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Seneca's *Natural Questions*, Book II: The Oldest Extant Account of the Stoic Conception of the Intention of the Air

Alberto Parisi[1,2]

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Abstract
This article offers a new reading of Book II of Seneca's *Natural Questions*, arguing that its opening chapters preserve one of the most complete surviving accounts of Stoic pneumatology—and in particular, the theory of πνευματικός τόνος (*pneumatikos tonos*), or the material tension of breath, rendered in Latin as *intentio*. Long overlooked or dismissed as a digression, Seneca's reflection on air reveals itself as a structured inquiry into the Stoic understanding of *pneuma*, material spirit, as the unifying, animating element of the cosmos. Through a close reconstruction of *Naturales Questiones* II.1–10, this study shows that Seneca articulates a physical theory in which *aer* (air), *spiritus* (spirit), and *animus* (soul) are materially continuous, and in which all movement, voice, and life—human or non-human—depend on the *intentio* of breath. By situating Seneca's argument within the broader history of Stoic cosmology and contrasting it with later Christian reinterpretations of *intentio* as immaterial will, the article recovers a lost genealogy of intention as a material and musical phenomenon. It proposes that Seneca's account anticipates contemporary theories of atmosphere, *ambiance*, and *Stimmung*, and invites a rethinking of intention as a mode of embodied, respiratory, and poetic attunement to the world.

The emerging fields of Respiratory and Atmospheric Studies have recently begun to rediscover the fundamental role played by the interrelationship between breath, air, and atmospheres in shaping the way human and non-human beings relate to themselves and the rest of the world. On the one hand, Respiratory Philosophy has shown that European culture is rooted in a profound "forgetfulness" of breath and material

✉ Alberto Parisi
parisi.alberto@yahoo.com

[1] Kobe Institute for Atmospheric Studies (KOIAS), Graduate School of Humanities, Kobe University, 1-1 Rokkodaicho, Nada Ward, 657-0013 Kobe, Hyogo, Japan

[2] Institute for Philosophical and Religious Studies, Science and Research Center Koper, Koper, Slovenia

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air (Škof & Berndtson, 2018; Fuller et al., 2021), while other traditions have afforded it a place of honor. According to these scholars, European culture has historically construed itself on the assumption that breath and air are irrelevant to what defines human life – namely, rationality, thought, and language. In other words, breath has not been entirely ignored, but it has been excluded from the very domain where "spirit" and "intellect" are thought to reside, precisely through its progressive dematerialization and transformation into "spirit" and "soul" (Škof & Berndtson, 2018; Fuller et al., 2021; Parisi, 2023).

On the other hand, Atmospheric Studies have opposed this European tradition by demonstrating the possibility and necessity of rethinking human subjectivity on the basis of the European concepts of atmospheres, ambiences, and *Stimmungen*, and by turning to the longer *qi/ki* (breath/energy) tradition in East-Asian cultures and its own atmospheric terms, such as the Japanese *fun'iki* and *kibun* (Schmitz, 1965; Griffero, 2010; Hisayama, 2014; Böhme, 2017; Marinucci, 2017; Griffero & Tedeschini, 2018; Thibaud, 2020; Kuwayama, 2023). Atmospheres, understood as the affects and emotions through which the world first and foremost opens itself to us, cannot be located inside an immaterial subject but need to be located corporeally, and even beyond the limits of the body, as a diffusion and resonance through and with the world. As the etymologies and histories of these terms show, they are aerial, pneumatic, breathing phenomena, which bridge the gap between so-called "materiality" and "spirituality," exposing the illusion of an immaterial "spirit."

Within this exciting context, however, the deeper, often complex and partially forgotten genealogies of breath, spirit, and related concepts remain profoundly underexamined.[1] This article returns to a largely overlooked moment in the common history of breath and atmosphere in the European tradition: namely, the theory of breath and its *intentio* (tension) presented by the 1st -century CE Stoic philosopher Seneca the Younger in the opening of Book II of his *Natural Questions*. I argue that these passages preserve one of the oldest and most complete extant accounts of Stoic pneumatology, namely of the Stoic theory of the material breath (*pneuma* or *spiritus*) pervading and giving life to the cosmos, and especially of the theory of the πνευματικός τόνος (*pneumatikos tonos)* – the material tone or tension of the spirit – which in Latin was interestingly rendered as *intentio*.

Long dismissed as a digression, this section of Seneca's text has gone unrecognized as a sustained reflection on the nature of air as the fundamental element of reality and on the role the material "intention" of the air plays in this Stoic theory. This oversight is due not only to the fragmentary nature of more ancient Stoic sources on these doctrines, but also to a series of historical processes: first, the internal evolution of Stoicism from materialist physics to moral intellectualism caused a growing

[1] While a few new studies have recently appeared on *pneuma* and *spiritus* in Ancient Philosophy and Religions, the long history of these terms remains unstudied or underappreciated (Bartoš & King, 2020; Coughlin et al., 2020; Schneider, 2022).

disinterest in Stoic pneumatology, which is still common today;[2] second, the Neoplatonic and Christian "spiritualization of the spirit," first highlighted by Gerhard Verbeke and recently rediscovered by Respiratory Studies, redefined *spiritus* (spirit and breath) in purely non-material terms, thereby severing its connection to breath (Verbeke, 1945; Škof & Berndtson, 2018); and third, a semantic shift occurred in the term *intentio* itself, which by the time of Augustine had come to signify an immaterial act of attention or will, rather than anything pertaining to breath or the body (Parisi, 2023). These transformations rendered Seneca's account illegible within dominant traditions of Western metaphysics and help explain its subsequent marginalization.

For these reasons, this article undertakes a close reconstruction of Seneca's argument in *Naturales Quaestiones* II.1–10, situating it within earlier Stoic theories of mixture, unity, and breath/spirit (*pneuma*) as the active, unifying principle of the cosmos. It shows how, alongside Seneca's more syncretic – at times Platonizing – moral philosophy, he preserved ancient Stoic physical theories, such as that of the material spirit and its tension. In Seneca's theory, there is no substantial difference between *aer* (air), *animus* (soul), and *spiritus* (spirit): they are all air characterized by a different intention. Every being in the world is a mixture of matter and breath, and it is thanks to the material tension of this breath that everything – wind, stones, plants, animals, and humans – moves and is alive in the cosmos. But Seneca does not stop at physiological movement: he even explains the human voice and music, as well as the rational soul, in terms of material intention, but this intention has nothing to do – at least in this context – with some form of immaterial attention or will.

