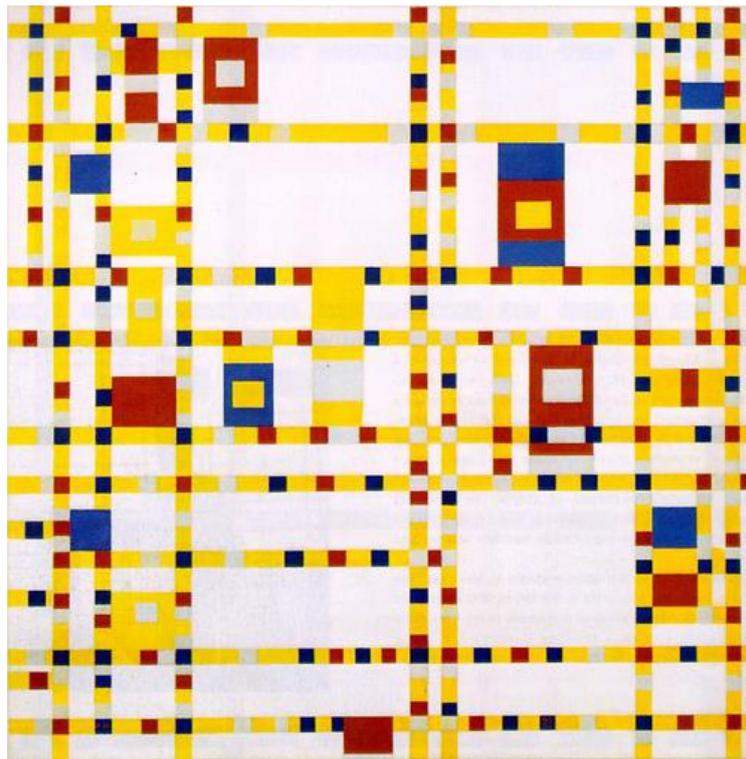


# *Theosophy and the Arts*

## *Texts and Contexts of Modern Enchantment*

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**Book of Abstracts**



COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY  
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## Keynotes

### Joy Dixon (University of British Columbia, Canada) “After Theosophy”

In the June 2015 issue of the *American Historical Review*, Greg Anderson makes the case for an “ontological turn” in historical practice. Anderson highlights those approaches that “problematize the primordial Cartesian distinction between mind and matter, between knowing and being, the epistemological and the ontological, that makes modernity’s objective standards of truth and realness possible in the first place.” While Anderson’s piece does not explicitly reference work on Theosophy and associated movements – the mystical, the metaphysical, the paranormal, and the esoteric – such work provides critical resources for his project of developing a more ethically responsible and historically and philosophically defensible form of historicism. To that end, this paper explores what comes “After Theosophy”: “After,” first, in the sense of “in the manner or style of” – looking at the ways that Theosophists and others like them have, historically, modeled different ways of knowing or being, which were in turn taken up and transformed in multiple ways; and, second, in the sense of “sequential to” – to explore what kinds of scholarly work have become newly possible in the wake of the explosion of research on Theosophy and the occult in the last twenty years. Taking my own current work on religion and the sciences of sexuality in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Britain as a point of departure, I illustrate not only the historical but also the historiographical impact of this work.

### Biography

Joy Dixon is Associate Professor of History at the University of British Columbia’s Vancouver campus. She is the author of *Divine Feminine: Theosophy and Feminism in England* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001) along with a number of articles. Her current project – tentatively titled *Sexual Heresies: Religion, Science, and Sexuality in Modern Britain* – explores the ways that new formulations of the sexual were constitutive of religious change and, conversely, that the effort to “modernize” spirituality was in many cases as crucial a contribution to the emergence of modern sexual identities as were the new sciences of sexuality. Like her earlier study of Theosophy, this project attempts to open up new ways of thinking about the complex relationships between the making of knowledge, spirituality, and modernity.

### Wouter Hanegraaff (University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands) “The Theosophical Imagination

The imagination is an underestimated key dimension of human consciousness and cognition. Equally relevant to religion and to the arts, it provides a common ground on which these different domains meet and overlap. In this lecture I will discuss modern Theosophy as a specific product of the creative imagination applied to the history of humanity and the nature of reality. Theosophy responded in a highly creative and, indeed, imaginative manner to the nineteenth century crisis of meaning that had resulted from the clash between traditional Christianity and scientific materialism as well as between Western civilization and colonial cultures. In presenting clairvoyance as a reliable means of access to factual knowledge about the visible and invisible dimensions of reality, from the remote past to the present and extending into the future, it claimed to lay the foundations for a superior science. Looking at Theosophical clairvoyance as a technique grounded in the creative imagination allows us to develop new perspectives on its relation to the visual arts.

## Biography

Wouter J. Hanegraaff is Professor of History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents at the University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands, and a member of the Royal Dutch Academy of Arts and Sciences. He served as President of the European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism (ESSWE) from 2005 to 2013. Alongside numerous articles, he is the author of *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (Leiden 1996/Albany 1998); *Lodovico Lazzarelli (1447-1500): The Hermetic Writings and Related Documents* (Tempe 2005; with Ruud M. Bouthoorn); *Swedenborg, Oetinger, Kant: Three Perspectives on the Secrets of Heaven* (West Chester 2007); *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (Cambridge 2012); and *Western Esotericism: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London 2013). He has also co-edited seven collective volumes, including the *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism* (Leiden 2005) and *Hidden Intercourse: Eros and Sexuality in the History of Western Esotericism* (New York 2011; with Jeffrey J. Kripal).

## Speakers

### **Toshio Akai (Kobe Gakuin University, Japan) “The International Lodge Reconsidered: the Theosophical Network and its Impact on Japanese Interbellum Modernity”**

This paper surveys the activities of International Lodge, founded in Tokyo in 1920 by James Cousins, an Irish delegate of Annie Besant. It thereby examines the Theosophical network and the major members involved in it from both an international and a local perspective. D. T. Suzuki and his wife Beatrice were two pivotal members who continued working in the Lodge after Cousins' departure. The materials they left enable us to explore the activity of this short-lived Lodge and its indirect yet significant impact on Japanese fine arts and society. Their collection of Theosophical publications and their personal correspondences reveal that the international network of the Lodge attracted a diverse group of people who shared a commitment and interest in modernist cultural trends. In the initial part of my paper, I shall discuss the Lodge's formation in relationship with its successor Mahayana Lodge, formed by the Suzukis in 1924. Furthermore, Cousin's friendship with Paul and Mirra Richard in Japan, the Lodge's correspondence with its Chinese counterpart, and the members' interest in Buddhist reformism will be examined. The second part will test the fact that the Japanese Theosophist movement remained within a limited religious boundary and did not expand further to secular fields such as politics, education and social work. This feature becomes clear when compared with the cases in India or Ireland where Theosophical ideas prompted unofficial but powerful movements for social reformation. Japanese Theosophists held strong concerns with new spirituality which was eagerly searched for in rapidly modernizing Japan. These concerns could be interpreted as accelerators of the specific inwardness of the Japanese Theosophical Society. More broadly, the reason could be sought in the nature of studying Theosophy itself, staying equivocally on the border between the religious and the secular, building upon loosely canonized texts and promoting indifference to the hierarchical organization of society.

## Biography

Toshio Akai is a Professor teaching cultural studies at the Humanities Department of Kobe Gakuin University, Kobe, Japan. He earned a master's degree in English Literature at Kwainsei Gakuin University, Nishinomiya, Japan. He later studied Anglo-Irish Literature at the University of Ulster, Northern Ireland, where he researched George W. Russell aka A. E. and his fellow Dublin

Theosophists. He read papers on the revival of Druidism attempted by W. B. Yeats and Scottish/Irish artists several times in Anglo-Irish Literary Conferences, published a series of monographs on the Cottingley Fairies Photographs and Spirit Photography, and contributed an article on Mirra Alfassa and Max Theon to a Japanese publication. He joined a research project on a nineteenth-century Buddhist educator Kinza Hirai, who invited Henry S. Olcott to Japan, and compiled the coeval Japanese Buddhist publications mentioning the coming of Olcott and Theosophist activities. He is a member of “Theosophist International Network across Asian Countries,” the current research project funded by JSPS Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research. Another field of his interest is film study of Indian cinema, on which he published several monographs in Japanese and English.

### **Shiben Banerji (School of the Art Institute of Chicago, USA) “Woodrow Wilson’s Great Mistake: Self-Determination and the Theosophical Concept of Peace”**

In 1944, an American architect named Marion Mahony wrote an essay imagining a post-war world in which a sense of responsibility to the other would bind different races, nationalities, and species together. At the time of the essay’s drafting, Mahony—who in 1898 became the first woman to be licensed as an architect in the United States—had just completed laying out the site plan for a pacifist commune in New Hampshire. Called the World Fellowship Center, this place gathered Theosophists and members of other heterodox movements in order to convert the war effort into a lasting global peace. Mahony’s 1944 essay did not make any direct reference to the physical layout of the World Fellowship Center, but it shared the Center’s conceptual outlook and conviction that hostile feelings could be converted into their opposite. Specifically, Mahony’s essay distilled the disparate cries of American isolationism and anti-colonial nationalism into an opportunity to create a borderless, worldwide economic community that shared a single international currency.

This paper interrogates the practice of condensing discontinuous claims into a constitutive moment as a literary habit—one that drew on the circulation, excerpting, and reprinting of news stories on imperial policy and anti-imperial struggles across the Anglophone world. Crucially, the abstract entity produced by this habit was neither the colonial state nor its nationalist alter ego. Instead, it was a globalizing mechanism that lacked attachment to territory and demos. By examining the Theosophical Society’s transnational inquiry into the League of Nations and Woodrow Wilson’s principle of national self-determination, this paper uncovers an internal dispute within modern occultism over the precise character of the mechanism needed to guarantee global peace. Prominent exponents of occult science like J.J. van der Leeuw attributed the failure of the League of Nations to its lack of a superstate police force, whereas others like Marion Mahony called for the formation of supranational, non-governmental organization.

