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Transcendental Disarticulations in Musical Theatre: *In The Green* and the Revolution of Rejecting the Bio-Musical

Abstract: Grace McLean's innovative 2019 musical *In the Green* portrays Hildegard von Bingen during her time with Jutta von Sponheim. The three actors playing Hildegard are designated as Hand, Mouth, and Eye, and the musical score is constructed around this disarticulation of the character, in counterpoint with the characters' spiritual goal of "wholeness". There is a perception that theatrical works based on historical figures or events are imbued with an objective voice that simultaneously creates accuracy in the staged portrayal as well as ceding to contemporary sensibilities. *In the Green* rejects an illusion of superiority or objectivity through its focus on the practice of anchorism, its recreation and extrapolation of music composed by the subject, and its willingness to obscure where a bio-musical might seek to illuminate. This experimental essay will take a combined use of phenomenology (Gaston Bachelard and Roland Barthes), theory of virtuality (Gilles Deleuze and Michel Proust) and aesthetics of body horror (Julia Kristeva) to describe these methods of transcendental disarticulation as pertinent to the show and the musical technology that inspired and made the score possible.

Keywords: Phenomenology, Virtuality, Hildegard von Bingen, Musical, Music

Résumé : Le musical novateur de Grace McLean, *In the Green*, créé en 2019, met en scène Hildegard de Bingen durant la période où elle vécut auprès de Jutta von Sponheim. Les trois actrices qui interprètent Hildegard sont désignées comme la Main, la Bouche et l'Œil, et la partition musicale est construite autour de cette dislocation du personnage, en contrepoint avec l'objectif spirituel de « totalité » poursuivi par les personnages. On considère souvent que les œuvres théâtrales fondées sur des figures ou des événements historiques sont investies d'une voix objective, qui produit simultanément un effet d'exactitude dans la représentation scénique tout en se pliant aux sensibilités contemporaines. *In the Green* rejette toute illusion de supériorité ou d'objectivité en se concentrant sur la pratique de l'anachorétisme, sur la recreation et l'extrapolation de la musique composée par le personnage historique, ainsi que sur sa volonté d'obscurcir ce qu'un biographical musical chercherait généralement à éclairer. Cet essai

expérimental mobilisera conjointement la phénoménologie (Gaston Bachelard et Roland Barthes), la théorie de la virtualité (Gilles Deleuze et Michel Proust) et l'esthétique de l'horreur corporelle (Julia Kristeva), afin de décrire ces procédés de dislocation transcendantale comme constitutifs du spectacle et de la technologie musicale qui l'a inspiré et a rendu sa partition possible.

Mots-clés : Phénoménologie, Virtualité, Hildegarde de Bingen, Musical, Musique

In The Green and Disarticulation

I m happiest now when most away / When I am not, and none beside., Emily Brontë

Why was what we were looking for on one side rather than on the other? Gilles Deleuze

Polaroid, roman photo / Aimant les flashes sentimentaux / Humanoïde, incognito / Amour impossible et mélo / Pellicule impressionnable / Petite bulle inconsolable / Je n'ai pas l'âge d'être sage / Comme une image, dommage, Dommage, Domm..., Ruth

In Grace McLean's innovative 2019 musical *In The Green*, historical figures and the stories told about them take center stage. This is not another tenuously watery production of *Hamilton* that produces ire from greats such as Ishmael Reed. Nor is it the flat cash grab of *Six* that examines the historical 'prison' of victimhood and drops the starry wives of Henry VIII into a pop spectacular while ignoring the misogynistic and oft-exploitative history of singers in girl groups. It is a listening experience. To listen properly one must explore: one must explore the relationship between anchorite Jutta von Sponheim and her mentee, future visionary Hildegard von Bingen, portrayed by actors playing her disarticulated Hand, Mouth and Eye in a score constructed around the plurality of the character, in counterpoint with the character's spiritual goal of wholeness.

In The Green rejects an illusion of objectivity through its focus on the practice of anchoritism, its recreation and extrapolation of music composed on the subject and its willingness to obscure where a bio-musical might seek to illuminate in relation to philosophical phenomenological virtualities. In this paper will describe these methods of transcendental disarticulation as pertinent to the show and the musical technology that inspired and made the score possible in relation to the digital age.

After all, you enjoy the theatre, don't you?

You enjoy going to the theatre in the year a worldwide pandemic ravages and isolates society, right?

