



**DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY,  
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**ECOLOGICAL THEOLOGY:  
The sense of hearing in the writings of  
Hildegard of Bingen**  
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# Abstract

**Title:** ECOLOGICAL THEOLOGY: The sense of hearing in the writings of Hildegard of Bingen

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There is an ecological crisis swiftly approaching and manifesting within us, and in a time when the narratives we live by have become untenable, it asserts a specific role for scholars and scientists: to reassess and cast new light on traditional knowledge. The purpose of this research is to investigate Hildegard of Bingen's (1098-1179) perspective on the phenomenology and psychophysics of her impositions on hearing and ears. To what extent does it pertain to/or achieve ecological wisdom? This study analyses the correlation between Hildegard's auditory conjectures in her natural philosophy and situating it within the broader framework of ecological theology. An analysis of the opus was carried out with the aim of identifying excerpts that showcase her innate philosophy. Subsequently, a textual analysis methodology was employed to examine the chosen excerpts. According to the analysis conducted, Hildegard's work demonstrates that her ability to perceive sounds and voices inspired her to compose a systematic method of theological instruction. According to her, our ideas and actions, i.e., inner listening in relation to voice, which all bodies have, shape us and others, and shows a deep connection to plants and the non-human world. Hildegard's teachings centred on contemplation and her ecological wisdom is essentially concerned with ethical behaviour; encouraging ecological justice.

**Keywords:** Ecological theology, ecological wisdom, hearing, listening, senses, *viriditas*, and sound.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

*Thus am I a feather on God's breath.*

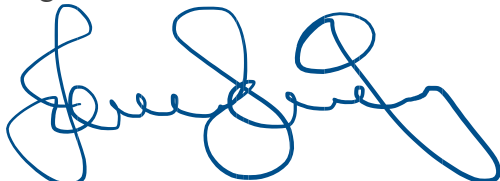
-Hildegard of Bingen

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Kungälv, June 2023



**Jessica Persson Schäring**

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

There is an ecological crisis swiftly approaching and manifesting within us. Sound pollution, light pollution, air pollution and the pollution of earth: The environment is in crisis. We are in crisis. How do we sense our-selves in the face of such desperation? Societies frequently perpetuate myths about the world and our place in it, including the myths of progress, human separation from nature, and civilization. And in a time when the narratives we live by have become untenable, it asserts a specific role for scholars and scientists, to reassess and cast new light on history, and the knowledge from before.

Senses connect with our understanding and have us experience and act in relation to others. And so, strengthening the connections between people and places, our history, and the more-than-human world, we may find a deeper understanding for ecology, and ethical practices that have been forgotten. Philosophers and scientists have studied the phenomenology and psychophysics of sensory perception and, in particularly vision, for many years. Increasingly, however, they have become interested in the non-visual senses in greater detail, and the problem of individuating the senses in a more general way, and there are now scientist, scholars and artists that are working on creating historical soundscapes of Europe during the High Middle Ages, so to attain “new knowledge”.<sup>1</sup>

A significant figure from this period of history, is Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179), also known as Hildegardis Bingensis and Sybil of the Rhine. Hildegard was a unique philosopher-theologian with a remarkable dynamic personality

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<sup>1</sup> For more on the philosophy of Soundscapes, see for example Pancer, N. (2017) on “The Silencing of the World: Early Medieval Soundscapes and a New Aural Culture.” Also, there are multitude of researchers and artists that are investigating Soundscapes. The interest into the effect of sound and soundscapes is growing. For example, the German Research Council have funded a network of researchers to study the complex intermingling of senses and bodies, and answer questions such as: “How were the soundscapes of the Middle Ages mediated through the involvement of all senses? And how was the sensual interplay configured aesthetically, liturgically, and architecturally? The research is to be conducted between 2021-2024. For more on this, see The Technische Universität Chemnitz and the DFG-Netzwerk: Lautsphären des Mittelalters, N.N. (2023).

who claimed to have experienced extraordinary illuminations, beginning at the age of five and which continued throughout her life. Visions which she felt compelled to preserve and share.