In doing so, the article not only recovers a crucial chapter in the history of Stoic physics but also proposes a new conceptual genealogy for *intentio* itself – one that links it not to interiority or volition, but to material breath and atmosphere. Such a recovery has broader implications. When understood in its original Stoic sense that Seneca has preserved, *intentio* reveals a striking proximity to the contemporary con-

[2] The history of Stoicism is a long one. The period of activity of the school spans from its foundation in Athens by Zeno in the 4th century BCE to the pinnacles of Roman Stoicism with the emperor Marcus Aurelius at the end of the 2nd century CE (Long, 1986). At the heart of Ancient Stoic philosophy lied a distinctive physical and cosmological doctrine founded on the material spirit (*pneuma*) (Sambursky, 1959; Hahm, 1977). Yet over time, Stoicism underwent a series of internal shifts that displaced this materialist foundation. The initial turn toward logic, associated especially with Chrysippus (3rd century BCE), was a response to attacks from Skeptics and Epicureans, and prioritized formal reasoning over cosmological speculation, while still maintaining and developing the early pneumatology of the school (Pohlenz, 1970; Long, 1986). This was followed, from Panaetius onward (2nd century BCE), by a deeper transformation of Stoicism into a practical ethics, increasingly oriented toward individual moral development, which reached its apex in Roman Stoicism (Long, 1986; Radice, 2008, 2012). It is probably also due to these shifts – and the lack of sources they caused – that Stoic pneumatology lost its centrality and is still largely underexamined compared to other aspects of Stoic philosophy. To give just one example, this is how contemporary scholar summarized the achievements of Stoic philosophy in an introduction to the new English translation of Seneca's *Natural Questions*: "The philosophical achievement of the Greek Stoics, and especially that of Chrysippus, was enormous: the invention of propositional logic, the invention of the philosophy of language, unprecedented achievements in moral psychology, distinction in areas ranging from metaphysics and epistemology to moral and political philosophy" (Asmis et al., 2010, p. x).

cept of atmosphere, especially in its *ambiance* and *Stimmung* form.[3] By inserting a reflection on voice and music within his discussion of air and its intention, Seneca testifies to a forgotten aspect of the Ancient Stoic theory of the *tonos*, or a later version of it. Seneca's intention is not only fundamentally related to breath but also always already a vocal and musical concept, bridging the gap between discussions of atmosphere/*ambiance* and *Stimmung*, understood as an affective musical attunement. By tracing this forgotten lineage, this article invites a rethinking of intention not as an act of consciousness, but as a mode of material, musical, respiratory, and atmospheric attunement to the world.

1.

Book II of the *Natural Questions*, tentatively titled by modern editors "De tonitribus, fulminibus fulguribusque," treats most importantly of the nature of lightning and thunder, the "physics" behind them, and the possibility of predicting the future on their basis.[4] However, in a move that always puzzled scholars – so much so that it led the editor of the first Teubner edition of this text, Gercke (1907), to wonder whether this book should in fact be considered the first of the whole work[5] – Seneca takes some space to reflect more generally about the study of the cosmos and its most basic assumptions.

It is in this context that, all too suddenly and not without skipping a few argumentative steps – or so it might seem to the modern reader – Seneca embarks on a surprising discussion of the nature of air, its unity, or rather its role in giving unity and life to everything. It is probably this liminal, peripheral position in Seneca's *Natural Questions* and, more generally, in the rest of his works,[6] along with its peculiar argu-

[3] There were no references to intention or to Stoic pneumatology in two pivotal, 20th -century pioneering atmospheric studies by the same scholar, namely Leo Spitzer's "Milieu and Ambiance" and "Classical and Christian Ideas of World Harmony: Prolegomena to an Interpretation of the Word *Stimmung*" (Spitzer, 1968, 2021). It is not feasible in the limits of this article but the Stoic theory of the intention of the air can be shown to be the missing link between *ambiance* and *Stimmung* in Spitzer's overall argument.

[4] This will give Seneca the opportunity, in the second part of book II, to discuss another central Stoic conception, that of fate (in Ancient Greek Εἱμαρμένη, *heimarmene*) (Seneca, 2010).

[5] Due to its limited early reception, the *Naturales Quaestiones* survives only in late manuscripts, the oldest dating to the 12th century and in poor condition. The work is acephalous, its title conjectural, and the order of books disputed – most notably between the *Grandinem* (IVb–VII; I–IVa) and *Quantum* (I–VII) traditions, the latter adopted in the 1490 *editio princeps* and still widely accepted (Vottero, 1989). However, it must be noted that several modern scholars have assigned special status to Book II: Gercke (1907) argued it might be the first one, citing its programmatic preface; Hine (1996, 2010), in his Teubner edition and English translation, placed it last. That Book II alone has received two critical editions – Hine's in English (1981) and Marino's in Italian (1996) – attests to its unique content and central importance.

[6] Winds are central to Book V of the *Naturales Quaestiones*, which deals with earthquakes, yet the pneumatic theory introduced in Book II is there simply assumed without further elaboration (Seneca, 2010; Williams, 2005). More broadly, the Stoic concept of *tonos* or *intentio* scarcely reappears in Seneca's *corpus*. A fascinating exception, however, is found in the following passage from his *Consolation to Helvia*: "Believe me, this was the action of the great creator of the universe, whoever he may be, whether an all-powerful God, or incorporeal Reason contriving vast works, or divine Spirit [*divinus spiritus*] diffused in all things from the smallest to the greatest with uniform intention [*aequali intentione diffusus*], or Fate and an unalterable sequence of causes clinging one to the other." (Seneca, 1932, 8.3).

mentative difficulty, that partially explains the neglect and overall misunderstanding surrounding these passages. So much so that even Hine (1981), one of the most acute readers of Seneca's *Natural Questions,* has called Seneca's discussion of air in Book II a simple digression, only loosely connected to the rest of the book or the work as a whole.

However, a new study of these passages that takes seriously the arguments presented by Seneca in the larger context of Ancient Stoic cosmology and pneumatology will be able to explain both issues: first, that if Seneca's discussion of air and its intention can appear here digressive, it is nonetheless a central digression, presenting core tenets of Ancient Stoic physics and cosmology; and second, it will show that the difficulties readers encounter stem first from the modern reader's overall ignorance of Ancient Stoic pneumatology, which Seneca was instead taking for granted, and then from complexities intrinsic to materialist and pantheist accounts of the world, such as the Stoic pneumatological one presented by Seneca. But let us consider the text on its own.

Book II begins with the following words: "The entire investigation of the universe is divided into the study of *celestia*, *sublimia*, and *terrena*" (Seneca, 2010, II.1.1).[7] Seneca then goes on to explain what each of these terms means and what belongs to each category, as well as a few "apparent anomalies," or unexpected classifications: (1) *caelestia* stand for everything taking place in the heavens, which means the nature of stars and planets; (2) *sublimia* are all the things taking place between the heavens and the earth, namely all kinds of meteorological phenomena or, as Seneca puts it, "everything the air does or has done to it" (Seneca, 2010, II.1.2);[8] and (3) *terrena*, everything taking place on earth, pertaining, therefore, to land, water, and even plants and animals. Among the anomalies that Seneca signals to the reader, there are earthquakes, which Seneca claims should be studied among the *sublimia* – as he had done or was going to do in Book V of the *Natural Questions* – since in his opinion, and according to ancient physics, they are caused by movements of air and are not, therefore, related to the earth. Another such anomaly is the planet earth itself, which – he argues – should be considered along with the rest of the planets to be among the *caelestia*, the heavenly things, rather than the terrestrial matters.

