

# Mountains and Waters of No-Mind

## A Transcultural Approach to Moments of Heightened Awareness and Non-Substantialist Ontology in Henry David Thoreau, Jack Kerouac, and Gary Snyder

Birgit Capelle

### Abstract

This article explores the epic poem *Mountains and Rivers Without End* (1996) by Gary Snyder and a Song/Chin dynasty Chinese landscape painting. I illustrate how the poem and the painting, together with Henry David Thoreau's autobiographical narrative *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (1849) and Jack Kerouac's *The Dharma Bums* (1958), form a complex web of intertextual and intermedial references. All four works, I argue, tell similar narratives of spiritual journey and paths through mountain and river landscapes; all four speak of moments of heightened awareness in the sense of Buddhist "no-mind" (Chinese: *wu-shin*; Japanese: *mushin*). I show how they converge in exhibiting ontologies of non-substantiality, emptiness, and becoming. Taking the philosophies of Zen Buddhism and Taoism as a theoretical frame, I argue that the American transcendentalist and Beat works poetically and narratively convey relational rather than substantialist views of Being and life. They depict the world as a dynamic and open field of tension between two non-oppositional forces from which we as subjects are not essentially separate in a dualistic way. I substantiate my argument by drawing on the French sinologist and philosopher François Jullien, who refers to the Chinese understanding of landscape ("mountains and waters") in his critical treatment of (European) philosophy's centuries-long subject-centered epistemology and substantialist "ontology of Being."

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Birgit Capelle

Over the course of several decades beginning in the 1930s, D. T. Suzuki and Alan Watts published numerous texts with the aim of making East Asian modes of thinking accessible to the Anglo-American reader. Their texts have since inspired scholars from diverse fields to highlight and investigate in ever greater depth the analogies and parallels between U.S. American and East Asian ways of thinking.<sup>1</sup> This article explores, from a transcultural and comparative perspective, three American literary works from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and one Song/Chin dynasty Chinese landscape painting titled *Streams and Mountains Without End* (Illustration 1). The guiding thought is that these works display astonishing isomorphic qualities on different levels and converge with regard to their ontologies of non-substantiality, emptiness, and becoming.<sup>2</sup> I will examine the texts' narrative structures, settings, stories, and themes while arguing that they form, together with the painting, a complex web of intertextual and intermedial references. They exhibit important similarities in structure and content. The three American works comprise three different literary genres: a book of poetry (Gary Snyder's *Mountains and Rivers Without End* [1996]), a personal narrative (Henry David Thoreau's *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* [1849]), and a novel (Jack Kerouac's *The Dharma Bums* [1958]). All three are autobiographical in nature, and refer, in varying degrees, to East Asian religious and philosophical traditions. They speak of moments



of heightened awareness in the sense of Buddhist “no-mind” (Chinese: *wu-shin*; Japanese: *mushin*). The point of departure for my argument is the Chinese landscape painting, which, by depicting a journey through a landscape scene, conveys the traditional Chinese view of nature or existence (ontology) as a dynamic interplay of “mountains and waters.”<sup>3</sup> My aim is to show how the three works of literature tell similar narratives of journeys and paths through metaphorical mountain and river landscapes in the form of spiritual quests. Most importantly, these works, like the Chinese landscape painting, convey non-substantialist ontologies in varying forms.

Before turning to my transcultural and intermedial comparison, I will give a short overview of the connections between the American transcendentalist and Beat movements and (East) Asian thought, and offer a brief introduction into the ways that Being has been conceived of in Europe, America, and Asia. This will serve as a basis for my subsequent analyses.

## **American Transcendentalism, the Beat Generation, and Asia**

The writers who came to represent the revolutionary cultural and literary movements of American transcendentalism and the Beat generation each looked toward Asia for new ways of living, writing, and thinking that differed from the established paradigms of Western culture with its dualistic ontology and epistemology. In the religions and writings of Asia, they hoped to find support for their inner intuitions and unorthodox beliefs. Waltraud Mitgutsch speaks of “a long-standing tradition, going back to Thoreau, Emerson, and Whitman . . . This tradition tries to define Western, specifically American experience by Eastern analogies thus achieving a fusion of Western and Eastern thought.”<sup>4</sup> In the same essay and in reference to the Beat generation, she expounds, “What was needed . . . was not only the rejection of Western civilization . . ., but models that could be turned to as viable alternatives.”<sup>5</sup> After traders and missionaries had established first relations between the North Amer-



**Illustration 1:** *Streams and Mountains Without End.*

From the website of the Cleveland Museum of Art, <https://www.clevelandart.org/art/1953.126>, which provides the image under a CC0 1.0 license. Image cropped and color altered.

ican continent and Asia by the end of the eighteenth century,<sup>6</sup> the American transcendentalists, in particular Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, were pioneers in integrating Asian (primarily Hindu) thought into their own philosophies and writings and, to a limited extent, into their ways of life. Through Latin, French, and early English translations, they had access to Hindu texts, the mystic poetry of Persia, and—to a lesser extent—Buddhist and Confucian texts. About a century later, American Beat writers such as Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and Gary Snyder took up and pursued this affinity for Asian views of reality. With numerous English translations at their disposal, this new generation was able to deepen enthusiasm for Asian (particularly Buddhist and Taoist) literature, philosophy, and religion, and, in contrast to the American transcendentalists, traveled extensively to the Asian continent. In particular, Gary Snyder spent several years in Japan pursuing spiritual training in Zen. Due to his fascination with ecology and the “East,” he came to be known as a “modern Thoreau.” Jack Kerouac, whose interest in Buddhism was inspired to a large extent by Snyder, focused on particular Buddhist insights and teachings, and his knowledge was based on private rather than academic studies.<sup>7</sup> All key figures of the Beat generation found intellectual and artistic inspiration in their nineteenth-century predecessors. This shows not least in their literary works with regard to the content and style. It also shows in their preoccupation with existential and ontological questions that engrossed Thoreau and, in particular, Emerson, the “endless seeker.”<sup>8</sup> The following section will identify the central features of Western and Eastern traditions of thought on Being.<sup>9</sup> The aim is to prepare a theoretical framework for the later explorations of non-substantialist ontological thought in the literary works of these American writers and thinkers.



Birgit Capelle

## Thinking Being in Europe, America, and Asia

According to the traditional Western view that opposes the concept of “matter” to either “form” (Aristotle) or “mind” (Descartes), mountains or rocks are commonly conceived as solid blocks of matter that neither move nor essentially alter or disappear. Their underlying substance does not change. This idea that rocks are substantial and fundamentally unchanging goes hand in hand with belief in the existence of an ultimate substance, principle or primary matter (Greek: *arche*) from which mountains and the whole world of visible phenomena are made. The corresponding search for the tiniest (fundamental) particles has preoccupied philosophy since antiquity, starting most notably with the Pre-Socratics, including atomists such as Leucippus and Democritus. Despite Heraclitus’s proclamation of the mutability of all existence,<sup>10</sup> interest in primary matter is a common thread throughout the Western history of ideas. Since antiquity, scientists and philosophers have been in pursuit of the most basic particles, whether it be atoms, quarks, or bosons.

