Myth, Ritual, and Symbol
ANTH 132/REL 134  Fall 2017
Cathy Stanton

Myth, ritual, and symbol exist in all human cultures and play key roles in structuring societies, integrating individuals, facilitating change, and explaining and maintaining our connection to the cosmos. This course will examine key concepts and theories drawn from anthropology, psychology, cultural geography, and studies of religion, ritual, performance, and art. We will investigate such topics as pilgrimage, tricksters, liminality, shamanism, initiation, and myths of origin and apocalypse, as well as some of the ways myths and symbols become located in bodies and landscapes. Challenging the notion of mythic materials as archaic, we will inquire into their power in the present day, including through social media and tourism. We will also explore the complex relationship between myth and science, particularly in contested discourses about anthropogenic climate change. This course counts towards the Social Sciences or Humanities distribution requirement and the World Civ requirement.

Readings and resources
All of the readings and other class materials are in digital form, and can be accessed through the class Wordpress site: https://sites.tufts.edu/mythritualsymbol2017/
You will need to log in with your Tufts ID to see and post to the site.

Departmental objectives addressed by this course
• analysis and interpretation of present and past human actions
• a capacity for critical thinking by engaging with ethnographic, textual, and media material
• writing skills, including developing an argument
• thinking internationally and globally
• understanding the meanings and uses of the concept of "culture"

Additional course-specific objectives
• to introduce a number of theoretical perspectives on myth, ritual, and symbol
• to foster an imaginative, integrative, experiential approach to cultural materials and processes
• to encourage students to make broad connections among (a) behaviors and materials categorized as myth and ritual, (b) historical and contemporary examples of such materials, and (c) systems of classification themselves
Course assignments and grading

(1) **Ritual analysis paper** (3-4 pgs, 800-1200 wds, due Oct 11) 25% of grade
   Describe and analyze any ritual of your choice, using Victor Turner’s ideas about ritual process and symbols as the building-blocks of ritual.

(2) **In-class test** (Nov 15) 30% of grade

(3) **Proposal for final paper/project** (1-2 pgs, due Nov 20) 5% of grade

(4) **Final paper/project** on any course-related topic of your choice, in any format appropriate to the subject (due by class time on Dec 11) 30% of grade

(5) **Participation** (based on attendance, demonstrated familiarity with the readings, general engagement with the course material, contribution to the trickster film fest, productive exchange during final paper/project planning, any additional contributions to the course blog, and both quality and quantity of contributions to discussion during class and/or with the instructor) 10% of grade

Course policies

See the class wiki for policies on classroom computer use, academic integrity, extensions, and email. The soundbite versions are as follows:

(1) Laptops may not be used in the classroom unless you have accommodations for computer note-taking. Phones must be turned off and out of sight during class time.

(2) Plagiarism is an extremely serious academic offense and will be reported to the Dean of Student Affairs office.

(3) Extensions on assignments may be negotiated under exceptional circumstances (but simply having many deadlines close together does not count as exceptional).

(4) Please email only for quick queries or information, and speak with Cathy before or after class or (better yet) during office hours about any substantive questions.

Accommodations

Tufts University values the diversity of our students, staff, and faculty, recognizing the important contribution each student makes to our unique community. Tufts is committed to providing equal access and support to all qualified students through the provision of reasonable accommodations so that each student may fully participate in the Tufts experience. If you have a disability that requires reasonable accommodations, please contact the Student Accessibility Services office at Accessibility@tufts.edu or 617-627-4539 to make an appointment with an SAS representative to determine appropriate accommodations. Please be aware that accommodations cannot be enacted retroactively, making timeliness a critical aspect for their provision.
CLASS SCHEDULE

Wed Sept 6  Introductions and overview

Mon Sept 11 Classic symbol theory I: Anthropological insights

Wed Sept 13  Classic symbol theory II: Archetypes
  Reading: Carl G. Jung, “Approaching the unconscious” from *Man and his Symbols* (1964) (NOTE: There is an intentional gap in this reading. Stop at "The importance of types" on p. 45 and start again at "The archetype in dream symbolism" on p. 56)
  James Hillman, “Polytheism” from *A Blue Fire* (1991)

Mon Sept 18  The body as a symbolic site
  Reading: Marina Warner, “The language of hair II: From the beast to the blonde” from *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers* (1995)

Wed Sept 20  Training for transcendence
  Reading: Marc de Civrieux, “Medatia: A Makiritare shaman’s tale” and Donald Philippi, “Inter-Species communication and the Ainu way of life” from *The Language of the Birds* (1985)
  Joan Halifax, “Into the Nierika” from *Shamanic Voices: A Survey of Visionary Narratives* (1979)

Mon Sept 25  Tricksters and transformations
  Reading: Richard Erdoes and Alfonso Ortiz, “Raven lights the world” from *American Indian Trickster Tales* (1998)
  Helena Bassil-Morozow, “Common motifs in trickster narratives” from *The Trickster in Contemporary Film* (2012)

By 1 pm on Tues, Sept 26, add a post to the class blog with a link to a trickster film clip and a brief (1-2 sentence) statement about why you chose it. We will use these links and statements as the basis for our Sept 27 class.

