Blissful Hypertextualities: Threading the Works and Insights of Hildegard of Bingen, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Josefina Báez. A Conversation with Josefina Báez

By Ary Malaver

Introduction

Born almost one thousand years ago in what is now Germany, Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179) was a polymath who excelled in the fields of music, herbal medicine, philosophy, and religion. As a *magistra* (monastic leader) and mystic, Hildegard's ontology is markedly theological. She was well known during her lifetime for her mystical visions, which reportedly had the approval of Pope Eugene III.[i] Her advancement of a metaphysics grounded in the interconnectedness of life allows for a connection with two contemporary multifaceted women: Chicana scholar and writer Gloria Anzaldúa and Dominican York writer and performance artist Josefina Báez.

Working with the specific drive to problematize reified assumptions about those labeled as the Other, Anzaldúa's work is grounded in both sociomaterial and (largely ignored) spiritual considerations. Similarly, Báez's work as a performer and writer highlights not only the need to transcend the limitations of the us/other divide, but also those of the self. All three women interweave various approaches in their work, employing a modus operandi that consistently emphasizes an awareness of a metaphysical dimension in life. This awareness can be seen in all of Hildegard's works, as well as in key works by Anzaldúa (*Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality* and *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*) and Báez (*Comrade, Bliss Ain't Playing*).

The commonalities in their approaches can be highlighted by the belief in the integration of different planes of human experience. The central notion of the interconnectedness among all aspects of life in Hildegard's belief system[ii] is also articulated in Anzaldúa's "metaphysics of interconnectedness"[iii] and embodied in Báez's "physicists poets",[iv] as well as in the principles that inform Báez's "performance autology", a practice in which "[t]he physical, mental and spiritual/conscience realms are researched and nurtured."[v]

Additionally, their bodies of work include practices that deal with, but are not limited to, the knowledge and practice of natural medicine, meditation, and various other forms of self-expression and transcendence of self, all of which are incorporated into everyday life. As such, the work of all three women ultimately points to the integration of different expressions of the intangible or metaphysical into the quotidian.

Echoing one of the key points in *Light in the Dark / Luz en lo Oscuro*, where Anzaldúa states that she is fully aware of the fact that "spirituality is a turn-off" for most (39) in "an academy indifferent and even hostile to spirit" (92), the present work seeks to emphasize different philosophical and metaphysical elements in the work of these three women. This, I believe, is a fundamental endeavor regarding both Anzaldúa and Báez, two authors who are frequently approached in matters related to colonialism, ethnicity, gender, and class, but not so in connection to the clear

metaphysical/philosophical foundation that (in)forms various key aspects of their critical and creative work.

While, in "Decolonial Phenomenologies: The Language and Affect of In-Betweenness in Gloria E. Anzaldúa's and Josefina Báez's Early Work", Lara-Bonilla accounts for the "philosophical concerns" of both authors, her work does so by paying close attention to the subversive use of language in the context of a colonial-decolonial divide. Although this same work identifies in Anzaldúa and Báez "a palpable interest in abstract thought accompanied by special attention to *research* through diverse philosophical, historical, and spiritual sources" (98), it does not explore any of these "spiritual sources". In contrast, attention to these sources is a pivotal aspect of this work. Also central to this work is the focus on "the inner life" and "oneness", as posited by Kevin Quashie in *The Sovereignty of Quiet*: "Oneness asserts the right of a human being to be just that —a human being— and this assertion privileges the inner life" (120). An inner life that, as we will see, is not "isolated from the social world" (120). On the contrary, the inner life of these three women is inextricably related to the communities of which they are a part. This work then threads the *spiritual sources* that (in)form *the inner life* and *oneness* of these women to emphasize, as Jaima puts it in "Literature is Philosophy", a series of "insights that bear upon humanity" (14).

As a thinker indebted to and influenced by Hildegard of Bingen, Gloria Anzaldúa, and others such as philosopher and theologian Adi Shankara, Josefina Báez's philosophical insights deserve examination from at least two angles. This exploration aims to provide a deeper understanding of how these views shape her cultural production as a writer and performer, while also shedding light on what they reveal about her approach to "the inner life" and "oneness". By pursuing this exploration, this work seeks to address the gap identified by Lara-Bonilla, who notes that "[p]ractically no critical literature focuses on the philosophical insights that her [Báez's] writing suggests regarding her theories on writing, performance, and other matters" (94).

The purpose of this interview with Josefina Báez is, largely, twofold. On the one hand, to highlight commonalities and differences in the approaches followed by Hildegard, Anzaldúa, and Báez, paying particular attention to the integration of a metaphysical awareness in their practice of the quotidian. On the other hand, to underline the fundamental importance of Báez's performance autology in her cultural production, not only as a writer and performer, but as a thinker as well. Ultimately, the conversation with Báez highlights how, like Hildegard and Anzaldúa before her, she balances her inner and social life. Báez's philosophical/metaphysical views, however, present us with someone capable of doing so within more fluid boundaries, following her own agency in both scholarly rigor and spiritual practices. This is the freedom of someone whose oneness —a type of oneness perhaps informed by the belief that, by virtue of being everyone and anyone, one is also no one— allows her to see beyond the polarization of inner life and social duties. Or, as Quashie eloquently puts it: "The abundance of oneness authorizes a kind of radical freedom, as if one's existence is no longer defined by membership in a community or group. One is everything and, in a way, also nothing" (120).

Hildegard, Anzaldúa and Báez's Performance Autology

AM: Let us begin at the beginning. How did you encounter the works of Gloria Anzaldúa and Hildegard of Bingen?

Josefina Báez: In the 70s and 80s. Back then, Anzaldúa's work was not just for scholars, but everybody in the different movements in the city will lend you *the* book: *Borderlands/La Frontera*, and it was also in the public library in New York City. It was something that we spoke about, and it made an echo. We really resonated with everything there and still [do] to this day. And with Hildegard, I was always reading, and I'm still reading, about the life of women saints. And for years I had been reading about Catherine of Siena, and then they made a reference to a Hildegard's recipe. And there was this book on 40th Street in New York about Hildegard, [it was] 1981 or 1982. And it was wonderful because it had tiny little representations of the visions. And I didn't know those were her visions. And we were curious, and we encountered her, you know —the mystic. And we read the gossip [about her life] at the abbey from where she had to move and all that. I was taking care of [all those details, but] I wanted to learn more [about] the everyday [aspects of her life]. And then [there was] the music. I heard it at the Public Library for the Performing Arts in New York, which had the LP of the canticles [*Canticles of Ecstasy*]. So, we were able to, little by little, find her works. Saint Patrick's Cathedral had a little book. The first book that I bought was *una cosita pequeñita sobre ella* [a little thing about her], a biography, not very thorough. But in Spain I found a whole movement about Hildegard, and I bought some medicine. And then my interest kept growing. And then back to the teas and the *mermeladas* [jams], and I loved all that. I would love to go to the abbey where you went [St. Hildegard's Abbey in Germany]. So, my interest has always been there; Hildegard grew on me.