But there has also been, especially in the past century, a handful of scientists and scholars advocating non-substantialist views of existence, in which reality is not composed of static substances but is instead inherently relational and processual. A noted advocate of a non-substantialist view is the German nuclear and quantum physicist Hans-Peter Dürr, who made the provocative claim around 2000 that “there is no matter.”<sup>11</sup> In elucidating his view of non-substantial nature, Dürr refers to East Asian views of reality, primarily Buddhist teachings. Well-known modern philosophers who likewise advocate non-substantialist ontologies include Alfred North Whitehead and the American pragmatists William James and John Dewey. According to Dewey, “every existence is an event.”<sup>12</sup>

In East Asian religious and philosophical traditions, particularly in Buddhism and Chinese Taoism, one does not find the dualism, or opposition, of mind (or form/idea) and matter, nor belief in the existence of indivisible material particles.<sup>13</sup> Instead, both philosophies view reality as void (Sanskrit: *śūnya*) or non-substantial (i.e., inherently relational and temporal). Buddhist views of reality—in accord with the teaching of *śūnyatā*—imply the rejection of finality in the cognitive search for truth and of the belief in metaphysical absolutes. This notion is succinctly captured by Michael G. Barnhart:

In particular, the second-century [Buddhist] philosopher Nāgārjuna argued forcefully, especially in his *Mūlamadhyamaka kārikā* . . . , that all reality was *śūnya* or empty. No thing, including nothing itself, had *svabhāva* or substantial and individual being, self-identity, self-being, or self-existence. Rather, emptiness or *śūnyata* was dependence; that all things were empty meant that all things were mutually (and thoroughly) dependent—the doctrine of *pratītyasamutpāda*.

Thus, no faith in a transcendent reality or principle could be sustained.<sup>14</sup>

In 1991, the biologist, neuroscientist, and philosopher Francisco J. Varela, together with Evan Thompson and Eleanor Rosch, published his pioneering work *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience*, in which he takes up the second-century Buddhist philosopher Nāgārjuna's systematic elucidation of the teaching of "emptiness" (Sanskrit: *śūnyatā*). He is critical of post-modern Western society's generally nihilistic treatment of what he calls "groundlessness," the "loss of foundations for the self and for the world." Varela takes up an optimistic position and encourages scholars to consider the more affirmative Buddhist insight into emptiness, and to integrate this insight into their research and practice. Making reference to Gianni Vattimo, he argues, for example, that reading Nietzsche and Heidegger non-nihilistically means focusing on the possibilities and "positive opportunities for the very essence of man that are found in post-modern conditions of existence."<sup>15</sup>

In *From Being to Living* (2020), the French sinologist and comparative philosopher François Jullien compiles a "Euro-Chinese lexicon of thought" in which he considers transcultural philosophy (here: "between the thought-languages of China and Europe") as a "work in progress" that, with regard to Europe, should have as its aim the gradual "emergence from ontology . . . , a way out of the 'question of Being,' the *Seinsfrage*, that is *at the same time* an entry into the thought of *living*." He takes a critical look at European philosophy's centuries-long "ontology of Being" which, as he suggests, understands Being substantially, in terms of *presence* (rather than becoming or time), and which goes hand in hand with a subject-centered epistemology that conceives of human being and the world as dualistically split (rooted in the Cartesian *cogito*). Jullien takes up Martin Heidegger's, Hans-Georg Gadamer's, and Jacques Derrida's critique of a metaphysics of "presence."<sup>16</sup> As an alternative to the European ontology of Being and the subject, he suggests envisioning human being and the world (i.e., *living*) in terms of an integral, indivisible dynamic field or "situation" from which we cannot be dualistically separated or split.<sup>17</sup> In order to explain his unorthodox understanding of the term "situation," he refers to the Chinese term for *landscape*, which is "mountain(s)-water(s)."

Subject *or* situation: this opposition is strangely illuminated quite differently in Chinese thought. Just think about what we call "landscape." . . . The Subject, in other words, is *in the presence* of the landscape, which is external to him and remains autonomous; he is not implicated in it. Yet China speaks not of landscape but of "mountain(s)-water(s)," *shān-shui* . . . At the same time, this is what extends towards the high (the mountain) and the low (water), towards what is motionless and remains unmovable (the mountain) and what never stops billowing or flowing (water) . . . The landscape is therefore not approached from the initiative of a subject, as the celebrated Cartesian beginning instituted it, but

is conceived as an investment of capacities reciprocally at work, . . . , at whose heart “some” subject is implicated. *Situation* would thus designate, in a preliminary way, this web of unlimited implications . . . from which only by abstraction can one exempt oneself.

In fundamental accord with the philosophy of Taoism, reality is seen as a dynamic web of interdependence, a continuous field of tension (situation) between the non-oppositional forces of yin/yang. We as individual selves (subjects) are thought to continually emerge from (and within) this web, situation, or field without ever separating from it: “I am at the heart of a continual relation of interaction which, as such constitutes ‘myself’ in response. The autonomy or independence of the subject is no longer an absolute predicate.”<sup>18</sup> Traditional Chinese conceptions of Being and the subject are inherently relational and accordingly empty (*śūnya*) rather than substantial.

One finds strikingly similar ontological insights in the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Jack Kerouac, and Gary Snyder. I believe that, in the spirit of Varela, their works reflect a life-affirming rather than nihilistic attitude toward Being as essentially groundless or non-substantial. By taking up the Chinese landscape painting *Streams and Mountains Without End* and its relevance for Gary Snyder (and Kerouac), my analysis will take a non-linear course. It will proceed in accord with the circular and open-ended structure of the Chinese painting (scroll) and its cyclical, periodic history of reception, analogous to the way Asian thought, which exhibits numerous structural similarities but also differences to American thought, has been adopted by American culture over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

### **A Chinese Handscroll, Gary Snyder’s *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, and East Asian Non-Substantialist Ontologies**

Among the many outstanding works in the collection of the Cleveland Museum of Art is a Chinese landscape painting titled *Streams and Mountains Without End*, which was acquired by Sherman Lee in 1953 ([Illustration 1](#) and [Illustration 2](#)).<sup>19</sup> It is unsigned and “painted on hand loomed single-cloth silk . . . in cold black ink of various tones” in a wide horizontal format (overall 13 13/16 by 43 9/16 in.)—a so-called handscroll (Chinese: *shou-chuan*).<sup>20</sup> The painting dates from the early to mid-twelfth century, the late Northern Song or early Chin dynasty.<sup>21</sup> On the museum’s webpage, one reads that “this impressive work demonstrates the culmination of stylistic developments in Chinese monumental landscape painting following the Northern Song tradition.”<sup>22</sup> Susan Bush points out that this particular handscroll “has been described intensively



**Illustration 2:** *Streams and Mountains Without End.*

From the website of the Cleveland Museum of Art, <https://www.clevelandart.org/art/1953.126>, which provides the image under a CC0 1.0 license.

as a key monument of early Chinese landscape painting in a well-known monograph of 1956 by Sherman Lee and Wen Fong.<sup>23</sup> In this work, Lee and Fong describe the age-old tradition in China of depicting “mountain and river” landscapes on horizontal scrolls: “the Chinese landscape handscroll is a paramount form in the history of Chinese painting from at least the *Wang-ch’uan* by Wang Wei in the eighth century until the present day.”<sup>24</sup> The Beat poet, ecologist, and Zen Buddhist Gary Snyder, who studied East Asian religions and cultures for many years, “came upon a reference to a hand scroll (*shou-chuan*) called *Mountains and Rivers Without End*” when he was still a student.<sup>25</sup> In the seventies or eighties, he visited “most of the major collections of Chinese paintings in the United States,” and “saw the Sung Dynasty *Streams and Mountains Without End*” in Cleveland.<sup>26</sup> He expounds upon the meaning of the handscroll in his essay “Blue Mountains Constantly Walking” (1990):