It is in this context that Seneca makes one of the first sudden shifts in his discussion and the shift is directly to what will become the main topic of the following pages, namely air. It is this very shift that led Hine (1981) to claim that there is only a loose connection between Seneca's early programmatic presentation of the divisions inherent to the study of physics and Seneca's discussion of air. However, the connection is not as loose as he reckoned. After having discussed the two anomalies to the categories he had proposed, Seneca writes, as if offering a third apparent anomaly:

> Since I have spoken about the parts into which all of nature's matter is divided, some things in common (*quaedam in commune*) need to be said, and for first

[7] "omnis de universo quaestio in caelestia, sublimia, terrena dividitur" (Seneca, 1971, II.1.1). Translations might have been slightly modified to preserve the original meaning of key terms throughout the paper.

[8] "quaecumque aer facit patiturve." (Seneca, 1971, II.1.2).

thing this must be taken as a premise: among the bodies that possess unity there is air (Seneca, 2010, II.2.1).[9]

The shift is certainly abrupt, and the "premise" Seneca claims must be accepted first is indeed puzzling—but only to a modern reader. Reconstructing the philosophical context in which Seneca was writing can help clarify both the motivation behind this turn to air and the significance of what follows.

Indeed, critics have often discussed the passage on the tripartition of the natural world in an effort to trace its ancient source. Initially, it was attributed to Posidonius, the 1 st -century BCE Stoic philosopher influenced by Platonism (Reinhardt, 1976); later, it was linked more directly to Middle Platonist sources (Donini, 1979). Hine (1981) traced it instead to Aristotle, while Marino (1996) regarded it as a fundamentally Platonic division. This might seem like a simple exercise in *Quellenforschung*, but that is not the case. In fact, it can help explain the apparently sudden shift to air that follows immediately in Seneca's text. What emerges from the scholarly discussion on the tripartition between *caelestia*, *sublimia*, and *terrena* is that this classification was not originally Stoic: Seneca had inherited it from another philosophical tradition.

In other words, having introduced a fundamental division into nature – a division foreign to Stoic philosophy, which conceives the cosmos as a single, continuous organism – Seneca appears to make amends by turning to what is common to all things: "Since I have spoken about the parts into which all of nature's matter is divided, some things in common (*quaedam in commune*) need to be said" (Seneca, 2010, II.2.1).[10] What is common to everything—an assumption Seneca almost takes for granted, skipping a few steps in the reasoning that will only become clear later—is air, and with it the fundamental claim that air has, or perhaps gives, *unity*.

The next enigma to resolve is why exactly unity. Seneca himself notes that his addressee, Lucilium, might be confused by this assumption and by the way Seneca is using the term unity.[11] He himself confesses that he is here using unity in a very specific, philosophical Stoic sense: "See how I am making things easier on your ears: I could have solved my problem if I had been willing to use philosophers' jargon and talk of unitary bodies" (Seneca, 2010, II.2.4).[12] Indeed, what he is retelling here is a very well-known piece of Stoic physics on the difference between continuous bodies and composite bodies.

Taking inspiration from the Aristotelian account of different kinds of unity in bodies (Aristotle, 1922), the Ancient Stoics had proposed their own updated catalog.

[9] "Quoniam dixi de partibus, in quas omnis rerum naturae materia dividitur, quaedam in commune dicenda sunt; et hoc primum praesumendum: inter ea corpora, quibus unitas est, aera esse." (Seneca, 1971, II.2.1).

[10] It is fascinating to note that both Thomas H. Corcoran (Seneca, 1971) and more recently Hine (Seneca, 2010) would translate "quaedam in commune" with "more general things," completely missing Seneca's play on the words "dividitur" and "commune."

[11] Williams (2012) has stressed the importance of unity against division in this section of Seneca's text and in his overall worldview. Unfortunately, he has not linked this theory in any way to the cosmology of mixture of the early Stoic school.

[12] "Vide, quomodo auribus tuis parcam; expedire me poteram, si philosophorum lingua uti voluissem, ut dicerem unita corpora" (Seneca, 1971, II.2.4).

According also to other sources, the Stoics recognized three ways objects can be to one another and to themselves: (1) separate, that is, merely touching or contiguous, such as in an assembly, an army, or a choir; (2) composite, which means made of different parts kept together by an external force, such as a house or a ship; and (3) unified, namely when parts of equal nature are kept together by a single force of cohesion, like a stone or a tree (*SVF* II.366–368).[13] Seneca gives the very same tripartition in terms of the division between *commissa*, *composita*, and *continua*, though in this context he is more interested in the difference between composites (*composita*) and unified bodies (*continua*) (Seneca, 2010, II.2.2-4).

For Seneca too, unified are those bodies that are kept together by a single cohesive force: "Whenever I say 'one,' remember that I am referring not to quantity but to the property a body has of cohering not through any external assistance but through its own unity" (Seneca, 2010, II.2.4).[14] While critics have noticed the Stoic background behind this new tripartition and discussion of unity (Hine, 1981; Williams, 2012), it is fascinating that, considering also the context in which it appears and its vicinity to an account of air, they have never considered comparing the use Seneca makes of it with one of the most important Stoic physical conceptions that this tripartition was first ideated to make possible: namely the Stoic theory of mixture and its relation to *pneuma* (material spirit). In fact, if Seneca gives the same exact examples as the other sources – a ship on the one hand, and a tree and a stone, on the other – he also adds two further examples of composite objects – a rope and *frumentum*, a heap of grain. (Seneca, 2010, II.2.2-3). As we will see, these make the connection even more apparent.

Indeed, a look at Chrysippus' theory of mixture, as it was handed down to us by Alexander of Aphrodisia's critique of it, two centuries after Seneca, will show how discussions of unity in objects must have been closely related to the Stoic theory of mixture. Furthermore, it will prove that by using the example of the heap of grain, which other sources do not list but it is instead listed in Alexander of Aphrodisias' version of Chrysippus's theory of mixture, Seneca's text is merging the two theories and, perhaps, offering us an older testimony of Chrysippus' understanding of mixture. It is worth lingering on this theory in full:

> Chrysippus' theory of blending is as follows: he holds that while the whole of substance is unified because it is totally pervaded (διήκοντος) by a pneuma through which the whole is held together, is stable, and is sympathetic with itself, yet some of the mixtures of bodies mixed in this substance occur by juxtaposition, through two or more substances being composed into the same mass and juxtaposed with one another "by juncture" as he says, and with each of them preserving the surface of their own substance and quality in such a juxtaposition, as, one will grant, happens with beans and wheat-grains in their juxtaposition; other mixtures occur by total fusion with both the substances and their

[13] Hans von Arnim's collection of Stoic fragments, *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta* (1903–1905), is hereafter abbreviated as follows *SVF*.