AM: What affinities exist between your work and those of Hildegard and Anzaldúa?

JB: They are the mentors. They are the masters. And the sources that I go to for centering —the oceans that I go to, being a wave. I can rest there because their fierce lives and theories and practices are in the always, in the forever. So then for me they are a very concrete background, and they are the mentors. With Hildegard, as I have already said, I was reading about *santas*, all the women saints, their lives and what they did. My concern was not their lives as we see them, but what they did with their holiness in everyday life. Because the quotidian is very big on my search. So that was my take with Hildegard. As for Anzaldúa, hers was a seminal work for all of us.

AM: Are you speaking specifically of *La Frontera*/*Borderlands?*

JB: *La Frontera* at the beginning, but then I found her posthumous work.

AM: *Light in the Dark / Luz en lo Oscuro.*

JB: Yes, there I felt like, 'This is it.' We had been working, naming the same processes in different words; I mean the processes were the same. In her case, with a sharper tongue in terms of the theories. As for me, more in a creative way and in my life. And Hildegard has been all that. If you think of it in three levels —you know Hildegard on top, then Anzaldúa who helped [me] become grounded, and then me— I am here the recipient of all this guidance, I mean humbly.

AM: Speaking of processes, could you talk about what the performance autology workshops you conduct entail?

JB: The workshop is an invitation for the body to be alert —alert without [consciously] feeling itself alert. I'm able to invite people with very specific exercises. We talk about energy, but there we are able to feel it very concretely. In the workshop, even in a collective format, we have a strong one-on-one interaction. My interest is for people to have a very particular experience. While we perform the same exercises, each person's particularity is highlighted. That for me is performance autology, in general. The workshop will be an invitation. People will be there, like in a moment of pause, in this energy that is the person at that moment, being requested to be in silence, in alignment, physically. And from the physicality, that alignment in physical terms, you will touch the spirit without me saying anything. I will never say, 'This is for the spirit. We are doing this for the spirit.' You must feel it for yourself.

AM: And what is the reason for not discussing those outcomes when they are part of the workshop results?

JB: I might not explain it well. I might get very emotional, so I try to leave aside all explanations. I mean, I'm inviting spirituality from the body; I'm inviting people to be here, to use a better term. I'm not promising a trance. It's a trance in joy, and in a very concrete way, so that's why I'm not saying anything. The search [is] for autology and with that invitation you start creating your own science of yourself. After you take the workshop, you will be keen to see everything that you do, both physically and mentally, with a whole different eye, with joy. Then you start collecting a lot of information that you already have, and you will be encountered. So, you create this massive bank of information, that is your autology. This is the science of yourself, and you have all these tools that you can go back and forth to when you need them.

AM: As we do with a personal hard drive.

JB: Yeah, yeah. And you can have all three tenses. You are in the present with the workshop, right? But then you can go and check all the books that you have read, all that stuff, and you start creating a bank of information that is vital for you. And then [from] all the workshops that you have taken, you select what you really want. That is, in fact, the autology. And, you know, we cover cooking, the body, the different systems, [including] the lymphatic system. I mean, over the years, you go inside the little parts, guided by your interests.

AM: I see. Therefore, the autology is personal, correct?

JB: Yeah, the science of self.

AM: In her role as a scholar, Anzaldúa is fully aware that "spirituality is a turn-off" for most and speaks of her tribulations in dealing with "an academy indifferent and even hostile to spirit." For example, she highlights how the spiritual elements in her most well-known work, *Borderlands / La Frontera*, were silenced and ignored by researchers. In your opinion, does the spiritual aspect of your work receive enough attention?

JB: I don't measure it because people will. We'll get into a work depending on what we are interested in. I don't put a lot of emphasis on that, on what is happening with the reception [of my work], that aspect of the reception. What I do know is that the word 'spiritual' is really a turnoff. But it's alright —everything that we say is a turnoff, you know? I don't invest [myself] in [whether the spiritual aspect of my work] has or has not [received attention]. Instead of 'spirit', I say 'conscience'. Or instead of 'meditation', I say, 'We will meet in silence.' Not because I want the theme to be accepted, but to be more inclusive of people from different religions or different *miradas* [views]. But researchers know. I mean, you are a researcher, and you are discussing every aspect of spirituality. The themes we explore reflect our own stories and histories, then it's a different mentality. It's a different group of researchers now who are interested in quite different themes.

Aesthetics of the *Hyper Quotidian*

AM: If we discuss approaches to the human experience, Hildegard's ontology is markedly theological, whereas Anzaldúa's can be labeled as animistic. Does holistic ontology seem like an appropriate term for the work you do through performance autology?

JB: I believe so. Holistic or *autology-ontology*.

AM: Right, you have already explained performance autology as the science of self. And that's linked to my next question. As Keating argues, with *Light in the Dark/ Luz en lo oscuro*, Anzaldúa seeks to advance an "aesthetics of transformation", a "metaphysics of interconnectedness" which is concerned with "(trans)formation and healing" (ix). I believe these are all terms that can be used to describe some aspects of your work. If so, how would you describe the aesthetics of your own work?

JB: Yes, I agree that these terms describe aspects of my work. My aesthetics is based on what is quite *manoseado* [handled], what is hyper quotidian, where I see that all tenses are present: past, present, and future. The project I'm currently working on ["Testimonies. Testaments. Today."] encompasses everything I have done and everything I will do. It will always be this way. So, the aesthetics is mainly this hyperlink to the present, allowing me to go back and forth between past and present. With command over tenses, jump into another reality —what you might call the grand existence— while working in the present that I have. First, before meditation, it's the treatment of the body. That's why we [in performance autology] emphasize the body, the posture, and all that. We are here, we are alive now. Thus, all that emphasis on the body: to eat, to uneat, to hydrate, to move. Little things, there seems to be the constant formula for everyday in performance autology. What this gives me is a sense of responsibility for my body. I will have that first. This is my spiritual aspect of life. To be that in alertness, and with alertness you are going to decide better for yourself. If you are alert, then you're able to see and discriminate what is best for you. Thus, with that alertness, to be with the holiest is part of the joy.