In common usage the compound “mountains and waters”—*shan-shui* in Chinese—is the straightforward term for landscape. . . . There are several surviving large Chinese horizontal handscrolls from premodern eras titled something like “Mountains and Rivers without End.” Some of them move through the four seasons and seem to picture the whole world.<sup>27</sup>

According to Snyder, the landscapes on the Chinese handscrolls can be read as microcosmic depictions of the earth as an altogether temporally unfolding, harmonious interplay of two complementary forces. Hunt speaks of “the interdependent dyad of mountains-rivers,” claiming that “Chinese landscape painting . . . attempts to capture life in its essential complementarity.”<sup>28</sup> In order to experience a Chinese landscape scroll, one has to—again following Snyder—“unroll the scroll to the left, a section at a time, as you let the right side roll back in. Place by place it unfurls.”<sup>29</sup> Chinese landscape scrolls exhibit a sense of temporality through the gradual unrolling and viewing of the silk canvas. Rather than representing a static object, a Chinese landscape scroll is “an experience” in the sense of John Dewey’s pragmatist aesthetics, an integral happening in time.<sup>30</sup> The temporal dimension is enhanced in the way the painting “represents a journey through a landscape.”<sup>31</sup> It is a narrative that unfolds in time and that the observer, in accordance with Dewey’s theory of art, engages with actively-passively (both physically and mentally) while unrolling and simultaneously rolling up the scroll.<sup>32</sup> In the case of the Cleveland handscroll *Streams and Mountains without End*, there is the added factor that the work itself evolved over centuries through the addition of “colophons that provide information about the work’s early history” as well as forty-eight “seals of collectors.”<sup>33</sup> Snyder states that “the East Asian landscape paintings invite commentary. In a way, the painting is not fully realized until several centuries of poems have been added.”<sup>34</sup> In line with its title, this landscape scroll could in principle be creatively continued “without end” by adding further commentaries and seals—analogous to the seeming boundlessness of the

horizontally expanding landscape. Snyder composed an epic poem titled *Mountains and Rivers Without End* that serves as a commentary and poetic translation of the painting, and thus a continuation of it. Anthony Hunt, in his book *Genesis, Structure, and Meaning in Gary Snyder's Mountains and Rivers Without End* (2004), claims that Snyder's engagement with his "verbal landscape painting" was extensive. He reworked the poem from the mid-1950s until its final publication in 1996. Hunt suggests that "the horizontal dimension of the scroll may be seen as a symbol for Snyder's personal journey in time and space and for humanity's general historical and cultural journey." The very first of a total thirty-nine largely autobiographical poems, which are narrated by a "traveling persona," is titled "Endless Streams and Mountains"/"Ch'i Shan Wu Chin."<sup>35</sup> Snyder states that it "describe[s]" the Chinese handscroll.<sup>36</sup> Similar to the macrocosmic *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, it can be considered a microcosmic ekphrasis (a more direct translation) of the Cleveland handscroll. Hunt explains that Snyder used "the horizontal handscroll as a structural model for his long poem" so that "various sections of the poem can be read in and for themselves, as 'innumerable small pictures,' or the entire poem may be read from beginning to end as a singular long poem, a linear journey."<sup>37</sup>

Clearing the mind and sliding in  
 to that created space,  
 a web of waters streaming over rocks,  
 air misty but not raining,  
     seeing this land from a boat on a lake  
     or a broad slow river,  
     coasting by.

The path comes down along a lowland stream  
 slips behind boulders and leafy hardwoods,  
 reappears in a pine grove,

no farms around, just tidy cottages and shelters,  
 gateways, rest stops, roofed but unwall'd work space,  
     —a warm damp climate;<sup>38</sup>

The speaker in these first three segments of the poem describes the process of being drawn into a landscape painting ("sliding in") as "that created space." In accordance with the Buddhist teaching of "self-lessness" (Sanskrit: *anātman*), Snyder employs the progressive form ("clearing," "sliding," "seeing") and avoids personal pronouns and references to a subject.<sup>39</sup> From a boat, the speaker becomes aware of the landscape as a dynamic "web of waters streaming over rocks," reminiscent of the dyad of mountains-rivers, displaying what I would like to call a non- or pre-subjective state of "no-mind" (Chinese: *wu-shin*; Japanese: *mushin*). With a "cleared mind," the

speaker becomes aware of the passing landscape of mountains and rivers, flora and fauna, nature and civilization without evaluating it, spotting a “path” while becoming an integral part of the landscape itself, the “totality of the process of nature,” as Snyder puts it elsewhere.<sup>40</sup> The “misty” air connects everything and dissolves boundaries, contributing to the atmosphere of quietude and emptiness. According to Alan Watts, “One of the most striking features of the Sung landscape . . . is the relative emptiness of the picture—an emptiness which appears, however, to be part of the painting and not just unpainted background.”<sup>41</sup> This deliberately “painted” emptiness could be interpreted as a visualization of Buddhist groundlessness or non-substantiality (Sanskrit: *śūnyatā*). In Snyder’s poem, this emptiness is evoked by the poem’s language, the lyrical I that, from a Western, subject-centered perspective, is “missing” from the beginning of the opening section. And the typographical, rhythmic arrangement of the lines which, on a horizontal level, mirror the vertical elevations and valleys, the “felt rhythms of the Cleveland handscroll,” together create the impression of empty space and empty mind.<sup>42</sup> “Snyder’s concept of space,” according to Hunt, “always includes the possibility of Buddhist ‘enlightenment,’ a moment when one ‘awakens’ to ‘a nowness of emptiness (. . . *shūnyatā*)’ wherein one comprehends ‘the true nature of things’ by knowing that ‘the entire universe is emptiness,’ including oneself.”<sup>43</sup>

Years prior to the poem’s publication, in his essay “Blue Mountains Constantly Walking,” (1990), Snyder referred to the “Mountains and Waters Sutra” by the thirteenth-century Japanese Zen master Dōgen. In this essay, Snyder appeals to the sacredness of East Asian mountains and elaborates the traditional East Asian view of the world as an ultimately empty, dynamic interplay of mountains and rivers. Reminiscent also of Taoist philosophy, he refers to nature as an ongoing dynamic happening of two polar yet non-oppositional, complementary forces:

There is the obvious fact of the water-cycle and the fact that mountains and rivers indeed form each other: . . . the Chinese feel for land has always incorporated this sense of a dialectic of rock and water, of downward flow and rocky uplift, and of the dynamism and “slow flowing” of earth-forms. . . . “Mountains and waters” is a way to refer to the totality of the process of nature. As such it goes well beyond dichotomies. . . . The whole, with its rivers and valleys, obviously includes farms, fields, villages, cities, and the (once comparatively small) dusty world of human affairs.<sup>44</sup>

