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Mysticism

Instructor

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Institution

York University

Course Description

The course will introduce a major aspect of religion: ecstatic experience of the individual and the effects of such experiences on culture and society. The course will be divided into three related parts.

PART I: A variety of ecstatic phenomena from a number of different cultures will be briefly considered as an introduction to the subject.

PART II: General approaches, issues and problems from several disciplines will be considered:

Philosophy- validity and communicability of the mystic experience.

Ethnobotany- identification, history and cultural uses of psychoactive substances.

Psychology & Neurophysiology - theories concerning the nature of consciousness, experimentally induced ecstatic states, neurophysiological changes related to ecstatic states, relationship between ecstatic states and mental health. (We will not specifically explore psychoanalytic and Jungian approaches in this course.)

Anthropology: etic understanding of the mystic experience, cultural roles of ecstatic experience.

PART III: An examination of the interrelationship between ecstatic experiences and the development of religious traditions, as well as the formation of new ones.

Required Texts

- Lamb: Wizard of the Upper Amazon (North Atlantic Books) ISBN#0-938-190-80-6f
- Euripides: Euripides V: Three Tragedies (Chicago) [Bacchae] #0-226-30784-0, or any other reputable translation of the Bacchae
- Baldwin: Go Tell It on the Mountain (Dell) #0-440-33007-6
- Laing: The Politics of Experience (Penguin) #0-14-013486-7
- Harner: The Way of the Shaman (HarperCollins) #0-06250373
- Course Kit (available from Beta):
 - from M. Smith, Jesus the Magician / Paper, "Sweat Lodge"
 - "Duminea" / Paper, "Mediums and Modernity"
 - selections from the Upanishads / selections from the Chuang-tzu (Zhuangzi)

- o selections from Meister Eckhart / selected psychological and neurological studies from Wasson et al: Persephone's Quest / from Bharati: The Light at the Center
- o selected readings in philosophy / the Yoga-sutra / from the Tao Te Ching from M. Idel, The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia
- o selected readings in Christian theology from S. Bramly, Macumba / from W. LaBarre, Peyote Cult

Recommended Reading

Paper, The Spirits Are Drunk: Comparative Approaches to Chinese Religion (SUNY Press) 0791423166

General Reference

Arbmann, Ecstasy (3 Vol.)

Course Requirements

20%: Reading responses (for every class for which a reading has been assigned, you must turn in a 1-page report, including discussion questions). The report will encapsulate the reading as relevant to the theme for which the reading was assigned. The report will conclude, within the 1-page limitation, with several questions regarding the reading in relation to the week's theme.

10%: Class report (in-class oral and written book report; oral - minimum 10, absolute maximum 15 minutes; written - 1000-1500 words). Report must include a) bibliographic data, properly placed and formatted for book reviews, b) description of book itself (not contents of book), c) discussion of aspects relevant to week's topic, d) evaluation of book, e) a few choice representative quotations. NOTE: You are writing a formal academic book review and will be evaluated accordingly; see religious studies journals in the journal room of the library for appropriate examples. Books for report will be chosen from those works listed as R# in the course outline; first come, first served. Reporters should be prepared to lead class discussion on book in relation to week's theme and assigned reading.

15% & 25%: Two examinations (in-class, closed book, cumulative, comprehensive essay questions based on understanding the course material and requiring extensive reference to the course readings).

Examination questions:

Mid-term: 1 essay question: a rewording of Part I of Course Description above.

Final: 2 essay questions: 1) a rewording of entire Course Description above; 2) open-ended questions (you will have a choice) regarding personal interpretations of course themes.

(No special examination preparation will be necessary for students who prepared for and took part in class discussions. For students who did not do so, no special preparation will adequately prepare them for the examinations.)

30%: Project: topic and format completely open but format and/or media (not the topic) must be one in which the student has prior experience and topic and format must be approved by course director.

Project requirements and due dates:

a) written statement of preliminary topic due: Nov. 06.

b) written statement of topic and annotated bibliography due: Jan. 8.

c) written statement of progress and outline (in outline form) due: Feb. 5.

d) completed project due: March 5.

Second copy of requirements "a" through "c", with course director's comments, will be returned the week following the due date; students must be present to receive them.

