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Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice

Catherine Bell

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Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice Catherine Bell
Arguing that the concept of ritual is overdue for critical rethinking, Bell here offers a close theoretical analysis of recent developments in ritual studies, concentrating on anthropology, sociology, and history of religions. She begins by showing how discourse on ritual has served to generate and legitimate a limited and ultimately closed form of cultural analysis. She then proposes that so-called ritual activities be removed from their isolated position as special, paradigmatic acts and restored to the context of "social activity" in general. Using the term "ritualization" to describe ritual thus contextualized, she defines it as a culturally strategic way of acting. She goes on to show how this definition can serve to illuminate such classic issues in traditional ritual studies as belief, ideology, legitimation, and power.

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