According to Snyder’s reading of Dōgen, experiencing reality as mountains and waters, yin/yang, the female and the male continuously interacting, is seeing reality as *is* (in an enlightened state of no-mind), in its “plain thusness” (Sanskrit: *tathatā*) of “passage” (Japanese: *kyōryaku*), temporality or non-substantiality (“selflessness”; Sanskrit: *anātman*). In his main work *Shōbōgenzō*, Dōgen makes the link between mountains

and water explicit. What they have in common is that both are temporal in nature: “The mountains are *time*, the oceans are *time* too.” He expresses a non-substantialist ontology in which there is no dualistic split between being and time. Rather, “all being is time.”<sup>45</sup> “Time is already existence and existence is necessarily time.”<sup>46</sup> The term he uses is *uji*, “existence-time.” Phenomena are constituted relationally and are ultimately empty. They are momentary manifestations within a dynamic web of interdependence and interpenetration (Sanskrit: *pratītya-samutpāda*), emerging only to dissolve again as spatiotemporal “particularities” (Japanese: *jiji*). Yet, because Dōgen views reality as a spatiotemporal network of dynamic interconnections, he believes in the simultaneity of all spaces and times in the immediate here and now,<sup>47</sup> which one experiences as a transient, enlightening moment of “Buddha nature” (Japanese: *busshō*) or “absolute now.”<sup>48</sup>

According to D. T. Suzuki, this moment involves a new viewpoint, a return to one’s original nature or “Self-nature,” which sees through the rationally constructed interpretations of reality that characterize and limit our normal thought.<sup>49</sup> Enlightenment (Japanese: *satori*) refers to a pre-verbal and pre-conceptual state of Buddha-mind or no-mind. It is an “empty” state of awareness in which, similar to William James’s “pure experience,” the mind does not cling to a definite thought but instead lets thought evolve freely—similar to the speaker in the opening section of Snyder’s poem. It precedes all conceptualizations and dualisms between subject and object, thinker and thought, knower and known. “The Zen masters speak of ‘no-mind’ (Jpn., *mushin*; Chin., *wu-hsin*), or synonymously of non-thinking (Jpn., *munen*; Chin., *wu-nien*) . . . The term [emptiness] denotes the non-clinging of the mind. The mind that does not adhere to anything is free and pure.”<sup>50</sup> Non-clinging or non-attachment makes reality accessible in its ultimate groundlessness and non-substantiality.

### **American Transcendentalism, Moments of Heightened Awareness, and Non-Substantiality**

Intimations of an absolute now can also be found in the writings of the American transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson.<sup>51</sup> More than a century before Snyder began to compose his poem *Mountains and Rivers Without End* in the 1950s, Emerson, in the famous “transparent eyeball” passage of his essay “Nature” (1836), describes a moment in which the narrator’s subjective perspective seems to dissolve: “Standing on the bare ground,—my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space,—all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eye-ball; I am nothing. I see all. The currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God.”<sup>52</sup> This is a moment of mystic fusion during which the narrator’s ego (“I”) or self

becomes one with an underlying, all-encompassing monistic power, “Being,” divine energy or “God.” While Emerson’s description is more in line with the Hindu belief in the identity of *Atman* (individual self/soul) and *Brahman* (universal soul/underlying power of the universe) than the Mahayana or Zen Buddhist teaching of *śūnyatā*, the passage is nonetheless an early expression of Emerson’s gradual move away from a dualistic and substantialist conception of Being.

But perhaps Emerson’s most explicit declaration of intellectual independence from Europe, including the abandonment of a metaphysics of presence and substantialist thought, can be found in his essay “The American Scholar” (1837). In this essay, Emerson presents a post-metaphysical vision of Being as “circular power returning into itself.”<sup>53</sup> He refers to Being as a beginning and endless dynamic continuity or, as Herwig Friedl puts it, a “self-constituting circularity of both nature and mind” whose transient manifestations form a multi-dimensionally expanding divine *textura* or “web” that eludes verbalization,<sup>54</sup> which Emerson refers to as “the inexplicable continuity of this web of God.”<sup>55</sup> With this ground-breaking ontological vision, Emerson abandons the traditional Western notion of Being as essentially substantial and the Western belief in metaphysical absolutes. Instead he advocates an open-ended revisionism, referring to himself as an “endless seeker” and “experimenter” and anticipating later, twentieth-century anti-foundationalist positions (such as pragmatism).<sup>56</sup> At the end of his essay “Circles,” he describes a process of letting go (“abandonment”) that, to a certain extent, is reminiscent of Buddhist non-attachment. He celebrates the process of emptying one’s mind and assuming an egoless, pre-conceptual perspective that allows the unexpected and unprecedented, the *new* to come forth (emergence).

The one thing which we seek with insatiable desire, is to forget ourselves, to be surprised out of our propriety, to lose our sempiternal memory, and to do something without knowing how or why; in short, to draw a new circle. Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm. The way of life is wonderful: it is by abandonment.<sup>57</sup>

At first sight, Emerson contradicts the Buddhist teaching of non-attachment and no-mind in describing “abandonment” as being accompanied by an extreme feeling of “enthusiasm” and the wish to re-construct or build anew. Yet this proto-pragmatist notion of looking forward that focuses on the importance of human creation is, after all, very close to the life-affirming way of Zen described by D. T. Suzuki in his *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism* (1934):

Do not imagine, however, that Zen is nihilism. All nihilism is self-destructive, it ends nowhere. Negativism is sound as method, but the highest truth is an affir-

mation . . . we must not forget that Zen is holding up in this very act of negation something quite positive and eternally affirmative.<sup>58</sup>

In *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, Henry David Thoreau, similar to Emerson in “The American Scholar,” narratively depicts life as a temporally unfolding continual circular happening. It is symbolically represented by the one-week boat trip of the narrator and his brother John along the rivers and mountains of New England, which begins and ends in the town of Concord, Massachusetts, and unfolds between Saturday and Friday (and could essentially start again, one might claim). During this journey, the narrator’s thoughts follow the stream of the river and wander across the surrounding landscape, freely associating topics, experiences, memories, and ideas. James R. Guthrie speaks of the book’s “discursive and [at the same time] meditative” character.<sup>59</sup> Transcending the pre-given, linear frame of the river, the narrator’s thoughts “weave” a multi-dimensional texture, a verbal painting, or what Judith Broome Mesa-Pelly calls a “web of time and space, memory and history” that is reminiscent of the Chinese landscape scroll.<sup>60</sup> In his book *Literary Transcendentalism: Style and Vision in the American Renaissance* (1973), Lawrence Buell states with regard to *A Week* that “Thoreau’s excursion does not have the kind of formal cohesiveness which modern readers have been trained to expect, but it does have a sinuous continuity, reminiscent of those lengthy Chinese scroll paintings entitled ‘Mountains and Rivers without End.’”<sup>61</sup>

At the end of the first chapter, the narrator, like the speaker in Snyder’s poem “Endless Streams and Mountains,” abandons his observing (external) perspective and steps into a boat and into the flowing river. He and his brother immerse themselves in the dynamically unfolding happening of the journey with an open, receptive mind, going *with* its current or flow. One could argue that the change of perspective comes down to the adoption of a state of no-mind, a state of immediate awareness that is prior to verbalization: “we, . . . who behold but speak not, silently glided past the firm lands of Concord . . . Our reflections had already acquired an historical remoteness from the scenes we had left.”<sup>62</sup>

In the “Tuesday” chapter, after experiencing the Sunday in nature as an archetypal, purely “natural Sabbath” and praising the myths, scriptures, and (alleged) contemplative attitude of the “Asiatics,” Thoreau retells the story of a climactic mountain ascent that he made during another journey. He inserts the story in the narrative of *A Week*, which was an attempt to come to terms with the death of his brother John. The narrator retells in the form of a memory how he climbed up “Saddle-back Mountain in Massachusetts” (Mt. Greylock) and after a while rose into a “new world . . ., the new terra-firma perchance of my future life.” His entering a “new world” could be read as a newly gained perspective on life beyond the illusory, unenlightened view.

