

R223 Religion and Imagination Section R071 Contemplative Music and Thought

William Jackson "Contemplation and Music" CA335 274-7643 wijackso@iupui.edu

Introduction. This is a course about traditions of contemplation and music, inquiring into the nature of the mind, and the patterns of the universe. The nature of consciousness is still a mystery and is the subject of many explorations and debates in various disciplines, from religious and philosophical inquiries to neurobiological research. The nature of consciousness is still a great frontier for human development. A greater understanding of the whole of consciousness (which, admittedly, is as unimaginable in toto as the whole of the universe is unimaginable) is a great attractor pulling on human endeavors in the present and foreseeable future. We are inevitably learning more about what "mind" means. It is the promising horizon which is stimulating new scientific research, and new humanistic approaches which often include a greater sense of interconnected mutuality. I feel that in the coming years a better understanding of the nature of consciousness and an appreciation of its powers will be important factors in facing new social and cultural challenges with new creativity. The study of contemplation involves developing a greater personal awareness of deeper experiences of consciousness. This course offers an entry into the wisdom of some major religious traditions, especially relating musical practices and varieties of contemplation. Contemplation is an integral part of religious traditions and that music, chanting, sounds and mantras often play crucial roles in contemplative practices. This course will explore religious imagination in contemplative experiences via environments, readings, listening to music, and discussions.

Part of our approach is concerned with consciousness as grounded in the way the systems of the universe seem to work, using the view of twentieth century science when its specialities are integrated and implications are followed for human life. The metaphysics and physics of vibrations are considered the basis of matter and music: "the music of the spheres." Humans do not exist independently from the creative universe, its elements, patterns and processes. Cycles, circadian rhythms, dynamic systems inform us. Vibrations, waves of energy, cycles of tunable systems are basic.

We will discuss historical writings about how contemplation has been traditionally practiced, the lore and philosophy, literature and arts associated with contemplation. Also, stories of practitioners, East and West and stories of the spiritual power of music.

The course may explore how concepts of music and mind relate to "flow," fluidity of natural systems; and how images of whole and parts reflect mind and music. Exercises may include exploring contemplation in particular physical settings (garden, hall, chapel, woods, mountain or hill, desert, water; times (dawn, dusk, midnight). Also, active and contemplative as complementary dynamics: service/sitting, stillness/ action, withdrawal-rest and return to work. It relates contemplation in an open-ended way to the age-old universal spiritual uses of voice and sound, examines contemplation "as a method to develop concentration, to deepen understanding, and to cultivate awareness." The Department of Religious Studies at IUPUI is careful to avoid church/state conflicts, offering courses about religious traditions, never teaching any particular religion as a favored path, and always respecting diversity. The goal of this course will be to familiarize students with the importance of historical contemplative practices in regard to music, and to encourage those who are interested to explore further their observations and experiments accordingly.

Goals. This course will (1) provide background on contemplation in a comparative religion mode, with readings in several key traditions and their practices. (2) It will also include study of the nature of sound in relation to the universe and to mental states, and (3) traditions of music as archetype of spiritual attunement and music's use in assisting contemplative states. (4) There will also be a personal experimental exploration component for those seeking experiential in-volvement, especially using music from traditions, Hindu, Jewish, Christian, Sufi, etc.

Requirements. Students will participate in discussions about readings. (15%) They will keep a contemplation notebook to record ideas, impressions, images.(25%) They will also write short papers reflecting on several topics of the readings, or a more comprehensive long paper.(30%) Take-home exam, project, or service learning activity.(30%)

Materials: Required Texts, available at Bookstore, Cavanaugh Hall basement:

Essential Mystics, William Harvey

The World Is Sound, Joachim Berendt

The Roar of Silence, Don Campbell

Occasional xerox readings will also be distributed for discussion.

Class Schedule and Readings for Discussion. (Please read each assigned reading on the date assigned, as a preparation for discussion & questions.)

Jan. 9 Introduction to the Course.

Jan. 11 Berendt The World is Sound, read forward and introduction.

Jan. 16 Essential Mystics, Primal Voices pp. 1-15.

Jan. 18 Essential Mystics, Taoism 17-33.

Jan. 23 Don Campbell, Roar of Silence, Chapter 1.

Jan. 25 Essential Mystics, Hinduism 35-66.

Jan. 30 Essential Mystics, Hinduism continued -- xerox.

Feb. 1 Berendt, The World is Sound, pp. 15-50.

Feb. 6 Berendt, The World is Sound, pp. 51- 75.

Feb. 8 Don Campbell, Roar of Silence, Chapter 2.

Feb. 13 Berendt, The World is Sound, pp. 76-111

Feb. 15 Berendt, The World is Sound, pp.112-127 Harmony.

Feb. 20 Essential Mystics, pp. 111-135 Greek thinkers.

Feb. 22 Plotinus xerox.

Feb. 27 Don Campbell Chapter 3.

March 1 Berendt, The World is Sound, pp. 128-151.

March 6 Essential Mystics, Buddhism, pp. 67-85.

March 8 Berendt, The World is Sound, Zen and Modern Japan, pp. 185-199 & Xerox.

