“Using sound to heal. From metaphysics to application”

Day: Thursday 12th July 2018  Time: 3:30 – 4:45 pm  Track: Various

The Vedic concept of “Nada Brahma”, which roughly translates as “Sound is/as God”, has received little scholarly attention in the Western world, despite having often been appropriated by various syncretic New Age thinkers, perhaps most famously by the German “pope of Jazz” Joachim-Ernst Berendt in his 1987 book Nada Brahma: Die Welt Ist Klang. The goal of this symposium is not so much to assess the validity, or lack thereof, of the Vedas’ ontological assessment of the world as sound, but rather to create an open discussion on the relevancy of the metaphysics of sound put forth by Vedas, as well as the implications that this ontology carries for contemporary mindfulness practitioners.

Summary of the perspectives being articulated:
Bringing together scholars from diverse backgrounds such as Social Work, South Asian Studies, the Neurosciences, and Continental Philosophy, the panel will explore how “Nada Brahma” can be conceptualized as a formal object of scholarly study both in the Humanities and in the Sciences, while also bringing to light how the ancient adage can be operationalized by stakeholders in the healing professions. Specific attention will be given to the ways in which “Nada Brahma” grounds metaphysical and spiritual conceptions of change, rejuvenation, and rebirth, in a tangible, aesthetic experience. Panelists will evaluate how a metaphysical understanding of sound can help ground a diverse range of mindfulness practices in experience, and subsequently facilitate engagement for those who could benefit from a mindfulness practice or those simply seeking to learn more about the tradition(s) of mindfulness.
Symposium overview

Presenter 1  **Nicolas Schwalbe** - From Nada Brahma to Nada Yoga: the Yoga of Sound, or how to transform a metaphysics of sound into a way of life.

Presenter 2  **Gabrielle Bodzin** - Using sound to heal: the neuroscience of sound perception, mysticism, and healing.

Presenter 3  **Nils de Mol van Otterloo** - Music, Mindfulness, and Compassion: Neuroscience of sound as healing intervention

Chair:  **Murali Nair**
From Nada Brahma to Nada Yoga: the Yoga of Sound, or how to transform a metaphysics of sound into a way of life.

Nicolas Schwalbe

University of Southern California, Los Angeles, United States

Background and objectives: The Vedic adage Nada Brahma, which roughly translates as “Sound is God/Sound as God”, has received little scholarly attention in the West. The aim of this presentation is to review the existing literature on the topic in order to foster a dialogue between the discourse(s) of deconstruction and postmodernism and the metaphysics of sound articulated by the concept of Nada Brahma. Special attention will be given to process in which the metaphysical concept Nada Brahma became formalized and operationalized in the various traditions that refer to Nada Yoga, the Yoga of Sound. The relationship between the Nada Yoga tradition and contemporary mindfulness practices will also be examined.

Methods: This presentation will use comparative text analysis as its primary method. The philosophical concept(s)/problem(s) of monism and dualism, along with the Foucauldian concept of “technologies of the self” will be the primarily heuristic lenses through which primary sources and secondary sources will be analyzed and interpreted.

Results: The presenter will argue that the metaphysics of sound contained in Nada Brahma create an ineffable object of thought that resists philosophical orthodoxies, be they Western or Eastern, thereby laying the foundation for a practice whose very existence is predicated upon challenging established values in order to make possible a form of spiritual and physical liberation.

Conclusion/Discussion: While the metaphysics of sound contained in Nada Brahma yield exciting possibilities for mindfulness practitioners and researchers, there needs to be a more coordinated effort to align the outcome oriented goals of scientific researchers with humanities-oriented researchers’ desire to let the texts speaks for themselves. Hopefully this presentation can help facilitate this coordination of research goals.
Using sound to heal: the neuroscience of sound perception, mysticism, and healing.

Gabrielle Bodzin

University of Southern California, Los Angeles, United States

Background and objectives: This presentation explores the evolution of evidence-based treatment and transpersonal client care, delving into the effects of sound-based interventions in Social Work. The paper examines the neurological phenomena associated with mystical states of cognition induced by the experience of sound. Descriptive neurological, rehabilitative, and spiritual research associated with sound will be discussed, along with the implications of that each body of research carries for a more effective and creative approach to well-being and healing.

Methods: In a extensive literature review, current sound-based interventions used in social work, the neuroscience of sound perception, the connection between sound, somatics, and space are thoroughly discussed.

Results: There is a critical need in the field of social work for culturally humble, as well as cost and time effective interventions. The scientific literature presents a perennial methodology involving the integration of metaphysical concepts in the tangible experience of sound to create new ways to engage clients and facilitate healing.

Discussion and conclusion: Although the information grounded in both scientific and sacred texts including cognitive neuroscience and the Vedas, respectively, have presented unequivocally potent literature indicating the effectiveness of sound-based interventions, the Western approach to social work has limited opportunity to integrate creative paradigms of knowledge and healing into its practice. When exposed to specific sound frequencies and patterns, neural functioning is altered in a way that generates the possibility to reconstruct memories, increase activity in areas of the brain associated with creativity, and develop strong emotional connections to those sharing the sonic experience. The implications of the exposure to specific frequencies of sound urges researchers, clinicians, and practitioners alike to consider integrating a more impactful, transformative, and cost-effective methodology in their work.
Music, Mindfulness, and Compassion: Neuroscience of sound as healing intervention

Nils de Mol van Otterloo

University of Southern California, Los Angeles, USA.

Background and objectives: Music and mindfulness are areas that are receiving increased attention. Problems based in neurological disorders such as Traumatic Brain Injuries, Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, Autism, Dementia and others have the greatest potential for benefit from integrative health interventions. Different types of music ranging from Indian Classical Ragas to popular melodies associated with early memories produce varying neurological, rehabilitative, and clinical results. The purpose of this discussion will be to explore how music, mindfulness, and compassion can be investigated by clinical therapists to improve care for patients and caregivers dealing with neurological disorders.

Methods: Over two years of research with diverse neurological disorder patients and caregivers in Burbank, California, and Kerala, India, the Musical Reminiscence Therapy (MRT) intervention was studied. MRT works to improve patient mood and interaction with caregivers by presenting music that is associated with memories from the patients’ early life. This discussion will explore current literature on music interventions in neurological base care and the implications for mindfulness and compassion interventions.

Results: Evidence points to the growing problems and needs of patients with diverse neurological disorders. MRT can be implemented by varied health care professionals. MRT along with mindfulness and compassion interventions works to improve patient-caregiver stress.

Discussion and conclusion: By working with neurological base patients in America and India it was possible to gain insight into the neurological processes involved in music and mindfulness interventions. Crucially, what was discovered is that through MRT it is possible to engage identical neurological responses with clients from entirely different backgrounds. Indian Classical Ragas could produce similar affective responses, while popular melodies could produce a different but similar result. Patients with Traumatic Brain Injuries, Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, Autism, Dementia and caregivers require the same level of stress-reducing protocols that music and mindfulness interventions produce. Most importantly, these interventions are available to train healthcare workers to produce dramatic improvements in patient and caregiver lifestyle.