AM: So, I'm hearing about different aesthetics: an aesthetics of being present and an aesthetics of wholeness, both grounded in the present moment, which I think can be linked to my next question. I would like to bring up one of Hildegard's most mysterious books, *Lingua Ignota.*[vi] This book is remarkable because it contains over 1000 words devised by Hildegard that have not been fully decoded. The words are written using an alphabet of 23 characters,[vii] following regular Latin grammar, but their meanings remain unknown. For some, the alphabet is "perhaps related in some way to the genetic code" (Strehlow and Gottfried 141). With *Dominicanish*, or with any of your other texts, did you set out to create a language of your own? If so, what is the scope of that language? What is it related to?

JB: *Dominicanish* is like the door seal of that language that is open. It's a door seal, but it's still open. And I write signs for me. It's a communication language of visible and invisible signs. I started from the so-called mispronunciation, how we, Spanish-speaking people, speak English. And I started owning that. What people laughed at, I said: 'This is me. This is how we are. This is how we say things.' And I started finding new words within that so-called mispronunciation. And then I went there and explored them, and I laughed about the laughter, demystifying the insult, demystifying it, owning it, and repackaging it and then I went like this: *Míralo aquí* [Look at this]. I believe that every work is a language in itself, and it's this work within the visible and the invisible. The book I write is not the book I read. When I read it, I find other stuff. It's like the way we braid when we are writing; the connection will be different when I read it, so language itself is the possibility. Language is a possibility for me.

So, then [back to] creating language: when we speak and don't recall a word in Spanish or English, we say things the way we think they are said. Once, I was giving a class and there was this woman who kept saying: "This is my *aportation* [a mistranslation of *aportación*; meaning *contribution*]. This is my *aportation*" and people were like… but I understood perfectly: "*Es mi aportación*" ["It is my contribution"]. So, then I might decide to go to silence, and that has other languages, but I might use what I have, and I will be there, and I'll say what I need to say, or what I think I need to say. For me, language is to find that language that is not known. The *unknown language* referenced in the title [of Hildegard's book: *Lingua Ignota*] is the traveling in the invisible world, in the meditations. And we also have this culture of dreams. There is a whole different language there that I'm very much interested in. Like now that I'm writing this thing about death. And death is walking that mystery.

AM: Oh, is that a new performance work?

JB: Yeah. Also, *Domicanish* is a language of joy and it is joy. It's about owning, owning the so-called imperfections and discoveries.

AM: Speaking of languages and discoveries, one of the key concepts for Hildegard is *viriditas* ("greenness"), the vital power that sustains life in all things.[viii] For Anzaldúa, we could mention the "new mestiza consciousness", a faculty or state that makes it possible for someone to exist in multiple spaces while seeing beyond conflicting binaries. Is *performance autology* the most important term we can link to your work?

JB: I think performance autology is the organization of my journey —doing my work, being my work, and working my being. Performance autology does not have what I have encountered, but rather what has worked for me. Of all the exercises I've trained in, these are the most efficient. I think in my work, *el ni'e* is one of the most important terms. Its root is like a rootless root, like *las raíces de las orquídeas* [the roots of orchids], like a rhizome all around; they are in the air, and they travel. For me, performance autology is that. It encompasses the traveling, the journey, the choices. It's the summary of my own voice, which I have been crafting since 1986: theory, praxis, and their transitions from one to the other.

AM: You just mentioned *el ni'e*. How would you explain this term?

JB: It's a slang word used in the Caribbean and in many places in Latin America. It refers to the perineum. For me, it is that space in which you are in the so called in-betweenness, at the border. Belonging redefined. And it is that space in which I live as a migrant. It could be seen with nostalgia. My reading, *la mirada mía* [my look] at *el ni'e* is truly of freedom. It's about belonging in the *isness*. *El ni'e* is becoming a rhizome. *El ni'e* for me is existence. This is how existence is. We are in *el ni'e*, we are always living in *el ni'e*. The same concept is in *Bliss*, *Levente no*, *Dominicanish*, and *Como la una*. They all host *el ni'e*, from the underworld all the way to bliss. It's the same; it's existence itself. When you die, when you live —I mean what is that? Who is You? What/Who lives? What/ Who dies? Who is Me?

Conscience

AM: That was very illuminating and can be connected to my next question. In reading *Bliss*, it seems that your life as a devotee is essential to your craft as a writer. Is *Bliss* the work that makes this dimension most apparent?

JB: Totally, totally. *Bliss* and its sister *Como la una*; they complement each other. Yes, *Bliss* has that quotidianess too. It talks about very simple things, and I try to keep the language not from the spiritual realm, but [rather use] very simple words, hoping that it gives me beauty, or takes me closer to beauty, or takes me closer to silence, or to see a relationship with so much beauty at the beginning, in the middle, at the end. And so, yes, I agree. I think it is *como* [like] *Dominicanish*, a door seal for language in general. *Bliss* is that —a door seal to that path. It's not the path itself, just the door seal.

AM: How often do you find yourself speaking about the spiritual dimension of your work?

JB: Never. Ever.

AM: And yet this dimension is obviously very important to you.

JB: Totally. It is the most important. This is why I do things. This is my reason. I don't see myself as anything but a devotee. I don't see myself as a writer, but [rather] writing as a devotee or dancing as a devotee. But that [the spiritual dimension of my work] is for me and for the few who will ask. Because devotion, and the realm of the visible and invisible, is very intimate work. It's very

intimate. I mean, most of the time it will lead to silence, and that is not a regular conversation, but I don't mind because it's the same thing I do as a reader: I will go to where I am, and I will pick all those themes or the same poets. I think we are speaking a little bit more about this [dimension]. I call it conscience. I like the term conscience because conscience gives me this [sense of] responsibility for my inner work; you have to have a higher conscience [to work] on that. So, instead of spirit or spiritual, I've been using the word conscience for the last three decades.

Writing and Performing

AM: I see. I'd like to ask now about the differences you see in writing and performing in your work. Regarding writing as a medium, Anzaldúa says: "Writing is the site where I critique reality, identity, language, and dominant culture's representation and ideological control" (3). As for your work, how do writing and performing differ as modes for representing reality?