### **Biography**

Shiben Banerji is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Art History, Theory, and Criticism at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. His research addresses American urbanism, and the global provenance of American empire. Shiben is currently working on two book projects that investigate the imbrication of urban design and the critique of political and economic liberalism. The first, titled *Inhabiting the World*, focuses on the little known work of the American architect Marion Mahony who sought to define a non-nationalist alternative to empire through projects completed in the US, Australia, and India between 1895 and 1949. The second project, tentatively titled *In the Shadow of Sovereignty*, examines the formative influence that experiments in communitarian living had on legal reasoning in the United States. Shiben received his PhD in the History and Theory of Architecture from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

**Fae Brauer (University of East London, UK/University of New South Wales, Australia)  
“Evolving Androgynous Astrobodies: Hélène Dufau's Occult Transformism”**

Amidst fiery parliamentary debates over the Separation of Church and State in France, in 1905 the Directeur des Beaux-Arts, Henry Marcel, commissioned Clémentine-Hélène Dufau to paint four murals for the Sorbonne Salle des Autorités to illustrate the Radical Republican religion of Science. The only woman artist commissioned to decorate the Sorbonne, Dufau seems to have been chosen for her facility to capture Neo-Lamarckian histories of the environmental and cultural evolution of the earth from the Cretaceous Geological period to an astrobiological projection of the planet propelled by the energies of what Marie Curie called “radiation électromagnétique”. Yet despite such distinctly Neo-Lamarckian titles for Dufau's murals as *Géologie*, *Zoologie*, *Astronomie-Mathématiques*, and *Radioactivité-Magnétisme*, close scrutiny of their significations reveals far from straight-forward depictions of Transformist evolution as articulated by Jean-Baptiste Lamarck and rearticulated by the Neo-Lamarckian Zoologist and Director of the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, Edmond Perrier.

Cultivating androgyny and esotericism, aligning herself with Rosicrucianism and immersing herself in Theosophy and Occultism, Dufau's picturing of Neo-Lamarckian evolution in these murals appears to have been fused, as this paper will demonstrate, with Occulture drawn from *Les Grands Initiés* by Edouard Schuré, as well as *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Doctrine* of Madame Blavatsky, particularly her cyclical theory of evolution, *Cosmogogenesis*. This will be illuminated by unraveling the significations not only of Dufau's depiction of Blavatsky's *Virgin of the Sea* in the Cretaceous Geological phase and Pythagoras in the modern Phanerozoic Phase but also her centralization of Khrishna in the Caenozoic evolutionary stage identified as the second great initiate by Schuré and “one of the true gods” in Blavatsky's *Isis Unveiled*. It will also be illuminated by exploring how coterminously Dufau depicted an evolution of gender and sexuality culminating in androgynous astrobodies in the Age of Astrobiology, as envisaged by *Le Martian epianthropus* of Perrier, *La Planète Mars* of Camille Flammarion, *L'homme astral* of Papus (Gérard Encausse), *L'Androgyne* of Joséphin Péladan and the Astral Bodies of Annie Besant and C. W. Leadbeater, in order to convey *Occult Transformism*.

### Biography

Fae (Fay) Brauer is Professor of Art and Visual Culture at the University of East London Centre for Cultural Studies Research (CCSR) and Associate Professor in Art History and Cultural Theory at The University of New South Wales National Institute for Experimental Art (NIEA). Her research focuses upon the interdisciplinary intersections between modern art, visual culture, occulture, science and medicine, as well as the cultural politics redolent in art and cultural institutions as demonstrated by her books, *Picturing Evolution and Extinction: Degeneration and Regeneration in Modern Visual Cultures* (2015), *Radical Space: Exploring Politics and Practice* (2015), *Rivals and Conspirators: The Paris Salons and the Modern Art Centre* (2013), *The Art of Evolution: Darwin, Darwinisms and Visual Culture* (2009) and *Art, Sex and Eugenics, Corpus Delecti* (2008), and her forthcoming books, *Regenerating the Body: Modernist Biocultures and the Fitness Imperative*; *Symbiotic Species: The Art of Transformism in Solidarist France*, *Canvassing Perversion: Picasso, Science and Medicine* and *Unmasking Masculinity: Imaging Hysterical Men in Republican France*. The author of many book chapters and journal articles, she is currently working on the projects, *Magnetism, Hypnotism and Hypnotherapy*; *Colonial Eugenic Cultures*; *Bloody Bodies: The Anatomy Lesson and the Arts of Dissection* and *BioArt and Biogenetics*.

**Catherine Candy (University of New Orleans, USA) “Theosophy and the Emergence of an Irish-Indian Decolonizing Counter-Modern through Margaret and James Cousins”**

The history of Theosophy in Ireland is distinguished by a constellation of famous writers and artists such as W.B. Yeats, "A. E." (George Russell) and, more arguably, by James Joyce. All three were reclaiming the land in their own way, through ideas, co-operative farming and literary mapping. Alongside them and institutionally involved in a second wave of Irish Theosophy were more "minor" artists such as Margaret Cousins and her husband James, whose geo-political careers have until recently been seen as somewhat "outlandish."

James Cousins was famously "snuffed out" of Dublin's literary circle by Yeats, while Margaret Cousins's musical career was stymied more indirectly in Dublin, ushering her instead to the streets as a militant suffragist activist, and from there to Theosophical headquarters in India, where she founded three national and internationalist women's organizations to considerable decolonizing effect in the interwar period. The Irish wave of Theosophy was conceived as a decolonizing force against church, state and university—an answer to the European enlightenment. In the Cousinses' carrying of this energetic vision through, and "from India" lies proof of this decolonizing determination.

While Margaret Cousins's Theosophical activism was inspired by art, she felt it her *dharma* (duty), at least by 1934, to not become "engrossed" in the arts but to use its "power for relief, expression and strength in action." For example it was in Vellore Women's jail in 1932 that, through music, she united jail wardens, prostitute women and "Untouchable" women with "political" prisoners, feeling herself to have at last reached the status of a sannyasi sister and "high priestess."

This paper tracks how the Cousinses used Theosophical ideas in efforts to establish a counter-modern global, decolonizing culture in Ireland, Britain and India, while implicitly and explicitly measuring their decolonizing impulses, and political traction in the twentieth century, against the differently banked Atlantic capital of Yeats and Joyce.

### Biography

Catherine Candy is Associate Professor of History at the University of New Orleans. A native of Ireland, her research in theosophy began as a feminist project and has extended to the role of the arts in envisioning decolonization. The paper to be given by Candy at this conference is taken from her forthcoming book *Mystics Against Empire: An Emergent Irish-Indian Counter Modern* (Ashgate, forthcoming). Other publications include: "Mystical Internationalism in Margaret Cousins's Feminist World", *Women's Studies International Forum* (2009); "'Untouchability', Vegetarianism and the Suffragist Ideology of Margaret Cousins", *Irish Women and the Vote: Becoming Citizens* (Irish Academic Press, 2007); "The Inscrutable Irish-Indian Feminist Management of Anglo-American Hegemony, 1917-1947", *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* (2001).

### Chuang Chien Hui (Osaka University, Japan) "The Reception and Propagation of Theosophy in China with a special focus on the introduction of Theosophy by Wang ChinFoo (1847-1898) and Wu Tingfang (1842-1922)"

Among the Chinese who were fascinated with Theosophy, Wang ChinFoo and Wu Tingfang are the most well known. Wang, who was close to Blavatsky, was brought up in the United States, the adopted son of an American missionary from the age of 13. As for Wu, he was a Chinese-British national, who was raised in Hong Kong, and produced the first Chinese translation of Theosophical literature. The interest in Theosophy is not the only thing that Wang and Wu had in common. First, they were educated from their teens in Christian Mission Schools. Furthermore, they both defended Chinese human rights in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century to the Western world in English. In addition, after becoming Theosophists, Wang was active in the introduction of Confucian philosophy to the United States, while Wu emphasized the common points of Theosophy and

Confucianism. Both of them had a similar educational background, and used Theosophy for the reconstruction of the traditional values of their home country, China.

In this presentation, first, I will analyze national identity in the case of Wang and Wu, comparing it with the attitude of other Chinese intellectuals who had received traditional Chinese education regarding Theosophy, in order to focus on Wang and Wu's reception of Theosophy. In addition, I will compare the similarities and differences between Wu's works and the magazines and books published by the Theosophical Society in modern China. By discussing the above, I will attempt to shed light on the reception and transformations of Theosophy in China, against the background of the country's fight against Western hegemony in the early twentieth century.

### Biography

Chuang Chien Hui is Specially Appointed Assistant Professor in the Graduate School of Letters at Osaka University; she previously held the position of Visiting Research Fellow at Osaka University. She was born in Hsinchu, Taiwan. She completed her undergraduate work at the National Tsing Hua University, where she earned a BA in Chinese Literature in 2004. She obtained her PhD in Japanese Literature from Osaka University in 2013. Chien Hui's areas of research interest are comparative literature and comparative culture. Her research covers Theosophy in China and its reception, as well as Postcolonial literature in Asia. Her work has appeared in *Studies in Comparative Culture*, *Machikaneyama Ronso*, and some other Japanese journals.

### Giuliano D'Amico (Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Trondheim, Norway) "Henrietta Frances Lord – a Translator of Ibsen for the Theosophical Movement"

This paper focuses on the translations of Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1879) and *Ghosts* (1881), made by Henrietta Frances Lord (1848-1923) in 1882 and 1885 respectively. Lord was a British women's rights activist and theosophist who produced the very first translations of Ibsen's works into English, thus paving the way to the great "Ibsen controversy" of the late 1880s and early 1890s, in which Eleanor Marx, William Archer and George Bernard Shaw were pivotal figures.

First, I will discuss how Lord's Ibsen translations epitomize an integrated system of theosophical, feminist and socialist thought which arose in Britain in this period. I will concentrate on the introductions Lord wrote to the two plays and analyse her distinctive theosophical reading of Ibsen, which has remained quite unique in his international reception. Second, I will move to the translated texts, and, through a comparison with Ibsen's Dano-Norwegian original, I will show how her renderings relate to the theosophical reading provided in the introductions. This analysis will be corroborated by a theoretical reflection on the nature of translation as a cultural and political act. By integrating theories of translations that focus on the nature of translation as a potentially subversive act with a reflection on the concept of Western esotericism as "rejected knowledge", I will show how Lord's translations, quickly dismissed by later Ibsen scholars and translators, are the expression of a spiritual and cultural movement which, although it gained a considerable worldwide recognition and was among the first to show interest in Ibsen in the English-speaking world, has remained outside the classic Ibsen reception narrative and thus provides an interesting counteraction to it. With the example of Ibsen, this paper argues for the importance of "alternative" discourses, such as Western esotericism, for the assessment of literary receptions and for the fuller understanding of a literary work.

### Biography

Giuliano D'Amico teaches at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Trondheim. He received his PhD in comparative literature from the University of Oslo in 2011. Among his most recent publications are *Domesticating Ibsen for Italy. Enrico and Icilio Polese's Ibsen Campaign*

(Edizioni di Pagina 2013), *Den engasjerte kosmopolitt. Nye Bjørnson-studier* (Novus 2013, co-edited with Liv Bliksrud, Marius Wulfsberg and Arnfinn Åslund) and “Aleister Crowley Reads *Inferno*. Towards an Occult Reception of Strindberg”, *Scandinavian Studies* 84.3 (2012), pp. 323-346.