Hildegard is famous for her work about nature, herbs and plants, and medicine, and she considered human being as a “microcosm”, where even the most seemingly insignificant part of the human body symbolizes some aspect in nature, in ethics, and in the spiritual. What distinguishes Hildegard from contemporary philosophers is her unique synesthetic, and her own organic concept “*viriditas*” (the green greening). For Hildegard the body is the garment of the soul, which, according to her has a living voice. Moreover, for her, one who has sharp ears of inner discernment, in the ardent love of God’s mirror, longs for “these” words and inscribes them in the consciousness of his soul (III.1.18; CCCM 43, p.347). What are these words that are to be inscribed in souls, and what does it mean to have sharp ears?

The self-styled polymath Hildegard, who examined and explicated the ecological Teutonic and ecclesiastical world’s metaphysical foundations during the Middle Ages,<sup>2</sup> did not only author biographies of saints and write about botany and geology, but she also composed over seventy poems and produced one of the masterpieces of medieval music drama and arguably the first morality play: *Ordo Virtutum*.<sup>3</sup> Hildegard wrote two medical books on herbal treatments and was sought out because of her reputation as a respected physician and her ability to heal. All together she wrote nine books, where *Scivias*, *Liber Vitae Meritorum*, and *De Operatione Dei* are the most renowned of her work. The three books mentioned above, mostly dealt with the narrative and interpretation of her visions and offered valuable moral insight. *Scivias* stands as the first volume of the theological-philosophical writings of Hildegard. The peculiar title is written together in all Hildegard’s manuscripts, wherein she takes her visions

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<sup>2</sup> For more on Hildegard as a Teutonic Prophetess, see Tsakiropoulou-Summers (2002).

<sup>3</sup> See Altstadt (2021), and Potter (1986), on “The “Ordo Virtutum”- Ancestor of the English Moralities?”.

as the basis for a theological overview that conforms to Church teaching in all essential points.<sup>4</sup>

In 1147, Pope Eugene III formally acknowledged Hildegard's visions in *Scivias* at the synod at Trier and allowing for the reproduction of the book.<sup>5</sup> Within time, Hildegard would be exchanging letters with the most prominent figures of her era; of this contact, around 300 letters have survived, and *Scivias* would eventually find its way into a multitude of libraries. The book took ten years to finish and is to be considered as a survey of the course of salvation history from beginning to end, from creation to the final judgment.<sup>6</sup>

Hildegard's canonization was initiated in 1228, and in 1940 she was recognized for her religious devotion and spirituality by the Vatican. 800 years later her canonization proceedings have yet not been finalized. Nevertheless, in May of 2012, she was added to the calendar of saints, and in October same year, Pope Benedict XVI made Hildegard a Doctor of the Church, an honor title that puts her on par with Augustine and Thomas Aquinas.<sup>7</sup>

In essence, Hildegard is a prominent figure in history. She has often been labelled as a mystic, seeing as her writing is not in a typical scholastic manner. Hildegard was unique in that sense; a knowledgeable woman writing in Latin. Hildegard is acknowledged for having produced a vast body of content on natural philosophy, and so her works provide us with a great insight into the world of the high Middle Ages that differs greatly from those of her contemporaries. Hildegard undertook a quite concerted attempt to illuminate the world of sound, therefore her discernments on these subjects are invaluable to our understanding of High Middle Ages soundscapes and the senses more generally, and hearing in particular.

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<sup>4</sup> In Cambridge Companion, on Hildegard's Theology, see Ginther (2021).

<sup>5</sup> Baird & Ehrman, 1994), p. 5

<sup>6</sup> Newman (1990), pp. 22–23, and Baird & Ehrman, The Letters of Hildegard of Bingen (1994), pp.3–6.

<sup>7</sup> For more on Hildegard's position within the Catholic Church, see Meenan (2022) and Britannica (2023).

## **2. BACKGROUND**

This chapter, which is divided into three sections, discusses the aims, objectives, methods, and theoretical framework for this thesis. The aims are outlined in chapter 2.1, and more detail on the objectives, approach and challenges, are given in section 2.2. The final section 2.3, which comprises of four sub-sections, establishes the theoretical framework for this essay.

