

1) JEAN-MICHEL RABATÉ, UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

“Eliot and Woolf in dialogue about spirituality and poetry”

It sounds counter-intuitive to pair Woolf and Eliot given the common view of the American poet as conservative and religious whereas the British author was a feminist, an atheist, and on the left. Even if critics focus on the decade when they were close friends (1918-1927), the general assumption is that Woolf rejected Eliot after his religious turn. I will argue that was not the case and that their friendship deepened in spite of the “conversion.” If it is true that Woolf vented some of her annoyance when depicting Eliot as Louis in *The Waves*, one must understand why this novel launched a new mode of poetic prose. Similarly, if Woolf’s *Orlando* had been triggered by *The Land*, a poem written by her female lover, we should remember that Vita Sackville-West had written it as a response to the modernism of the *The Waste Land*. Both poems would be quoted and parodied in Woolf’s fiction. Beyond such a triangular interaction (Eliot was also a friend of Vita, whom he published), all three authors considered that poetry would give access to a privileged synthesis of belief and spirituality, a synthesis that had important social and political consequences while aiming at a broader audience. Woolf and Eliot moved to the theater at the same time, Woolf writing *Freshwater* in 1923 and having it performed in 1935, Eliot moving from lyrical poetry to drama, an evolution culminating with *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935). The ethical impact of drama reverberates momentarily in Woolf’s last novel *Between the Acts*. Eliot was aware that he might have saved Woolf from suicide had he come to a planned visit to her. His obituary reflects his pain and admiration. These numerous connections prove that Eliot and Woolf agree when they problematize the role of poetry in an age of mediatic alienation.

2) NORA HORVATH, SZÉCHENYI ISTVÁN UNIVERSITY, GYŐR, HUNGARY

“Spiritualization of Beauty, Love, and Suffering – Bostonian Art and Aesthetics at the End of the 19th Century”

"I do not live only for a friend. But I am to live for something, for the idea; and I cannot pursue it without some *spiritual atmosphere*;" – wrote Edward Perry Warren in a letter to his friend, John Marshall.

In my presentation, I focus on the spiritual atmosphere sought by artists and philosophers of the Boston artistic elite who possessed a classical education (based on the Greats [*Literae humaniores*]). They searched for this atmosphere, whether in a work of art or a living person, based on an ancient aesthetic and philosophical idea. I’d like to point out connections that reveal how American art and aesthetics drew significant inspiration from the works of 19th-century British authors, especially those who idealized ancient philosophical ideas and medieval art. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, many at

Harvard University and in Boston's cultural scene created artworks and artistic theories based on Plato's philosophy and the teachings and principles of new artistic and philosophical movements emerging in Europe. These contributions added a new layer to the development of American culture. In the works of intellectuals like George Santayana, Fred Holland Day, and Edward Perry Warren, the motifs of beauty, friendship, and love—and in Day's case, especially the motif of suffering—were imbued with a unique spiritual significance. With Ralph Adams Cram's art, for example, medievalism became widespread. They regarded art and an aesthetic way of life with an almost religious reverence, and they expressed strong opinions on why certain paintings or buildings could be filled with genuine, spiritual content, unlike the creations of other art forms. Authors like John Addington Symonds provided excellent inspiration for their American contemporaries in this regard. Both Santayana and Warren highlight how the Greeks placed religious ideas into beautiful human forms as a way to get closer to the gods. Day's interest in the Greek relationship with nudity led him to pictorial experimentation with the nude. He used his own body for these photographs, which caused a great public uproar but also made photographic history and brought new dignity to the representation of the body. For Day, photography offered a way to convey feelings and profound thoughts that had previously only been possible in exceptional genres of literature and painting.

The Boston artists to be presented in my talk almost unknowingly pioneered the popularization of body aesthetics in America. With our current understanding of the principles of somaesthetics, we can now examine even more interesting aspects of their work.