### Colin Duggan (University College Cork, Ireland) “Theosophical Individualism and the Politics of Neutrality”

This paper examines the work of members of the supposedly apolitical and neutral Theosophical Society in Ireland at the beginning of the twentieth century, a time when religious and political discourse was shaping the emerging nation and a massive cultural investment in the significance of the arts helped to imagine a new Ireland into being. The examples of George Russell and Eva Gore Booth will be used to illustrate individual approaches to the practicalities of applying Theosophical ideas and the implications of its religious concepts to life more broadly. Both individuals were strong advocates for their political causes and often justified their beliefs through appeals to religious ideas in their poetry, novels, and political and religious analyses. This paper argues that these writings demonstrate the monism of Theosophically-inspired worldviews and that, for individual members, politics and religion/spirituality are not separate fields of knowledge or action but part of one singular explanatory model of knowledge itself, from which one can derive an ultimate, and often individualized, script for action.

#### Biography

Colin Duggan is a PhD researcher at the Study of Religions Department, University College Cork, Ireland and is working on a dissertation entitled *The Theosophical Society: Esoteric Discourse and Politics in Early 20th Century Ireland*. He holds MAs in philosophy and religious studies from the National University of Ireland, Galway and the University of Amsterdam, respectively. He has previously presented research on the political activities of members of the Theosophical Society and published chapters and encyclopedia entries on British Chaos Magick, zine culture, iconoclasm, and tradition.

### Christine Ferguson (University of Glasgow, UK) “The Theosophical Gothic: Propaganda and Positive Epistemology in H.P. Blavatsky’s *Nightmare Tales* (1892)”

In a pamphlet entitled “Occult Novels as Theosophical Propaganda” (1932), American Theosophist James Taylor offers a list of almost 200 works of fiction that fellow believers might recommend to their local libraries for proselytization purposes. “Experience has shown,” he insists, “that if an individual can be persuaded to read a few occult novels, many prejudices will disappear . . . and the way will be opened for the real study of Theosophical books” (3). Dominating the recommendations are popular gothic texts by non-Theosophists, including R. L. Stevenson’s *The Mysterious Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), Guy Boothby’s *Dr Nikolai’s Experiment* (1895), Marie Corelli’s *The Sorrows of Satan* (1895), and Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897). The Theosophical alliance with such works, my paper contends, was a necessarily tricky one, given that by the early twentieth century their genre had become increasingly saturated with conventions— namely, a paranoid fixation on the threat of the foreign (Brantlinger, 1988) and a negative epistemology of occult knowledge (Pasi, 2007)— that seemed directly opposed to the Theosophical Society’s meliorist and egalitarian mandate. I trace how a key work of *fin-de-siècle* Theosophical Gothic, H. P. Blavatsky’s posthumously-published collection *Nightmare Tales* (1892), attempts to navigate these countervailing tensions by capitalizing on the popularity of the gothic revival in literature while repurposing the genre’s conventions, environments, and political affiliations to fit with a

Theosophical worldview. In its fictional encounters with the magical traditions and shamanic practices of Finland, Japan, Siberia, and Turkey, I argue, *Nightmare Tales* aims to promote a form of spiritual internationalism, one in which the horrors of the Western world are alternately brought into relief, salvaged, or explicated through the wisdom of the de-stigmatized global margins, and in which the dangers of occult contact, albeit very real, are imagined as tameable through positive epistemological practice.

### Biography

Christine Ferguson is senior lecturer in Victorian literature and culture at the University of Glasgow, where her research currently focuses on the literary production of the nineteenth-century occult revival. She is the author of two monographs— *Language, Science, and Popular Fiction in the Victorian Fin de Siècle* (Ashgate, 2006) and *Determined Spirits: Eugenics, Heredity, and Racial Regeneration in Anglo-American Spiritualist Writing, 1848-1930*— and co-editor of the multi-volume primary source collection, *Spiritualism: 1840-1930* (Routledge, 2014). Her new project, *Open Secrets: The Public Spheres of the Victorian Occult*, investigates the exoteric face of the late Victorian occult revival, examining how occultist and mystical writers such as H.P. Blavatsky, A.E. Waite, Mabel Collins, Hargrave Jennings, Arthur Machen, and others used popular fiction and periodical writing to breach the divide between hidden and public knowledge.

### Marta Ferrer (Columbia University, New York, USA) “Fables of Enchantment: Spiritualism, Anarchism and the Politics of Affection between Women in Spain and Latin-America”

Theoretical critiques of Religious Studies, Post-colonialism and Historical studies have recently challenged the dyadic analysis of belief and unbelief, as well as of secularization and religion, which has persisted over time. Dipesh Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe* (2007), for instance, succeeds in breaking the modern Western paradigm not only by opening up more complex descriptions about India but also by shedding light on a more complex Europe. However, Europe studied *from within* is still understood through the rationalist discourse of the Counter-Reformation and the French Revolution. Not only is modernity identified with the England-Germany-France axis (despite the many geographical paths of its formation), but it is also increasingly identified with certain religious, political, and even scientific orthodoxies that create a variety of "fringes": geographical (countries that somehow end up outside the sphere of production of the "modern"); cultural (some forms of subjectivity, thought, and feeling are excluded); and religious (some forms of esoteric religiosity, and specifically theosophical knowledge, are set aside from the mainstream of the secularization process).

This paper engages with the above triple fringe: In the context of late nineteenth-century Spain, I will try to reframe Spanish modernity - always seen as lacking - by providing examples of writing and cultural practices by a group of women, specifically Belén de Sárraga, Amalia Carvia and Ana Carvia. They were anarchists, yet also influenced by the main teachings of Theosophy. While these women were influenced by Blavatsky's Theosophy, they adapted her main Theosophical tenets to their own political interests. In some respects, they changed the Theosophical primordial message in order to adapt it to their own possibilities, leaving out a certain ambiguity about their beliefs.

This group of women popularized nineteenth-century Theosophy by expanding an affectionate message throughout popular circles in Spain and Latin America – that means that they not only expounded a utopian discourse but they also circulated friendship letters among them. By finding unexpected links between their Theosophical standpoint and their political message, the paper will try to (1) rethink European modernity in a broader context, by 'provincializing' its main axis; (2) broaden our understanding of secularization by acknowledging the role played by the popularization of Theosophy in the formation of the modern; (3) demonstrate the ambiguous

interplay between Theosophy, popular culture, and politics in the aforementioned women's literary texts and letters, which circulated throughout Spain and Latin America.

### Biography

Marta Ferrer is a third-year PhD student in the Department of Latin American & Iberian Cultures and the Institute for Research on Women, Gender and Sexuality at Columbia University. She holds a BA in Hispanic Studies, an MPhil in Avant-Garde and Post-Avant Garde Theories (University of Salamanca) and an MSc in Visual and Material Cultures (University of Edinburgh). Her focus of interest is on the late nineteenth and early twentieth century interactions between religious and scientific discourses in the West, with a special emphasis on the Iberian archive and on the intersection between religion, politics, gender and popular culture. She combines a cultural history approach with archival research on textual and visual material, fictional and non-fictional. One of the main arguments of her research is to acknowledge how occult imaginaries worked on social and popular discourses and how these - many times proclaimed by women - trafficked among feminist circles not only within Spain but also to and from feminine networks in Europe and Latin-America.

### Annika Forkert (University of Bristol, UK) “Serialism Enchanted: The Theosophical Basis of Elisabeth Lutyens’s Modernism”

English composer Elisabeth Lutyens (1906–1983) is one of the neglected pioneers (if not *the* pioneer) of the modernist composition technique of serialism in Britain. At the same time, she belonged to a number of British composers steeped in the traditions of Theosophy. Unlike, for example, Gustav Holst's documented interest in this intellectual edifice, however, her attitude to Theosophy was highly ambivalent. The daughter of Lady Emily Bulwer-Lytton and Edwin Lutyens, Elisabeth and her sisters, particularly the youngest, Mary, grew up in companionship with the young Jiddu Krishnamurti from 1911 and were subjected to Theosophical teaching. With their mother they travelled to the centers of the movement to follow Charles Leadbeater and Annie Besant. In her autobiography, *A Goldfish Bowl*, Lutyens would later renounce Theosophy and hold Krishnamurti's direct influence on her education responsible for several early nervous breakdowns. However, this did not stop her fascination with Theosophical thought in her compositional development. In her choice of texts and libretti for her vocal music and her operas as well as in her usage of serialism itself she sought original, even idiosyncratic, ways to re-enchant a mostly masculinist tradition of modernist composition. Particularly the opera *Isis and Osiris*, the cantata *O saisons, ô châteaux!* on a poem by Arthur Rimbaud, and her autobiography's credo for what amounts to a 'magical serialism' allow a reassessment of the way Theosophical thought elements shaped Lutyens's attitude towards technique and finally metamorphosed into her own poetics of composition. This paper will trace these different elements from her retrospective assessment of her childhood's Theosophical experiences to the cantata, to the opera, and to her meditations on the aesthetics of mystery in music.

### Biography

Annika Forkert is Leverhulme Early Career Fellow in Music at the University of Bristol. She was recently awarded her PhD at Royal Holloway, University of London for her thesis *British Musical Modernism Defended against its Devotees*, which claims that an Adornian concept of modernism can be salvaged for application to tonal British concert music between 1900 and 1950. Between October 2014 and March 2015 Annika was a postdoctoral research fellow in an AHRC Leadership Grant project on eighteenth-century music pedagogy and theory at the University of Nottingham. She works as a visiting lecturer at the Music Department of Royal Holloway, London, and the English Department at Leeds Trinity University. Additionally, she is a tutor for The Brilliant Club, a London-based charity providing specialist research courses for high-achieving state-school pupils, and a

writer of program texts and introductory lectures for, among others, Bregenz Festival, Bavarian Radio, and Komische Oper Berlin. Her research interests include twentieth-century music history, analysis, and cultural production, and feminist musicology.

### **Pia van Gelder (University of New South Wales, Australia) “Alexander Hector’s Color Music and Unified Theories of Sonic and Visual Frequencies”**

Theosophy inspired many explorations in color music, which have been discussed in relation to artists and composers such as Oskar Fischinger and Alexander Scriabin. The scientist and inventor Alexander Hector was perhaps the most avid proponent of color music in Australia, although little is understood about his work scientifically and theoretically. In fact, he has gone virtually unnoticed in the history of color music internationally. From 1910, Hector designed a number of color organs and over 40 years, demonstrated his color music in public venues around Sydney, including the Sydney Town Hall and later at his own laboratory, where he also hosted the Greenwich Color Music Society. These demonstrations were Hector’s most convincing evidence of his underlying theory of the “correlation of the sciences” by facilitating a spectacle that inspired wonder about the harmony between color and sound. This paper will give a picture of Hector’s surroundings including the blossoming Sydney Theosophical Society and its influence on the arts. Examining his patents, research and writing, I will discuss the background of Hector’s instruments in spectroscopy, the work of Isaac Newton and John Tyndall, and the harmonograph. Furthermore, I will situate Hector’s work with the vibrational theories of Besant and Leadbeater in their *Thought Forms* (1901), and the work of Blavatsky in her reading of the *Music of the Spheres*. Specifically, I will analyze how Hector’s theoretical understanding of frequencies contributed innovative approaches to creative expression, as well as to music and color therapy.