In The Green asks the audience not what they know about their historical subjects, but what the characters themselves do not know about themselves and the world around them. Jutta von Sponheim guides a novice Hildegard von Bingen into a state of higher spiritual being that makes

both of them question what is “intrinsically corporeal”¹ and “the limit of primal repression”² and inverts the intertextual and metatextual verses of liturgical music composed by the real Hildegard. Throughout the course of their spiritual enlightenment together, Jutta, a monstrous and nearly Virgilian guide, both reinforces and further fractures Hildegard's existence by insisting they ask the question “why am I broken?”³ and to acknowledge that she must “become whole”⁴. These meditative exercises will hopefully lead to the reincorporation of Eye, Hand, and Mouth into a newly consolidated Hildegard.

Of course, in this quest for wholeness, Jutta will eventually try (and fail) to stitch together their monstrous shadow-self, a clear “not me”⁵ that is a “sudden emergence of uncanniness”⁶. In doing so, Jutta tries to separate Hildegard into body parts rather than an autonomous whole, and by doing so hopefully separate Hildegard from the actions that brought them to the hermitage. Leading Hildegard through day-to-day life in the cell of an anchorite, the audience does not learn about these parts of the body, so much as the characters try to recall just why they matter and/or why they do not, and how they are connected: “I have dreams/I remember...”⁷. ‘If I had a knee’⁸ and ‘I am Hungry’⁹ culminate in Jutta asking Hildegard to question everything she knows in order to become aware of who she really is and why she is here. In this search for wholeness, this “splitting of the ego”¹⁰ takes its first turn when Jutta belts out the haunting ‘Eve’: “Eve hid the whole human race in her body/so we carry her curse in our blood”¹¹. Rather than enlightened,

¹ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay On Abjection.*, Trans. Leon Roudiez. Columbia University Press. 1982, p. 11

² Idem.

³ McLean, Grace. “Ritual Lyrics | Genius Lyrics.” Genius Lyrics, www.genius.com/Rachael-duddy-ashley-perez-flanagan-hannah-whitney-and-grace-mclean-ritual-lyrics.

⁴ Idem.

⁵ Julia Kristeva, op.cit., p. 2.

⁶ Idem.

⁷ McLean, Grace. “In The Green | Genius Lyrics.” Genius Lyrics, <https://genius.com/Grace-mclean-and-mia-pak-in-the-green-lyrics>.

⁸ McLean, Grace. “If I Had a Knee Lyrics | Genius Lyrics.” Genius Lyrics, <https://genius.com/Rachael-duddy-ashley-perez-flanagan-hannah-whitney-and-grace-mclean-if-i-had-a-knee-lyrics>.

⁹ McLean, Grace. “I Am Hungry | Genius Lyrics.” Genius Lyrics, <https://genius.com/Ashley-perez-flanagan-rachael-duddy-and-hannah-whitney-i-am-hungry-lyrics>

¹⁰ Julia Kristeva, op.cit., p. 7.

¹¹ McLean, Grace. “Eve Lyrics | Genius Lyrics.” Genius Lyrics, <https://genius.com/Grace-mclean-and-ashley-perez-flanagan-eve-lyrics>

joyful self-discovery, Hildegard learns to repeat the same, even deeper sense of disarticulation that Jutta believes to be both spiritual and comfortably numb and safe.

Throughout this journey, there is a clear process where one is “seek[ing] to hear the fragments of [hearing’s] dispersed body”¹². Sound becomes its own dreamscape and hearing what one another has kept inside for so long is a source of desire, power, liberation, and...intense fear. For what has been brought to light cannot seemingly be put back. By singing, one is brave because it makes everything forgotten, remembered, and anything unreal *real*. For the first time in act one, Hildegard and Jutta are on the same page, even if it is unwillingly. Hildegard repeats the sentiment we hear from Jutta throughout the first act:

I have seen into the shadows/And beyond the things I think I know/I am burned/I am slow inside this flesh I wear.../But if I erase every flaw/If I embrace a higher law/then tooth and nail and skin and claw/I need not ever care.¹³

To which Jutta echoes, sagely: “If you kill your every care/your burden will be less to bear”¹⁴ until it is Hildegard taking on the same melody as her. This disarticulation seems to become pure amalgamation once they are on the same page. In ‘If I Had a Knee’ Hildegard speculates that “If I had a knee I could climb/If I had a knee, out the window”¹⁵ and once more in both ‘Eve’ and ‘I Am Hungry’ chants “This is how I become whole/I Shut my mouth to gain control...”¹⁶. Now established as a type of frenetic search where rather than encountering a single “shattered mirror”¹⁷ where the ego “gives up its image in order to contemplate itself in the other,”¹⁸ Jutta and Hildegard scatter into a hall of mirrors in order to distance themselves from what also must be inevitably reassembled to understand *why* they are there. Both step into a space that is permeated by dreams, even if they are dark ones. As they descend into the anchorite cell of the hermitage they enact what is undoubtedly the oneirism of the “house-body”¹⁹.

