

**TOPICS:
CONTEMPLATION AND DEVOTION:
ART AND SPACE**

PROFESSOR J.E. ZIEGLER/SPRING 2001

“But the spiritual journey is more than a psychological process. It is of course primarily a process of grace. God also speaks to us through nature. The more we know about nature, the more we know about the mind of God. Einstein believed that science was directed toward discovering God’s thoughts. *Quantum physics itself is a kind of spirituality insofar as it is always looking farther in the unknown to see what is beyond the known. It is search for ultimate reality.*” Thomas Keating.

“Nothing is real to us but hunger; nothing sacred except our own desire. Shrine and after shrine has crumbled before our eyes; but one altar forever is preserved, that whereon we burn incense to the supreme idol,—ourselves. Our god is great, and money is his Prophet! We devastate nature in order to make sacrifice to him. We boast that we have conquered Matter and forget that it is Matter that has enslaved us.” Okakura Kakuzo

This is an exploratory course, which has grown out of the Topics Seminar I taught last semester. It looks at art and architecture in order to show how they have nourished human beings in their quest for stillness and contemplation. Images and spaces have been powerful tools in assisting people to attain greater spirituality and deeper meaning in their lives. We seek to understand these tools and, in part, some of the impulses that gave rise to them.

We begin by reviewing western monasticism, especially Benedictine, and its contribution to Christian arenas for contemplation—the cloister, in particular. We shall also explore devotional imagery (books, paintings, and so), which has been a continuous source of insight, gained through repetitive meditation on images. There will be 2 required field trips to The Trappist monastery, Spencer Abbey, and to the Peace Abbey in Sherborn.

We will also look very briefly at non-western examples of contemplative space and imagery, through the Zen rock garden, the Japanese tea ceremony, and tantric Buddhist mandala. Guest lecturers will introduce this material, along with the reading.

This course examines images and spaces, then, as much from a philosophical and spiritual perspective as an art historical one. In this sense, we are enriching the traditional methods of the discipline of art history in order to focus on and embrace the role of works of art and architecture as spiritual guides and shapers of contemplative consciousness.

For as long as civilization has made artifacts and ordered space, it seems that humans have understood that the *cosmos* is revealed through *contemplative awareness* of nature and things. This conviction has been suppressed in our time. Our relationship to nature is one of control and technological superiority. We no longer consult nature as a source of wisdom. Oh indeed, TV gives us a modern contemplative shrine; we sit in a contemplative trance for

hours on end. But it does not yield a stronger relationship with our inner lives, or with God. It dissatisfies our senses, envelops us with anger and violence, deludes and confuses us with a commodified materialism.

This course addresses, therefore, not only our intellect but our spirit, as well. In doing so, it requires that students become involved in experiencing—in small or large ways—the content of contemplative awareness. This is not an “armchair” course, but in which theory and practice are entwined.

January 17 Introduction. Clip from “The Sopranos” and selections from “A Child’s Christmas in Wales,” written and read by Dylan Thomas

Part I: Why should we understand the relationship between art and contemplation more fully? What is contemplation and how do philosophers and contemplatives illuminate it?

January 24 Josef Pieper, *Only the Lover Sings: Art & Contemplation* (Ignatius Press, 1988).

January 31 Pieper (con’t)

February 7 Philip Zaleski, Paul Kaufman, Daniel P. Goleman, *Gifts of the Spirit : Living the Wisdom of the Great Religious Traditions* (Harper San Francisco Press, 1998).

February 14 Thomas Keating, *The Human Condition: Contemplation and Transformation* (Paulist Press, 1999).

Part II: Monasticism and Devotional Painting

February 21 Kathleen Norris, *The Cloister Walk* (Riverhead Books: 1997).

February 28 No class (CAA conference): Field trip/TBD

March 7 Spring Break

March 14 Norris

March 21 John Drury, *Painting the Word* (Yale Press, 1999)

Part III: Other Cultures

March 28 Francois Berthier, *Reading Zen in the Rocks: The Japanese Dry Landscape Garden*, Graham Parkes trans. (University of Chicago, 2000)

April 4	Okakura Kakuzo, <i>The Book of Tea</i> (Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1956)
April 11	Gary de Angelis (Rel.. Stu. and CISS), “Varanasi and Mandala: Its Place in the Hindu Tradition”
April 18	Todd Lewis (Religious Studies), “Mandala”
April 25	Conclusion/Field trip

Course Requirements

Please read these carefully.

This is a seminar. It demands a high degree of participation, along with a spirit of independence and willingness to explore--a desire to be open to change and dialogue. As stated above, this is not an “armchair” course, where learning happens at a distance from the material. Evidence of active engagement with the course material is primary and will take a number of forms: faithful attendance, preparation of readings (for every class a group of students will prepare the reading for discussion, providing study questions and an outline, typed, of course), a notebook and/or journal (described below), and a final design for a contemplative space.

Notebook/journal: From the first day of class, this is to be a continuous project, with daily entries. It will contain two types of material. First, it should include all notes, all handouts, class discussions, information of field trips, notes on guest lecturers, and so on. In other words, you should hand me, at the end of the semester, a notebook (preferably 3-ring), containing everything pertinent to the course—especially any additional material you may read, Xerox, be gifted with, pick up during a walk, liturgy, or retreat. Second, there should be continuous daily reflections, which show your working through the course ideas in order to arrive at your decision for final project. Lastly, the journal will show how you work through the ideas for your design.

Design for contemplative space: This does not require any background in studio art but it does require a willingness to become sensitive to “how things look.” This is your opportunity to design your perfect contemplative space. The journal will chronicle how you came to the design and what steps you took to work through it. I am pleased to help you work through this process. Ultimately, however, the design will arrive from yourself and your sense of being in the world, still and quiet and attentive—and how to accomplish that routinely and beautifully.

My office is in Fenwick 436 (x2598) or you may call the department secretary, Faye at x2227.