#### **Biography**

Pia van Gelder is an artist and researcher and currently a PhD candidate at the University of New South Wales in Art & Design. Van Gelder’s work engages in interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary explorations of science, technology and media art in the form of installation and performance as well as curation and event based art. Van Gelder’s work investigates methods and philosophies of hacking, electronic instrument design, media archaeology, music, energy, esoteric philosophy, counter-culture histories and DIY pedagogy. With a working title, *Microcurrents: Esoteric Electronic Instruments in the Arts*, van Gelder’s PhD thesis examines a number of historical electronic instruments that were inspired by esoteric philosophy and experimental approaches to creative expression and the healing arts. Van Gelder has exhibited and performed extensively in Australia and internationally as well as lectured at the University of New South Wales and the Sydney University, Conservatorium of Music.

### **Emily Gephart (School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, USA) “My Theory of Soul Atoms’: Theosophy and Occult Mysticism in Sadakichi Hartmann’s Aesthetics”**

American poet, critic, and modern art advocate Sadakichi Hartmann first used the term ‘soul atoms’ to describe properties shared by art and artists alike in 1894, but it took until 1910 for Hartmann to clarify what this meant. In a slim book, he explained his theories: ‘soul atoms’ were elemental particles of spiritual and material significance which transcended time and space, oscillating in “a superior state of heat.” Flowing freely through the cosmos, they vibrated in sympathetic harmony when they lodged in embodied human minds or in the artworks they created. They enabled

transcendent insight, giving rise to common inspiration among artists, scientists, poets, musicians, and philosophers. ‘Soul atoms’ were both current and timeless, and were fundamental to Hartmann’s understanding of art, creativity, and human development. Yet, although his theories informed his endorsement of modern aesthetics, modern science, and modern society deeply, Hartmann’s book remains poorly known.

In this paper, I situate the origins of Hartmann’s ‘soul atoms’ within a network of contemporary scientific and metaphysical theories about space, time, and non-Euclidean dimensions; psychological discoveries about the mind’s capacity to visualize thought; Eastern philosophies and Theosophical principles; and modern aesthetics in poetry, painting and photography. Hartmann’s text amalgamated diverse sources: Besant and Leadbeater’s *Thought-Forms*; Paul Carus’s Monistic theology; Wilhelm Wundt’s studies of human perception; Jean-Martin Charcot’s research on hypnotic ‘suggestion’; and the evolutionary theories of Robert Chambers, among others. I assess the ways in which Theosophical mysticism underlay and paralleled many of Hartmann’s beliefs, informing his poetry, plays, and influential art criticism. I argue that in his theories about the unity of all thought, eternal meaning, and fundamental form, Hartmann promoted Theosophical evolutionary principles, as he proposed ‘soul atoms’ were fundamental to modern progress toward an enlightened state of integrated mind, body, spirit, and aesthetic form.

### Biography

Emily Gephart is a historian of American art, social science, and visual culture. Her research investigates how texts and material objects alike provided tools through which Americans worked through new discoveries about the unconscious mind, as I examine how the nascent nineteenth-century studies of inner visionary perception and the pursuit of modern consciousness met and mingled in the realm of art and its criticism. She earned her PhD in 2014 at MIT’s program in History, Theory and Criticism of Art. During her thesis research, she made one of the happy discoveries that inter-disciplinary scholarship provides, encountering Sadakichi Hartmann’s *Theory of Soul Atoms* while studying the conjunction of psychology, mystical theologies and modern aesthetics that informed American art at the turn of the twentieth century.

### Michael Gomes (Emily Sellon Memorial Library, New York, USA) “Unveiling Isis and other Victorian Literary Pastimes”

Although the influence of Theosophy on so many aspects of the arts in the first half of the twentieth century has been well-discussed, the actual nature of this influence remains to be further explored. As I remarked in my 1994 bibliography *Theosophy in the Nineteenth Century*, “it is relatively simple to cite ideas from books as representing Theosophy, but the overall acceptance by members of these ideas is still difficult to ascertain.” Since the movement stressed no dogma or belief, the elastic boundaries of what was considered Theosophy were sometimes stretched far. A number of recent academic studies, notably Hanegraaff and Hammer, have provided excellent overviews of the contents of some of the leading Theosophical texts. This paper will look at the identifying concepts that filtered down to the membership (and public) through an alarming number of pamphlets, leaflets and journals. Focusing on the movement’s foundational literature, textual sources of the basic concepts introduced by nineteenth century Theosophy—ancient wisdom, karma, rebirth, and the complex nature of the individual, and the cyclicity implied in Theosophical notions of the Races—will be noted. For Theosophy was not only a belief system but a literature, receiving its own classification in both the Dewey Decimal and Library of Congress classification systems. Its authority lay in the citation of ancient texts (Blavatsky’s “Stanzas of Dzyan”), and in turn it produced its own rich vocabulary, which Joyce parodied so well in his writings. This paper will look not only at the nature of text and context but the assumed interaction between author and audience.

### Biography

Michael Gomes is Director of the Emily Sellon Memorial Library, a Theosophically themed library organized in New York in 1931. He is author of a number of studies on the life and work of H. P. Blavatsky, and has produced abridgements of her two major books, *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Doctrine*, the latter published by Penguin in 2009. He studied South Asian history at Columbia University and was awarded the Herman Ausubel Memorial Prize for achievement in history by Columbia University after the publication of his *Dawning of the Theosophical Movement* in 1987. His latest book, to be issued this year, is an edition of Blavatsky's *Esoteric Instructions*, which provided her theories on light and color. He was a presenter at the first Theosophical conference, organized at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion in November 1994, along with Antoine Faivre and Jean Pierre Laurent, and the keynote speaker at the University of Sydney's 2010 Legacies of Theosophy Conference.

This paper draws on research from his larger project on Eastern Esotericism: the History of an Idea. His research looks at the development of the idea of an Eastern esotericism, of which Theosophists were large contributors, created not only for comparison but also as confirmation of the existence of a Western esotericism. Some of these findings will appear in my fifth book of edited Blavatsky texts, a critical edition of her *Esoteric Instructions*, which will be published next year, as well as in the chapter on Theosophy that I have in *The Cambridge Handbook of Western Mysticism and Esotericism*, forthcoming from Cambridge University Press.

### Jennifer Griffiths (Iowa State University College of Design, Rome, Italy/American Academy in Rome, Italy) "A Theosophical Portrait of Ruzena Zatkova, Futurist"

Much of what has been written about Italian Futurism emphasizes its materialism and misogyny, overlooking other important discourses such as the influence of occult spiritualism or the role of women. This paper is intended to address these more marginalized aspects via an exploration of Ruzena Zatkova's iconic *Portrait of Marinetti (Luce Solare 1920)*, which I will situate within a wider context of Futurist portraiture and its engagement with Theosophical ideas about color, light, auras, genius and clairvoyance. If Annie Besant and Charles Leadbeater's widely translated and circulated Theosophical text on *Thought-Forms* (1901; Ital. 1905) is known to have exerted considerable influence on Wassily Kandinsky and František Kupka, its mark is also evident in the work of Futurist artists including Umberto Boccioni, Luigi Russolo and Giacomo Balla (Cigliana 2002; Chessa 2012). Boccioni made bold claims for the intuitive genius of the Futurist artist, whom he described as a "clairvoyant" with a "sixth sense" enabling him to perceive "the luminous emanations of our body" (Roman Lecture of 1911). His understanding that the energies of the mind might be visualized as "auras" or "etheric doubles" of color and light by a select number of such intuitive people was derived directly from *Thought-Forms*. Boccioni's *States of Mind* series of 1911, like Russolo's *Self-Portrait (with etheric double)* of 1910 or Balla's *Self-state of Mind (Autostato d'animo)* of 1920, is evidence of a widespread interest in such themes among the Futurists. While her portrait pictures Marinetti amidst emanating concentric rings of red and yellow like a sun at the center of the Futurist universe, I intend to argue that Zatkova's portrait says as much about its illustrious sitter as it does about a woman artist who is staking her own claim to artistic genius as a "clairvoyant" within the terms of Futurism and Theosophy.

### Biography

Jennifer S. Griffiths completed doctoral work at Bryn Mawr College in 2012 across the disciplines of Italian Studies and the History of Art. She is currently a lecturer for Iowa State University College of Design in Rome and a staff writer for the American Academy in Rome. Her publications on issues of

gender and representation in Italy have appeared in *Gastronomica* (2012), *Women's Studies Quarterly* (2013), and *Annali d'Italianistica* (2015). She is currently working on her first monograph, which is tentatively entitled *In the Lions' Jaws: Women Artists of Italian Futurism in Critical Perspective*.

### Linda D Henderson (University of Texas at Austin, USA) "Kandinsky, Boccioni, and the Ether in the International Cultures of Science and Theosophy"

We can better understand the prominent role that Theosophy played in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century when we recover the popular scientific context in which figures like Annie Besant and C. W. Leadbeater were operating, along with artists such as Wassily Kandinsky and Umberto Boccioni. The ether of space, for example, dismissed by Einstein in the Special Theory of Relativity as irrelevant and hence lost to cultural history during most of the last century, was still at the center of the popular understanding of the nature of reality in this period. Beyond space as filled with vibrating ether, matter had been reconceived in the wake of the discovery of X-rays, the electron, and radioactivity in the 1890s. Just as radioactivity suggested that all matter might be dematerializing into the ether, certain scientists asserted that the ether might be the very source of matter, as in the "electric theory of matter" of Sir Oliver Lodge, which both Kandinsky and Boccioni cite in their writings. Besant commented in similar terms in *Thought-Forms*: "Ether is now comfortably settled in the scientific kingdom, becoming almost more than a hypothesis. . . . Roentgen's rays have rearranged some of the older ideas of matter, while radioactivity has revolutionized them, and is leading science beyond the borderland of the ether into the astral world." In fact, ether physics played a vital role in making aspects of Theosophical doctrine understandable to an early twentieth-century audience.