[14] "Si quando dixero unum, memineris me non ad numerum referre sed ad naturam corporis nulla ope externa sed unitate sua cohaerentis" (Seneca, 1971, II.2.4).

> qualities being destroyed together, as he says happens with medical drugs in the joint-destruction of the constituents and the production of some other body from them; the third type of mixture he says occurs through certain substances and their qualities being mutually coextended in their entirety and preserving their original substance and qualities in such a mixture: this mixture is blending in the strict sense of the term (Alexander of Aphrodisias, 1976, 216.1-218.1).

Chrysippus' theory of mixture uses the exact same catalog of different kinds of unities and similar examples to Seneca's. More than just the difference between continuous and composite bodies, which Seneca would also mention, more superficially, in his *Letters to Lucilium* (1917–1925, 102.6), it is this Stoic theory of unity thanks to mixture that Seneca is here retelling.

But what is even more important to note is that at the basis of such a theory of mixture there was, according to Alexander of Aphrodisias' version, precisely the Stoic assumption that the *pneuma* (spirit) or the soul – which is just a kind of *pneuma*, in their opinion – are just a material breath in perfect mixture with other bodies, matter, to which they give unity and life:

> he holds that while the whole of substance is unified because it is totally pervaded (διήκοντος) by a pneuma through which the whole is held together, is stable, and is sympathetic with itself […]. They employ as clear evidence that this is the case: the fact that the soul which has its own substantiality, just like the body that receives it, is diffused [διήκειν] throughout the whole of the body while preserving its own substantiality in the mixture with it (for there is nothing in the body possessing the soul that does not partake of the soul) (Alexander of Aphrodisias, 1976, 217.32).

It is on the basis of this understanding of mixture that the Stoics could explain their conception of the soul and the spirit as breath. The spirit and the soul are able to penetrate or diffuse completely through bodies because in nature there exists something like a perfect mixture, a complete interpenetration of substances without any loss of qualities.

Only when read in such a context, Seneca's text starts making sense and we understand his aim: he has here set the stage for an analysis of the central role that *aer* and *spiritus* play in the physics of the Stoic school.

2.

But a full investigation of the role of air and material spirit in Stoic physics will still have to wait. Before that, Seneca must deal with one more problem – one more assumption, perhaps – intrinsic to Stoic physical and cosmological theories of breath: the paradox of matter. He makes a new claim: "All the things that are known to us or can become known are contained within the world. Some of them are parts of

the world; some just have the status of matter" (Seneca, 2010, II.3.1).[15] Among all the things that belong to the universe – which is everything we can know – Seneca explains, some things are its parts, as how in a body one finds different parts such as eyes, hands, bones, and nerves; but some other things are just "matter," as for example digested food is matter for the body, or even blood, which could be seen as part of the body but is actually its vital material. Seneca does not stop there; he adds: "For all of nature needs matter, just as all the manual arts do" (Seneca, 2010, II.3.1).[16] Matter is not the realm of untruth and illusion, as in Platonic philosophy, but a necessary part of the world. The whole of nature needs matter, precisely as every artisan needs raw material to create something. All these points, but especially the reference to *ars*, namely τέχνη (*techne*), reveal that Seneca is once again retelling a central tenet of Stoic physics and cosmology, merging different elements of Stoic doctrine that go all the way back to Zeno.

Two are the Stoic conceptions Seneca is retelling here: first is the Stoic idea that there are two principles in the cosmos, one active, namely God, the *logos* – at times understood as *pneuma*, at times as fire or as a warm breath, but always corporeally conceived – and one passive, namely matter (*SVF*, I.85–96; Pohlenz, 1970; Hahm, 1977). The second one is Zeno's conception of nature as artisan-fire (*ignis artificiosus* or πῦρ τεχνικόν), namely as matter that creates itself out of itself (*SVF*, I.171; Pohlenz, 1970; Hahm, 1977).[17] Seneca's discussion of the difference between matter and the parts of the cosmos finds direct counterparts in other sources that report Zeno's theory of matter and we know Seneca was familiar with the Stoic theory of matter (Seneca 1917–1925, 65.2-3). This is just another sign that Seneca is here reaffirming some of the most basic principles of ancient Stoic physics and cosmology.

As one may imagine, these claims having been now put into context, air plays a central role in all these issues. Seneca does not shy away from saying this loud and clear – it is critics who have downplayed the significance of these sections, due to a misunderstanding of the explicit references to Stoic physics in the first three chapters of Book II. Seneca has just explained the difference between matter and parts in Stoic physics so that now he can write: "In the same way air is a part of the world, and a necessary one" (Seneca, 2010, II.4.1).[18] Air is a necessary part of the world. It is true that air is just a part of the cosmos, like blood is a part of the body; and yet it is a necessary part, since it connects heavens and earth: it divides them, yes, but by keeping them together, by transfusing (*transfundit*) the power of the heavens into the earth.[19]

[15] "Omnia, quae in notitiam nostram cadunt aut cadere possunt, mundus complectitur; ex his quaedam partes eius sunt, quaedam materiae loco relicta" (Seneca, 1971, II.3.1).

[16] "desiderat enim omnis natura materiam sicut ars omnis quae manu constat" (Seneca, 1971, II.3.1).

[17] As Lloyd (1966) showed, the Stoics had developed such a conception from the Platonist understanding of the artisan creator, the δημιουργός (*demiurgos*) and from Aristotelian sources. But they had clearly taken it in a very different direction.

[18] "Sic mundi pars est aer et quidem necessaria." (Seneca, 1971, II.4.1).

[19] "In the same way air is a part of the world, and a necessary one. For it is what links heaven and earth, what separates the lowest and the highest levels and yet joins them: it separates them because it comes in between; it joins them because through it they can communicate with each other; whatever it receives from the earth, it passes upward, and, conversely, it spreads energy from the heavenly bodies over things on earth" (Seneca, 2010, II.4.1).

Seneca is here trying to clarify the very special status of air in Stoic philosophy: it is a part of the universe but a necessary one because of its specific power.

Thus, he insists: air is not just a part of the universe. To clarify this claim, he introduces once again the case of the earth. The specificity of the earth is that it is both part and matter of the world: "Earth is both part and matter of the world" (Seneca, 2010, II.5.1).[20] The earth is a part of the cosmos just as the heavens are; it is an organism per se. But it is also matter, since all the forms that populate it make use of it and depend on it for their vital material, and so do the heavens, according to Seneca.[21] And the same counts for air: air too is just a part of the world (a necessary one) but also matter to this world, because, due to its median position and role, it transmits to the stars everything the earth has produced for them.