### **2.1 RESEARCH AIMS**

Hildegard of Bingen is well known for her music, her medical knowledge, her idiosyncratic notion of *viriditas*, and her illuminating visions of God. The interplay between sensory perception, God, and the world around us, in her work *Scivias* have been investigated, but her understanding and thoughts on hearing have not been widely reported. The aim of this thesis is to comprehend Hildegard's understanding of our sense of hearing in the context of her natural (ecological) philosophy, and in particular that of hearing. The overall guiding question of this thesis is to explore what we can learn from Hildegard's take on the phenomenology and psychophysics of her impositions on hearing and ears, and to what degree it relates to/attains ecological wisdom. Based on this aim, the essay proposes the research question: How is hearing articulated? From that question we can determine or observe the consequences of such understanding.

### **2.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND METHODS**

This thesis has two main research objectives. The first is interpretive: to examine and reaffirm the significance of auditory speculations in *Scivias*. The second is philosophical: to trace the scope and origins of Hildegard's perspective on "hearing" and "ears" and place it within the larger tradition of ecological theology. The study is based on qualitative methodological research, with Hildegard's Latin work *Scivias* as the primary source. In order to better understand Hildegard's natural philosophy and her perception on audial experiences, Hildegard's other writings, such as her letter of correspondence with authorities are read as secondary literature. Moreover, Barbara Newman's translation of *Scivias* is consulted in parallel with the work of other academics



and philosophers. Textual analysis, including content analysis, theme analysis, and a discourse analysis are used to deconstruct words and observations, which is an approach that enables new perspectives.

Hildegard's extensive corpus of writings, her "unpolished" Latin, her intricate and comprehensive stylistic literary expression, and interesting life; when juxtaposed with those of her contemporaries, make her work a captivating topic for examination. Albeit it is one that presents significant challenges in compilation. The comprehensive understanding of a text as a whole is dependent on the understanding of its individual components and their interrelationships within the larger context. Therefore, it is crucial to establish a strong theoretical foundation and provide a historical overview, particularly when discussing Hildegard. As a result of the aforementioned challenges, this essay may occasionally exhibit a dense and intricate nature, as an emphasis on profundity over simpleness has been given precedence. The objective is not to alienate the reader, but rather to provide a more intricate and rewarding reading encounter. Therefore, endeavors have been made to direct the reader through Hildegard's life and oeuvre, utilizing a contrasting and illuminating language; and the reading should become easier throughout the analysis.

## **2.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

In this section, the theoretical background for this thesis, which lay's the foreground for the analysis, will be presented in the following order: 2.3.1 Senses; 2.3.2; Natural Philosophy as Ecological Theology; 2.3.3 Ecological wisdom; 2.3.4 Vegetal power. The framework aids to contextualize Hildegard's work and frame it in both a historical and contemporary facet, so to attain "new knowledge", that can be of consideration when addressing current ecological dilemmas.

### **2.3.1 Senses**

The ability to perceive and identify objects in the environment is fundamental to all forms of sentient life and has traditionally been considered to be the foundation of knowledge. This is due to the fact that perceptual processes—

which are the means by which knowledge is either generated or made accessible to higher levels of cognition—are the basis of all knowledge.

McPherson’s extensive work on the classic and contemporary philosophical perspectives on the senses, articulates the traditional Aristotelian dichotomy and teaches us that there are five external senses: smell, taste, hearing, touch, and sight. Moreover, the dichotomy expresses the criteria different theories use to individuate the five senses are most often: representation, phenomenal character, proximal stimulus, and sense organ.<sup>8</sup> However, more recent accounts that have expanded sensory perception to include pain and other internal senses, and possibly other non-human senses as well.<sup>9</sup>

In terms of hearing, there is an ambiguity inherent in our conception of it<sup>10</sup>, and the wide range of perspectives on the metaphysics make studying audial perception from a philosophical vantage point an appealing prospect. The word “hear” has been continuously employed to limit the range of sounds accepted as “real” or “good” in Western thought<sup>11</sup>. The concept of hearing manifest contradictory duality that can be seen in the language we use to describe it. Albeit etymologically accidental, the word “hearing” incorporates the key organ involved in the process of hearing—the ear—into its own structure, reflecting the key role this organ plays in the process of hearing.