Both popular science and Theosophy were truly international phenomena in this period, widely promulgated in journals and books. Thus, artists in diverse locales—Kandinsky in Munich and Boccioni in Milan—were grounded in very similar cultures of science and occultism. This paper examines these two artists, not regularly connected in art historical writing, who shared key interests, including the vibratory ether.

#### Biography

Linda Dalrymple Henderson is the David Bruton, Jr. Centennial Professor in Art History, a University Distinguished Teaching Professor, and a Regents' Outstanding Teaching Professor at the University of Texas at Austin. In addition to numerous essays, she is the author of *The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidean Geometry in Modern Art* (1983; new, enlarged ed., MIT Press, 2013), *Duchamp in Context: Science and Technology in the Large Glass and Related Works* (1998), and *Reimagining Space: The Park Place Gallery Group in 1960s New York*, which she guest curated for the Blanton Museum of Art in 2008. With literature scholar Bruce Clarke she co-edited the anthology *From Energy to Information: Representation in Science and Technology, Art, and Literature* (Stanford University Press, 2002). She is currently at work on book projects titled *The Energies of Modernism: Art, Science, and Occultism in the Early 20th Century* and *The Fourth Dimension in Art and Culture Decade-by-Decade Through the 20th Century*.

### Christina Iglesias (Columbia University, New York, USA) "'Oneness with the Infinite': Self and Symbol in D.H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow* (1915)"

Before D.H. Lawrence suggested that "there is nothing for a man to do but to behold God, and to become God" ("The Crown" [1915]), H.P. Blavatsky wrote in *The Secret Doctrine* (1888), "Man is truly

the manifested deity in both its aspects, good and evil.” Despite obvious similarities between Lawrence’s heterodox approach to religion and Theosophy, modernist critics have largely overlooked Lawrence’s reading in Theosophical literature. Recent critics (Virginia Hyde, T.H. Wright, Luke Ferreter) acknowledge the impact of Theosophical ideas on Lawrence’s thought, but tend to consign its influence to his deployment—and, in many cases, redefinition—throughout his work of central Theosophical symbols: the mundane egg, the rosy cross, the crown, the plumed serpent. I hope to argue that Theosophy’s influence extends beyond supplying symbols for Lawrence’s religious pastiche; rather, key features of Lawrence’s theories about civilizational and religious periodicity; the consubstantiality of cosmos, creation, and Creator; the vitalist energy he calls “the God mystery within us”; and his esoteric approach to reading the ritual, icon, and text of Christianity itself expand on and revise crucial tenets of Blavatsky’s *Secret Doctrine*.

My paper takes as its focal point Lawrence’s early novel, *The Rainbow* (1915) which narrates the increasing difficulty of achieving both personal and spiritual fulfillment across three generations of the same family, the Brangwens. Lawrence explores this conflict largely through his characters’ approaches to reading Christian scripture and iconography; their rejection or embrace of religious symbolism indicates their grappling toward a form of religiosity that accounts for personal autonomy as well as a relationship to an impersonal God. Just as religious symbols must be taken as terrestrial manifestations of their universal, esoteric significance—an approach to religion challenged by the materialist bent of early twentieth-century intellectual culture as well as by the literalist approach to scripture celebrated by evangelical Christianity—the members of the Brangwen family must recognize the transience of their “personal” selves before they can apprehend their relationship to the divine. Just as religious symbolism ought to capture a vital relationship between man and God, Ursula Brangwen recognizes toward the end of the novel that she, too, contains divinity, that “self [is] a oneness with the infinite”—an epiphany that echoes Blavatsky’s celebration of “the divine principle in every human being.” In my paper, I will argue that Lawrence dramatizes this interrelationship between the Brangwens and the symbols through which they understand God to demonstrate the spiritual possibilities that lie beyond the terrestrial trappings of self and language alike.

### Biography

Christina Iglesias is a PhD candidate in English at Columbia University specializing in Modernist literature. Her dissertation, tentatively entitled “Modernist Unselfing”, narrates a strain of modernism that emerged from the decline of orthodox religion with a spirituality predicated on subordinating self to larger, deeper, and semi-otherworldly forces. Her previous work has been published in *Papers on Joyce*.

### Massimo Introvigne (The Pontifical Salesian University in Torino, Italy) “Every Picture Tells a Story. Édouard Schuré’s *The Great Initiates*: Theosophy, Text, Context, and Influence on the Visual Arts in France”

In 1889, French esoteric author Édouard Schuré (1841-1929), who had met Madame Blavatsky in 1884 and joined the Theosophical Society in 1885, published his main work, *The Great Initiates*. Although Schuré was a prolific author, he is widely remembered for this book only, which made him a European celebrity. *The Great Initiates* eventually attracted the attention of Rudolf Steiner, who became a close associate of the French writer until Schuré’s anti-German nationalism in World War I interrupted their relationship (Schuré and Steiner would eventually reconcile in 1921). The paper investigates how Schuré’s *The Great Initiates* became a key text of modern (re)enchantment, particularly for French-speaking intellectuals, inside and outside the Theosophical milieu. It explores the work’s context in Schuré’s career and the author’s relationships with Richard Wagner (1813-

1883), Blavatsky, Steiner, French politics, and World War I. *The Great Initiates* was also a text that inspired a great number of artists and, particularly, painters. The paper explores how Schuré's text benefited from a peculiar context and was translated into images by different groups of artists active in Paris or familiar with the French capital's "occulture", including the Belgian Jean Delville (1867-1953), the German Carlos Schwabe (1866-1926) and even some Italian Futurists – Schuré and F.T. Marinetti (1876-1944) became friends in Paris in the 1900s. The paper will particularly focus on French artists influenced by Schuré, such as the Nabis – including Paul Ranson (1864-1909), Paul Sérusier (1864-1927), Jan Verkade (1868-1946) and the sculptor Georges Lacombe (1868-1916) – and the symbolist Maurice Chabas (1862-1947), discussing also the possible influence of *The Great Initiates* on Paul Gauguin (1848-1903).

### Biography

Massimo Introvigne is Professor of Sociology of Religion at the Pontifical Salesian University in Torino, Italy, and the managing director of the Center for Studies on New Religions. He is the author of some sixty books in Italian, some of them translated into English, German, and French, on sociology of religion and Western esotericism, and of more than one hundred journal articles, including several on the influence of the Theosophical Society on visual arts. He served in 2011 as the Representative of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) for combating racism, xenophobia, and religious discrimination.

### Paul Ivey (University of Arizona, USA) "Theosophical Impulses in the Work of John Varian: Mystic, Poet, Inventor, Masseur"

John O. Varian, Irishman, poet, playwright, inventor, and masseur, was a visionary artist whose works were meditations on Theosophical cosmological and racial ideals. He published work in the *Temple Artisan*, *Troubadour* and *Everyman* magazines, and in his own books. His mystery plays, poetry, prose, and inventions inspired musicians such as ultramodernist Henry Cowell, and photographer Ansel Adams. Varian's work celebrated the epic qualities of Irish myth, his faith in spiritual development, and the grandeur of nature and its processes, displaying what one editor called the "bold originality and rugged grandeur of Walt Whitman's," that "sang of the cosmos, thrilling us with the magnificence of evolutionary eons."

Originally a member of the Dublin Lodge from 1892, Varian and his wife Agnes, an early feminist, settled in Palo Alto, California, in 1903, and created a rich intellectual and literary salon atmosphere in their regular Theosophical meetings. Moving to the Temple's intentional community of Halcyon, California in 1914, their home became a center for artists, authors, and musicians. Many of them, such as Ella Young, came from Ireland and settled in the vicinity. Varian was a massage therapist at the Halcyon Hotel and Sanatorium, and his principles undoubtedly produced a unique healing practice, based in osteopathy and chiropractic, that utilized Theosophical notions of the seven principles of human nature.

Varian created a rich textual practice based on Theosophical conceptions of the universe, racial myth, and spiritual evolution. These ideas informed his art in the context of his love of California's Central Coast, and in his support for the Irish nationalist cause, with Ireland holding a special place in Theosophical literature in the aftermath of World War I. My paper will address the rich interconnections between Varian's various literary works, healing methods, musical inventions, the local politics of place, and faith in Irish self-determination.

### Biography

Paul Eli Ivey is Professor of Art History at the University of Arizona, Tucson, where he teaches Modern and Contemporary Art. He is author of *Radiance from Halcyon, A Utopian Experiment in Religion and Science* (Minnesota, 2013), concerning a turn of the twentieth century Theosophical intentional community on California's Central Coast, and *Prayers in Stone: Christian Science Architecture in the United States, 1894 – 1930* (Illinois, 1999). His new book project is *Building Respectability, Globalizing Christian Science Architecture*. He is now actively finishing research on another book tentatively entitled *Called to America: The Architecture of Eastern Religious Congregations in the United States 1900-1950: Intersections of Architecture and Theology*. His research interests include metaphysical, Eastern, and esoteric religions in the United States that evolved during the Progressive Era. He studies the art and architecture, class and institutional structures, theology, therapeutic ideals, political and representational strategies of these related and indigenous religious/philosophical/therapeutic groups.

### **Serena Keshavjee (University of Winnipeg, Canada) “Images of Buddha and Christ in French Symbolist Art: Interpreting East and West through a Theosophical lens”**

The academic study of Buddhism came late to the Western world, but by the mid-nineteenth century the idea of Buddhism as a world religion inspired new scholarship on philology and comparative religions. Symbolist painters Paul Ranson (1864-1909) and Claude-Emile Schuffenecker (1851-1934) adopted this primitivist gambit of an East-West dichotomy by directly comparing images of Christ and Buddha in their art during the 1890s. Similarly Paul Gauguin, in his well-known painting *Self Portrait with Yellow Christ* (1889-90) represented his bi-racial background by positioning himself between the “savage” and the “civilized.” In France, Buddhism, especially Indian Buddhism, came to represent an ancient, “pure” religion, and was beginning to be constructed as the originating source for Christianity; this attitude is evident in the displays at the Musée Guimet, the Universal Exposition (1889) and Theosophical texts. The French Theosophical Society widely disseminated Helena Blavatsky's popular *Secret Doctrine* (1888), which presented a rudimentary version of the comparisons between Christ and Buddha. Blavatsky's writings published in *Le lotus bleu*, the French Theosophical journal, created a universalizing history of religion and a syncretic story of humanity that was attractive to the Symbolists. When Ranson and Schuffenecker painted their images of Christ and Buddha, influenced by the Theosophists, they were contributing to the revision of Christianity as part of an Indo-European mythical history.