As the morning light gradually grows brighter, he becomes surrounded by “an ocean of mist” reminiscent of the Chinese landscape paintings, which hides from him the world of parts and particularities. He experiences reality as a dreamlike mystical unity and undifferentiated whole, beyond language and discrimination:

As the light increased I discovered around me an ocean of mist, which . . . shut out every vestige of the earth . . . All around beneath me was spread for a hundred miles on every side, as far as the eye could reach, an undulating country of clouds . . . It was such a country as we might see in dreams, with all the delights of paradise . . . There was wanting the symbol, so there was not the substance of impurity, no spot nor stain. It was a favor for which to be forever silent to be shown this vision. The earth beneath . . . was not merely veiled to me, but it had passed away like the phantom of a shadow, . . . and this new platform was gained.

From his “new platform,” from his superterrestrial perspective, the narrator sees the world below and around as a bright, paradisiac place beyond Platonic shadow, contamination, language, and differentiation. He envisions a future entering of the “region of eternal day.”<sup>63</sup> We can read his reaching a new platform as a metaphor for attaining a state of heightened awareness or no-mind. The narrator no longer clings to visual particularities, which he calls “symbols,” but instead gradually awakens to a “pure world” that, ironically, is not marked by clarity and translucence or eternal ideas, but by the opaque, undifferentiated simultaneity of *all* existence, reminiscent of Dōgen’s ontology.

The final chapter of *A Week*, titled “Friday,” is marked by quietude, silence, and contemplation. According to my reading, it complements and balances the passage on ascent with an atmosphere of exhilaration. Reminiscent of luminist paintings, the scenery is described as crystalline, illuminated, and divine. After having experienced overnight “the turning point in the season,” the passing of summer into autumn, which could be read as a metaphor for the brothers’ inner conversion, they quietly float down the stream towards their final destination. Interestingly, the narrator describes their experience of nature from the perspective of the boat as if he were reading a Chinese landscape painting, “map,” or Chinese scroll that gradually unrolls before his eyes. Just like the speaker in Snyder’s poem, he becomes aware of the objects—mountains and rivers—mentioning them moment by moment *anew* without evaluating them, as if he had assumed a new perspective of no-mind: “Sitting with our faces now up stream, we studied the landscape by degrees, as one unrolls a map, rock, tree, house, hill, and meadow . . . Viewed from this side the scenery appeared new to us.” Most importantly, at the very end of *A Week*, the brothers abandon their subjective perspective and individuality, fusing with the surrounding silence, portrayed as the never-absent “back ground” to the temporally unfolding painting of life:

Silence is the universal refuge, the sequel to all dull discourses and all foolish acts, a balm to our every chagrin, as welcome after satiety as after disappointment; that back ground which the painter may not daub, . . . and which, however awkward a figure we may have made in the foreground, remains ever our inviolable asylum.<sup>64</sup>

One cannot avoid the impression that Thoreau was familiar with Song dynasty landscape scrolls when he wrote this passage. While the “back ground” generally depicted in transcendentalism is a monistic divine power and not Buddhist emptiness, the narrator’s meditation on silence hints at a different view, evoking Zen Buddhist and Taoist ways of intuiting reality as ultimately nameless and empty. The (paradoxically “audible”<sup>65</sup>) silent background mentioned by Thoreau also brings back to mind Alan Watts’s remark on the “relative emptiness” of the Chinese landscape paintings.<sup>66</sup>

### **Non-Substantialist Ontology and Intertextuality in Jack Kerouac’s *The Dharma Bums***

Roughly a century after Thoreau’s *A Week*, the Beat writer Jack Kerouac published *The Dharma Bums*—a semi-autobiographical narrative of a journey across the United States. This story recounts the spiritual search of a whole generation for the alleged essence, substance or, as Thoreau put it in *Walden* (1854), the “marrow of life.”<sup>67</sup> The book vividly illustrates how this generational search (represented by the protagonist’s personal quest and transformation) was fueled by the intense study and practice of Asian philosophy and religion. It culminates in the narrator’s momentary enlightening return to a pre-verbal and pre-conceptual state of emptiness and silence (no-mind).

Notably, Jack Kerouac dedicates *The Dharma Bums* to the Chinese Tang dynasty poet Han Shan. A “Zen lunatic,” sage, and mountain hermit, Han Shan was admired by Gary Snyder, who translated Shan’s “Cold Mountain Poems” into English in the 1950s.<sup>68</sup> Han Shan literally means “Cold Mountain.” Like Thoreau’s *A Week*, Kerouac’s semi-autobiographical novel narrates a spiritual quest that unfolds like a Chinese landscape painting. It contains two climactic mountain ascents, time spent on hills and trips through the U.S. and Mexico at ground level by train, bus, and car.<sup>69</sup> *The Dharma Bums* conveys the Beat generation’s “vision of a great rucksack revolution” based on the transformation of mind into no-mind. The friendship of the two main characters, “Dharma Bums” or “Zen lunatics” Ray Smith and Japhy Ryder—Kerouac’s fictional names for himself and Gary Snyder—lies at the center of the story. The “religious wanderer” Ray looks up to Japhy as “a great new hero of American culture” who translates poems of Han Shan into English and who is versed in the art of mountain climbing and Zen practice. He encourages Ray to climb a mountain and explains to him how the art of climbing mountains is akin to Zen. Both entail cultivating a state

of awareness marked by playfulness and flexibility, the ability to immediately adapt to each presently given situation: “The secret of this kind of climbing,’ says Japhy, ‘is like Zen. Don’t think. Just dance along.” Japhy associates mountains with the Buddha, an enlightened attitude of no-mind, marked by mental and verbal silence and the immediate awareness of the world’s ultimate “emptiness.” This is also an awareness of its simultaneous beginning and end, which are always directly present:

Now the mountains were getting that pink tinge . . . “They’re so silent!” I said. “Yeah man, you know to me a mountain is a Buddha. Think of the patience, hundreds of thousands of years just sittin there bein perfectly silent . . . This is the beginning and the end of the world right here. Look at all those patient Buddhas lookin at us saying nothing.”<sup>70</sup>

In this same spirit, the philosopher Masao Abe states that, according to Buddhist teachings, “time dies and is reborn at each and every moment.”<sup>71</sup> The world, accordingly, emerges and dissolves in and as each and every single transient (empty) moment of “existence-time” (Japanese: *uji*).