3) ALBERTO PARISI, KOBE UNIVERSITY, JAPAN

“Poetry, Breath, and Atmosphere: The Symbolist Atmospheric Legacy”

In the past decade, the Humanities have witnessed a marked “turn to breath” and “to atmosphere,” revealing the centrality of air, breath, and aerial environments in human life and cultural production. Yet, while this paradigm is significantly reshaping various fields, its implications for literary studies — and especially for the interpretation of modern European poetry — remain underexplored. This paper argues that a renewed engagement with breath and atmosphere allows us to reframe the very project of modern poetry. Far from being merely a vehicle of inner, spiritual expression, as Romantic aesthetics and its Hegelian legacy maintained, modern poetry can be understood as a material practice of atmospheric production — one that dissolves the autonomous subject into a dynamic continuum of breath, voice, and environment.

Focusing on Paul Verlaine's *Romances sans paroles* (1874) alongside Hugo von Hofmannsthal's fin-de-siècle poetics, I argue that Symbolist and post-Symbolist writing radicalize this atmospheric turn. Through a poetics of murmurs, breezes, and exhalations, they replace the expressive "I" with a diffused, porous subjectivity coextensive with air and milieu. Taken together, these practices rematerialize "spirit" and soul as *pneuma* and situate poetic language within a shared ecological field. Rather than offering a comprehensive genealogy, the paper isolates a threshold where modern lyric ceases to disclose an interior consciousness and becomes the crafting of atmospheres that blur the boundaries between self, body, and world.

4) Mark Tschaepe,

"Generative Noise: Somaesthetics and Atmospheres of the Spiritual"

This paper explores noise as a multisensory phenomenon that shapes and destabilizes atmospheres of the spiritual. While commonly defined as unwanted sound, noise extends across all perceptual registers—visual clutter, tactile irritation, cognitive distraction, emotional turbulence, and even olfactory or gustatory dissonance. Noise is here understood as relational: an affective surplus that unsettles perception and challenges the soma to reorient itself within its environment. In spiritual contexts, noise is not limited to the sonic but extends into visual, material, and affective registers, shaping how bodies perceive, attune, and commune within aesthetic environments.

From a somaesthetic perspective, noise is both destructive and generative. It disrupts concentration, harmony, and clarity, yet it also provokes attentiveness, heightens bodily awareness, and can serve as a gateway to spiritual attunement. In meditation, ritual, and communal practice, noise may fracture immersion but also transform into a resource for sustaining focus or cultivating resilience. These shifting dynamics reveal noise as a precarious threshold: at once a threat to and a condition for the emergence of spiritual atmosphere. By situating noise as a cross-sensory, relational phenomenon, I argue that spiritual atmospheres are often achieved in the ongoing negotiation with disturbances that reconfigure perception, embodiment, and communion.

By reframing noise as a generative practice of inquiry and attunement, this paper argues that atmospheres of the spiritual often depend on precisely those disturbances that unsettle clarity. Noise becomes a vital medium for forging embodied connection, communal resonance, and transformative spiritual atmospheres. Through a somaesthetic perspective, noise generates

atmospheres that resist binary distinctions of silence and sound, sacred and profane, inner and outer.

5) ERIC MULLIS, QUEENS UNIVERSITY OF CHARLOTTE

“Atmospheric Dance Partnering”

Contemporary concert dance features partnering techniques that facilitate experiences characterized by spontaneously shared intentionalities and blurred bodily borders. They culminate in a sense that the exchange transcends the moment, intimating the possibility of harmonizing with social realities. In this presentation, I consider first-hand experience with duet partnering in light of concepts from Daoist metaphysics, specifically, ideas surrounding its characteristic focus-field ontology. Seen through this lens, dance patterning technique sheds light on how two individuals may use cooperative movement to create an atmosphere that has implications for our understanding of reality.