### **Biography**

Serena Keshavjee is Associate Professor and Co-Coordinator of the Cultural Studies MA Program (Curatorial Practices Stream) at the University of Winnipeg. Her work focuses on the intersection of art and science in visual culture at the end of the nineteenth century in France. She is especially interested in marginal religious philosophies that were constructed as scientific religions, including Spiritualism, Theosophy and Transformism. In 2009 she edited a special issue of *Canadian Art Review* (RACAR) on “Science, Symbolism and Fin-de-Siècle Visual Culture.” She is the recipient of a Social Sciences and Humanities Council Grant to investigate evolutionary theory and art.

### **Ayla Lepine (University of Essex, UK) “Revivalism as ‘Beautiful Necessity’: Tracing a Transatlantic Gothic Spirit”**

In 1910, the architect Claude Bragdon wrote that architecture aspired to a future state of perfected modern mysticism, in which spirituality and the built environment could be entirely fused. Indeed, it was upon Bragdon's recommendation that the firm of Pond and Pond be invited to design the Chicago headquarters of the American Theosophical Society in a Gothic style. “It is not

unreasonable,” Bragdon postulated, that mysticism “will flower out into an architecture which will be in some sort a reincarnation of and a return to the Gothic spirit”. As a ‘state of balance rather than a state of rest’, Gothic forms’ uniquely energetic expression of complex forces seemed to hold a significant key that could, if rightly deployed, unlock unfathomable potential for new spiritualized architecture. Crucially, this new architecture might or might not be in the Gothic style *per se*. As early as John Ruskin’s mid-nineteenth-century discourse on the significance of Gothic culture for designing and building a better world, the prospect of Gothic spirit as distinct from Gothic form was a serious possibility.

Taking the Gothic style as a point of departure rather than a core priority, this paper offers a distinctly transatlantic array of intersections in order to discern what was meant by ‘Gothic spirit’ and how it infused Theosophically inspired architecture in the first decades of the twentieth century. In Britain, architects and theorists including Giles Gilbert Scott and W. R. Lethaby were invested in the sacred, medievalism and modernity with startlingly bold results. In America, Bragdon’s perceptions of Gothic were in no way isolated, and were affirmed by association with the unique medievalism of Boston-based architect Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue and his circle. The ‘Gothic spirit’ was a priority driving many of the twentieth century’s most innovative architectural projects on both sides of the Atlantic.

### Biography

Ayla Lepine holds a BA in Art History from the University of Victoria and an MA and PhD in Art History from the Courtauld Institute of Art. A specialist in the Gothic Revival in Britain and America c.1800-1950, her current projects focus on medievalism and modernity in relation to the rise of the modern city. Lepine has been awarded an Andrew W. Mellon Postdoctoral Fellowship at the Courtauld Institute of Art and was a 2012-13 Fellow at Yale’s Institute of Sacred Music. She has taught at King’s College London, Warwick, the Courtauld, Yale, and the University of Nottingham. She has convened numerous international symposia and colloquia, including *Gothic and Its Legacies* (Courtauld, 2009), *Revival: Identity, Memory, Utopia* (Courtauld, 2012), *Medievalism in Twentieth-Century Britain and America* (Yale, 2013), and *Queer Gothic: Difference and Sexuality* at the 2013 CAA conference. She has edited three books, published articles in *Architectural History* and the *Architectural Review*, has published essays in collections including *Music and Modernism 1849-1950* (2011) and *The Routledge Companion to Music and Visual Culture* (2014), and is co-editor of the Pickering & Chatto book series *Religion, Architecture and Visual Culture*. She is a Lecturer in Art History at the University of Essex.

### J Barton Scott (University of Toronto, Canada) “Practical Asceticism: On Theosophy’s Astral Ethics”

Sleeping in a tent near Lahore in November 1883, Colonel Henry Steel Olcott awoke when he felt “someone putting his hands upon me.” Alarmed, the expatriate American grabbed the intruder by the upper arms and demanded his identity in rudimentary Hindustani. The stranger replied in a kind, familiar voice: “Do you not remember me?” It was, Olcott realized, Koot Hoomi, his spiritual master, whom he had never before met in the flesh. How is one to read this strangely intimate encounter? As “astral” beings, the Mahatmas suggest a splitting of the self that is indicative of Theosophical subjectivity more generally. Appearing only in secret, Koot Hoomi intensifies the lonely interiority of the Theosophical subject by guiding him from within as much as from without. The Mahatma is not a spiritual despot, but rather the sign of the aspirant’s own internally differentiated self. Less an entity than a function, the “Master” as cipher doubles the subject by facilitating its own self-negation, its desire to be other than what it is. This presentation traces how Blavatsky and other early Theosophists positioned the Mahatmas as an ascetic technology that facilitates the rule of self as

other. Despite the complaints of many Theosophists (who continued to hanker after miracles even after the Coulomb Affair of 1884-85), the Theosophical genres that emerge in the late 1880s insistently returned the occult to mundane matters of ascetic self-discipline. This was particularly true of Theosophical conduct manuals and allegorical commentaries on the *Bhagavad Gita*, both of which rise to prominence at this time. Here, the Mahatmas become a figure for a worldly asceticism that negates the particulars of material life in the name of a “universal brotherhood.”

### Biography

J. Barton Scott is Assistant Professor of Historical Studies and the Study of Religion at the University of Toronto, Canada. He works at the intersection of modern South Asian studies and the cultural history of the study of religion. He has articles published or forthcoming in *History of Religions*, *The Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, *South Asia*, *The Journal of Hindu Studies*, *Postscripts*, and *Comparative Studies in South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East*. His first book, *Spiritual Despots: Modern Hinduism and the Genealogies of Self-Rule*, is forthcoming with University of Chicago Press as part of the series “South Asia Across the Disciplines”. The book analyzes how the critique of spiritual despotism in colonial India shaped the ideal of the self-ruling subject. Even as reformers decried the spiritual power of priests, they promoted new types of religious discipline by mobilizing Hindu and Protestant ascetic practices and extending them to worldly householders. The resulting concern with practices of self-government remained as important to later nationalist thought as it was to nineteenth-century reform culture.

### Jeremy Stolow (Concordia University, Canada) “Astral Bodies: From Clairvoyant Perception to Technological Mediation”

This paper considers the legacy of the Theosophical writings of Charles W. Leadbeater and Annie Besant—especially *Thought Forms* (1901) and *Man Visible and Invisible* (1902)—in the domains of occult Science and spiritual healing over the course of the twentieth century, with particular attention devoted to the spread of Kirlian photography in the 1960s and 70s. In particular, Leadbeater’s *Man Visible and Invisible* helped to canonize the visual representation of the subtle energies that were understood to make up the ‘astral body’ or ‘aura’, linking the human nervous system with a larger, cosmic reservoir of vibrations that remain normally invisible, but that could be detected by clairvoyant mediums as nebulous clouds or vapors of color. Theosophical writers thus contributed decisively to the formation of an iconographic repertoire for the visualization of the ‘finely graded matter’ that was said to surround all living things and that registered varying states of health, emotional disposition, intellectual attunement, and spiritual progress. However, whereas Leadbeater and Besant relied upon their own native powers of clairvoyant perception to produce written descriptions and hand-painted drawings of these astral forms, generations of scientists and engineers have been busily at work designing and adapting photographic instruments to perform the analogous work of ‘seeing aura’. Photographic technologies were thus proclaimed simultaneously as scientific instruments capable of producing visible evidence that proved the existence of auras and also as *extensions of* powers of esoteric insight normally reserved for clairvoyant mediums. My paper explores this complex relationship between photographic apparatus and the two images that were central to early twentieth-century Theosophy by considering how the latter were taken up in the case of Kirlian photography, a form of electrically mediated contact photography that became immensely popular in the USA, Brazil, and elsewhere starting in the late 1960s, where it generated a new stock of technologically mediated pictures of auras and astral bodies available for parapsychological research and New Age healing, and where it was installed as a familiar visual element in the broader terrain of psychedelic popular culture.

### Biography

Jeremy Stolow is an Associate Professor and the Director of the PhD in Communication Program in the Department of Communication Studies at Concordia University, Montreal, Canada. Among his publications are *Orthodox By Design: Judaism, Print Politics, and the ArtScroll Revolution* (Berkeley: U of California Press, 2010), and his edited book, *Deus in Machina: Religion, Technology, and the Things in Between* (New York: Fordham U Press, 2013). His current research project, "Picturing Aura" investigates the history and contemporary use of optical instruments and visual media technologies for the visualization of human radiant energy fields, sometimes (controversially) referred to as the human aura, tracing the way such images are incorporated into the diverse scenes of psychic research, alternative healthcare, art photography, and the New Age spiritual marketplace. For more details about his publications and research, see his website: [www.jeremystolow.com](http://www.jeremystolow.com).

### Yuri Stoyanov (School of Oriental & African Studies, University of London, UK) "Transmutations of Theosophy in Russian and East European Literary and Philosophico-Scientific Contexts (c.1880s-1950s)"

The purpose of the paper is to present and discuss some as yet insufficiently known and explored processes through which the writings and ideas of Blavatsky, Besant and Leadbeater were assimilated into East European and Russian literary and philosophico-mystical and philosophico-scientific milieux and then subjected to characteristic transmutations and "domestication" in novel ideological and literary contexts. Such new syntheses and literary developments were to a large extent generated by the obvious syncretistic dynamics and potential of early Theosophy and in their constructs could either re-emphasize the vital importance of late antique Neo-Platonic, Gnostic, Hermetic and Kabbalistic figures, currents and texts for the transmission of ancient universal wisdom or follow re-orientalizing courses, drawing on the Hindu and Buddhist thought and vocabulary absorbed and recast into the works of Blavatsky.

The case studies which will be explored in the paper will be from the late imperial/early Soviet Russia and the early post-Ottoman and inter-war Balkans. They will include cases in which elements of the impact of the French Occult Revival and early Theosophy interacted with already existing Eastern Orthodox mystical and spiritualist currents, as in the case of Bulgarian Theosophic Neo-Gnostic circles in the early twentieth-century, which led to Theosophically inspired new "sectarian" literary pseudigraphy, effectively reviving and modernizing the medieval genres, narratives and genres of Eastern Christian apocryphal and apocalyptic literature. Apart from such elite literary phenomena the paper will discuss the impact of Theosophy on more popular genres, as represented, for example, in the novels of the prolific Russian occult author, Vera Kryzhanovskaia (described as the "first lady of science fiction") as well as on the narratives of the literary ritualism of Russian Neo-Templarism of the early Soviet era.