The first climactic mountain-top experience is when Ray and Japhy and their friend Henry Morley attempt to climb Matterhorn Peak in California. Guided by Japhy, Ray learns how to both ascend and descend a mountain with a playful and enlightened attitude of no-mind or *wu wei* (Chinese: “action without action,” “no action against the course of nature”). They run down Matterhorn, lightheartedly dancing from boulder to boulder, following the course of nature without any effort or deliberate thought. “Then suddenly everything was just like jazz: it happened in one insane second or so: I looked up and saw Japhy *running down the mountain* . . . and began running down the mountain after him.” Ray concludes with regard to his new state of heightened awareness: “Ah Japhy you taught me the final lesson of them all, you can’t fall off a mountain.’ . . . But when I looked up and saw you running down that mountain I suddenly understood everything.’ ‘Ah a little satori for Smith today,’ says Morley.”<sup>72</sup> Ray’s friend Morley is described here in a way similar to a Japanese Zen master who attests to his disciple the attainment of enlightenment.

Later in the narrative, Ray experiences another moment of satori away from mountain tops. In the passage, the correspondence between the Mahayana Buddhist teaching of *śūnyatā* and the growing tendency of Western science to view existence as ultimately empty, groundless, or void of substance is addressed directly. While visiting his mother and family for Christmas in North Carolina, Ray resumes his spiritual quest by meditating every day quietly under a “baby pine” in a forest close to his mother’s house. In one moment, he gains the enlightening insight into the non-substantiality of all existence:

But then suddenly under the tree at night, I had the astonishing idea: “Everything is empty but awake! Things are empty in time and space and mind.” I figured it all out and . . . I felt the time had come to explain everything to my family. They laughed more than anything else. “But listen! No! Look! . . . It’s empty, everything’s empty, things come but to go, . . . you see them, but they’re made up of atoms that can’t be measured or weighed or taken hold of, even the dumb scientists know that now, there *isn’t* any finding of the farthest atom so-called, things are just empty arrangements of something that seems solid . . . they’re ghosts pure and simple.”<sup>73</sup>

Ray takes up an insight that the historical Buddha had uttered in the fifth or sixth century BCE and that has become increasingly relevant over the past century to nuclear scientists such as Hans-Peter Dürr: that there is no ultimate tiniest particle or primary substance, but rather only existence as a temporal and relational, continuous *event*.<sup>74</sup> In another passage of *The Dharma Bums*, Japhy expresses to Ray a similar insight into the ultimate identity of “matter” and “spirit:” “The closer you get to real matter, rock air fire and wood, boy, the more spiritual the world is. All these people thinking they’re hardheaded materialistic practical types, they don’t know shit about matter, their heads are full of dreamy ideas and notions.” Here “spirit” is not to be understood in terms of a substantial reality or ghost-like substance or power. The character of Japhy represents the Zen Buddhist insight that matter and spirit (or mind) are not essentially different because both are ultimately manifestations of emptiness. Ray’s attempt to explain his enlightening insight into the non-substantiality of existence to his family necessarily fails because it is an intuitive insight that must be experienced directly. It is beyond rational comprehension and cannot be fully grasped in language. Frustrated, Ray leaves his family and returns to California, where Japhy procures for him a job as a mountain lookout on Desolation Peak. In the mountainous landscape, Ray’s final enlightenment experience happens one morning upon looking down at the world below:

Lo, in the morning I woke up and it was beautiful blue sun-shine sky and I went out in my alpine yard and there it was, everything Japhy said it was, hundreds of miles of pure snow-covered rocks and virgin lakes and high timber, and below, instead of the world, I saw a sea of marshmallow clouds flat as a roof and extending miles and miles in every direction, . . . I had a tremendous sensation of the dreamlikeness . . . , especially when I stood on my head to circulate my blood, . . . and then the mountains looked like little bubbles hanging in the void upside down. In fact I realized they were upsidedown and I was upsidedown! . . . I realized, “there is no answer.” I didn’t know anything any more. I didn’t care, and it didn’t matter, and suddenly I felt really free.<sup>75</sup>

What eventually brings Ray peace of mind is his turn to an empty state of no-mind, symbolized by the headstand, in which he no longer dissects reality into pieces, into



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knowledge or particular thoughts. He simply becomes aware of reality in its “suchness” (Sanskrit: *tathatā*) and ultimate emptiness, realizing that the empty present is all there is.

It is relevant to my argument that in *The Dharma Bums* Japhy talks about his future plan to compose a poem titled “Rivers and Mountains Without End.” With an intertextual reference, Kerouac addresses Gary Snyder’s poetic project with which I started—the project that was inspired by his encounter with the Chinese landscape painting.

Know what I’m gonna do? I’ll do a new long poem called “Rivers and Mountains Without End” and just write it on and on on a scroll and unfold on and on with new surprises and always what went before forgotten, see, like a river, or like one of them real long Chinese silk paintings that show two little men hiking in an endless landscape of gnarled old trees and mountains so high they merge with the fog in the upper silk void. I’ll spend three thousand years writing it, it’ll be packed full of information on soil conservation, the Tennessee Valley Authority, astronomy, geology, Hsuan Tsung’s travels, Chinese painting theory, reforestation, Oceanic ecology and food chains.<sup>76</sup>

It is not difficult to imagine that the “two little men” on the canvas who merge with the fog in the void are Japhy and Ray, who, moment by moment, reach the enlightened state of no-mind. Anticipating the creation of his ekphrastic poem, Japhy imagines what could be called a poem-painting of the world as a temporally and spatially unfolding web of interdependence and mutual conditioning (Sanskrit: *pratītya-samutpāda*) that, in line with the Buddhist doctrine of “momentariness” (Sanskrit: *ksasikavāda*), actualizes itself (i.e., is unrolled, lived, painted, and poetically created) moment by moment (reminiscent of the “Net of Indra” mentioned in the *Avatamsaka-Sūtra* of Mahayana Buddhism). The poet-painter (Japhy) says it will take him “three thousand years” to create his poem, which is a time span that clearly transcends that of an individual human life and thus, one could argue, connotes a view of reality (the poem-painting) as a self-creative happening that transcends temporal and spatial boundaries and emerges, ever anew, out of nothingness (“void”) through poetic imagination (Greek: *poiesis*).

## Conclusion

One may say that both *A Week* and *The Dharma Bums* reflect the Emersonian and central Buddhist insight that life, in its very essence, is a dynamic continuity, a relational happening or “web of events.”<sup>77</sup> The narrative structure of both works is similar to Snyder’s poem and the Chinese scrolls. They, too, give expression to ontological insights that can be found in the centuries-old elucidations by Nāgārjuna, the Zen

ontology of Dōgen, specifically his notion of “existence–time,” and Buddha’s insight into “impermanence” (Sanskrit: *anitya*). Both Thoreau and Kerouac crafted their semi-autobiographical narratives in the form of journeys that unfold through meandering geographical and spiritual landscapes, reaching points of climax on mountain tops and quietly flowing rivers (as well as in the woods), where the narrators experience epiphanies or moments of heightened awareness. The journeys are similar to the dynamically interacting mountains and rivers of Dōgen and Snyder and may be read as narrative descriptions of Being (ontologies) as an essentially temporal, rhythmical happening that continually emerges from the creative interplay of two complementary forces. Most importantly, they generate and *comprise* occasional moments of spiritual insight (no-mind) during which the narrators instantaneously become aware—in Dōgen’s sense—of the simultaneity, interconnectedness, and ultimate “emptiness” of all existence in an essentially life-affirming way.