JB: I write creating my world. I create my rules. You see, there are like three parallels. There's this world —the so-called concrete world— in which I will live, and there's how I encounter it. And from those two, I create this play, this joy or this back and forth where I change the rhythm, where I write in a corner or [where] I play with it. I publish because if I don't, I will not complete my action; I will continue editing. Even if it's published, I will continue [revising]. So, I say, 'OK, I went through this process.' Writing is a part of me, so I'm not able to put a lot of weight in terms of the possibilities of my writing, because, as an audience member or reader, I have been allowed to do what I want in my readings. This is what I learned from very early in my writing. My writing is open, and as a reader you will have to be responsible for it. It's always halfway; I don't think it's ever complete. It's complete in me, but it completes itself with the Other. I'm speaking about silence, and you might be referring to the silence when you were nine years old, and you asked for permission, and nobody gave you permission. And you sat with that silence, but it was a silence that was quite dense. It's these different silences that I'm interested in. The word silence, yes, we find it in all spiritual practices, but I'm interested in the practice of all that exists in its quotidian realm.

AM: And is this different when you perform, to quote your words, these half-finished or open pieces? Is it the same in your performances? Is this also given halfway?

JB: Yes, totally. Not that I go and do things halfway, but the meaning needs to be completed. Here I am with another person, but that person will take it to another place. It's this network of meaning that is created in every intellect or conscience. So then when I'm performing, I'm not able to say that you will like what I'm doing, but I'm for sure able to say that you will decide based on your readings, on your likes or dislikes and all that. So, then I count on that. I'm not able to say, 'This is good, and you will like it because…'. 'No, no, no, you don't know me. You don't know all my richness'. I don't. I'm not able to say, 'This is for this group of people.' No. 'Don't count me in that group because I don't know what I want yet.'

AM: So, not coming from a theory perspective —to engage with, say, identity, as someone like Anzaldúa sets out to do— your approach is necessarily different.

JB: It's open-ended. It's a play, it's a game. It's extending my own meanings. It's extending my own levels of consciousness. Everything that I have written, when I read it, takes me to another person's reading or writing, or what the other person has said, or the sounds or the songs. And I know that this is related to my spiritual practice. I'm saying all this because the sounds and the words led me to my silence. I was very loud to go to silence. I had to say a lot of B.S., you know. I had to say a lot. I had to scream a lot. I had to *susurrar mucho* [whisper a lot] to find my silences. So, in writing, I found nothing, nothingness. Writing, sounds, symbols have led me to this ocean of myself and everything. So then, at this point in my life, I'm able to say this. Before *Dominicanish* and the other works, it was different, quite different. I have grown up; now I am Sunday.

AM: Right, as opposed to "When I grow up / I want to be a Sunday."[ix]

JB: Exactly. Exactly.

AM: Is your writing less open-ended in pieces like *Dominicanish*?

JB: No, no. The writing is open because that has been my way. It has been my spiritual walk in that conscience that my work gave me. It took me for a walk, and it's still taking me for a walk. In 2008, I was able to say: "When I grow up, I want to be a Sunday". *Bliss* took me by the hand and woke me. Now, after years, I'm able to say, 'Oh, I'm Sunday.' The same thing applies to *Dominicanish* and my other texts. Now I think I'm going into that line, but I'm going up or down. It's like the death of the same thing. I might take some of Hildegard's visions to explain this because in her visions what I found was like a photograph of some of my sentiments and levels of consciousness. I could take five of her visions and take phrases from *Bliss* and put them there together.

AM: Having seen representations of Hildegard's visions and having read *Bliss*, I can see that as well. For instance, when I look at the cover of Hildegard's *Illuminations*, which features the famous vision of the Blue Man standing in a circle with different paths, it reminds me of the labyrinth laid out in the ground for the *Lecturance* of *Bliss*.[x]

JB: And the Blue Angel [mentioned in *Bliss*[xi]].

AM: Yes, the Blue Man and the Blue Angel as well. That's right.

JB: Yeah, I mean, if we want to be very literal. But there are other things we can match perfectly there.[xii]

AM: Right. Regarding the Blue Angel, now that you've mentioned it, I watched an interview with Matthew Fox,[xiii] a scholar of Hildegard's work. He discusses the Blue Man in her work as a Christ figure and also connects it to the Green Man,[xiv] which is also very important in Hildegard's work. The *green* element, you know, as in *veriditas*. And in your case, there is the Blue Angel. What or who is the Blue Angel for Josefina Báez?

JB: It's the companion. It is like…it's the higher self. It is the higher plane being outside of me, and it's grander than that. It's related to the realm of what I have known before, like Jesus, the Virgin Mary, and *San José* [Saint Joseph]. And the relationship to my name and all that.

AM: I see. Let me revisit the question of the different formats used in the creation process. Speaking of Anzaldúa's *Light in the Dark*, Keating explains how the manuscript exists in various formats: "handwritten notes, outlines, drafts, email communications, conversations with comadres and computer files" (x). This diversity of formats is reminiscent of *Levente*, a work that also exists in different iterations. Could you speak about the diversity of this particular work?

JB: Totally, totally. It's like a cacophony. It gets you very upset, you know, because it doesn't stop. After *Bliss*, we needed something like that to break me. The characters are non-stop; they live in this world, but they don't give a fuck, you know. So, the work has a lot of work within — many different formats and stories within it. One of the stories, talking about communication, features the telegram and then you have the classic black telephone. It has all that and is just one segment. And it has this format of lists of all these photographs that play with images and time. There are stories presented as paragraphs that are stories by themselves. It includes all those different spaces. I went crazy. And there's one phrase that might…*puede quizás coserlos* [sew them together] with that siren, that siren that goes out. For me, the formats are very important, and they teach me a lot about having the same text presented in different formats. Using different formats will give me a whole different meaning, and then I will stay with the meaning that I'm most satisfied with. So, as a writing exercise, I like to do that. I encountered this exercise in *Exercises in Style* by French writer Raymond Queneau. He takes one text and he passes it through different formats. I love that because I get bored with writing very easily.

Liminality

AM: I now would like to talk about transitioning across boundaries and modes of existence and being. Both Hildegard and Anzaldúa operate in different spheres in parallel. The former alternates her work as a religious leader with the spacetime in which she receives her mystical visions, while the latter works as a person whose discernment of experience relies on an epistemology that stresses both objectivism and subjectivism (the self, the occult). As an artist and a devotee, how do you navigate the different modes of existence in which you participate, particularly in the sociopolitical context of a Dominican York?

JB: Being an outsider, as a Dominican York, you are already outside the structured realm. I surf between my own realms and the realms that I need to visit. There is a fallacy and a concrete mental state of the migrant that is perennial. The fallacy [is that] we are better off, and the mental state of everything you lose while you are living, regardless of migration. To live is to migrate; we have all and we have nothing. It's like [being] a dutiful citizen, where the main premise [of] difference is respected.