In the field of Theosophically influenced philosophico-scientific syntheses the paper will discuss the attempts at a polymathic synthesis of Western esotericism, Theosophy and "Eastern Wisdom," as in the work of the Russian esotericist, Vladimi Shmakov, and the transmutations of Western esotericism and neo-Gnostic notions in the openly and determinately syncretistic endeavors of Daniel Andreev in his *Rose of the World*. Finally, the paper will discuss the elaboration of the Theosophic complex of notions related to Shambhala, the Mahatmas and evolutionary racial cycles of humanity in the works of Nicholas and Elena Roerich and their obvious messianic and geopolitical dimension and potential, as demonstrated by the repeated attempts to politically instrumentalize them in conflicting geopolitical contexts in the 1920 and 1930s and after World War II.

The topic of the paper relates directly to some of my ongoing research projects, ranging from the cataloguing and exploration of previously unknown and unpublished Russian sectarian documents of apocryphal and esoteric character to my work on convergence of Theosophy and Neo-Gnostic currents in modern Eastern Orthodox cultures from the 1880s to the 1950s and the resultant literary and philosophico-scientific fashions and currents. Apart from published works and sources these projects also use a variety of unpublished documents (including relevant Theosophical Society correspondence and material) from multi-lingual archives in Russia and South-Eastern Europe.

### Biography

Yuri Stoyanov obtained his PhD in Combined Historical/Religious Studies from the University of London (The Warburg Institute). He is based at the Department of the Near and Middle East, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London and is currently a Senior Fellow at the Albright Institute, Jerusalem and a scholar in residence at the Tantur Ecumenical Institute, Jerusalem. He was Director of the Kenyon Institute (formerly the British School of Archaeology) in Jerusalem and has lectured and published widely on various facets of the interaction between mystical and esoteric currents in Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam and their survivals into the modern era. His publications include English-language books such as *The Hidden Tradition in Europe* (Penguin, 1994), *The Other God* (Yale UP, 2000), *Defenders and Enemies of the True Cross* (Austrian Academy of Sciences Press, 2011) as well as assistant editor of *Christian Dualist Heresies in the Byzantine World c.650-c.1450* (Manchester UP, 1998).

Since 2000 he has worked on research projects and pursued wide-ranging fieldwork, partially focused on the survival of archaic and esoteric teachings and ritual practices in sectarian and dissident religious communities in the Levant, the Middle East and Central Asia.

### Corinna Treitel (Washington University in St Louis, USA) "Enchanting the Farm: Anthroposophy and the Origins of German Organic Agriculture"

For more than a century, Germans have been international leaders in the development and implementation of ecological agriculture, yet historical knowledge of this topic is scant. Gunter Vogt opened up this area for scholarship in his path breaking doctoral thesis *Entstehung und Entwicklung des ökologischen Landbaus im deutschsprachigen Raum* (2000), but offered a rather teleological history of organic agriculture as it is practiced in Germany today. Rather than starting with the present, my paper returns to the interwar years to examine this topic at the interface of the German life sciences and German life reform. It explains the emergence of "biodynamic agriculture" - an interwar cultivation system that shunned the use of commercial fertilizers and pesticides - as the product of two trends: the emergence of the scientific field of agricultural bacteriology circa 1900 and the simultaneous burgeoning of the influential Theosophical offshoot Anthroposophy. Attention will focus on the material, political, and philosophical factors that inspired the first generation of biodynamic pioneers as well as the ways in which Anthroposophical ideas were translated into practice on working farms. The paper will conclude with a consideration of biodynamics' fate in Nazi Germany. Biodynamic agriculture, the paper argues, owes its origins, development, and popularity both to the enchanting and disenchanting impulses of German modernity.

### Biography

Corinna Treitel is Associate Professor of History at Washington University in St. Louis, USA. She is a modern German historian interested in the intersections of science, culture, and politics. Her first book *A Science for the Soul: Occultism and the Genesis of the German Modern* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004) examined the German occult movement as an aspect of European modernism. German occultists made major contributions to twentieth-century art, psychology,

literature, medicine, and what we now call "New Age" spirituality. Their efforts were also an excellent example of a larger historical trend: the use of science to enchant the "disenchanted" modern age anew.

Her current research concerns the history of food in Central Europe. She has written on the nutritional physiologist Max Rubner, a forgotten but key figure in the cultural history of the calorie. In September of 2008, she organized a conference at Washington University in St. Louis on "The Ethics of Diet". Most importantly, she is now finishing a second book called *Eating Nature: Food, Agriculture, and Environment in Modern Germany*. It explores the history of natural foods and farming since the early nineteenth century.

Major grants to support her research have come from the Woodrow Wilson Foundation, the American Historical Association, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Humanities Center at Washington University in St. Louis.

### Gauri Viswanathan (Columbia University, New York) "Theosophy as Cultural Translation: Mediating Hinduism"

My interest in this paper is to examine a less obvious art in Theosophical practice: translation. Sanskrit terms and concepts drawn from Hinduism were not only adapted by Theosophists in their writings but also re-presented in new translations of classical Hindu philosophy. These editions reached an assortment of readers in nineteenth-century Britain and India, influencing the reception of Hinduism in both metropole and colony. My paper focuses on two significant moments in Theosophy's mediation of Hinduism: first, the appropriation of Sanskrit by Theosophy's most famous exponent H. P. Blavatsky, who translated concepts in Hinduism (as she understood it) into terms that invoke the psychology of the self's relation to the world, rather than to the salvific promises of the afterlife; and second, M. K. Gandhi's encounters with Theosophical writings, which were an important channel (if not the only one) through which he came to understand Hinduism. With Blavatsky something akin to translated Hinduism emerges, refitted to serve Theosophical purposes. Theosophy's mediation of Hindu concepts and terms proved useful to her for the resolution of issues involving agency and causation. Gandhi took a page out of her book by reworking terms to serve the ethical directives of the Indian freedom struggle. My paper repositions translation as a medium of clarifying insight, akin to other transmissive media such as image and sound.

### Biography

Gauri Viswanathan is Class of 1933 Professor in the Humanities at Columbia University. She has published widely on education, religion and culture; nineteenth-century British and colonial cultural studies; and the history of modern disciplines. She is the author of *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (Columbia, 1989; Oxford, 1998) and *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity and Belief* (Princeton, 1998), which won the Harry Levin Prize awarded by the American Comparative Literature Association, the James Russell Lowell Prize awarded by the Modern Language Association, and the Ananda K. Coomaraswamy Prize awarded by the Association for Asian Studies. Prof. Viswanathan is completing a book entitled *In Search of Blavatsky*. She has held numerous visiting chairs, among them the Beckman Professorship at UC Berkeley, and she was most recently an Affiliated Fellow at the American Academy in Rome. She has received Guggenheim, NEH, and Mellon Fellowships, and was a fellow at various international research institutes. She is co-editor of the book series *South Asia Across the Disciplines*, published jointly by the university presses of Columbia, Chicago and California. Among Prof. Viswanathan's recent articles on Theosophy-related topics are: "'Have Animals Souls?' Theosophy and the Suffering Body", *PMLA* (2011), "The Great Game: The Geopolitics of Secret Knowledge", in *Locating Transnational Ideals* (2009), "Spectrality's Secret

Sharers", in *Beyond the Black Atlantic* (2006), "Ireland, India and the Poetics of Internationalism", *The Journal of World History* (2004), and "The Ordinary Business of Occultism", *Critical Inquiry* (2000).

### Christopher White (Vassar College, USA) "Claude Bragdon and the Art of Invisible Dimensions"

Every day the American artist, stage designer and Theosophist Claude Bragdon (1866-1946) began the day with Yoga, meditation and an attempt to draw a perfect circle. Like other artists interested in Theosophy, Bragdon used meditative and artistic disciplines to see beyond the surface of things and into their underlying depths. From those depths came geometric forms that multiplied and proliferated into, for example, the patterns seen in the veining of a leaf, the spirals of a seashell or the concentric circles found in disturbed water. As he drew his circles, Bragdon reproduced these patterns, harmonizing himself with the concentric circles that rippled outward from the Absolute. But to Bragdon and other Theosophists, the circle had additional meanings. It pointed to heavenly perfection. It harmonized opposites. And, as Kandinsky wrote once to a friend, it represented a higher oneness that incorporated all things, pointing to something beyond, pointing "to the fourth dimension." Bragdon also knew that a higher, fourth dimension existed above all things, and he used his art to try and capture that higher dimension. In this paper, I examine how Bragdon and others in his coterie used both geometric and Theosophical ideas to develop a new vocabulary for art as a way of seeing into invisible dimensions. Like the Theosophists Leadbeater and Besant, to whom he was greatly indebted, Bragdon pursued art as a way of expanding the range of human perception. He did this by producing fractal-like art with proliferating shapes, paintings of higher-dimensional objects (such as hypercubes) and illustrated books with drawings of geometric objects. He also incorporated higher-dimensional geometric shapes in illuminated lanterns that he used in public festivals, such as the Song and Light festival in New York's Central Park in 1917. Bragdon was successful in both making Theosophy's esoteric aims more public and influencing later artists striving to see something beyond the material world.

#### Biography

Christopher White is associate professor of American religious history at Vassar College, where he has taught since 2008. He is the author of *Unsettled Minds: Psychology and the American Search for Spiritual Assurance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009). He is currently writing a book on the cultural history of ideas about the Universe's boundaries and invisible dimensions.

### Mimi Winick (Rutgers University, USA) "Jessie L. Weston's Occult Anthropology: Theosophy in *From Ritual to Romance*"

In 1920, Cambridge University Press published a monograph by Britain's leading Arthurian scholar, Jessie L. Weston. In its scholarly apparatus, *From Ritual to Romance* resembles literary monographs today; but its startling theory that the medieval grail romances were coded records of an ancient fertility ritual makes surprising, apparently un-academic claims—*e.g.*, that "the Otherworld is not a myth, but a reality" existing on an "astral plane."

Weston's scholarship has been variously understood as religious, scientific, clear-eyed, bogus, and occult—with these last two dominating discussion since the 1970s. Recent critics have reconsidered Weston by de-emphasizing her occult affiliations; but it is this resistance to and imprecision about *From Ritual to Romance's* occult antecedents that has led to the misreading of this work and its place in literary history. In this paper, I show how nineteenth-century Theosophy contextualizes Weston's sacred-scientific scholarship as a remarkable but hardly anomalous instance

of “studied enchantment,” a mixed genre of fiction and scholarship that not only used scholarly conventions to seek knowledge about the past, but also *performed* scholarship in such a way as to foster—rather than dispel—enchanted experiences in its readers. Specifically, I show how key aspects of *From Ritual to Romance*’s enchanted practice—its self-consciously scientific form, its use of the so-called “comparative method,” and its thematic concerns with matriarchy, lost civilizations, and hidden religious traditions—emerge from the overlapping worlds of Victorian Theosophy, amateur scholarship, and anthropology.