¹² Weisman, Karen via Faflak, Joel. “Shelley’s Sound Body.” *Romanticism and Sound Studies: Recording Romantic Relationality*. 2023. p. 8.

¹³ Mclean, *In The Green*, ‘Eve’, op.cit.

¹⁴ Mclean, *In The Green*, ‘Eve’, op.cit.

¹⁵ Mclean, *In The Green*, ‘If I Had a Knee’, op.cit.

¹⁶ Idem.

¹⁷ Julia Kristeva, op.cit., p. 7

¹⁸ Idem.

¹⁹ Gaston Bachelard, *Earth and Reveries of Will: An Essay On The Imagination of Matter*. Trans. Kenneth Haltman, Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture, 2004. p. 92.

This shared dreamscape of miniatures is totally Bachelardian—do you think so?

These “two images”²⁰ (Jutta and Hildegard) are lived as “a double”²¹ as memories, traumas, and visions are explored within a shared dream. They are not merely victims of their narrative. Instead, they go into their own space of great exploration. They are “images of dreamers who, having one day overcome their human— and subhuman fears, wished to explore their cellars, cellars both human and subhuman”²². While physically going down into the darkest and most closed off part of the hermitage, an anchorite cell, they also go into a transient state navigating the darkest impulses, desires, and memories that refuse to resurface while they are otherwise going through their routine at the hermitage.

Jutta’s dreams eventually become so powerful that they follow her around as a giant shadow, leaving both pilgrim and guide in the exact dreaded cell where Jutta promises they will find enlightenment. As Hildegard engages and unravels what is horrifying and what is real in dreams, Jutta struggles, with the monstrous Shadow singing “I have never wandered the dark/I thought wandering would make me lost...”²³. In this most private setting, one is reminded of Foucault's analysis of surveillance in this intense “sequestered and observed solitude”²⁴ but not necessarily constrained by it; after all, these queer creatures who become more light and voice over the course of the musical than mere flesh and blood, are so desperate to retreat to a place where no one can see them, that it is a triumph to be nearly entombed. After all, they are both together in a world that has made entombment feel like it is the only safe place to belong; what kind of world is that, where two people cannot openly express their feelings, opinions, traumas, griefs, and desires out in the open, out in the green?

Is it a world you wish to escape from—is it a world you already know?

²⁰ Idem.

²¹ Idem.

²² Idem.

²³ McLean, Grace. “Light Undercover Lyrics | Genius Lyrics.” Genius Lyrics, <https://genius.com/Mia-pak-hannah-whitney-rachael-duddy-and-ashley-perez-flanagan-light-undercover-lyrics>

²⁴ Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality Vol 1*, Ed. Random House, 1976, p. 201.

Counterpoint, Centre-Stage, and the Lyricism of Selfhood Amidst Disability

What exactly does it mean to be disarticulated in a phenomenological dreamscape and then reassembled in front of an audience? To enter into the problematic realm of “being”²⁵ and non-being”²⁶ where lines easily begin to blur—do you know that feeling? Should a spectator assume that these characters are induced in a “state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power?”²⁷ Is this idea being subverted by the complication of a character’s inability to know and sometimes, even their refusal to, destabilizing the audience as we go further into the unknown? As Hildegard continues to untangle what happens in the past, she sings “I have seen into the shadows/and beyond”²⁸ and everything that hurts her might seem like an easy fix; to once more ascend and step into the light. While this does eventually happen (and perhaps not in a way that it is expected,) it is more interesting to see what is lingered on when Hildegard is in the anchorite cell: not the hand or mouth that we hear and feel so much for in the beginning of the show, but her disarticulated eye²⁹.

An eye that must learn to see there is “more in the idea of the possible than there is in the idea of the real”³⁰. Hildegard’s eyes take prominence when looking at where her self-hood lies. As stated by Sarah Kirkland Snider in her interview with Lana Norris for *icareifyoulisten.com* Von Bingen is famously known for having a “chronic illness, which was seen as a moral failure or spiritual judgement in her time,”³¹ a disability that is as strange as it is visionary: chronic hemiplegic migraines, migrainous auras, and undoubtedly, seizure episodes. Hildegard’s disability is not a brief representation of empowerment but rather its own way of envisioning, revisioning,

²⁵ Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, Zone Books, 1988, p. 18.

²⁶ Idem.

²⁷ Michel Foucault, op.cit., p. 201.

