
The Pilgrimage: Rituals of Mortification and Purification and the Achievement of Ecstatic Transformation on the Camino de Santiago

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Abstract

The central goal of this experimental ethnographic film project is to foster a critical dialogue about the human pursuit of ecstatic states through ritualized punishments to the body. Situated in the loosely-defined field of "carnal sociology," I conduct a systematic, immersive audiovisual study of the ecstatic rituals found among pilgrims who walk the Camino de Santiago in Spain on a quest for spiritual and self-transcendence.

Methodologically, this work employs the conventions two genres of cinematic expression – observational documentary film and discontinuous narrative film – to create a multi-sensory account of ecstatic practice among pilgrims who make the 450-mile trek from St. Jean Pied de Port in France to Santiago de Compostela in Spain.

Ultimately the piece seeks to advance (1) theoretical developments in the sociology of the body and soul and (2) methodological innovation via the use of fictional forms and devices to produce empirical sociological knowledge of human behavior and transformation. This investigation of human association yields new insights into how humans employ rituals of self-mortification and self-purification to achieve ecstatic, transcendent states.

Keywords: pilgrimage, ethnography, film, video, ecstasy, carnal sociology, ritual, religion

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