6) FRED MAUS, UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

“Discovery and Transcendence in Music Therapy
(The Bonny Method of Guided Imagery and Music)”

Helen Bonny (1921-2010) created an influential mode of music therapy, the Bonny Method of Guided Imagery and Music. Used in psychotherapy, the method involves deeply relaxed, receptive listening to specially designed programs of classical music. These programs evoke experiences, often dreamlike, that bring to awareness thoughts and feelings that would otherwise evade access. Though the client in a Bonny GIM session is typically still, lying on their back, bodily sensations and fantasies of movement are common. Bonny's ideas developed from an exceptional and unique experience: playing violin at a conference on prayer, she felt that her playing escaped her control and became transcendently beautiful. Spiritual or transcendent experiences, referred to in the Bonny tradition as transpersonal, are a recurrent feature of Bonny-style therapy sessions.

7) AOKI TAKAO, HIROSHIMA UNIVERSITY, JAPAN

“Spiritual Atmosphere: Aesthetic Sensibility of ‘Envelopment’ and ‘Permeation’ in East Asia—The Intersection of Weather and Spirituality”

The aesthetics of atmosphere is often regarded as a theoretical import from the West. However, in East Asia—especially Japan—a deep sensitivity to atmospheric qualities has long been cultivated, even in the absence of a formal academic framework. This sensitivity extends beyond aesthetic appreciation to include spiritual dimensions, rooted in cultural experience and linguistic expression. Chinese characters such as 霧 (atmosphere), 雨 (rain), 霞 (mist), and 雲 (cloud) reflect a worldview attuned to meteorological phenomena, particularly the gaseous forms of water. These characters suggest that East Asian cultures have historically valued not only scenic beauty but also the enveloping and permeating qualities of weather.

In Japan, aesthetic experience has been shaped by the interplay between natural scenery and meteorological conditions. The atmosphere of ceremonial occasions—joyful weddings or solemn funerals—is often expressed through weather-related vocabulary, indicating a universal tendency to perceive emotional and spiritual atmospheres through nature. In traditional arts such as waka poetry, this atmospheric sensibility plays a central role. Fujiwara no Shunzei (early 13th century) emphasized that superior poems possess not only verbal beauty but also a certain atmosphere, illustrated by examples such as flowers or the moon enveloped in mist, rain, or night.

Zeami (15th century) described theatrical experience as not merely visual or auditory, but as a shared immersion between stage and audience, often evaluated through terms related to moisture and humidity. Bashō (17th century) revealed the spiritual depth of his art through the motif of winter rain (shigure).

These examples show how natural beauty, when enveloped and permeated by meteorological phenomena, is elevated into a deeper, spiritual aesthetic. In considering the spirituality of water, it is the gaseous forms—mist, rain, humidity—that reveal its existential and spiritual significance. The aesthetics of atmosphere in East Asia is thus not a borrowed theory, but a deeply rooted cultural and spiritual orientation.

8) KEVIN SCHILBRACK, APPALACHIAN STATE UNIVERSITY

“The Relational Ontology of Spiritual Atmospheres”

My primary interest as a philosopher of religion is in communicating the value of recent work in 4E cognition for the study of religion. For this goal, the concept of an “atmosphere” is an invaluable conceptual tool. The call for papers for this conference says that the concept of atmospheres does not fit neatly into our common binaries of object and subject, physical and mental, and that is true. My hope in this paper is to move beyond the observation that a dualistic ontology renders atmospheres mysterious, and to contribute to the development of a more adequate approach, an approach that will not

treat the existence of felt values as merely subjective. The central idea of my paper is that atmospheres, like colors, are best understood on a relational ontology. Colors are the product of light waves on the eyes of animals with a certain arrangement of rods and cones, and so they exist relative to that organ. On this account, colors are both dependent for their existence on the structure of eyes and they are also, given that structure, objective features of the world. This paper will argue that, analogously, atmospheres exist relative to agents with a certain affective disposition and they are also objective features of the world. What is crucial about atmospheres, however, is that a person's perceptual and affective disciplines can be trained. Exactly this training, I would argue, is often provided by participation in a religious form of life. This paper therefore supports Richard Shusterman's argument that some forms of religious participation are pragmatic disciplines "recommended to improve our experience and use of the body" (1999: 305).