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<sup>8</sup> Macpherson (2011), pp.27–29.

<sup>9</sup> For example: The representation of vision is color, shape, and movement at a distance from our body in front of our eyes, whereas sounds, volume, pitch, or objects being struck or vibrated at locations in and at a distance from and all around our body, is a representation of hearing. The phenomenal character for hearing is presented by auditory experience, where the proximal stimulus for is pressure waves in a medium such as air or water. See Macpherson (2011), p. 29.

<sup>10</sup> For instance, we know it to involve sound and sound sources. For example, we know we hear multiple sources, yet we hear one melody. If we focus on the traits of the sound itself, independent of its cause and of its meaning, as in reduced listening, we see that there is an ambiguity in sound, as sound shuttle between a sound’s actual content, its source, and its meaning. For more on reduced listening, see LeVen (2019), pp.214-215.

<sup>11</sup> For more on sound and the ancient senses, see Butler & Nooter (2019), p.2.

O’Callaghan’s work puts forth an entry on audial perception that presents the main debate on the matter, and notes that due to the complexity of the auditory experience, scholars of the philosophy of sound have concentrated on a number of key questions, including the link between sound and sound sources.<sup>12</sup> Sounds are inherently nebulous, and the variety of perspectives on its metaphysics is mirrored in the definitions we use to describe them. O’Callaghan illuminates several important impositions on hearing, pinning a variety of challenging philosophical questions, such as: What do we make out of sounds? What do we hear? Is hearing spatial? What makes hearing unique compared to other senses? What are the things that make up our auditory field? Is there a significant difference between how we perceive sounds and how we have visions and see common objects?

Several studies have focused on the visions of Hildegard of Bingen underlining “otherness” with respect to the sensible world and the bodily experience in *Scivias*. However, there have been recent efforts to put emphasis on the significance of the sensory language found in religious texts such as Hildegard’s, and the work of Ortúzar Escudero „Sinneswortfeld“ Im *Scivias*” examines the word field that contains the terminology that is used in the context of the respective senses.<sup>13</sup> This work enables a broader context of Hildegard’s entries on the notions, so research on her psychophysical scaling can be more thoroughly addressed.

### **2.3.2 Natural Philosophy as Ecological Theology**

With the rise of the universities in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, a new method became the norm, and natural philosophy developed from philosophy’s observation, theorybuilding and logical analysis into a separate field of study (*scientia*, “knowledge”). Hildegard of Bingen and Peter Abelard both played a significant part in the early formative stage of the new European science, but unlike Abelard, who tried to provoke and finally found himself engaged in a rather pernicious

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<sup>12</sup> O’Callaghan (2021).

<sup>13</sup> Ortúzar Escudero (2016).

quarrel with the highly revered and powerful Abbot Bernard of Clairvaux, Hildegard sought harmony with the Church, and was impelled by the assembled prelates, with the specific support of Clairvaux, and commanded by the Pope Eugenius, to continue writing *Scivias*, after her initial writings about her visions came to their attention in 1147.<sup>14</sup>

The term ecological theology (ecotheology) gained popularity in the latter half of the 20th century, with the emergence of the scientific discipline of ecology. Ecological theology is a form of constructive theology that emphasizes ethics and the intersectionality of human and nonhuman viewpoints while highlighting the entire “household” of God’s creation. The discussion looks at the general upkeep of ecosystems, as well as the relationship between spirituality and ecology, in order to revive a sacred conception of the universe and confront the current environmental crisis.<sup>15</sup> The main argument put up by those who disagree with this viewpoint, is that religious disposition, such as that of Christianity, effectively fosters the idea of human domination over nature, regarding nature as a tool to be used and even exploited for survival and prosperity; some scholars even contend that by teaching followers that God, and thus also humans, transcends nature, theology (in particular Christianity), contributed to the current worldwide environmental disaster. Critics argue that Christianity is inherently anthropocentric, and has lost its application to the natural realm, and is even in some ways destructive to the soul. This critic, also referred to as “The Ecological Complaint”<sup>16</sup>, played a crucial part in the development of ecotheology as a discourse in the 20th century.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, as a theoretical background, it ensures an interactive web of associations and knowledge-dependability. It also serves to give a nuanced understanding of natural philosophical attitudes during the Middle Ages, as it takes in various contexts of the world we perceive, as well as the explicit theological teachings themselves.