In particular, Theosophy illuminates the relationship among the feminist, anti-colonial, and racist alternative histories that constitute Weston’s once popular, now discredited, but still influential theory of the grail. By combining a formal analysis of Weston’s text with an account of its relation to Theosophical writings, I explore how feminism, anti-imperialism, racism, and enchantment itself are here formally and historically intertwined.

### Biography

Mimi Winick is a PhD candidate in English at Rutgers University, New Jersey, where she was a 2014-15 Graduate Fellow at the Center for Cultural Analysis. Her dissertation, “Histories of Enchantment: Scholarly Writing on Religion and the British Literary Imagination, 1862-1935,” explores scholarship as an agent of enchantment in British literary culture. Her article, “Modernist Feminist Witchcraft: Margaret Murray’s Fantastic Scholarship and Sylvia Townsend Warner’s Realist Fantasy” is forthcoming in *Modernism/Modernity*.

### Devin Zuber (Graduate Theological Union at Berkeley, California, USA) “The Colors of Conversion: Swedenborg, Theosophy, and Transcultural Mysticism”

The eighteenth-century theology of the Scandinavian scientist-turned-mystic Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772) substantially impacted various nineteenth-century occult and esoteric contexts that gave shape to the rise of Theosophy. From Arthur Conan Doyle hailing Swedenborg as the “the father for our new knowledge in supernal matters” in his *History of Spiritualism* (1926), to Helena Blavatsky claiming Swedenborg as “the greatest among modern seers” and (somewhat anachronistically) a “Theosophist” in *Isis Unveiled* (1877), references to Swedenborg form a consistent, if variegated, pattern across the diverse tapestry of Theosophical writings. In general, Theosophists like Blavatsky downplayed or critiqued Swedenborg’s Christological framework—thus reiterating Ralph Waldo Emerson’s earlier mid-century complaint that Swedenborg’s primary vice was “his theological determinism”—while appropriating and adapting his doctrine of correspondences, and his micro- and macro-cosmic analogies of the universe.

This paper delineates one strand of this influence through an exploration of how Swedenborg’s writings facilitated what might be called transcultural mysticism for artists affiliated with Theosophy, often in ways that dovetailed and intersected with Theosophy’s own religious syncretism. On the west coast of California, for example, in 1887, Philangi Dasa—an ex-Swedenborgian minister formerly named Herman Vetterling—began publishing *The Buddhist Ray* out of his simple shack in the mountains above Santa Cruz. A magazine “devoted to Buddhism in General and the Buddhism in Swedenborg in Particular,” as every issue announced, *The Buddhist Ray* stands as the first bona fide Buddhist periodical to be published in North America. Prior to this, Dasa had published extensively on Swedenborg in Blavatsky and Olcott’s Theosophist journal (in at least seven different articles), before effectively “converting” to his self-identified form of Tibetan Buddhism.

If Dasa (and slightly later on, D.T. Suzuki, who wrote in Japanese about Swedenborg as a “Buddha of the North”) model how Swedenborg could readily translate into Buddhist eclecticism, a different set of coordinates is suggested by the trajectory of the erstwhile Theosophist painter Ivan

Aguéli. The Swedish Aguéli (born John Gustaf Agelii) became associated with radical Theosophical and anarchist circles in Paris in the 1890's; his private mystical experiences led to a lifelong reading and interest in his fellow countryman, Swedenborg, and ultimately, a conversion to Sufi mysticism (all the while retaining his abiding interest in Swedenborg's writings). Aguéli's innovative use of Swedenborg for doing interreligious comparative hermeneutics with Islamic medieval mystics, such as Ibn Arabi, critically anticipates the later pioneering work of Henry Corbin by fifty years.

With this complex intercultural, interreligious dynamic taking place, my paper tries to address several related questions: What was it about Swedenborgian ideas that could "ferry" figures across Theosophical currents into particular nonwestern religious traditions—Aguéli's Islam or Dasa's Buddhism? Why did Swedenborg's theology, in both cases, facilitate conversions out of (or away from) Theosophical eclecticism? With Aguéli, what are the visual analogs to this process—the "corresponding" colors, to paraphrase Swedenborg, of his conversion?

### Biography

Dr. Devin Zuber, MA, MPhil., is an assistant professor of American Studies, Literature, and Swedenborgian Studies at the Graduate Theological Union (GTU) in Berkeley, California, where he serves as core doctoral faculty for the graduate programs in Art and Religion and Interdisciplinary Studies. Prior to coming to the GTU, Dr. Zuber taught at the University of Osnabrueck (Germany), the Ludwig-Maximilians University of Munich, and at Queens College (CUNY). He was the 2010 European postdoctoral fellow at the Eccles Centre for American Studies at the British Library, and was recently nominated for a 2015-2016 Fulbright Scholar award at the University of Stockholm. His essays and chapters on Swedenborg and Buddhism, on the memorial aesthetics of 9/11, on ecopoetics, on Don DeLillo's ekphrastic fiction, on Ralph Waldo Emerson, William Blake, and Henry James, have appeared in *Religion & the Arts*, *American Quarterly*, *LWU: Literature in Wissenschaft und Unterricht*, *Variations*, and other collections and anthologies. His monograph, *A Language of Things: Swedenborg and the American Environmental Imaginary*, is currently under review at an academic press; his new project is an exploration of postsecular literary theory and transcultural Romantic poetics.

## Invited Respondents

### Stefan Andriopoulos (Columbia University)

#### Biography

Stefan Andriopoulos is Professor of Germanic Languages at Columbia. He is the author of, most recently, *Ghostly Apparitions: German Idealism, the Gothic Novel, and Optical Media* (Zone Books, 2013). His previous book *Possessed: Hypnotic Crimes, Corporate Fiction, and the Invention of Cinema* (University of Chicago Press, 2008) won the SLSA Michelle Kendrick award for best academic book on literature, science, and the arts. He has also co-edited a special issue of *Grey Room* "On Brainwashing: Mind Control, Media, and Warfare" (2011). His articles have appeared in such journals as *Critical Inquiry*, *Representations*, *New German Critique*, *English Literary History*, and the *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift*. Other books, published in German, include a monograph on *Accident and Crime: Configurations between Literary and Legal Discourse around 1900* (Centaurus 1996), and two co-edited volumes, *1929. Contributions to an Archaeology of Media* (Suhrkamp 2002) and *Addressing*

*Media* (DuMont 2001). Stefan Andriopoulos' areas of teaching and research focus on German and European literature, media history, and interrelations of literature and science from 1750 to the present. He has held visiting professorships at Harvard University, in the Department of the History of Science, at the Bauhaus Universität Weimar, in the Research Center "Medial Historiographies," and at Cologne University, in the Research Institute "Media, Culture, Communication." In 2009/10, he received the Columbia Distinguished Faculty Award for his teaching, research, and mentoring. Andriopoulos is co-chair of the executive committee for a new Ph.D. program in Film and Comparative Media and a contributing editor of *New German Critique*.

### Sarah Cole (Columbia University)

#### Biography

Sarah Cole is Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia. She specializes in British literature of the 19th and 20th centuries, with an emphasis on the modernist period. Her areas of interest include war; violence, sexuality and the body; history and memory; imperialism; and Irish literature of the modernist period. She is the author of two books, most recently *At the Violet Hour: Modernism and Violence in England and Ireland* (Oxford UP, 2012) and *Modernism, Male Friendship, and the First World War* (Cambridge UP, 2003). She has published articles in *ELH*, *Modern Fiction Studies*, *Modernism/Modernity*, and *PMLA*, and has written essays for a variety of edited collections. She is the recipient of a 2014 Guggenheim Fellowship for a book project entitled *The Wells Era*.

### Matt Hart (Columbia University)

#### Biography

Matt Hart is Assistant Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia. He specializes in 20<sup>th</sup>- and 21<sup>st</sup>-century literature, with an emphasis on modernism, poetry, and contemporary British fiction. He is also interested in connections between literature and the visual arts and between literary history and political history. His publications include *Nations of Nothing but Poetry* (Oxford UP, 2010) and, with Jim Hansen, *Contemporary Literature and the State*, a special issue of *Contemporary Literature* (2008). His new book project focuses on recent writers such as J. G. Ballard, Kazuo Ishiguro, Amitav Ghosh, and W. G. Sebald, especially upon the way their work emphasizes the fractured and pockmarked nature of present-day legal and political territoriality. He is associate editor of *Contemporary Literature*, founding coeditor (with David James and Rebecca L. Walkowitz) of the Columbia University Press book series, *Literature Now*, and vice president of A.S.A.P.: The Association for the Study of the Arts of the Present.

### Cóilín Parsons (Georgetown University)

#### Biography

Cóilín Parsons is Assistant Professor of English at Georgetown University. His research interests include Irish literature, global modernism, theories of geography and space, cartography, and

postcolonial literature and theory. He is also interested in theories and histories of colonial archives. His book *The Ordnance Survey and Modern Irish Literature* is forthcoming from Oxford University Press. Among his journal articles are: "Mapping the Globe: Gulam Mohammed Sheikh's Postcolonial mappae mundi," *English Language Notes* (2015); "The Turd in the Rath: Antiquarians, The Ordnance Survey, and Beckett's Irish Landscapes," *Journal of Beckett Studies* (2013); "The Archive in Ruins: James Clarence Mangan and Colonial Cartography," *Interventions: The International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* (2011); "Greatly Altered: The Life of Sydney Owenson's Indian Novel," *Victorian Literature and Culture* (2010). Prior to Georgetown, he also taught at the University of Cape Town.

### **Susan Pedersen (Columbia University)**

#### **Biography**

Susan Pedersen is Professor of History and James P. Shenton Professor of the Core Curriculum. She specializes in British history, the British empire, comparative European history, and international history. Her book about the League of Nations and its impact on the imperial order, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire*, was published by Oxford UP in 2015. Her previous books include *Settler Colonialism in the Twentieth Century: Projects, Practices, Legacies* (Routledge, 2005); *Eleanor Rathbone and the Politics of Conscience* (Yale UP, 2004), which won the Albion book prize of the North American Conference on British Studies; *After the Victorians: Private Conscience and Public Duty in Modern Britain* (Routledge, 1994); and *Family, Dependence, and the Origins of the Welfare State: Britain and France, 1914-1945* (Cambridge, 1993), which won the Allan Sharlin Prize of the Social Science History Association. She has been awarded numerous fellowships by, among other places, All Souls College, Oxford University (2014), the Cullman Center for Writers and Scholars, New York Public Library (2011-12), the Princeton Institute for Advanced Study (2011), the American Academy in Berlin (2009), the Guggenheim Foundation (2006), the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin (2005-6), and the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study (2002-3 and 1994-5).

## **Enchanted Modernities Project Team**

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# Enchanted Modernities

A research network on theosophy, modernism and the arts, c. 1875-1960

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