Wed Sept 27  Tricksters on film
  Reading: “The Trickster” on TVTropes (read the main article and at least a couple of the sub-tropes)
Mon Oct 2 Turner’s ritual process model
Reading: Victor Turner, “Variations on a theme of liminality” from Secular Ritual (1977); excerpts from “Liminality and communitas” (pp. 94-97 and 125-130) from The Ritual Process (1969); “Liminal to liminoid” (pp. 41-44) from From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play (1982)

Wed Oct 4 Communitas in practice
Paxus Calta, “Making the big labor credits” on Your Passport to Complaining (2015)
Guests: Maximus Thaler, Paxus Calta, and other activists from the Point A Project

Mon Oct 9 – No classes INDIGENOUS PEOPLES DAY
Ritual analysis paper due in Trunk by class time on Oct 11

Wed Oct 11 Problems in mythography: Origins and endings
Daniel Wojcik, “Approaching Doomsday: The contours of American apocalyptic belief” (pp. 5-20) from The End of the World as We Know It (1997)
Viewing (before class time): Popol Vuh

Mon Oct 16 Problems in mythography: Linear and cyclical time
Reading: Adam Kuper, “The idea of primitive society” from The Invention of Primitive Society: Transformations of an Illusion (1988)
Mircea Eliade, “Profane duration and sacred time” from The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion (1959)

Wed Oct 18 Problems in mythography: Myth as code
Elizabeth Kolbert, “Flesh of your flesh” (2009)

Mon Oct 23 Problems in mythography: The psychic imagination
Reading: Sigmund Freud, “A dream is the fulfillment of a wish” from The Interpretation of Dreams (1900)
Alan Dundes, “The trident and the fork: Disney’s ‘The Little Mermaid’ as a male construction of an Electral fantasy” from Bloody Mary in the Mirror: Essays in Psychoanalytic Folkloristics (2002)
“The Juniper Tree” from The Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm
Joan Accocella, “The lure of the fairy tale” (2012)
**Wed Oct 25  Problems in mythography: The politics of classification**


**Mon Oct 30  Drawing power: Maps and math**


Shannon Najmabadi, “Meet the math professor who’s fighting gerrymandering with geometry” in *Chronicle of Higher Education* (2017)

*Guest:* Moon Duchin, Tufts Department of Mathematics

**Wed Nov 1  Moral landscapes**

*Reading:* Keith Basso, ‘‘Stalking with stories’: Names, places, and moral narratives among the Western Apache” from *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language among the Western Apache* (1996)

**Mon Nov 6  Art and pilgrimage**

*Reading:* Mircea Eliade, “When the sacred manifests itself” and other excerpts from *Myths, Rites, Symbols* (1975)


**Wed Nov 8  Myths as cultural property**

*Reading:* “The story of the Ramayana according to Valmiki”


Kevin Dodd, review of “Sita Sings the Blues” from *Journal of Religion and Film* (2009)

*Viewing (in class):* “Sita Sings the Blues” (excerpts)

**Mon Nov 13  Repairing the world: Yuan Yunsheng at Tufts**

*NOTE:* We will hold this class session at the Tufts Art Gallery in the Aidekman Arts Center.


Han Wei and Liu Fang, “Ground-breaking painting back in spotlight with modern art movement retrospective” in *Caixin* (2017)


**Wed Nov 15  In-class test**

Final paper/project proposal due in Trunk by class time on Mon Nov 20
Mon Nov 20 Symbols in the age of the meme, the brand, and the emoji
Reading:  Susan Blackmore, “Taking the meme’s-eye view” from The Meme Machine (1999)
Optional:  Leah Shafer, "I can haz an Internet aesthetic?!? LOLCats and the digital marketplace" (2012)
            Neil Harris, “Who owns our myths? Heroism and copyright in an age of mass culture” from Cultural Excursions: Marketing Appetites and Cultural Tastes in Modern America (1990)

Wed Nov 22 – No class THANKSGIVING BREAK

Mon Nov 27 Ritual as tourism
Reading:  Evgenia Fotiou, “The globalization of ayahuasca shamanism and the erasure of indigenous shamanism” in Anthropology of Consciousness (2016)

Wed Nov 29 Tourism as ritual
Reading:  Dean MacCannell, “Sightseeing and social structure” from The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class (1977)

Mon Dec 4 Science problematized
Reading:  William Doty, “Myths, science, and truth(s)” from Mythography: The Study of Myths and Rituals (2000)
            Claude Lévi-Strauss, “The meeting of myth and science” from Myth and Meaning: Cracking the Code of Culture (1978)
            Paul Hawken, “Stop saying you ‘believe’ in climate change” on Salon (2017)

Wed Dec 6 Reinhabiting the cosmos
Reading:  Gary Snyder, “Reinhabitation” from A Place in Space (1976/1995)

Mon Dec 11 Brief presentations of class papers/projects
Bring a material object as a symbol to represent your final paper or project.

Final papers/projects due in Trunk by class time on Dec 11