9) KENNETH HOLLOWAY, FLORIDA ATLANTIC UNIVERSITY

"Zen-Based Practices for Anxiety and Mood Improvement in middle Aged and Older Women with Hypertension"

Abstract

Background: Hypertension is a common chronic condition among middle-aged and older adults, often accompanied by psychological comorbidities such anxiety, fatigue, and sleep disturbances. Our prior research has identified a particularly high prevalence of these symptoms in hypertensive women. As interest in complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) grows, Zen-based practices—such as meditation, scripture reading, and contemplative arts—have emerged as potential strategies to enhance emotional regulation and mental well-being. Despite their culture relevance, limited empirical evidence exists regarding their physiological and psychological effects among hypertensive women.

Objectives: This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness and underlying mechanisms of various Zen-related practices in reducing anxiety and fatigue, while improving sleep quality among middle-aged and older women with hypertension. The specific objectives are: (1) to assess changes in psychological and physiological parameters before and after Zen-based interventions; (2) to compare the effects of five distinct Zen practices; and (3) to explore the potential mechanisms through which these practices regulate emotional and physiological responses.

Materials and Methods: A randomized controlled trial will recruit 180 middle-aged and older women diagnosed with hypertension. Participants will be randomized assigned to one of five

intervention groups or a control group (routine daily activity). The intervention include: (1) silent reading of *Amitabha Sutra* using a finger to follow the text; (2) chanting the *Amitabha Sutra* with a pre-recorded audio; (3) tracing an image of Amitabha Buddha with black pencil; (4) seated meditation with visual focus on an image of Amitabha Buddha; and (5) mandala coloring with six colored pencils. Each intervention consists of a 20-minute session conducted once daily for four consecutive weeks (28 sessions in total). Data will be collected at three time points: baseline (T0), immediately after the first session (T1), and post-intervention (T2). Physiological outcomes included blood pressure, heart rate, brain wave activity, and salivary cortisol levels.

Psychological outcomes will include anxiety (State-Trait Anxiety Inventory), fatigue (Chalder Fatigue Questionnaire), and sleep (Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index).

Predictive Results: It is anticipated that participants engaging in Zen-related practices will exhibit greater improvements in anxiety, fatigue, and sleep quality compared to the control group. Guided chanting and seated meditation are expected to produce stronger physiological regulation (e.g., reduced cortisol and stabilized blood pressure), while mandala coloring and Buddha image tracing may provide enhanced emotional relief and psychological focus. The combination of meditative attention and spiritual symbolism is hypothesized to activate both cognitive and neuroendocrine pathways related to stress reduction.

Conclusion and Implications for Practice: This study will provide valuable evidence on the use of culturally embedded, non-pharmacological interventions for hypertensive women. The findings may support the integration of Zen-based practices into community health programs and inform the development of accessible, low-cost mental health strategies tailored to aging female populations. These practices may serve as effectiveness adjunctive therapies to improve well-being and reduce the psychological burden associated with hypertension.

Keywords: Zen practices; hypertension; anxiety; middle-aged and old women; complementary and alternative medicine

10) SCOTT R. STROUD, UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

“Ambedkar’s Navayana Pragmatism and the Atmospheres of Caste”

How do our religious orientations and traditions condition our activities and self-awareness in broad, perhaps even unknown, ways? This question becomes even more pointed when one considers religious customs and traditions that function to oppress members of their communities, as some interpretations of Hinduism have done with the customs of caste. This presentation aims to interrogate caste oppression as a type of spiritual atmosphere that permeated both those enforcing this rigid system of birth-based hierarchy and those affected by its crushing power.