It is not easy to understand exactly what Seneca is hinting at with these sections of the argument, unless we link them once again to Stoic theories he was rehearsing. The main issue at stake here, in the context of Stoic physics, is that being materialists, the Stoics tried to explain matter out of matter itself and not out of an external spiritualist principle. As we already saw, the first tenet of their school is that there are two principles, matter and *logos*, but both are corporeal: the *logos* is indeed fire or *pneuma*, air, as they repeatedly state. But this brought them to the following paradox, which Seneca tries to make sense of for the reader: if the *logos* is air or fire then the basic elements of the cosmos, which Aristotle already recognized to be four – namely fire, air, water, and earth, and in particular the active ones, fire and air (*SVF* II.412–438) – end up being both parts and matter of the universe. It is known that later Stoics were aware of this paradox:[22]

> Chrysippus has the following views on the elements formed out of substance, following Zeno the leader of the school. He says that there are four elements <fire, air, water, earth, out of which everything is composed – animals,>plants, the whole world and its contents – and that they are dissolved into these. The element *par excellence* is so called because the remainder are composed out of it in the first place by alteration and into it lastly everything is diffused and dissolved, but it does not admit of diffusion or resolution into something else (*SVF*, II.413).

In the case of this specific source, the "element par excellence" is fire but, as already noticed, the title is often attributed to air as well, or to a mixture of air and fire, *pneuma*. But the point here is that the Stoics recognized this paradox and embraced it. The same source thus claims that Chrysippus understood the word "element" in three ways: for him, it first meant the one single element, fire, because all the other elements derive from it by alteration; second, by it he meant the four elements, fire,

[20] "Terra et pars est mundi et materia" (Seneca, 1971, II.5.1).

[21] "Then again, the earth is matter of the world, since from it nourishment is apportioned to all the animals, all the plants, all the heavenly bodies; from it provision is made for each thing individually and for the world itself with all its numerous demands; it produces nourishment for all those heavenly bodies, which are so energetic, so eager, by day and night, in both their activity and their feeling" (Seneca, 2010, II.5.1-2).

[22] On the issues caused by Stoic conception of the two principles and the four elements, see Lapidge's work (1973).

air, water, and earth, since everything else is made of a combination of them; and finally, it meant that which causes generation out of itself (*SVF*, II.413–420). This ambiguity, according to Chrysippus, derives from the fact that the element in itself is completely unstable, but also completely rational and able to move itself: namely, it is both the material and the rational element (*SVF*, II.413).

Seneca makes a somewhat similar claim: "[air] should be reckoned as matter, not as a part. This is the cause of all its instability and turbulence" (Seneca, 2010, II.6.1).[23] Air is both part and matter, and for this reason it is so inconstant, unstable, and tumultuous. Indeed, the paradox of the elements is exactly the problem Seneca is addressing when trying to explain the nature of air and earth. Both are, at the same time, parts and matter of the world. This is the paradox of being an element and, even more, of being an active element, such as air: air is both a *necessary* part of the world, an element in the sense of something that can move itself and generate from itself, and an element in the sense of one of the most basic building blocks of matter. The paradox sounds impossible to resolve, unless, the Stoics claim, one stops to think about building blocks and tries to imagine "unified" bodies, "mixtures," in which bodies are able to pervade one another thanks to the tension of the air – what Seneca is about to call "intentio." This is exactly what Seneca will do next: namely, attack the atomists, by proving the existence of intention in air.

3.

It is at this point that, having reached a conclusion on the role of air as both element and matter, as the medial, central part of the universe, and as an active element of the cosmos, Seneca's introduction to his book on thunder and lightning turns into a short treatise on *intentio*. The modern reader may well be shocked by the sudden repetition of this term, as much as by its significance and meaning in this context. Yet, setting aside the general indifference that has so long accompanied the appearance of the word *intentio* in this text, its centrality is undeniable.

Having presumed that air, what is common to every part of the cosmos – *caelestia*, *sublimia*, and *terrena* – has unity, and having tried to explain the paradox of the elements, which can be both parts and matter of the universe – both active elements and raw material that by blending with everything else gives life to the world – Seneca turns now to what was a famous criticism of Stoic physics or at least a rival theory: the atomism of the Epicureans. Here too he is working in a well-known, attested Stoic tradition, which proves how faithfully Seneca is echoing the fundamentals of Stoic physics. As we know from numerous references in Galen, the Stoics had been the only ones to claim that air is not made of miniscule bodies, considered very similar to dust and separated by void, namely those originary components of reality that the Epicureans, following Democritus, called atoms (*SVF*, II.424–427). On the contrary, the Stoics had claimed that air had unity – this is what Seneca has been arguing from the beginning – or, in other words, that air is one single, continuous

[23] "ut scilicet materia, non pars, intellegi debeat: ex hoc ominis inconstantia eius tumultusque est" (Seneca, 1971, II.6.1).

body, and that there is no void in the world, but everywhere, in every interstice, there is air (*SVF*, II.424–427).

Seneca repeats the atomistic criticism and gives his own answer, in line with the rest of Stoic physics:

> Some people form air from discrete particles, like dust. They could not be further from the truth. For there can be no pressure except from a body bound together in unity, since the parts need to agree and combine their forces to produce intention (*intentionem*). If air is chopped up into atoms, it is scattered; but dispersed things cannot be in tension (Seneca, 2010, II.6.2).[24]

To the criticism that air is divided into miniscule bodies similar to dust, namely, material atoms, Seneca replies that this is not possible because otherwise air would not be able to exert pressure and have an effect on the rest of the world. Only where all the parts harmonize and blend their forces in one intention, there can be unity. If air were to be split into atoms, as the Epicureans claim, it would simply disperse because what is divided cannot be put in tension. Given what was established in the first part of this chapter, the modern reader can now perhaps appreciate more easily the use Seneca is making here of the word "intentio." There is no doubt that Seneca here is *not* talking of an immaterial intention, of a turning of some kind of spiritual soul towards something, or of a willful movement. With *intentio*, he is translating the Stoic concept of *tonos*, the internal tone and tension characteristic of the *pneuma*, understood as breath and air, to which many other Greek sources testify (*SVF*, I.497; 514; II.439–462).