It's similar to accents, you know? 'Oh, these Latinas have this accent.' Who doesn't have an accent? I mean, when I hear you, you have an accent. We must know that we are the other of the Other. We need some freaking mirrors, you know? I have an awareness of otherness; I am the otherness, and I don't belong. When people see me, they see a black woman. When they hear me, they see a black woman with an accent. When they ask me questions, they see a black woman with an accent, with a big mouth [laughs], or rolling her eyes, and she won't say shit, you know? So, the more we listen to the Other, the more we will know that person. For me that is interesting. The outside is a good place [laughs]. I claim otherness. I claim my *ni'e*. I claim not belonging, but being, *relacionándome desde el ser con cada ser* [relating from my being to each being].

AM: Returning to the issue of the different modes of existence, Anzaldúa introduces the figure of the nahual.[xv] For Anzaldúa, her *naguala* is a "mode of consciousness" (105) that allows her to tap into the realm of the non-human. It also serves as a guiding spirit, assisting her in her work. Regarding this same topic, Keating writes: "Anzaldúa's approach to writing was dialogic, recursive, democratic, spirit-inflected, and only partially within her conscious control. She relied extensively on intuition, imagination, and…her 'naguala'" (xi). Hildegard, in turn, attributes her works to divine inspiration received from what she calls God. Is Josefina Báez someone who taps into other realms, or someone who experiments alternatives modes of existence? If so, how do such explorations impact your work?

JB: What I write from that space is the foundation of my work, but it's not the work that I share. It's a spiritual practice for me to write there, to write from there. It's part of my silence. It's part of one of the practices that I follow: reading out loud, meditating, cleaning rice. And from there, I go and I write. The work that I do from my inner self is the foundation of all the work that I have done, but the practice itself —the intuition, the text itself— no, it's not shared. And I don't think I'm able to see it anymore in the text. I know that it has come from there, but it's not there, you know. It is very elusive, this invisible center. That invisible being, which is also me, has created me.

AM: Is it the Blue Angel?

JB: Could be. It could be my Blue Angel. It's not Josefina who is still having schedules and is still too *cuadrada* [square]. That space is not inspiration, but it is way too much free for my taste. I'm doing different poetic forms, and there I can see that presence. I have seen, I have found, that I have done some poetic forms without knowing that those were poetic forms. When I understood that, I said: 'Oh my God who wrote this? Come on!'. So, my spiritually based writing, or my conscience-based writing, is not out [there]; it's not to be shared. It's more part of *mi vida espiritual* [my spiritual life]. It is more the devotee aspect of that. I accompany myself with that.

AM: I see. Anzaldúa writes some of her pieces with the specific intent of connecting —using her terminology— *the underworld, the concrete physical world, and the upper realities of spirit* (25), is *Bliss* one of your works in which this same multidimensionality can be seen?

JB: Totally. In the trilogy, you can find it. *Las levente* [the female characters in *Levente*], are loud yet inner-guided. They're so free that they live in the very upper realms with their "very *bajo*

mundo [underworld] language" and the exercise of their sovereignty. They live in freedom at all times. I find that connection of the three dimensions, the three realms, in three main works: *Bliss, Dominicanish and Levente.*

AM: How is this multidimensionality seen in *Dominicanish*?

JB: *Dominicanish* is the center of those three works, and *Dominicanish* is [about] not taking yourself that seriously, while very seriously expressing your language, your take on things, your *isness*, which is not how North Americans will express or pronounce a word, but the way in which you are doing that. And yes, you will be laughed at. But yes, you will continue, and yes, you will have more meanings with that. This is the spirituality of the quotidian. For me, this is big; all worlds are in every world, as long as we have a body. Therefore, I cannot say that they are interconnected; [rather] they are all, they encompass all. That's why, in performance autology I start with the body and the emphasis remains on the body throughout the different phases of your growing. I mean, for me, at 63, it's not the same training I did when I was 25. So, you are conscious of who you are and continue, still emphasizing the body. What I have found is that with old age and dying, and dying and death, there's another door seal to a mystery. Another door seal to another *etapa* [stage]. But it's the same corridor.

Incorporating Personal Narrative

AM: Very interesting. Let's talk about incorporating personal narrative now. While Hildegard gives divine inspiration full credit for her views on different matters, thus effectively effacing her own input, Anzaldúa emphasizes the importance of incorporating her personal narrative in her theoretical writing, an approach she calls *autohistoria* (self-history) or *autohistoria-teoría* (self-history-theory). In your case, many of your pieces show details that coincide with your everyday experience. How would you explain this tendency to rely on the autobiographical?

JB: I'm the vessel, relying on the body to be alert. The body is the vessel of the possibilities while alive. It's from there, from what this vessel has lived specifically, that you extend the meaning. If I start with a very personal narrative, I extend it, and I sometimes don't find myself. Most of the time, I don't find myself because what you are going to share has to be edited, and what you lived there is what is effective, for the writing, not for my story. I will not force my story into it, but [rather focus on] what is effective for the writing in general. Everything is a personal story. Everything. I might write about extraterrestrials, and it's a personal take on it. I might write about a *nebulosa* [nebula] or the tribes in Africa that have this connection to another realm all the time. I will write about that, but it's a personal take on it. I take full responsibility for the themes, and it's my take. It is how I see things. It's *mi mirada* [my point of view], so that makes it *historia*: more story than history.[xvi]

AM: Right, of course, as the storyteller that you are.

JB: Stories more than history. What interests me in history is what is genuine in it. Right now, we see that most of it is about men. So, the stories that I write *son cuentos [are stories, tales], no*

historias [*not histories*]. And in the internal work, it works totally different. We need to drop the stories, drop the history, and only then we reach the inner song that speaks of the soul song.

AM: I see. The importance of seeing beyond the myth of history. It feels appropriate to bring up this next point. It seems to me that we can extrapolate Anzaldúa's assessment that she "fuse[s] personal narrative with theoretical discourse" (6) to make the following statement about *Bliss*: a text that fuses personal narrative with the quest to embody the universal in the singular. What do you think of this assessment? Is *Bliss* doing this?

JB: Yes, I agree 100%, and I will add that it's in that universal language that I found the particular. I went from the particular to the universal, and in that *ni'e enorme en el multiverso* [*enormous ni'e in the multiverse*], I found just how particular it is. It was going from one side to the other, as John Coltrane said: "Start in the middle and go back and forth". That's how I felt.