Viewed from a broader analytical perspective, all four works with their various intertextual and intermedial references and interconnections as well as their numerous analogies of structure and content, together form a distinct web, a manifestation (phenomenon) of reality as an altogether multi-dimensionally expanding non-substantial relational happening. Elucidating this web (or “situation” in the sense of Jullien) from a transcultural perspective has been the aim of this article and will hopefully serve as a minor yet fruitful contribution to the ongoing project of (East/West) comparative philosophy, literary and cultural studies. It is intended to support what Jullien envisions as the “work in progress” of European-shaped cultures. By closely studying the philosophies or “thought-languages” of Asia (and the United States, as I would like to add) and setting them in critical relation to European thought, one moves away “from [a focus on] the question of Being to the thought [and attainment] of *living*.”<sup>78</sup>

## Notes

- 1 See, for example: Van Meter Ames, *Zen and American Thought* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1978); Kenneth K. Inada and Nolan P. Jacobson, eds., *Buddhism and American Thinkers* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1984); Robert S. Ellwood, ed., *Zen in American Life and Letters; Interplay 6: Proceedings of Colloquia in Comparative Literature and the Arts* (Malibu, CA: Undena Publications, 1987). For a more recent publication, written from the transcultural perspective of a Japanese scholar, see Yoshio Takanashi, *Emerson and Neo-Confucianism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).
- 2 I have explored a similar matter with regard to the topic of time in my book *TIME in American and East Asian Thinking*. See this work also for a more comprehensive comparative study of East Asian thought (Zen and Hua-yen Buddhism) and works of the American transcendentalists Emerson and Thoreau. Birgit Capelle, *TIME in American and East Asian Thinking: A Comparative Study of Temporality in American Transcenden-*

- talism, Pragmatism, and (Zen) Buddhist Thought* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2011).
- 3 Gary Snyder, “Blue Mountains Constantly Walking,” in *The Gary Snyder Reader: Prose, Poetry, and Translations 1952–1998* (New York: Counterpoint, 1999), 203.
  - 4 Waltraud Mitgutsch, “Gary Snyder’s Poetry: A Fusion of East and West,” in *Essays in Honour of Erwin Stürzl on His Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. James Hogg (Salzburg: Institut für Englische Sprache und Literatur, Universität Salzburg, 1980), 430.
  - 5 Mitgutsch, “Gary Snyder’s Poetry,” 425.
  - 6 Arthur Christy, *The Orient in American Transcendentalism: A Study of Emerson, Thoreau, and Alcott* (New York: Octagon Books, 1978), vii.
  - 7 David Need, “Kerouac’s Buddhism,” *Talisman: A Journal of Contemporary Poetry and Poetics*, nos. 32–33 (2006): 83–90. See also: Birgit Capelle, “Generating Newness in the Flow of Immediacy: Stein, Kerouac, and the Tao of Modernist Writing,” in *Modernities and Modernization in North America*, ed. Ilka Brasch and Ruth Mayer (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2018), 46–48.
  - 8 Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Circles,” in *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vol. 2, ed. Joseph Slater et al. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1979), 188.
  - 9 “Western” is to be understood as “European and North American traditions/histories of ideas”; “Eastern” as “Chinese and Japanese, Taoist and Buddhist traditions.”
  - 10 Heraclitus’s proclamation implies, however, the hypothesis of an unchanging principle of “change.” In *Experience and Nature* (1925), John Dewey asserts: “The argument is not forgetful that there are, from Heracleitus to Bergson, philosophies, metaphysics, of change . . . But the philosophies of flux also indicate the intensity of the craving for the sure and fixed. They have deified change by making it universal, regular, sure.” Dewey, John. “Existence as Precarious and as Stable,” in *The Later Works, 1925–1953*, vol. 1, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1981), 49.
  - 11 Hans-Peter Dürr, *Es gibt keine Materie! Revolutionäre Gedanken über Physik und Mystik* (Amerang: Crotona, 2018).
  - 12 Dewey, “Existence as Precarious and as Stable,” 63. In the field of neuroscience, Wolf Singer and the molecular biologist and Buddhist monk Matthieu Ricard postulate that the human ego or self does not exist in a substantial way but is rather a delusional mental construct. Wolf Singer and Matthieu Ricard, *Hirnforschung und Meditation: Ein Dialog* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2008), 51.
  - 13 In Buddhism, there is, however, the belief in elementary *skandhas*, which are considered to be ultimately empty.
  - 14 Michael G. Barnhart, “Śūnyatā, Textualism, and Incommensurability,” *Philosophy East and West: A Quarterly of Asian and Comparative Thought* 44, no. 4 (1994): 649, DOI: [10.2307/1399756](https://doi.org/10.2307/1399756).
  - 15 Francisco J. Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch, *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 230, 253, 229. Varela points out that “the majority of the world’s Buddhists do not speak of their deepest concerns in negative terms; these negatives are preliminaries—that are pointing toward the realization of a positively conceived state” (248). He also finds reason for his optimist position in the structural analogies and convergences of Western science and

- philosophy as well as Buddhist practice and thought: “We do find remarkable, however, the extent to which the Western tradition, based on the reasoning of philosophy and scientific practices, and the Buddhist tradition and thought, based on experiencing the world with mindfulness/awareness, have converged” (230).
- 16 François Jullien, *From Being to Living (De l’Être au Vivre): A Euro-Chinese Lexicon of Thought*, trans. Michael Richardson and Krzysztof Fijalkowski (London: Sage, 2020), 202, 204, 7, 12, 203, 203. Jullien asserts: “Just as the ontology of Being that serves as a basis of knowledge needs to be taken apart, so we will have to try to undo the ontology of the Subject” (12).
  - 17 It is important to note that William James overcomes, in a sense, the European approach when in the “Stream of Thought” chapter of his *The Principles of Psychology* (1890), he presents a phenomenological approach to his psychological philosophy. He suggests that philosophy and psychology should start with consciousness or thinking, which has, in its pure, original state, a pre-subjective quality. It “tends to be [but not necessarily is] part of personal consciousness” (220; emphasis mine). This is why, instead of the Cartesian *cogito*, James uses the subject-less phrases “it thinks” and “thought goes on” when he speaks of “the first fact for us . . . as psychologists” (219). William James, *The Principles of Psychology Vol. 1*, in *The Works of William James*, vol. 8 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981).
  - 18 Jullien, *From Being to Living*, 8–9, 11. Please note that “*shān-shui*” in the block quotation should be written with an i-breve; unfortunately, the font JAAAS uses does not support this character.
  - 19 “Streams and Mountains without End,” *Cleveland Museum of Art*, accessed October 25, 2020, <https://clevelandart.org/art/1953.126>.
  - 20 Sherman E. Lee and Wen Fong, *Streams and Mountains Without End: A Northern Sung Handscroll and Its Significance in the History of Early Chinese Painting*, 2nd ed. (Ascona: Artibus Asiae, 1967), 2–3.
  - 21 See also Susan Bush, “Yet Again ‘Streams and Mountains without End,’” *Artibus Asiae* 48, nos. 3/4 (1987): 197, DOI: [10.2307/3249871](https://doi.org/10.2307/3249871); Anthony Hunt, *Genesis, Structure, and Meaning in Gary Snyder’s Mountains and Rivers Without End* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2004), 30.
  - 22 “Streams and Mountains without End.”
  - 23 Bush, “Yet Again,” 197.
  - 24 Lee and Fong, *Streams and Mountains*, 1.
  - 25 Gary Snyder, *Mountains and Rivers Without End* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 1996), 155.
  - 26 Snyder, *Mountains and Rivers*, 158.
  - 27 Snyder, “Blue Mountains,” 203.
  - 28 Hunt, *Genesis, Structure, and Meaning*, 65, 29.
  - 29 Snyder, *Mountains and Rivers*, 9.
  - 30 John Dewey, *Art as Experience*, in *The Later Works, 1925–1953*, vol. 10, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987). In the chapter titled “Having an Experience,” John Dewey presents his view of art as “an [integral unified] experience” that dynamically unfolds in a non-dualistic way (35). Art, according to Dewey, is a temporally stretching process of dynamic interaction between an artist and her/his work (=