In order to prove the existence of *intentio* in air—and, consequently, the impossibility of the atomistic theory—Seneca offers a series of examples. One can observe the *intentio* of air in inflated objects, which, thanks to this tension, are able to resist blows; in the power of the wind, which can carry away even large objects; but above all, in voices and sounds (*voces*), which vary—being low or clear—according to the different excitations of the air (Seneca, 2010, II.6.3-4). All these examples, Seneca claims, bear witness to what he calls *intentio aeris* (the intention of the air). But it is in the example of the voice, which Seneca explicitly highlights, that we find a unique feature of the Stoic account of *intentio* and *tonos* – a feature that is almost entirely absent from other sources, yet profoundly significant, particularly in light of the later appropriation of *intentio* in the European Augustinian tradition (Parisi, 2023). In fact, Seneca adds: "After all, what is the voice, if not just the intention of the air (*intentio aeris*) produced by the tongue by striking it?" (Seneca, 2010, II.6.3).[25] While this too reflects a familiar Stoic formulation – defining voice as a movement of agitated air (*SVF*, I.143; 148–150; II.139–141)[26] – the application of *tonos* and *intentio* to the concept of the voice is a striking Senecan *hapax legomenon* within the Stoic corpus.

[24] "Hunc quidam ex distantibus corpusculis ut pulverem struunt plurimumque a vero recedunt. Numquam enim nisi contexti per unitatem corporis nisus est, cum partes consentire ad intentionem debeant et conferre vires. Aer autem, si in atomos inciditur, sparsus est; tendi vero disiecta non possunt" (Seneca, 1971, II.6.2).

[25] "Quid enim est vox nisi intentio aeris, ut audiatur, linguae formata percussu?" (Seneca, 1971, II.6.3).

[26] In the words of Gellius: "Sed vocem Stoici corpus esse contendunt eamque esse dicunt ictum aëra" (*SVF*, II.141).

The Stoics are often remembered for having initiated the study of grammar, describing the basic elements of language, and it is in this context that their references to the voice are usually read (Pohlenz, 1970). But they went further than that and gave the voice a place of honor in their philosophy by recognizing it as a specific part of the soul and by putting its definition at the basis of their physics, logic, and dialectic.[27] Furthermore, because of their materialism, they recognized the voice too as a material body (*SVF*, II.138–142; 387).[28] This is precisely what Seneca's formulation does here: it stresses the physical significance that the voice had for Stoicism, before and beyond its grammatical, logical, or dialectical value. He brings back the voice to its materiality, or more simply, to that intention of the air formed by the tongue. The contrast with later accounts of the voice and its relationship to intention and will are striking.

With this in mind, it is worth lingering on the musical character of this voice and its value for Stoicism, since it has often been underestimated or gone unnoticed, in part due to a lack of sources. As already mentioned, the Stoics had paid particular attention to the voice and were also well known for their interest in poetry, whose argumentations they claimed could be as powerful as philosophical ones (*SVF*, I.486). But none of the three founders seemed to have written about music per se and the first reference to a treatise on music can only be found in Diogenes of Babylon, Chrysippus' successor at the head of the school. Furthermore, none of the surviving fragments makes a connection between music and *tonos* (*SVF*, III.54–90). In other words, Seneca might be preserving here a piece of the Stoic theory of *intentio* lost to the tradition or at least an interesting syncretic musical theory, perhaps of Pythagorean influence.

In fact, not long after providing his definition of the voice, Seneca claims to be turning to "less important examples" (*ad minora veniamus*), and he adds: "What music is there without an intention of the spirit (*intentione spiritus*)? Horns and trumpets, and instruments that by water pressure make a louder sound than can be produced with the mouth, do they not perform their function thanks to the intention of the air (*aeris intentione*)?" (Seneca, 2010, II.6.5).[29] The intention of the air is not just at the origin of sounds and voices but also of singing per se. Music, in other words, is just an intention of the spirit, as the workings of wind instruments and water organs show. There seem to be something inherently musical to Seneca's Stoic *intentio*. The

[27] Zeno claimed that the soul was divided in eight parts: the *hegemonikon*, the five senses, and the faculties of phonation and generation (*SVF*, I.143). Chrysippus explicitly said that the study of dialectics should start from the voice (*SVF*, II.136). Later, Diogenes of Babylonia, who took Chrysippus' place as the head of the school at his death, wrote a treatise on the voice, and set the voice at the origin of his logic (*SVF*, III.17–19; 29).

[28] For example, Aetius wrote: "The Stoics say voice/sound is body. For everything that acts and causes is corporeal and the voice/sound causes and acts. For we hear it and perceive it hitting our hearing and moulding it like a ring (pressed) into wax. Moreover, everything that moves [sc. something else] and distresses is body, and good music moves us while bad music distresses us. Again, everything that is moved is body; the voice is moved and when encountering smooth places reverberates, like a ball thrown against a wall. Indeed in the pyramids in Egypt a single voice/sound released inside produces four to five echoes" (*SVF*, II.387).

[29] "quis sine intentione spiritus cantus est? Cornua et tubae et quae aquarium pressure maiorem sonitum formant, quam qui ore reddi potest, nonne aeris intentione partes suas explicant?" (Seneca, 1971, II.6.5).

connection is intuitive if one considers the history of its Greek counterpart, namely *tonos*, which meant both tension and tone and has preserved this musical character in most European languages to this day. It is fascinating that almost no reference to such a musical connotation of *tonos* can be found in the Stoic *corpus*. But the same does not hold for *intentio*.

Seneca is not the only one to have preserved such a musical understanding of intention. In Book I of his *Tusculan Disputations*, in the context of an initial discussion of the nature of *anima* and *animus*, Cicero writes:

> Others however identify soul (*animus*) and breath (*anima*) as we Romans practically do – the name explains this […]; the actual word for "soul" has come from the word for "breath" in Latin; - Zeno the Stoic holds the soul to be fire. Now the views I have mentioned, that the soul is heart, brain, life or fire are those ordinarily held: the remaining views are as a rule peculiar to individual thinkers, just as philosophers of old held individual views long ago, but nearest in date to our time there was Aristoxenus, musician as well as philosopher, who held the soul to be a special tuning-up of the natural body (*ipsius corporis intentionem quandam*) analogous to that which is called harmony (*harmonia*) in vocal and instrumental music; answering to the nature and conformation of the whole body, vibrations of different kinds are produced just as sounds are in vocal music (Cicero, 1927, I.19).[30]

Right after considering the Stoic theory, according to which *animus* derives from *anima* such that the soul is a breath or a mixture of breath and fire, Cicero turns to Aristoxenus' fascinating fusion of Aristotelian and Pythagorean conceptions of the soul.[31]

The theory of Aristoxenus, a Pythagorean philosopher and musician who later became a student of Aristotle, only survives in Cicero's concise formulation: the soul is a certain intention of the body itself.[32] But if we take Cicero's use of the word *intentio* here seriously and consider Aristoxenus' role in coming up in the 4th century BCE with a theory of *tonoi*, musical tones (Solomon, 1984), we may speculate that *intentio* is here too a translation of the Greek *tonos*. Aristoxenus' formulation seems to be a materialization of the Aristotelian conception of the soul as the form of the body through the Pythagorean idea of the soul as harmony. It is impossible to establish whether Aristoxenus' theory – he wrote in the 4th century BCE – influenced the Stoic conception of the *tonos* of the spirit, understood as corporeal, but what is certain is that the Stoics too materialized the Aristotelian conception of the soul as form through the *tonos* of the spirit (Hahm, 1977; Gottschalck, 1971; Laskowska, 2016;