Spring Break no classes

March 20 Essential Mystics, Judaism, pp. 87-109.

March 22 Don Campbell, Roar of Silence, Chapter 4

March 27 Essential Mystics, Islam, pp. 137-167.

March 29 Berendt, The World is Sound, pp. 173-182. and xerox.

April 3 Essential Mystics, Christianity, pp. 169-189.

April 5 Essential Mystics, Christianity, pp. 190-216.

April 10 Don Campbell, The Roar of Silence, Chapter 5.

April 12 Berendt, The World is Sound, India and Jazz, pp. 200-227.

April 17 Don Campbell, Roar of Silence, Chapter 6.

April 19 Berendt, The World is Sound, What do musicians say pp. 152-172.

April 24 Introduction to Essential Mystics, and xerox.

April 26 Don Campbell, Roar of Silence, Chapter 7. Looking back, consider the whole.

“In this world of onrushing events the act of meditation-- even just a ‘one-breath’ meditation -- straightening the back, clearing the mind for a moment -- is a refreshing island in the stream. Although the term meditation has mystical and religious connections for many people, it is a simple and plain activity. Attention; deliberate stillness and silence. As anyone who has practiced sitting knows, the quieted mind has many paths, most of them tedious and ordinary. Then right in the midst of meditation, totally unexpected images or feelings may sometimes erupt, and there is a way into a vivid transparency. But whatever comes up, sitting is always instructive. There is ample testimony that a practice of meditation pursued over months and years brings some degree of... serenity, focus and self-confidence to a person who stays with it.” Gary Snyder, in his introduction to Beneath a Single Moon: Buddhism in Contemporary Poetry, an anthology.

Example of a xerox reading on Contemplative Thought

While other kinds of thinking and writing may be intended to be strictly objective, pragmatic, calculative, etc., reflective thought and writing are thoughtful, questioning, imaginative, philosophical, exploratory, open-ended, free and fluid, intended to consider and ponder matters from different angles, spontaneous, playful, connection-making, pattern-noticing, looking back from a vantage point, moody, tentative --but not all at once.... Albert Einstein said “It is enough for me to contemplate the mystery of conscious life perpetuating itself through all eternity; to reflect upon the marvelous structure of the universe, which we can dimly perceive, and to try humbly to comprehend even an infinitesimal part of the intelligence manifested in nature.”

Gary Snyder: “There’s nothing exotic about meditation. It’s the birthright of everybody. Animals know all about it. Animals have the capacity for sitting still and tuning in on their own inside consciousness, as well as the outside consciousness, for great periods you can see them doing it. The calmness of deer at rest at midday is the order of meditation. It’s a curious thing that Western man has gotten so anxious about it and has forgotten what it is and really looks askance on anyone doing it. Most of the rest of the world knows how to meditate and does so in one way or another...It’s a great oversight not to take the time to look at what your mind is doing and what your body is really like and what speech is when something rises from within, that makes you want to utter a sound. So meditation is sitting still and cutting off the inputs and the distractions and the things that are always leading you from one thing to the next thing to

the next-- just stopping that stream of often very trivial and inattentive acts and creating a condition of attention in which you look within and try to see what the mind is doing on its own within you -- a completely natural thing to do.... poetry comes into this at many levels. Poetry is before it begins in a sense. Like stopping a person momentarily in their tracks with a poem they have happened to look at accidentally and they forget that they were to catch a bus somewhere and they look around and think: My God, I'm living in the world! Or like the great enlightened poet saints like Milarepa or Zen Buddhist masters who wrote poetry. They wrote poetry at the height of their delight, the sheer play of being. Or they would trade poems with each other that other people has written. So the poem always stands there as almost the essence of it. And the beauty of it is that at the beginning and at the end it is equal. That the poem is as valid for the Zen master who is seeing through it, as it is for the man on the street who suddenly remembers that it is spring because the poem has turned his head from his preoccupation... poetry is really the dance at the top of the whole process...." The Real Work, New York: New Directions, 1980, pp.17-19.

Natalie Angier: "Plato called the psyche a sphere. Carl Jung said that the circle symbolizes the self. The Buddha sat on a lotus of eight radically symmetrical petals. The circular mandala signifies the unity of the conscious and unconscious minds. In the great Gothic cathedrals of Europe, where every window is stained with the tears and hymns of every pilgrim and atheist to behold it, the highest artistry is displayed in the rose windows, the symbolic circles of heaven. The crowning achievement of Filippo Brunelleschi, father of the Renaissance, was the Duomo, which returned to the world the forgotten joy of the dome... to encircle is to love and to possess, as we acknowledge today with a wedding ring. Shakespeare's theatre was constructed around a circular stage, and it was named the Globe. We live life vertiginously, attending to the round. Who knows why. It may have all started with the face. The first thing that a newborn pays visual attention to is not the breast, which the infant cannot adjust its focus to see from its ringside position, but the mother's face. Human faces are round... Or was it our reverence for light...the sun and the moon are round... The circle illuminates and delimits. We can't escape it. We can't get enough of it." Woman: An intimate Geography. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999. pp.139-40.