- “an experience”) during which both are not dualistically split. In a way, the artist creating is in a pre-subjective, immediately present state of no-mind that no longer differentiates between subject (herself/himself) and object (her/his work of art).
- 31 “Streams and Mountains without End.” See also Lee and Fong, *Streams and Mountains*, 6–7.
- 32 See also Dewey: “For to perceive, a beholder must create his own experience. . . Without an act of recreation the object is not perceived as a work of art. . . There is work done on the part of the percipient as there is on the part of the artist.” Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 60. According to Dewey’s aesthetics, neither the artist nor the perceiver is dualistically separated from the work but, rather, forms an integral part of the temporally unfolding work of art itself.
- 33 Bush, “Yet Again,” 197.
- 34 Snyder, *Mountains and Rivers*, 161.
- 35 Hunt, *Genesis, Structure, and Meaning*, 27, 35, 61.
- 36 Snyder, *Mountains and Rivers*, 158.
- 37 Hunt, *Genesis, Structure, and Meaning*, 31.
- 38 Snyder, *Mountains and Rivers*, 5.
- 39 See also Hunt, *Genesis, Structure, and Meaning*, 65.
- 40 Snyder, “Blue Mountains,” 203–204.
- 41 Alan Watts, *The Way of Zen* (New York: Vintage Books, 2019), 179.
- 42 Hunt, *Genesis, Structure, and Meaning*, 32.
- 43 Hunt, *Genesis, Structure, and Meaning*, 36.
- 44 Snyder, “Blue Mountains,” 203–204.
- 45 Thomas Cleary, “Shōbōgenzō: Zen Essays by Dōgen,” in *Classics of Buddhism and Zen: The Collected Translations of Thomas Cleary*, vol. 2 (Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications, 2001), 348, 344.
- 46 Hee-Jin Kim, *Dōgen Kigen: Mystical Realist* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1987), 143.
- 47 Steven Heine, “Temporality of Hermeneutics in Dōgen’s *Shōbōgenzō*,” *Philosophy East and West: A Quarterly of Asian and Comparative Thought* 33, no. 2 (1983): 144, DOI: [10.2307/1399098](https://doi.org/10.2307/1399098).
- 48 Kim, *Dōgen Kigen*, 147.
- 49 Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *Manual of Zen Buddhism* (New York: Grove Press, 1994), 85–86. According to D. T. Suzuki, Zen “looks backwards to a point before the world with all its dichotomies has yet made its début.” Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *Living by Zen*, ed. Christmas Humphreys (London: Rider & Company, 1972), 70.
- 50 Heinrich Dumoulin, *Zen Buddhism: A History*, vol. 1, trans. James W. Heisig and Paul Knitter (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1988), 142–43.
- 51 In his “Works and Days,” Emerson applies the term “everlasting now” (with a slightly different meaning). He was inspired by Thomas Carlyle’s *Sartor Resartus* (1834). Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Works and Days,” in *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vol. 7 (Cambridge, MA: Riverside Press, 1904). 174.

- 52 Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Nature," in *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vol. 1, ed. Robert E. Spiller and Alfred R. Ferguson (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1971), 10.
- 53 Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The American Scholar," in *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vol. 1, ed. Robert E. Spiller and Alfred R. Ferguson (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1971), 54.
- 54 Herwig Friedl, "Fate, Power, and History in Emerson and Nietzsche," *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance*, no. 43 (1996): 280.
- 55 Emerson, "The American Scholar," 54.
- 56 Emerson, "Circles," 188.
- 57 Emerson, "Circles," 190.
- 58 Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism* (New York: Grove Press, 1964), 9.
- 59 James R. Guthrie, *Above TIME: Emerson's and Thoreau's Temporal Revolutions* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001), 49.
- 60 Judith Broome Mesa-Pelly, "Thoreau's 'Basket of a Delicate Texture': Weaving History in A Week," *The Concord Saunterer*, no. 4 (1996): 176.
- 61 Lawrence Buell, *Literary Transcendentalism: Style and Vision in the American Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973), 236.
- 62 Henry David Thoreau, *The Writings of Henry David Thoreau: A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, ed. Carl F. Hovde et al. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 16–17.
- 63 Thoreau, *A Week*, 46, 126, 180, 188–89.
- 64 Thoreau, *A Week*, 334, 349, 392.
- 65 Thoreau, *A Week*, 391.
- 66 Watts, *The Way of Zen*, 179.
- 67 Henry David Thoreau, *Walden, Civil Disobedience, and Other Writings: Authoritative Texts, Journal Reviews and Posthumous Assessments, Criticism*, 3rd ed., ed. William Rossi (New York: Norton & Company, 2008), 65. In *On the Road* (1957), this search turns into the pursuit of an ultimately nameless "IT."
- 68 Jack Kerouac, *The Dharma Bums*, in *Road Novels 1957–1960*, ed. Douglas Brinkley (New York: Library of America, 2007), 290.
- 69 See also Keith N. Hull, "A Dharma Bum Goes West to Meet the East," *Western American Literature* 11, no. 4 (1977): 321–29, DOI: [10.1353/wal.1977.0014](https://doi.org/10.1353/wal.1977.0014).
- 70 Kerouac, *The Dharma Bums*, 351, 356, 282, 302, 326, 328–29.
- 71 Masao Abe, "Time in Buddhism," in *Zen and Comparative Studies: Zen and Western Thought*, vol. 2, ed. Steven Heine (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1997), 168.
- 72 Kerouac, *Dharma Bums*, 341–42.
- 73 Kerouac, *Dharma Bums*, 378, 385–86.
- 74 See also Dewey, "Existence as Precarious and as Stable," 63.
- 75 Kerouac, *Dharma Bums*, 432, 453–58.
- 76 Kerouac, *Dharma Bums*, 427.
- 77 Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Over-Soul," in *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*,



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vol. 2, ed. Joseph Slater et al. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1979), 163.  
78 Jullien, *From Being to Living*, 202–205; my emphasis.

## About the Author

Birgit Capelle is a postdoc researcher and lecturer in the North American Studies program at the University of Bonn. She has taught at the University of Düsseldorf, where she graduated with a dissertation titled “TIME and Temporality in American and East Asian Thinking,” in which she analyzes structural parallels between American Transcendentalist, Pragmatist, and (Zen) Buddhist ways of conceptualizing temporality and existence. Her dissertation received the “Best Dissertation in The Faculty of Arts and Humanities 2009” award and was published by Universitätsverlag Winter in 2011. Capelle’s primary research interest concerns the convergences and intersections of U.S. American, European, and Asian thought. She is currently working on a global study of spiritual crises in autobiographical writing (from the seventeenth to the twentieth century). In September 2018, she made a short research trip to Concord, MA, supported by the Ralph Waldo Emerson Society.

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