²⁸ Mclean, *In The Green*, Eve, op.cit.

²⁹ Sometimes, Hildegard’s eye will be referred to as two eyes.

³⁰ Gilles Deleuze, op.cit., p. 17.

³¹ Sarah Kirkland Snider, interview by Lana Norris, “Sarah Kirkland Snider Reframes Chronic Illness as a Creative Force in New Opera Hildegard, <https://icareifyoulisten.com/2025/10/sarah-kirkland-snider-reframes-chronic-illness-as-a-creative-force-in-new-opera-hildegard/>, October, 2025.

and hearing. What kind of Bergson “illusions”³² must such an eye navigate—and can it reconstruct a different order from the being/non-being dichotomy?

What Hildegard makes from these events in an altered dream state is equally as interesting. Hildegard’s disability becomes clearer as we see that the disarticulation of mouth and hand and eye are maybe not as metaphorical as first depicted, but rather a way to present disability on stage, especially as a way to present the numbness and disembodiment that these headaches often trigger³³. This is also why the eye is such an important part of their dream journey: if Hildegard’s visual processes are emphasized— then that changes how she is experiencing this entanglement and navigation of dreams. Shadows and shadow selves are not as clear, but also frighteningly clear to the point of being painful and neon. We as an audience are asked to confront the direct lens of disability that makes not only the creation of the story possible, but the original musical texts and religious music that the musical itself is inspired by. Here, a Deleuzian landscape of “memory-matter”³⁴ is dis/articulated and reconstructed using sound; in desperate search of an order, Hildegard’s eye creates chants, polyphonic soliloquies, reverberating pieces that seep into soil and air, and the maze of selves of which Jutta has lost all grip.

Is the self a maze for you—or is it something else? In the night, is there something else?

As light and darkness repeat lyrically repeatedly, it is more than just about what is hidden or what Hildegard wants to be (in the dark or light) but about the literal flashes which make it possible for Hildegard to access these memories as they travel along. Jutta’s desire for the unknown is also what pushes Hildegard into a state that could trigger various states of hemiplegia; it is not an easy choice or necessarily a kind one. It also reveals a key flaw in Jutta’s character: she is stuck and cannot overcome the monstrous shadow that is following her— the illusion where her deepest intelligence lies is far too strong, and thus repressed³⁵. She is stuck and her teaching is not always rooted in kindness, empathy, or safety. However, this conclusion does not come without its complications. By pushing Hildegard into this state Jutta is *also* able to give Hildegard a chance

³² Gilles Deleuze, op.cit., p. 20.

³³ Stephen Silberstein, “A Perspective On The Migraine Mind”, in *American Scientist*, May-June 2014, digital version <https://www.americanscientist.org/article/a-perspective-on-the-migraine-mind>

³⁴ Gilles Deleuze, op.cit., p. 20.

³⁵ Idem.

to focus on physical disability and other sights of bodily horror: a chance to recover, to out-grow Jutta's own perspective, and to take her own conclusions from what is going on around them—in essence, to not only be student, but teacher as well through the lens of sickness. Hildegard learns about Jutta seeing her body as inherently “sick”³⁶ due to previous physical assault in ‘Confession’³⁷ and ‘In the Green Reprise’³⁸. Hildegard also remembers why she was brought here in ‘The Ripening’³⁹ a ballad about her own sister's failed abortion. Finally, Hildegard is able to see how deprived of life and nourishment Jutta actually is in her own state: “she wanted freedom from what broke her heart/you have to be broken to see light in the dark”⁴⁰ and learns that Jutta wishes to die willingly.

This focus on representing and presenting Hildegard's revelations through a disabled lens is more than mere representation. It is a transgressive way to look at how Hildegard's disability would make it possible for these dreams and memories to be recovered, akin to the “three-lines”⁴¹ have a conference of “memory”⁴² and mystical”⁴³, while using a disabled lens to hone in on other sights of bodily autonomy, assault, transgressions, dysmorphia, and horror. This brings together Kristeva's ideas of “repugnance, disgust, and abjection”⁴⁴ while darkly answering the duplicity of “where are all these victuals flowing?”⁴⁵ Are they in corridors or in an esophagus?”⁴⁶ If one is heart-sick by the grief of living, dreams can help one recover what has been lost by time, but the uncertainty of moving forward, whether in life or death, is not a clear path ahead, even if it appears to be. Hildegard's eye is a representation. As the audience we watch a visual of Hildegard's brain. This relationship between “received movement (excitation) and executed movement (response)”⁴⁷