Methods of Composition

AM: I'd like to ask you now about your methods of composition. As a polymath, Hildegard's multiple ways of composing are exemplified in her writing of music, medicinal work, letters, and the invention of a personal language, with many of her works inspired or revealed to her during her visionary trances. Similarly, Anzaldúa had a highly eclectic way of working which included "meditating, visualizing, freewriting, and collecting diverse source materials" (Keating xi). These source materials, in turn, included "dreams, meditations, journal entries, films she had seen, thoughts scribbled in notebooks and on pieces of paper, article clippings, scholarly books, observations from her interactions with human and nonhuman others" (Keating xii). As works as *Levente* or *Dominicanish* can attest, you are also someone who explores different ways of composing, can you talk about your different approaches to composition?

JB: Every work is totally different and will have its own way of researching. In *Levente*, I researched through photographs, taking pictures of photographs, people, signs. I did the list of Washington Heights.[xvii] I also saw the differences between the various lists I compiled. In *Levente*, I was able to share them more than in any other text. There was also music, going to the supermarket, and seeing the brand labels and the signs and the language that supermarkets use to sell their products. In *Dominicanish*, the process was different because first we did it for a performance. I was asked to gather the texts that I liked the most, so I selected a few, and Claudio [Mir] organized them for a performance. Among the texts I needed to include were the *Panchatantra* stories and one of my philosophers, Adi Shankara. Composing is always what I really like or what I really don't like, or what I'm listening to, what I'm cooking. I mean we are cyclical, so everything happening in my life informs my writing. And what forms the writing is the editing. You see, because of all these experiences, I have this bank of material that I filter through *un cedazo específico* [a specific sieve]. It might be lists. It might be poetic form. Formats are interesting to me. And every time I need to break the format, especially the ones that I have used before.

AM: Why is it so important to you to break away from a former method?

JB: I think that's the only revolution I can make without killing anybody. I am able to break *lo que me limita* [what limits me]. What gave me form in the past also limits me now. I did that, and it served a purpose, but if I stayed there, it would limit me. It's not exposing me to the new, in my case. You know what I'm saying?

AM: This is one of the benefits of fully embracing living in *el ni'e.*

JB: *Totalmente* [Totally]. And I think with *el ni'e* you have no floor.

AM: How empowering.

JB: Exactly, and the power lies in the challenge it presents to me every time. It takes me to the present, to the new, every time.

AM: I see. I'd like to return to the topic of consciousness. Both Hildegard and Anzaldúa lived their lives with an awareness of consciousness beyond the human realm. Anzaldúa, for instance, wrote "I know that the universe is conscious and that spirit and soul communicate by sending subtle signals to those who pay attention to our surroundings, to animals, to natural forces, and to other people" (24). Works like *Bliss* also refer to this awareness of the invisible. Could you comment on the extent of this awareness of the invisible in your day-to-day life, as well as on the impact of this awareness in your work?

JB: Yeah, the beauty that I encounter every day. Beauty in the rays of the sun and in the cloudy days too, and in the little *plantitas que yo tengo* [plants that I have], and how they sprout: the beauty of the simple stuff. But then you will have perils. The quotidian is so exquisite, and within the quotidian some special stuff is hidden. I'm listening to people, and listening, you will find that, oh, my God, everybody has this poetry going on, even the one that's screaming in traffic... I'm with all my senses up in the present; that's why I get tired very easily, because to be aware is very demanding.

AM: This is very interesting because I formulated the previous question in terms of awareness of the invisible, while you are clearly discussing the beauty of awareness of the visible.

JB: Yeah, beauty is invisible. Beauty is the concept of the invisible, the supreme. I see the supreme in that, and it accompanies me at all times. It's not just in silence that I see the supreme or feel it; I also perceive it listening to and dancing salsa, or [while] defending myself in the street from some *loco viejo* [crazy old man]. The supreme works wonders in me in my quotidianess. When I laugh until my belly hurts, it feels like every single cell in my body is this smile. And it hurts, it really hurts laughing, and you bend yourself over. If you see why I'm laughing, you might wonder, 'What?' But that means it's embodied with something more than what is visible to the eyes. I am touched somehow, but the invisible is something you can feel.

AM: Now, this awareness of the invisible in both Hildegard and Anzaldúa is linked to access to non-objective planes of reality. As a seer, Hildegard claims to transcend the limits of ordinary human perception, whereas Anzaldúa thinks of herself as a "[w]alker between the worlds",

interested in "intentionally entering realms that others encounter only in dreams and myth and bringing back information (treasure for healing others, the community, the Earth) (32)." What worlds do you access, and in what ways do they inform your literary or performative works?

JB: I access the world of my inner self, and that is the highest in myself. That's what speaks when I'm there —not all the time, but when I'm there [laughs]. The space I access is a voice that is very precise: no drama, no drama whatsoever, and very simple, very concrete. It's like I'm there too. I access it through meditation, through exercises. When I'm directing, I enter that space to teach, to nurture people. I have to care deeply when directing a class on performance autology because you have to care for the other the most, because that person will have that in their body. So, I'm there —not as Josefina, the little Josefina, but as the big Josefina from the inner self. But how do I enter? [There are] techniques and meditations to access those [spaces]. Right now, the greatness is that these worlds are here. *Lo que intuíamos* [What we used to intuit] is here now. I feel like everything has opened, and I'm poured with so much now that my levels of alertness have increased, and I need more stillness and silence. It's like a trance-like moment for me and for humanity in general. And you are aware of it; there's so much joy, and [yet] you see so much destruction and injustice. You feel for that, but you also have this constant joy within now. We are in the space that we dreamt of.

AM: Was Josefina Báez able to see joy during the pandemic, for instance?

JB: Oh yes, totally. Especially during the pandemic. You see, as a writer and a reader, I lived in a pandemic all my life [laughs]. I mean, I need my space. I need my little table where I work, and my meditation. So, having lived like that all my life, it was very interesting to have everybody in the same boat. I was not pressured to do anything because everybody was in the same [situation]. I mean, some of my friends would say, 'Oh, now we live like you.'

Healing

AM: I see. I'd like to ask you now about healing. Both Hildegard and Anzaldúa had a strong interest in aspects of their work as healing tools. For Hildegard, it was not only about living a righteous spiritual lifestyle; she also wrote about the importance of maintaining a healthy body. The legacy of her medical writing is exemplified in the practices followed at the Hildegard Center in Allensbach, Germany. Anzaldúa, in turn, proposed stories as *healing visions,* specifically describing them as teachings and healers (24). Is this healing aspect an element of your work as a writer or performer? If so, could you explain how you envision this healing component in your work?

JB: Both masters, the *magistras*. I have *herencia de las dos* [inherited from both]. My healing modalities are based on healing the body, consciousness of the body, awareness of what you eat, of what you *uneat*, in order to have a balanced way of living your thoughts, the quality of the thoughts. There are very specific modalities that we may practice. One thing that I do from Hildegard is the joy cookies. I even have them listed on the Ay Ombe Theatre website.