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<sup>14</sup> Jaeger (2023), p.14.

<sup>15</sup> For example, see Troster (2013), pp.383–384.

<sup>16</sup> Lynn White (1967). It is recognized that the 12<sup>th</sup> century work of Alain De Lille “De planctu naturae”, is known for “Natures Complaint”, but is not in reference to this “The Ecological Complaint” Of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. <sup>17</sup> Lynn White (1967).

<sup>17</sup> Lynn White (1967).

### 2.3.3 Ecological Wisdom

The ethical challenges of ecological action, the overlapping perspectives of humans and nonhumans, and the current condition of ecology, are central concerns in ecological philosophy, a subfield of natural philosophy. Within this context, ecological wisdom, or “ecosophy,” a term that was coined by Naess in 1973, refer to the theoretical knowledge that Plato called “sophia”, (σοφία) namely, “how to live on Earth appreciating and respecting the complete richness and diversity of life-forms of the ecosphere”.<sup>18</sup> Ecological wisdom (EW) in the context of ecological practice, can be regarded as both individual and collective, and it is suggested that it does not only refers to ”sophia”, but also to the Aristotelian “phronesis,” the “sense of right action” (EK; practical wisdom). That is, the “ecophronesis” in EW defines “the master skill par excellence of moral improvisation to make, and act well upon, right choices in any given circumstance of ecological practice”, i.e., EK. Ecosophy, ecophronesis, and the integration of the two into EW should be considered as the center of current discussions of EW.<sup>19</sup>

While studying traditional ecological knowledge (TEK), a type of ecological knowledge possessed by non-industrial or less technologically advanced communities concerning the interaction between all life and their biophysical environment, the boundary between EW and EK becomes blurry. Grounded in moral, ethical, and spiritual world perspectives, TEK is increasingly understood to be a synergy of various types of information (e.g., facts, opinions, practices, traditions, institutions, etc.). TEK is defined by Berkes as a body of knowledge, practice, and belief concerning the interdependence of living things, (humans, as well as non-humans) and their environment that has been passed down through cultural transmission across time.<sup>20</sup> The religious traditions of a community are part of the knowledge-practice-belief nexus that constitutes TEK<sup>21</sup>. In context of

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<sup>18</sup> Naess (1973).

<sup>19</sup> Chan & Liao (2016).

<sup>20</sup> Chan & Liao (2016). For more on Traditional Ecological Knowledge in Perspective, see Berkes, (1993).

<sup>21</sup> Berkes, (1993).

Hildegard, her epistemology, as well as our own cultural biases becomes challenged.

#### 2.3.4 *Viriditas*

Hildegard is renowned for her own unique term *viriditas*, literally meaning “the greenness”; figuratively, a self-refreshing vegetal power of creation instilled in all finite beings, which has given an impetus to the notion of vegetal power.

The ancients believed that the vegetal soul could grow, perish, and change its state, but not its place, and so vegetative states are usually defined by what faculties they lack, thus becoming passive.<sup>22</sup> Marder’s notion on vegetal power and the vegetative soul, contrasts the traditional meaning and modern conception of vegetative as “lifeless” or “passive”. He contends that such perspective fails to account for the immense ecology, and that we may regard plants as lacking since they exceed our understanding.<sup>23</sup> Regarding the current philosophical focus on non-human animals, and how a language centered on plant life may help us better understand the “non-transcendental conditions of possibility” for interacting with plants rather than viewing them as unknowable entities, Marder’s account on the vegetal world become a new way of analyzing Hildegard’s perception on hearing. By this we can re-assess Hildegard’s natural philosophy and challenge our own ecological wisdom.