³⁶ McLean, Grace. “The Ripening Lyrics | Genius Lyrics.” Genius Lyrics, <https://genius.com/Grace-mclean-the-ripening-lyrics>

³⁷ McLean, Grace. “Confession Lyrics | Genius Lyrics.” Genius Lyrics, <https://genius.com/Rachael-duddy-ashley-perez-flanagan-and-hannah-whitney-confession-lyrics>

³⁸ McLean, Grace. “Light Undercover/In the Green Reprise Lyrics | Genius Lyrics.” Genius Lyrics, <https://genius.com/Rachael-duddy-ashley-perez-flanagan-hannah-whitney-and-mia-pak-light-undercover-in-the-green-reprise-lyrics>

³⁹ McLean, *In The Green*, ‘The Ripening’, op.cit.

⁴⁰ Idem.

⁴¹ Gilles Deleuze, op.cit., p. 30.

⁴² Idem.

⁴³ Idem.

⁴⁴ Julia Kristeva, op.cit., p. 11.

⁴⁵ Idem.

⁴⁶ Gaston Bachelard, op.cit., p. 92.

⁴⁷ Gilles Deleuze, op.cit., p. 30.

makes a complicated web of images—still, one wonders if the dis/ability and the divine create some of these, and what that means. As the audience, we watch for the space between miracle and insanity, piety and madness, torture and total grace. The ecart, of course is simple; who believes more. Who blinks first.

Did you blink? What did you hear when you blink?

The Anti-Bio Musical and Intersectional Feminism

For the remainder of *In The Green*, the falling action is as follows: Jutta dies. Miserably so. Hildegard is “integrated”⁴⁸ from once being a disarticulated hand, mouth, and eye. Hildegard takes on all of Jutta’s best qualities and leads a community of women in teachings and togetherness. Or, so she believes. Hildegard goes on to believe she is “whole”⁴⁹ now and so her teachings are “sacrosanct”⁵⁰. With autonomy, Hildegard is also hearing what she wishes to hear. In believing she is whole but never questioning Jutta’s guidance in her teaching or in what she should take from her death, she has formed her own way of forging ahead—but not without consequences. In the last song, ‘Exorcism’⁵¹ these expectations are inverted once more:

You criticized the community for its corruption. And you spoke about "others" who had broken off. Others who were laughing at you. Others who were threatening you. I want you to know the "others" are not other. They have names.⁵²

This is not a harmonious “rhythm of duration”⁵³ and the sugar cube of reverie burns into a newer, cacophonous shadow-self that burns through any gently elegiac memory of Jutta. A Cathar named Sigavitza boldly reveals what has been happening at the cost of Hildegard’s teachings: those who do not follow the community rules exactly are outcast, ostracized, and even murdered for not

⁴⁸ McLean, Grace. “Integration Lyrics | Genius Lyrics.” Genius Lyrics, <https://genius.com/Hannah-whitney-rachael-duddy-and-ashley-perez-flanagan-integration-lyrics>

⁴⁹ Idem.

⁵⁰ Idem.

⁵¹ McLean, Grace. “Exorcism Lyrics | Genius Lyrics.” Genius Lyrics, <https://genius.com/Hannah-whitney-and-mia-pak-exorcism-lyrics>

⁵² Idem.

⁵³ Gilles Deleuze, op.cit., p. 32.

following the teachings of the church exactly. She also reinstates, once more, the haunting idea of the other in critical theory; that a decolonial approach to identity is to look beyond a Lacanian order and “the privileged subjects anxiety and guilt in the face of those others on whose backs that privilege is built”⁵⁴. Thinking about “listening with a third ear”⁵⁵ which becomes “a way of thinking the unthought of ideology, of listening for both the oppressive and liberatory effects and potentiality of its deep resonance”⁵⁶.

Sigavitza speaks (and sings) not with the voice of the beloved now-passed Jutta, but with the voice of the Shadow creature that followed Jutta around until her death. As observed by Genius Lyric User DroughtofApathy, Sigavitza says “the last words Shadow says before Jutta banishes her back underground. Jutta refuses to see her”⁵⁷. What Jutta refuses to see and what Hildegard sees in a dream, is now thrust back to reality. Hildegard faces a moment of ambiguity, and is once more an inmate that is “caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers”⁵⁸. The production ends. Hildegard does not triumphantly embrace this new other. The “pure ontology of the past”⁵⁹ does not hold up—stunned and frozen on the stage as the music does not modulate to any resolving key-structure or sound⁶⁰. After a two hour journey of self-discovery and trauma, one would think the narrative would end in healing—instead, it turns icy—searing so cold it becomes burning hot again. It asks the audience: is the rhetoric of our victimization and oppression more important than actually helping everyone? Who speaks for a narrative—and who are you to speak for anyone?

