approach is the sequence of the research steps that also forms the structure of the book: “first a method, then a case, and finally a theory” (p. 3). Grimes’s work is down to earth, based on fieldwork, and he sees the researcher as someone who actually operates among the ritual actors. This makes his approach very challenging for theologians, too, as the positive theological reception of his earlier work, especially in the Netherlands, shows. His ethnographic method is applicable not only to ritual studies but also to liturgical studies if one is interested in liturgy as a major feature of ‘lived religion’.

The ‘anthropological turn’ that has played a major role in many recent approaches to liturgy, too, implies a new self-understanding that goes beyond polarizations: “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*” (p. 4). As a result the actual work to be done makes the researcher an actor in the ritual field. He develops the necessary skills to really grasp a ritual practice. Then he explores a concrete case, and only from that hands-on work can he draw theoretical conclusions. This apparently inductive research cycle is surprising for two reasons: first, the multisensory character of the research through the use of new media like films; and second, the researcher’s existential involvement.

The book is structured as follows. The first part is on *method*. It indicates many concrete and useful steps when entering the ritual field and which practical aspects one should not overlook. In addition the method is broader than just a technique. It is seen as ‘performative’ in itself (p. 11). In a playful way Grimes makes the reader reflect on the existential background to his approach from the very beginning: the researcher *does* play a role that has implications for the field as well as for the scholarly forum. The most relevant elements of these chapters for liturgists are the use of new research media and the
existential reflection (features mentioned earlier). Far too few liturgists actually use film and other media. And the role that liturgists play in parish churches and ecclesial debates when they take a position as a researcher is hardly reflected existentially.

In the second part Grimes outlines a case he has already studied several times in recent decades: the Santa Fe Fiesta. It is a feast held in autumn every year since 1712 to celebrate the re-conquest of Santa Fe by Spanish colonists in 1692. There is much folklore in the festival, which Grimes describes colourfully but nonetheless precisely. Whether one is interested in the case or not, it is relevant for every reader to know how Grimes documents the research process. He sketches the scenarios in which films were shot, which can be found on the internet by readers who are interested. This is innovative, because “the practice of shooting rites continues unabated” (p. 95). Another question he deals with is how social conflicts and dynamics actually affect the researcher, too. Only an inside perspective can offer a really integrated approach to the various dimensions of a ritual performance like the fiesta. It is this insight that offers food for liturgical thought, because liturgists rarely include consultative research in their academic work, something that Grimes already proposed for ritual studies years ago. Finally, the historical framework of the case is described to better understand the field material (p. 124). Although the research presented here is not liturgical, the different steps, resources and interpretations are highly relevant to liturgy. Liturgists could also reflect on the various dimensions of the liturgical settings they study, liturgy being – metaphorically speaking – a ‘festival’ for everybody involved.

The third part of the book deals with ritual theory. Grimes interprets theoretical concepts differently from deductive approaches, be it in the sense of scientific hypotheses or religious doctrine. A good example is the elements of ritual he describes. Grimes writes: “I call the smallest unit of ritual studies research an element, as if a rite can be factored in its constituents” (p. 232). Elements like actions, actors, places, times, et cetera are used to carefully reflect on the whole spectrum of a rite, which is a concrete ritual enactment of a particular tradition. Apart from these elements, Grimes offers tools for reflection on the social surroundings of ritual, its dynamics and many other topics. What is the liturgical relevance of these theoretical investigations? They can be helpful to hermeneutically distil liturgical theory from praxis. Often educational programmes for liturgy proceed the other way round – from theory to practice in a more deductive way. But if we take the notion of liturgical theology seriously as a theoria deriving from the faithful’s liturgical actions, the leitourgia, Grimes’ bottom-up approach might be one possible way. Note that the author himself does not claim to describe an exclusive way of researching ritual. Historical and systematic research is as appropriate as the ritual approach. The same applies to liturgy, but it is a rather innovative approach in liturgical studies.

Grimes himself indirectly invites liturgists to join in interdisciplinary dialogue: “Those wanting to study their own rituals […] will have to make modifications” (p. 12). Liturgists want to do that, so here lies a task for future research to contribute to a field-oriented, existential method that is not only about others (like a lot of cultural anthropological
research) but also about oneself; that is not only existentially moving but also makes
liturgical research a craft: reflecting theologically on the living tradition of liturgy. Then the
approach can be a fruitful contribution to the interdisciplinary field of liturgical studies, in
dialogue with history, systematic theology and, of course, liturgical practice in the past,
present and future. Grimes offers us a good starting point for that both in the field and in the
academic classroom!

Thomas Quartier (Nijmegen, Leuven, Rome)
"I'm hoping to provoke you into doing your own reimagining of ritual, its theories, and the methods for studying it - even if you do so against what I have written here." With these words, Ronald Grimes concludes the main body of his new book, The Craft Of Ritual Studies. It's a generous spirit with which to write a guide for students of ritual, and one that reflects the noncommittal approach that has come to typify the study of ritual.

It's ironic that the academic tradition of ritual studies has become so reluctant to adopt any particular stance about how ritual works, or even what ritual is. Ritual, after all, is a practice that requires some form commitment - at least enough to translate abstract ideas into concrete action, and often a great deal more than that. Over the last few decades, ritual studies has wandered away from clear, inspiring metaphors into a misty territory of abstractions that often reads more like philosophy than a description of a form of human behavior.

Such an approach is appropriate for academics, who specialize in sustaining intellectual debate. It hasn't produced much of use for those who would seek to apply the dynamics of ritual, rather than merely discussing ideas of ritual. To actually work in ritual requires more firm ground than ritual studies can offer.

It's important, in reading this book, to remember that it is written for an academic audience - for students and professors whose goal is to publish papers, and perhaps books, with which to earn academic advancement. It is not written for consultants or managers who seek to learn about ritual so that they can craft more fruitful experiences. Those who would apply ritual dynamics are currently without a guide, and the Craft of Ritual Studies does not bridge the gap between academic study and practice.
However, of all the books that have been written by specialists in ritual studies, The Craft Of Ritual Studies goes the furthest in providing concrete ideas about how to organize research of rituals. Unlike other books about ritual studies, which focus on ritual theory and on research findings, The Craft Of Ritual Studies explores the methods of research. So, while Ronald Grimes refuses to commit to any particular model of ritual, he at least provides those of us who seek to apply ritual dynamics with a set of tools for researching ritual activities, and for critically considering the models we adopt, not as final truths, but as solid methods for practice.

The Craft of Ritual Studies is at its strongest in the lists that Grimes provides, which show the comprehensive scope of Grimes' consideration of ritual - a benefit of his decades of experience in the area. This book should be read by anyone who seeks to study ritual, either as an academic or in the application of ritual dynamics - not because Grimes always makes the most useful judgments about how ritual works, but because he has identified the most useful questions that students of ritual can ask.