My starting point will be the thought of an important civil rights and political leader in modern India, Bhimrao Ambedkar (1891-1956). Ambedkar is noted as one of the chief architects for India's democratic constitution, and he is often known as a fierce critic of the caste system. He was born an "untouchable" (now, "Dalit"), so he vividly felt the sting of the atmosphere of pollution and impurity surrounding his existence as an untouchable. He is also notable as a philosopher and theorist of democracy, having earned his Ph.D. from Columbia University where he was especially enamored of the thought of John Dewey.

This presentation will examine the atmospheric quality of the religious customs of caste, and how it operates to divide community and preclude the sort of political community that Dewey and Ambedkar both dreamed of. More than this, we shall see that Ambedkar's thought—a form of pragmatism I call "navayana pragmatism"—diagnoses a spiritual malady that is brought on by this atmosphere of caste. The customs of caste infect the somatic experience and mental outlooks of both those oppressing others, and those oppressed. Ambedkar found this latter consequence particularly distressing, as it sapped all the self-respect and spiritual strength from untouchables such as himself once this mindset was internalized. Ambedkar's pragmatism was formulated as both a diagnosis of this atmosphere of spiritual pollution and as a remedy that might regain self-respect for those encumbered by the ideas that past karmic debts determined their oppressed status as "untouchable."

11) ROSETTA CAPONETTO, AUBURN UNIVERSITY

"Edible gardens and Spirituality"

This paper focuses on the edible gardens cultivated by diasporic Italians who settled in Alabama between 1870 and 1920. The paper allows landscapes to be intersected by scholarship bestowing healing in agricultural practices in the analysis of how the gardens that diasporic Italians looked at, touched, and were touched by, affected their life in the United States. The presentation analyzes the sensory experience of these diasporic gardens and the gardeners that tended them, exploring how a spiritual and physical connection to the land affected their American dreams. In the paper, the repetitive actions of handling crops are examined through the works of anthropologist Stephanie Bunn and

architect Jujani Pallasmaa who make the argument about hands being a source of invisible knowledge. The paper ties scholarship on embodied knowledge to the work of environmental historians of migration, such as Marco Armiero and Daniele Valisena, to chronicle the exploitation of immigrants during Alabama's Industrial Revolution. The manual work in the mine and steel factory in Birmingham, Alabama, marked the bodies of diasporic Italians. It debilitated their health internally and reinforced the perception of them as non-White bodies; covered in dust, and surrounded by a society that was, supposedly and by contrast, whiter, cleaner, and healthier (Armiero and Valisena 2017). When diasporic Italians planted edible gardens, they metaphorically used the skills stored in their hands to transform an environment and an atmosphere that signified exploitation and disease into a landscape of aspiration. As these immigrants responded to their senses and one another in the slow process of digging, planting, growing, caring, waiting, and harvesting, their bodies and environments were molded by each other, showing their strengthening skills, their nurtured spirits, and their flourishing identities. This is the spiritual dimension the paper is interested in capturing.

12) CRISPIN SARTWELL, AMERICAN INSTITUTE FOR PHILOSOPHICAL AND CULTURAL THOUGHT

“Aesthetics of Quakerism”

The aesthetic of Quakerism might be characterized as an extreme or purified version of the aesthetic of Protestantism (the same Protestantism that led to outburst of iconoclasm aimed at church decorations all over northern Europe). It is minimalist, anti-ornament, stripped-down, bare. The meeting houses are usually extremely modest and plain, and this has a basis in the meditative and moral practices of Friends: the emphasis on simplicity, honesty, directness, and equality. The simple physical contexts are supposed to provide an environment for certain kinds of meditative practices, with minimum dogma and decoration, focused on 'the inner light' and collective experience in silence and 'waiting'. I will conclude with some speculations about the relations of physical environments to spiritual/somatic practice.