“Who are you helping”⁶¹ is asked not only to Hildegard, but to everyone in the audience—and it is a confronting line that resonates long beyond the confines of the theatre. Should you lead by healing your own trauma at the exclusion of others? By pointing fingers at those with less power than you in community spaces so you can create a new group to punch down upon? Should you

⁵⁴ Kelly Oliver, *The Colonization of Psychic Space*, University of Minnesota Press. 2004. p. 4.

⁵⁵ Joel Faflak, “Shelley’s Sound Body”, in *Romanticism and Sound Studies: Recording Romantic Relationality* 2023, digital version <https://romantic-circles.org/praxis/sound/praxis.2023.sound.faflak>.

⁵⁶ Idem.

⁵⁷ DroughtofApathy. Original Cast Recording. Genius Lyrics. <https://genius.com/albums/Grace-mclean/In-the-green-original-cast-recording>, 2019.

⁵⁸ Michel Foucault, op.cit., p. 201.

⁵⁹ Gilles Deleuze, op.cit., p. 56.

⁶⁰ Mclean, *In The Green*, ‘Exorcism’, op.cit.

⁶¹ Idem.

lead by exclusion? Do you really want to dismantle a system or do you want corruptible power? You do enjoy the theatre—don't you? Do you sit there and wonder who is watching? Do you sit and watch? Do you want to be watched—and how so? Do you watch others and silently, aching to realize you are not rhetoric but air and song? Do you walk along at night? Do you listen for something else?

On a repeated watch (or listening,) the musical can be examined at a different angle; one can see/hear/experience how fraught it clings to identities and non-identities; could the whole show be a steep metaphor for how even intersectional feminist spaces will always reject those who need it the most? Could our greater panoptic society that singles constant virtue have a problem with how it sounds; cheery, sanitized, and expecting silence from those that do not meet its criteria? These characters could also be read as nonbinary, transmasculine, intersex, queer men, monstrous, unlabeled, etc., and... unable to accept that.

How fraught can a digital landscape look to those who do not have a socially 'acceptable' body in the physical world—where rhetoric is more important than empathy? They absolutely could be, but there are no words for this—and these characters, in their false problems—do not yet understand identity as separate from a rudimentary assignment, a flat extension of their oppression. Are Jutta and Hildegard from *In The Green* were in love? Yes, absolutely. But it is not love that leads to the harmonious sex scenes of *Carol* (2015) or *The Handmaiden* (2016)—for all the searching of heavenly divinity, it might bear more of a resemblance to Dante's seventh circle of hell or the body horror in *Leviticus* (2026). A tomb is an empty symbol until you put someone in it: for Hildegard to see Jutta as they finally are, they must once again bury them, alone and terrified. Love as bearing witness in times of great loss is a rarer and rarer type of queer representation these days. To see that turned on its head to ask its audience "Could you also be part of the problem? Who should we have empathy for and how is that different from pity or doing 'the right thing—and is that what divinity asks of each small act of love?" does not make it hard to understand. It makes it richer, stranger, and even more dazzling. Don't you think?

“Harmony is an elusive goal in this show. So, unfortunately, is the clarity that would allow an audience to embrace it”⁶² is a line from a disastrous mis-listening of the show itself. Moments of harmony are not always bright and becoming, sometimes they are painful. Additionally, there is great, current socio-political context for this piece's relevancy. “With music is born power and its opposite: subversion”⁶³. McLean does not purport to re-write history, but instead satirize the coldness and clinical aspect of cult-like spaces and harsh binaries that make living unbearable.

Like unidentifiable, unlabeled, and transcendental forms of queer bodies and love, so has the hungry beast of societal articulation. It would be easier not to think of this as a history piece or a failed attempt at palatableness, but a litmus test of listening; what reaches for you beyond easeful cheeriness—where does it reach you? Online, in person, inside, outside, with/in, beyond? Is it enough to be yourself in a setting that defines you—and who defines you in relation to yourself? Such questions have no clear answers for each person (nor lead to easeful digital replication) in adjacent productions that trade glossy capital for narrative risk such as *Hamilton* and *Six*, where it is easy to repeat; it feels good to be seen—doesn't it? You are glad you are sitting here today—aren't you?

Harmony of the body, and who is seen and empathized with (and why,) must undoubtedly contend with the digital age. Some musicals are easier to image and re-distribute—especially when their image is easily replicable to understand. Rather than “converting experience into an image, a souvenir”⁶⁴ a piece of art that uses music to dis/order and challenge the complacency of the industry. But if one cannot empathize with someone who is nothing like them—what does that say about a society of non-artists? And where should Art, with all its ghastly shadows and untameable, expressive faces show its face? Who would listen to such an eldritch, abominable?