AM: Is that so?

JB: Yeah. Her teas and all that. So then *el manual de medicina es importante para mí* [her medicine manual is important to me]. I'm now getting the translations they have done in Spanish because I have found them to be very good. For me it's about tending the body so that the body can have better thoughts, and this will lead to a higher consciousness. It's about emphasis on the body and knowing the different systems: *cómo se atrofian, cómo se trabajan, todo eso, el sistema de circulación, el sistema linfático* [how they atrophy, how they need to be worked, all that, the circulatory system, the lymphatic system], and very specific things like that. Not everybody in Ay Ombe is interested, but the majority is.

AM: This healing aspect, based on what you are saying, is more evident in your performance autology work rather than in your writing or performing, correct?

JB: As a performer, this is how I train: it's there in my body, and I'm not able to detach it from it. As a dancer, I was trained to do *oleaciones* [oleations], massages, and all that. The person, the body that did that, is now doing this, and continues to do so, and that has an impact on the audience. It's the vibration that you bring to the audience. We are writing about performance autology now. We are doing some questions and answers and stuff like that. I've applied the autology to create, to play, and to see how it works. When I was doing *Dominicanish*, I began doing the *oleaciones* and I knew that I was flying on stage. So instead of stating in a text. 'This is what we do', I did it, I embodied the teachings. This is what I have done.

AM: Let me echo this idea by Anzaldúa: proposing stories as healing visions. I wonder if you think the same applies, in any way, to your storytelling or poetry. Do you envision them as healing tools as well?

JB: I don't know, but what I do know is that when people work with me, each person that I work with will remember and create healing modalities. So, the visions are there, but my visions are very mundane. The visions are in the pictures I take and in the pictures I didn't take. Both types of pictures are always the work of light and shadow. The visions are in the silences, in the stillness, in the act of contemplation. They're in the play of words, in the nonsense, in play and games. Nonsense will get you to good places, sometimes [laughs]. Nonsense in writing, when you intentionally break stuff, it will take you to a space that you don't know, and the question will be: what do you do with not knowing? What do you do with difference? And that question is so vital —so, so vital. What do you do with difference? I mean, things are changing very rapidly. What are we doing with that? Are we content? Are we? What do you react to? How do you react? What do you do with difference?

AM: That's an important question you just asked: "What do you do with difference?" Could you elaborate on that?

JB: What do I do with difference? Most of the time, I go to silence. Most of the time, I retreat. Usually, I retreat, and when I come back, I'm able to ask for forgiveness. I cook. I ask. With difference, I ask; I ask too: Why or how? How is this? 'Oh, I do it like that.'

AM: I see, seeking understanding.

JB: Yeah, but I usually go to silence because it is in silence where I find my answers. And I'm not able to harm, you know, with a thought or a word that I might say.

Pre-Patriarchal Spiritualities

AM: I see. I'd like to explore the themes surrounding women and patriarchy now. Hildegard's philosophy of well-being is considered to belong to the paradigm of "pre-patriarchal spiritualities" (Fox 7), which emphasizes the feminine aspects of creation, while Anzaldúa's work often critiques the dominant narratives that marginalize the voices of women. As I understand it, you serve as a mentor figure to many women. In your opinion, how is your work related to Anzaldúa's or Hildegard's in this regard: working with women?

JB: The work with women emphasizes the body. Performance autology is a laboratory, and I couldn't take on another work or another body but mine, so I became quite knowledgeable about my body. As performers, women have, every single day, different levels of balance. For me, as a performer, when you do a performance piece, you will do it differently every day, but your contract states that you have to do the same thing every day. Therefore, you need to find a training method that helps you manage that balance. I mean, most people don't know of the varying levels of balance that women have. I take care of my body and know all its facets; that is the knowledge of my body. When I train women, I know of work that we shouldn't do because if we stand too hard, the ovaries will be affected. I took my time to know myself, and to take care of myself, so I wouldn't hurt myself in training or performing. It was not like that at the beginning, though. At the beginning, I didn't know. Now that I do, I know I'm able to at least offer support or at least listen and look for common ground.

AM: Your work with women, then, is based on your inner knowing of your body as a woman.

JB: Yeah, the inner work is communal with all souls. My soul dances with my body, my woman's body, which has its own specifics. I study my body —my bodies: mental, conscious, causal, pain, ancestral… all the traits in the sea of possibilities, pauses and silence included. But I know my specificity is my own, and that each person, each body has its own particularities. So, I work from my particularity to be alert to others' particularities.

AM: I see. Would it be a mistake to say that Josefina Báez adopts a feminist approach to working with women, empowering them over men?

JB: Yeah, I work with the feminine and masculine energies found in everybody, in every *space-body*. I'm training myself to be more alert so that we can heal from any toxic energy affecting our decisions. I have seen my work labeled as feminist; depending on the definition of feminism, I can relate to it. I have to find a definition of feminism that is more aligned with indigenous people from communities that are closer to me —to my social strata, my skin color, my devotion to beauty

and spirit. I have not seen it yet, but we are co-creating segments of it. My work is to create a space where people can come and recharge. This is my space.

AM: So, your interest in Gloria Anzaldúa is not necessarily grounded in a feminist standpoint, is it? What aspects of her work interest you the most, then?

JB: I will not call it feminism. What other people call feminism, I refer to as rights —my rights and responsibilities. For me, what she's saying and her work speaks about me as well. The pictures [in her books] have my name all over them. She calls it a certain way because of her experiences and particular upbringing. The same goes for Hildegard: it's the spiritual Catholicism and all that. So, mine is mainly the space where we recharge and we can go and impact the collective. It's not that I took a step back to the side. As a healer, I must heal whoever asks me, and that's the code. There's a code of respect.

AM: I see. This is my last question, and it's about creativity. By emphasizing a creation-centered approach (as opposed to a fall/redemption one) and by insisting on the possibilities of not being *ni de aquí ni de allá*, both Hildegard and Anzaldúa, respectively, make a statement about the cyclical, nonlinear nature of creativity. As an innovative and eclectic artist who fuses different practices, could you talk about what it is that you seek to create?