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<sup>22</sup> Giglioni (2021), p.346

<sup>23</sup> Fullarton, (2014).

### 3. ANALYSIS

My intention with this thesis is to make my first foray into the land of Hildegard's perception on the senses, by taking a closer look at her notions on hearing and listening within her natural philosophy. In this chapter I will be yielding a general overview on senses and an in-depth essay on the references to hearing, and ears that are made by Hildegard in *Scivias*, after which I will then contrast them with notions on sound and voice, all with the attempt to contextualize their relevance. The analysis will be prolonged in four sections, wherein each section is divided into subsections, for easier reading.

The essay will be presented in the following manner: In section 3.1 an overview on the composition of *Scivias*, Hildegard's introduction, and the notion about "hearing" God will be conveyed upon. In section 3.2 senses are addressed, where traditional thoughts about sensory perception and inter-related perceptual processes are compared with Hildegard's cover on the topic. 3.3, which is dedicated to Natural Philosophy, where Hildegard's natural science and theology is discussed in a broader context. The thrust of the matter in the last section 3.4 concerns that of Ecological Wisdom, where the frame of reference to knowledge and wisdom are to be considered under the duress of ecological complaints, and the pressing matter of an ecological crisis, while also discussing Hildegard's idiosyncratic concept *viriditas* as a vegetal power, setting plants and plantthinking in a relevant context.

By the end of the chapter, I hope to have uncovered Hildegard's thoughts on audial sensory perception that limn her ecological theology, emphasizing the relevance of further research on Hildegard's sensory ecology, ethical practices, and her understanding of humans, as well as plants, animals and the spiritual.

#### 3.1 SCIVIAS

*Scivias* (also known as *Scito vias Domini* or "Know the Ways of the Lord") is divided into three books (or parts) of unequal length, through which twenty-six

prophetic visions are described. It is an extensive opus<sup>24</sup> written in a distinctive style, where Hildegard takes a quite novel approach to the interpretation of her visions by first setting the scene with a powerful narrative. The set-up is about an understanding of God's will, as the title suggests. The manuscript may be regarded as a system-building ecological theory that seeks harmony within the theological framing of the genesis.<sup>25</sup> The third book of *Scivias* contains as many visions as the first two combined, and the thirteenth vision of the third book contains seven longer texts, which Hildegard also set to music as fourteen songs. Worth paying attention to is the fourth vision of the first book, wherein Hildegard discusses the relationship between the spirit and the body. This vision is broken up into three sections, by which it first offers an evocative narrative, followed by insights on human nature and psychology, and then finalized with a set of moral exhortations that leads to good life. Given that Hildegard painted three unique pieces based on this vision, we may consider that it held special significance for her. Sadly, the original manuscript of *Scivias*, with 35 miniatures drawn by herself, was lost during the Second World War.<sup>26</sup>

The Latin source of this thesis is the *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis XLII A Hildegardis Scivias*, edited by Fürkötter in collaboration with Carlevaris.<sup>27</sup> The *Corpus* presents a large appendix on a vast number of terms, such as *viriditas* and *sensus*. In the appendix, senses, sound, and voice are explicated at length on several pages, yet hearing is noted only by just a few lines. Nevertheless, ears (*auris, -es*) are mentioned one-hundred-eight times in the corpus.<sup>28</sup> As for the title, Hildegard describes her vision at length in, for example her letters of correspondence with the monk Wibert von Gembloux in 1175.<sup>29</sup> The letters include, among other things, an appendix that makes direct

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<sup>24</sup> The CCCM, 43 A, consists of 917 pages all together.

<sup>25</sup> Newman (1990).

<sup>26</sup> Newman (1990), pp. 23-23, 28.

<sup>27</sup> Hildegard (1978).

<sup>28</sup> For example, see the index in CCCM see *Sensus* in CCCM, 43. pp. 859–860, or *Viriditas* on pp. 897–898. Reference on hearing is considered in the index under *Auditus* and *Auris*, pp. 680–681.