Would you?

Even if you did not like what you hear, would you listen?

⁶² Ben Brantley, *Review: A Singing Nun Struggles With PTSD in 'In the Green'*, The New York Times, June, 2019, digital version <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/27/theater/in-the-green-review.html>.

⁶³ Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, trans. Brian Massumi, Minnesota University Press, 1985, p. 6.

⁶⁴ Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor*, New York, Straus and Giroux, 1977.

When writing this paper, the first image that came to your mind was MiMU gloves and how they are used by artists today to “map additional parameters to larger arm movements on up-and-down and side-to-side axis, as well as speed thresholds”⁶⁵. These gloves are both physical and digital, symbol and metaphor. Deleuze writes that virtual is not opposed to real but opposed to actual. The virtual becomes “ideal-real”⁶⁶. What does this say about our ability to comprehend philosophy and what is actually in line with the virtual? Dis/ability and aural symptoms of hemiplegia already do what MiMu gloves do—and even more so.

Do the gloves come with searing pain or a floating feeling? Do they know the colour and taste of the note—or the dream you need to hear an aria before ever singing it? Can image and tech and theatre utilize lived and digital realities at a different angle, perhaps an even stronger one as they evolve over time? Or, is the beauty in not seeing what Hildegard sees, only hearing it? Some images make disability easier to understand—but does a simple comprehension equate to the potency and depth of a harder, more historical, and complex, yet less articulate one?

Barthes says language is a skin. Language is something to rub against another. Words instead of fingers, or fingers at the tips of words; language trembles with desire⁶⁷. This is innate to the above creative ideas on virtualism, and the connection between phenomena and virtualism in and of itself. Our experiences stretch around us and become us; there are so many layers of the self that are already innately ordered if only one looks with an open mind. Deleuze said it is memory that makes the body something other than instantaneous and gives it a duration in time⁶⁸. Proust believed it was from an intense series of vital sensory cues. Memory is what all love must become. Jutta’s sound at the time of death is silence; a shivering tomb that opens only to close once more—a breath sharply inhaled, a hiss of winds for too long a beat—the absence of another. the silence that ends Hildegard’s own rhetoric when another shadow self comes back—this time without Jutta at their side. Silence. Absence. Duration.

⁶⁵ “Music Through Movement.” MiMU, <https://production.mimugloves.com/documentation/mapping/>.

⁶⁶ Gilles Deleuze, op.cit., p. 96.

⁶⁷ Roland Barthes, Stephen Heath, *Image, Music, Text*, Flamingo, 1984, p. 73.

⁶⁸ Gilles Deleuze, op.cit., p. 26.

We haven't time in this world of ours, to love things and see them at close range, in the plentitude of their smallness⁶⁹ Hermaphroditism is a rose; castrati's sing of ancient longing juxtaposed modern anxieties, blooming. In the way of sentence-arias, the "lover is not to be reduced to a simple symptomal subject, but rather that we hear in his voice what is unreal or intractable"⁷⁰.

Transcendentalism. Transcendence. Transposition. True transgenderism is not possible without love; you cannot transcend a body without loving another, you cannot change without knowing another so intimately. Society is largely a digital extension of the self; is nature? divinity? souls? Sufjan Stevens writes of a similar phenomena of this dis/ordered world, especially one where the rampant eye of social media amplifies and distorts "celebrity culture and idol worship"⁷¹ There is the creation of hyper-visible martyrdom and there is an inherent virtualism as music, as much as societal webs are invisible yet totally tangible to some: "go ahead and play your video game/I don't wanna play..."⁷²

For a second, slide the soft grain against the left, ringing halo of flesh.

*Do you hear someone listening to music, across the lakeside?*⁷³

A shrouded collection of sounds: *a soul leaving a body. A sharp sigh. A gash of air.* A tangle of bare tree branches in the bluedark. weeping, the sky is weeping. The lake at night ripples darkly along the Ontario shore; it iterates in the gloom of *a void*. Here is the sweet rustling of junipers and evergreens held by something deeper; *silence*. There is an Echo complex—did we simply forget to write about it? *The gash of air*. The space between the stars. A chord reaching

⁶⁹ Gaston Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, Trans. Maria Jolas, Beacon Press, 1994, p. 163.

⁷⁰ Roland Barthes, op.cit., pp. 2-4.