Students notified of required changes on the second copy must return the revision (two copies) at the following class (two classes after original due date)

Films & Videos

Week 2: [Fast Cars] (V); [Yamomani] (V)

Week 3: Eduardo the Healer (F)

Week 5: Duminea (F); Les Maitres Fous (F); [Church Exorcism] (V)

Week 6: Trance and Dance in Bali (F); Kalogeros (F)

Week 7: The Holy Ghost People (F), [Pentecostal Church] (V)

Week 8: [Saddhu] (V)

Week 9: Rites of Origin (V), JVC Video Anthology of World Dance & Music, Vol 2 (V)

Week 10: Pocomania (F); [Candomblé] (V)

Week 11: To Find Our Lives (F)

Week 12: [Past Life Regression Therapy] (V)

Outline

[List number = week; R = books for class reports, on 3 day reserve]

1. PART I

Introduction to course

2. Ecstatic states Lamb: Wizard of the Upper Amazon

R1: J. Lizot, Tales of the Yamomani

R2: F. Bruce Lamb, Rio Tigre and Beyond

3. Shamanism Course Kit: Smith, Jesus the Magician; Paper, "Sweat Lodge"

R2: D. Merkur, Becoming Half Hidden

R4: Bäckman & Hultkrantz, Studies in Lapp Shamanism

4. NO CLASSES AT YORK

5. Mediumism Course Kit: "Duminea"; Paper, "Mediums and Modernity"

R5: G. Rouget, Music and Trance

R6: E. Lewis, Ecstatic Religion

6. Classical Greece Euripedes: The Bacchae

R7: E. Dodds, The Greeks and the Irrational

7. Classical India Course Kit: from the Upanishads

R8: E. Conze, Buddhist Meditation

8. Classical China Course Kit: from the Chuang Tzu (B. Watson, trans.)

R9: D. Hawkes, Ch'u Tz'u, Songs of the South

9. Medieval Europe Course Kit: Meister Eckhart

R10: Colledge & Walsh, Julian of Norwich: Showings

R11: R. Otto, Mysticism East and West

10. American Christianity Baldwin: Go Tell It On the Mountain

R12: M. Kelsey, Tongue Speaking

R13: W. La Barre, They Shall Take Up Serpents

11. EXAMINATION I

12. **PART II**

Psychological approaches Course Kit: selected articles

R14: C. Tart, States of Consciousness

R15: A. Hardy, The Spiritual Nature of Man

R16: Laughlin, McManus, d'Aquili, Brain, Symbol & Experience

13. Medical approaches Laing: Politics of Experience

R17: C. Zaleski, Otherword Journeys

R18: N. Cousins, Head First, The Biology of Hope

R19: W. Jilek, Indian Healing

14. Ethnomycological approaches Course Kit: from Wasson et al: Persephone's Quest R20: R. Wasson, Soma

R21: R. Wasson, The Wondrous Mushroom

- R22: R. Wasson et al, The Road to Eleusis
15. Anthropological approaches I Course Kit: from A. Bharati: Light at the Center
- R23: L. Kendall, Shamans, Housewives & Other Restless Spirits
- R24: D. Jordan, Gods, Ghosts and Ancestors
16. Anthropological / New Age approaches Harner: The Way of the Shaman
- R25: R. Bucke, Cosmic Consciousness
17. Philosophical approaches Course Kit I: selections
- R26: W. Stace, Mysticism and Philosophy
- R27: J. Horne, Beyond Mysticism
18. **PART III**
- India Course Kit: Yoga Sutra
- R28: A. Bharati, The Tantric Tradition
- R29: C. George, The Candamaknosana Tantra
19. China Tao te ching
- R30: L. Kohn, Early Chinese Mysticism
- R31: Lu K'uan Yü, Taoist Yoga: Alchemy and Immortality
- R32: I. Robinet, Taoist Meditation
20. The Monotheistic Traditions Course Kit: from Idel, The Mystical Experience in ... Abulafia; selections from Christian theology
- R33: S. Dresner, The Zaddik
- R34: Idel & McGinn, Mystical Union and Monotheistic Faith
- R35: B. Krivocheine, In The Light of Christ
21. Afro-America Course Kit: from Bramly, Macumba
- R36: K. M. Brown, Mama Lola
- R37: Murphy: Santeria: An African Religion in America
22. Native America Course Kit: from LaBarre, Peyote Cult
- R38: W. Powers, Yuwipi AND Garter Snake, The Seven Visions of Bull Lodge

R39: Brown & Brightman, "The Orders of the Dreamed"

23. "New Age" Individual field trip: Check out a New Age book store (e.g., Omega)

-- a response paper is required regarding your observations

R40: Lewis & Melton: Perspectives on the New Age

24. FINAL EXAMINATION

25. STUDENT PROJECTS [SEMINAR]

26. STUDENT PROJECTS [SEMINAR]

Select a location 

<http://www.wlu.ca/~wwwaar/syllabi/mysticism-paper.html>

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