[30] "Animum autem alii animam, ut fere nostri—declarat nomen; […] ipse autem animus ab anima dictus est—Zenoni Stoico animus ignis videtur. Sed haec quidem, quae dixi, cor, cerebrum, animam, ignem vulgo: reliqua fere singuli, ut multo ante veteres, proxime autem Aristoxenus, musicus idemque philosophus, ipsius corporis intentionem quandam, velut in cantu et fidibus quae harmonia dicitur, sic. ex corporis totius natura et figura varios motus cieri tamquam in cantu sonos" (Cicero, 1927, I.19).

[31] The Pythagorean theory of the soul as harmony of the body is well-known from Plato's *Phaedo*, where it is rejected (Plato, 2005, 91c-d).

[32] By Aristoxenus only a musical work has survived, *Elements of Harmony*.

Inwood, 2023; Rapp, 2023): what gives form to each thing is the specific tone of the spirit (or soul) pervading it. It is possible, as Seneca's text seems to testify, that *intentio* could be for the Stoics the technical term to indicate the attunement, the tone, the internal tension of the corporeal air producing a soul that is always already a musical attunement with itself and with the world.[33]

4.

Interestingly, the conclusions of our last digression on the theory of the soul as an attunement of the body do not diverge significantly from Seneca's further comments on *intentio*. As he writes, the *intentio* of the air makes not only voice and music possible – granting them notable centrality – but, more fundamentally, it also enables every form of motion in the cosmos: the movement of human beings as much as that of everything surrounding them, including that with which movement is intrinsically associated in ancient philosophy, namely, the soul.

> What is running, and every form of motion? Are they not the activities of an intended spirit (*intenti spiritus*)? That gives strength to sinews (*nervis*) and speed to runners. That, when it is violently agitated and whips itself up, tears up trees and woods, seizes whole buildings, and smashes them high in the air. That stirs up the sea, which is naturally sluggish and still. […] Let us look at things that exert great force invisibly: tiny seeds, slim enough to fit in the crevices between stones, grow so big that they dislodge huge bits of masonry and destroy monuments; very small, very fine roots sometimes split rocks and cliffs. What else is this but the intention of the spirit (*intentio spiritus*), without which nothing is strong, and against which nothing is strong (Seneca, 2010, II.6.4-5)?[34]

The meaning of the rhetorical question, "Quid cursus et motus omnis nonne intenti spiritus opera sunt?" (What is running, and every form of motion? Are they not the activities of an intended spirit?) cannot be underestimated. If there is movement in the cosmos, it is because of the spirit that pervades all things and gives force to them through its intention, which is nothing more than its ability to stretch materially. It is this intended spirit that gives strength to the nerves when living beings move or run; it is this spirit that, when stirred, becomes the wind capable of uprooting trees, toppling buildings, and stirring tempests at sea.

[33] It is precisely this materialist theory that is missing from Spitzer's study on *Stimmung* and the history of ideas of world harmony (Spitzer, 1968).

[34] "Quid? cursus et motus omnis nonne intenti spiritus opera sunt? Hic facit vim nervis, velocitatem currentibus; hic cum vehementer concitatus ipse se torsit, arbusta silvasque convolvit et aedificia tota corripiens in altum frangit; hic mare per se languidum et iacens incitat. […] Consideremus quae ingentem vim per occultum agunt: parvula admodum semina, et quorum exilitas in commissura lapidum locum invenit, in tantum convalescunt, ut ingentia saxa deturbent et monumenta dissolvant; scopulos interim rupesque radice minutissimae ac tenuissimae findunt. Hoc quid est aliud quam intentio spiritus, sine qua nihil validum et contra quam nihil validum est?" (Seneca, 1971, II.6.4-5).

Critics have often been puzzled by the way Seneca suddenly introduces the concept of *spiritus*, a direct translation of the Greek *pneuma*, into his discussion of *aer*, as well as by the fact that he sometimes uses it interchangeably with *ventus* (wind). They rightly explain it by reckoning that Seneca is using *spiritus* in the Stoic sense of the term, in the sense of a material breath or wind, yet they still attempt to preserve a distinction between *aer* and *spiritus* (Hine, 1981). Nevertheless, the point of Stoic pneumatological theory – and the point Seneca is implicitly making – is that such a difference cannot be maintained: spirit is a kind of air, as the examples he provides show. This is confirmed by Seneca's following point: he writes that the intention of the spirit is not just what allows animals to move and the wind to blow; it is also what gives strength to the most hidden parts of the vegetative world, as shown by the examples of seeds (*semina*) and roots (*radices*) that are able to infiltrate and destroy rocks and monuments.

Once again, scholars have tried to keep this passage at a distance from earlier Stoic philosophy. But the theory Seneca is expounding here is exactly the Stoic pneumatological one to be found in other sources. The Stoics believed that all things were kept together by and had life thanks to the pervading spirit and its specific *tonos*. It was just one spirit diffused throughout the cosmos, but this spirit could have different *tonoi* or intentions, and these were given different names: (1) the first and most basic tone was what they called ἕξις (*hexis*), the cohesive force that kept together even inanimate objects; (2) the second was φύσις (*physis*), the tone typical of plants, which differs from the preceding one because it provides the ability to grow; and finally (3) the ψυχή (*psyche*), namely the soul, which is nothing other than a spirit or breath endowed with an intention granting it movement; and (4) λόγος (*logos*), the rational soul, usually translated into Latin as *animus* (*SVF* II.368; 439–462; Long & Sedley, 1987, 47 A-T).

If this version of the theory already displays some Aristotelian influences – since the difference between *physis*, *psyche*, and *logos* mirrors the difference between vegetative, sensitive, and rational soul – Seneca preserves the original monism of the Stoic school. He gives the same examples, namely those of animals ("running, and every form of motion"; "strength to sinews and speed to runners"), stones and buildings ("buildings," "stones and monuments," "rocks and cliffs") and plants ("seeds," "roots"), but he gives a single name for the power that keeps them together, making them strong and cohesive ("What else is this but the intention of the spirit (*intentio spiritus*), without which nothing is strong, and against which nothing is strong?"): *intentio spiritus* or *intentio aeris*, which are the same thing.

It will not surprise to find out that he does the same for the human soul, the rational soul, the *animus*.