JB: It's not creation itself, you know; it's the way I marry stuff. It's the way I *bordo* [embroider]; e*s bordar* [it's embroidering]. I'm giving; it comes with life —all the threads, *y yo bordo* [and I embroider]. *Es una creación desde lo supremo, desde la fuente*. *La creación se tiene.* [It is a creation from what is supreme, from the source. Creation creates itself]. I'm not seeking anything. It happens. I'm not seeking. What I'm reading, what I'm writing, will create something, but I'm not seeking something specific. I have a responsibility to myself. I have a responsibility as a writer. I have a responsibility as a devotee, and those guides/guidelines are like in in my bloodstream, you know? It's a chosen and granted responsibility that I have gladly accepted. [Being a] devotee is an expression, and writing is another expression of the same. And dancing is yet another expression of the same. It's like the way I do embroidery; it's the same way that I write and the same way that I practice my calligraphy, and it's wonderful. I'm now doing basic Arab calligraphy, and it's taking me to a whole different space, so I'm not seeking anything. I'm in that process, as life is, as living is. Nothing tops contemplation and silence.

Works Cited

Anzaldúa, Gloria E. *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality*, edited by AnaLouise Keating, Duke University Press, 2015.

Báez, Josefina. *Comrade, Bliss Ain't Playing*. Ay Ombe, 2008.

---. *Dominicanish*. Ay Ombe, 2000.

---. "Touchka." *Josefina Báez,* https://www.josefinabaez.com/gallery/k2du4yxgzofchenj5scest5zxgl0b2. Accessed 23 November 2023.

Fox, Matthew. Preface. *Meditations with Hildegard of Bingen*, by Uhlein, Bear & Company, 1983, pp. 7-11.

Jaima, Amir R. "Literature Is Philosophy: On the Literary Methodological Considerations That Would Improve the Practice and Culture of Philosophy." *The Pluralist*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2019, pp. 13-29.

Keating, AnaLouise. "Re-envisioning Coyolxauhqui, Decolonizing Reality. Anzaldúa's Twenty-First-Century Imperative." Introduction. *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality*, by Gloria E. Anzaldúa, edited by Keating, Duke University Press, 2015, pp. ix-xxxvii.

Kelly, Patricia. "The Essential Hildegard." *Hildegard: A Play*, edited by John Gunn, University of Queensland Press, 1999, pp. 49-86.

Kienzle, Beverly Mayne. Introduction. *Homilies on the Gospels*, by Hildegard of Bingen, Cistercian Publications, Liturgical Press 2011, pp. 1-28.

King-Lenzmeier, Anne H. *Hildegard of Bingen: An Integrated Vision*. Liturgical Press, 2001.

Lara-Bonilla, Inmaculada. "Decolonial Phenomenologies: The Language and Affect of In-Betweenness in Gloria E. Anzaldúa's and Josefina Báez's Early Work." *Lectora*, vol. 29, 2023: pp. 89-116.

Pratt, Christina. (2007). The Green Man. In C. Pratt (ed.), *An Encyclopedia of Shamanism. Volume One* (p. 86). The Rosen Publishing Group.

"Rhineland Mystics Part 1: Hildegard von Bingen with Matthew Fox." *Gaia*, www.gaia.com/video/rhineland-mystics-part-1-hildegard-von-bingen-matthew-fox.

Quashie, Kevin. *The Sovereignty of Quiet: Beyond Resistance in Black Culture*. Rutgers University Pres, 2012.

Uhlein, Gabriele. Introduction. *Meditations with Hildegard of Bingen*, by Uhlein, Bear & Company, 1983, pp. 15-18.

Notes

[i] A claim that has been challenged by some scholars. See, for instance, Kienzle's introduction to *Homilies on the Gospels* where she writes: "Scholars question the veracity of Gottfried's [Gottfried of Disibodenberg, Hildegard's first biographer] and Hildegard's accounts…What Gottfried expresses as permission and encouragement from Eugene III [and] Hildegard presents as a papal mandate (19).

[ii] As Hildegard herself puts it: "Everything that is in the heavens, on the earth, and under the earth, is penetrated with connectedness, is penetrated with relatedness" (79). For more details, see "The Essential Hildegard" by Patricia Kelly, included in *Hildegard: A Play* by John Gunn.

[iii] The term is used by AnaLouise Keating in different works including her introduction to *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro*.

[iv] As can be read in *Comrade, Bliss Ain't Playing*: "At last, there are physicists poets. / Poets in physics. /Poets of physics.". It should be noted that *Bliss* has no page numbering system.

[v] As defined in Josefina Báez's website: "Josefina Báez has devised a practice based on her own learning/healing/creating, called 'Performance Autology'. It approaches the creative process from the autobiography of the doer. Technically kept to the core, this path is developed in sobriety. The physical, mental and spiritual/conscience realms are researched and nurtured."

[vi] *Lingua ignota*, Latin for "unknown language".

[vii] *Litterae ignotae*: "unknown letters", also devised by Hildegard.

[viii] *Viriditas* is one of the terms devised by Hildegard to refer to "the verdancy, the 'greening' power of God […] the vital force that embraces creation" (Uhlein 17). As King-Lenzmeier points out, "Hildegard's use of *viriditas* is both engaging and frustrating. How do you translate a word that, through a variety of uses, is the pivotal point of her thought? Especially when its literal translation turns out to be 'greenness' or 'verdure' or something else that entirely lacks the spectrum of resonance of the original Latin word" (7).

[ix] As presented in *Bliss*.

[x] *Lecturance* is based on *Comrade, Bliss Ain't Playing*. The world premiere was on November 18th, 2017, at Riverside Church in New York City.

[xi] "I have a colored angel. / He knows all my passwords. / My angel is blue.".

[xii] One such correlation is the integration of the sacred and the secular in the lives of both women. While Hildegard was the widely traveled cloistered nun of the 12th century, Báez tells us in *Bliss*: "I am a nun / a non-denominational nun. / A nun with benefits. A nun married to harmony. A nun dancing the sacred with secular riffs, /".

[xiii] "Rhineland Mystics Part 1: Hildegard von Bingen with Matthew Fox."

[xiv] A symbol of renewal and oneness with nature. "He is both a fertility god and guardian of the earth whose charge is to prevent her misuse…The Green Man teaches that human lives cycle just as the rest of Nature from birth, through growth, realization of potential, death, and rebirth" (Pratt 86).

[xv] In Mesoamerican mythology and mysticism, this word can be understood in at least two ways: (1) as the human being who is able to shapeshift into an animal or an element of nature, or (2) as the tutelary animal assigned to each human being at birth. Speaking of the nahual, Anzaldúa writes in *Light in the Dark*: "My naguala (daimon or guiding spirit) is an inner sensibility that directs my life —an image, an action, or an internal experience. My imagination and my naguala are connected— they are aspects of the same process, of creativity" (4).

[xvi] The Spanish word *historia* signifies both *story* and *history*.

[xvii] A text listing things and people encountered while walking along Washington Heights in New York City.