

Review of Alessandro Testa's Habilitation Thesis, by Peter Jan Margry

The habilitation thesis as delivered by Testa is to my opinion a daring and impressive piece of academic work. Although the book has for the major part been compiled and written on the basis of earlier published articles, and hence a product of about twelve years of research on that topic, it reads in its present book form as a more or less coherent academic work.

The thesis is daring as the chosen topic is daring in the sense that it concerns an important European wide cultural phenomenon practiced over about nearly a millennium, and on which a library of publications has been written. To get grip on such a vast topic is certainly a difficult task and to reflect consistently on those results even more.

Content

1. Relevance topic

The relevance for Folklore Studies/Ethnology/Cultural Sciences is great as no (modern) overview was written on the topic of Carnival. Due to specializations, lack of longterm research time and changing appreciation regarding 'classic' of 'traditional' themes or topics within the mentioned fields, it has become quite rare to make such overview studies, although they remain fundamental and necessary for the progress within academic fields.

2. Formulation topic

The topic is quite clearly formulated. Within the authors ambitious plan to study carnival in Europe it must be noted that it is meant as a generic study on the phenomenon, but that in practice it leans strongly on studies and historical examples from the south (mainly Italy and also France) and to a much lesser extent to sources from Middle, East, West or Northern Europe. As the study is set up to trace structural and universal aspects of Carnival culture, this can be considered being not a crucial flaw.

3. Contribution thesis

The major contribution of the study is its "status quaestionis"- status, bringing up a modern overview of research lines and the analysis and interpretation of that historiography on how to perceive the phenomenon of Carnival. In that sense it is a unique study; there are no modern competitors to be compared with.

Methodology

4. Relevance methods

A discourse analysis and an overall structuralist approach are the leading and appropriate methods within this study, the author combines these with some case examples from historical sources and brings them in a critical testing with the proposed theories of earlier scholars on Carnival. One could argue about a (mainly) structuralist approach, but the author does his work competent and consistent.

5. Level analysis

There is a very high level of analysis and theorizing. Therefore the study is not an easy reading piece; it questions and debates a great variety of general and specific Carnival related theories. The sometimes extensive and exuberant wording of the author does not simplify the

argumentation. Various theoretical and historiographical issues are even also debated in the often 'thick' endnotes to the chapters.

6. Standards

The language in which the study is written is excellent, although sometimes the argumentation is too wordy and inclines to a somewhat over-sophisticated word choice. Citations, notes etc. are all excellent.

Conclusion

In sum, I can state that this book impressed me by its universal scope and the exposed scholarly knowledge and theoretical skills of the (relatively young) author. Such vast comparative-theoretical researches on large single socio-cultural phenomena are scarce nowadays, therefore academia (ethnology/folklore studies) is definitely enriched by it. *Ritual and Social (Dis)Order* meets easily the standard thesis requirements within Ethnology.

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