⁷¹ Al Horner, "I Have a Sense of Urgency": Sufjan Stevens Wakes from the American Dream", in *The Guardian*, 25 September 2020, www.theguardian.com/music/2020/sep/25/sufjan-stevens-interview-the-ascension. Notably this album is considered a pandemic text.

⁷² Sufjan Stevens, "Video Game" | Genius Lyrics." Genius Lyrics, <https://genius.com/Sufjan-stevens-video-game-lyrics>.

⁷³This essay is concluded with a section of "web weaving" such as from <https://webweavingarchive.tumblr.com/>, a digital practice which links disparate texts to evoke new images and ideas. While it is not a new practice--if it was defined as virtual--that virtuality, social media or not, would be ascribed to something Virgilian such as the Aeneid, or Penelope's grief practices with/in the web/weft of *The Odyssey's* narrative. Italics are purposeful and a stylistic choice at times.

into diminishing ache: *A minor 7th. A minor 7th, flat the 5th...* The black begins to shift; navy, indigo, burnt cornflower prisms of dusk. *If there were no paintings in this world...*⁷⁴

Van Gogh's night paintings were two in a sequence of thousands of chiaroscuro. Where was the light? Augment the fifth. salt-ripples. rustling ochre, sweet. crickets chirping. "When we see not thro' the eye/some are born to endless night. One must imagine music or it begins to imagine you."⁷⁵ "To see a world in a grain of sand and heaven in a wild flower." *Dear Brother, I wish you could understand...*⁷⁶ *Tears. The weeping wind, composing. A minor 7th. A minor 7th, flat the 5th. F sharp minor. to...G.* "I also loved the objects on the table Such as candlesticks and ashtrays And the table itself."⁷⁷ *Indigo, cornflower, cerulean, grey. crickets singing. A plethora of alluring, seizing shadows. G7 to Cm. A symphony of void. ...that there are various things which I must be consistent about.* Van Gogh paints many night skies but sees with only two eyes; sunflowers, stars, swirls of al/most. prodrome. The flash of light. crickets screaming. *Sometimes living persons sat for me. May I say to them again: Thank you for coming to my room.* flakes. tears. indigo. *G7 augmented 5th. A minor 7th. A minor 7th, flat the 5th. F sharp minor. to...G7. Cm.* wind-swept salt-suite. crickets dying. *my paintings look darker here ...is that because the light isn't as bright in the city?*⁷⁸ A twin sized bed and a wooden chair across from a wheat field. a wild flower. a lake in the night, turquoise. wine dusk. *infinity in the palm of your hand. eternity in an hour.* ochre. volta. two eyes: where did you— across the rippling tide, who are you?

What do you want from this brief, exhaustible dream?

Here in the neon, dripping landscape telling you a story as ordered as it is primordial; absence. Ripples. Darkness. Aural se(l)ections: Did you see yourself? Did you, for a second, hear someone—something else? Is it the sound of an image, or an image of sound? Bachelard writes of "the poetic graft"⁷⁹. Another type of image. postdrome. One that makes poetic fashioning of digital, natural, original, sacred, musical, destabilized, dis/ordered, and queer. A soul leaving a body. A

⁷⁴ Leonard Cohen, "If There Were No Paintings | Genius." Genius Lyrics, <https://genius.com/Leonard-cohen-if-there-were-no-paintings-annotated>

⁷⁵ William Blake, "Auguries of Innocence", Poetry Foundation, www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43650/auguries-of-innocence.

⁷⁶ Vincent van Gogh, *The Letters of Vincent van Gogh*, Trans. Arnolds Pomerans, Penguin, 1998, p. 231.

⁷⁷ Leonard Cohen, op.cit.

⁷⁸ Vincent van Gogh, op.cit., p. 316.

⁷⁹ Gaston Bachelard, op.cit., p. 10.

sharp sigh. A gash of air. A *kiss* is also a way for the air to escape— to let the sound out of that unconfined body of memory. To transcend time. Lakes, lunar eclipses, [after]lives. A tangle of bare tree branches in the bluedark. wine dusk. ochre. indigo: where are you tonight— where do you go?

The representation of something is not a single, static image.

A queer entity is a detached eye, dazzling and frightening— looking right back at you; history and time and memory. bird song. longing. lakes. icestorms. lovegrief⁸⁰. laments.

Did you *hear* the blink? What colour music is in it?

Out across the wind-swept shores and swirling, cataclysms of snow:

O, beloved, what do you hear— where did you go?

⁸⁰ Use of this term first appears in “Nisus and Euryalus At The Louvre” via Onlypoems or <https://onlypoems.com/poems-catalog/nisus-and-euryalus-at-the-louvre>.

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