> One can infer that unity is characteristic of air just from the fact that our bodies hold together. What else could make them cohere, apart from breath (*spiritus*)? What else is there that moves our mind (*animus*)? What motion could it have except intention (*intentio*)? What intention (*intentio*), except from unity? What unity, unless it existed in air? What else produces fruit, makes weak, green corn stand upright, and makes trees either spread their branches out or grow up high,

> apart from the intention and unity of breath (*spiritus intentio et unitas*) (Seneca, 2010, II.6.6)?[35]

The *intentio* of the spirit is what allows movement in animals, by fortifying their nerves. It is what allows the wind to move and act on the world. It is what allows plants to grow and even split rocks and stones. But it is also what keeps together the very body of human beings ("our bodies"). Indeed, Seneca argues that human bodies above all show the unity of air. After all, what is it that keeps them together? By what is the *animus* animated (*agitatur*)? The answer is spirit. Moreover, what are the movements of this *animus* if not the very intention of that spirit that is the *animus* itself? What took place here is the already mentioned shift in terminology, one totally in line with the Stoic theory Seneca is illustrating: *aer*, *spiritus*, and *animus* are the same thing, the same breath.

Seneca's discussion of the theory of intention can hardly be said to be a mere digression. Seneca's reflection on air began from one assumption, namely that air has unity, in a specific, philosophical, Stoic sense. The theory of intention that Seneca has presented is the main foundation for the claim that air has unity, as it extends well beyond the initial premise. Indeed, by the end of his exposition of the theory of the intention of the spirit, Seneca has not only demonstrated that air has unity, but also that air is the only thing to have unity, that is to say, intention. Consequently, air is the only thing that can give unity to everything else in the world, by pervading it and providing it with a certain intention. The argument can be difficult to follow, which is likely another reason why it has remained, for most readers, a mysterious "digression." But this complexity is part of the pleasure of having to deal with a materialist pantheism. The complexity lies in the paradox already outlined: that air is both a part of matter and what gives unity and intention to it – namely, what makes it rational: a sensible god, in Plato's famous formulation from the *Timaeus* (*SVF*, II.1026).[36]

It is also worth lingering for a moment on the way Seneca has presented this theory. While the use of rhetorical questions is indeed a hallmark of Seneca's style, as Vottero (1989) once showed, their deployment in these passages is nonetheless exceptional within his corpus. As any reader will notice, the sheer number of rhetorical questions even solely in Book II, Chap. 6 – the paragraph in which the theory of intention is presented – is considerably higher than in any other section of the *Naturales Quaestiones*: one can count nine in a single paragraph.[37] In this case, the insistence with which Seneca turns to rhetorical questions goes beyond the mere interest in emphasis or *variatio*, or the attempt to reproduce a dramatic, dialogic effect typical

[35] "Esse autem unitatem in aere vel ex hoc intellegi potest, quod corpora nostra inter se cohaerent: quid enim est aliud, quod tenet illa, quam spiritus? Quid est aliud, quo animus noster agitatur? Quis est illi motus nisi intentio? Quae intentio nisi ex unitate? Quae unitas, nisi haec esset in aere? Quid autem aliud producit fruges et segetem imbecillam [aut] in altum exigit ac virentes erigit arbores ac distendit in ramos, quam spiritus intentio et unitas?" (Seneca, 1971, II.6.6).

[36] From this formulation derives the title of Emanuele Dattilo's recent treatise on Pantheism, *Il dio sensibile: Saggio sul panteismo* (2021).

[37] Such a comparison with the use of interrogatives in the rest of the book is possible thanks to Vottero's study (1989) in his introduction to *Le questioni naturali*. In the section on style, he noted down all the chapters of Seneca's text in which there are more than two rhetorical questions in close vicinity (p. 45fn).

of his letters (Lucilius is the addressee of the *Naturales Quaestiones* as well). Rather, it is almost as if Seneca was here presenting the reader with a series of well-known truths – facts that he would expect everyone to easily accept. The modern reader is then confronted with the possibility that at least some of the complexities of the theory of intention Seneca is endorsing are due more to the modern reader's spiritualist perspective, which is unable to conceive of the materiality of spirit, air, and breath (and their intention), than they are to Seneca's theory.

The preface of Book II of Seneca's *Natural Questions*, an apparently innocuous and alien piece of text, preserves one of the oldest versions of Stoic pneumatological philosophy, as well as a theory of pneumatological and musical *intentio* that would otherwise be lost and forgotten. The peculiarity of this short *addendum* to the text of the *Natural Questions* and in Seneca's larger philosophy is that here the physics is really allowed to be studied in separation from the ethical context. This does not mean that, in Seneca's eclectic philosophy, physical theory cannot be reabsorbed into a larger, pluralistic philosophical system, as other texts show. However, it does mean that the basic physical and cosmological teachings of the Stoic school, namely their pneumatology, are here studied on their own, so that even their most extreme consequences may be expressed. This is what Seneca's text has preserved for us.

Seneca begins by dividing nature up into different parts, to then try to show that there is something common to all these parts and this something is air, wind, soul, or spirit. In line with earlier Stoic philosophy, he envisions a world fully pervaded by a corporeal spirit, which gives unity to everything in the cosmos and makes movement and life possible, through its most peculiar characteristic, its *intentio*. There is no difference between the seed of a tree, the tree spreading its branches in the sky, and the wind blowing away the tree's leaves. Each of them is matter pervaded by *pneuma* with a different intention.

But, in truth, as Seneca's Stoic pneumatology demonstrates – there is no difference even between the wind and the soul of human beings. They are just different intentions of the eternal, rational, and yet material spirit of God. The wind is as rational as the human soul and the human soul as material as the wind. None of these passages contains any reference to the will or to the modern concept of intention. The human body moves according to its "intention," but this does not mean in any way that a will is called upon to decide on this movement, nor does the wind require a will to blow. What it had to do with, instead, was voice and sounds, and even song, music, and poetry.

In the pneumatological theory that Seneca recounts, one finds an opposite conception of voice and music from the one found in the later European tradition, even though they depend on the same concept: intention (Derrida, 1973, 1997; Cavarero, 2005; Agamben, 2006, 2018; Parisi, 2023). If in the later European, Augustinian tradition intention as immaterial attention and will was what allowed the voice to become Spirit and reach God, here intention stands for the very materiality of both voice and song. "What is voice if not an intention of the air?" "What is song if not an intention of the spirit?" To make the experience of the voice or, in other words, to sing or recite a poem, is none other than a way to experience one's own material intention, to be brought back to the very air one shares with the rest of the world. The highest, Stoic ethical aim had always been ὁμολογουμένως τῇ φύσει ζῆν, or in Latin,

congruenter naturae vivere (to live according to nature) (*SVF*, III.5). But, when read as part of their pneumatological cosmology, this simply means to try to hear and feel the spirit's material intention in everything one does. Music and poetry achieve exactly that.

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