<sup>29</sup> CIIR, 258–265; Baird & Ehrman (1998), pp. 21–25.



reference to the name *Sciuias*, and when Gembloux addressed the question about the language in which Hildegard receives her visions, about her learning, whether the result of personal study or divine revelation, etc, she replied that she, in a vision also saw that her first book of her visions was to be called *Scivias*, for it was brought forth by the way of the Living Light and not through any human instruction.<sup>30</sup>

### 3.1.1 Hearing God

Hildegard only explains how she had the visions to *Scivias* in the introduction and the afterword of the volumes; the remainder of the book is devoted to the details of the visions and, more crucially, their interpretation. In the introduction Hildegard writes:

*“It happened...when I was forty-two years and seven months old, a fiery light of the greatest brightness, coming from the open sky, pierced my whole brain and my whole heart and my whole chest were like a flame... it ignited... I was aware of the volumes of both the old and new testaments of other Catholics...I believe the visions I saw, not in dreams, nor sleeping, nor in frenzy, nor in the corporeal eyes or ears of the outer man. I did not perceive them in hidden places, but I received them, watching and looking around in the pure mind, eyes, and ears of the inner man, in open places, according to the will of God. How it is, it is difficult for a carnal man to find out.”<sup>31</sup>*

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<sup>30</sup> Baird & Ehrman, *The Letters of Hildegard of Bingen* (1998), p.24.

<sup>31</sup> *Factum est... cum quadraginta duorum annorum septemque mensium essem, maximae coruscationis igneum lumen aperto caelo ueniens totum cerebrum meum transfudit et totum cor totumque pectus meum uelut flamma... inflammauit... Et repente intellectum expositionis librorum, uidelicet psalterii, euangelii et aliorum catholicorum tam ueteris quam noui testamenti uoluminum sapiebam... Visiones uero quas uidi, non eas in somnis, nec dormiens, nec in phrenesi, nec corporeis oculis aut auribus exterioris hominis, nec in abditis locis percepi, sed eas uigilans et circumspecta in pura mente, oculis et auribus interioris hominis, in apertis locis, secundum uoluntatem Dei accepi. Quod quomodo sit, carnali homini perquirere difficile est.* (CCCM, 43. I, pp.3-5). The translation made is of my own, with the support of Newmans work.

Hildegard's assertion to voice hearing is considerable, as she professes that she heard a voice from heaven [*audiui uocem de caelo*].<sup>32</sup> By such notion, she puts forth herself as the one chosen by God, chosen to follow the prophets of the Old Testament. The prophetic quality of Hildegard's spirituality can be used to explain the odd disregard for her own subjectivity in *Scivias*.

Undoubtedly, it is evident that Hildegard expends significant effort in elucidating her lack in formal education. In a letter to Eberhard, Bishop of Bamberg, Hildegard writes that her words are not hers, and to Arnold, Archbishop of Cologne, she continues to assert that her "genuine visions" foretell a heavenly setting. She adds, "I remind you that it (the book) contains nothing originating from human wisdom nor from my own will, but rather it contains those truths which the unfailing Light wished to reveal through his own words".<sup>33</sup>

*Scivias* details Hildegard's perception on the crucial role of sound in the Scripture and in her visions, and her approach to sound reflects historical contexts. The core of Hildegard's writing lies in the protagonist's heightened sensitivity to spiritual voices. This phenomenon finds resonance with many of her contemporaries, who viewed voice-hearing as a subject that warrants explanation, justification, and exploration within the context of medieval philosophy. The utilization of voice hearing as a narrative tool has been observed in several of the most fundamental literary works of the Middle Ages. The medieval perspective on nature presupposes the presence of a "supernatural" element and provides a comprehensive theoretical structure for elucidating such occurrences that diverges from modern comprehension.<sup>34</sup>

The private and imaginative nature of the spiritual hearing from God in *Scivias* is indicated by the fact that there seems to be no clear distinction between a vision and a dream. God makes himself known through his word, which is found in the

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<sup>32</sup> CCCM, 43. I, p. 3, and see Newman (1990), p. 22, 55.

<sup>33</sup> Baird & Ehrman, *The Letters of Hildegard of Bingen*, 1994, p. 53.

<sup>34</sup> For more on the art of medicine and the perspective of voice hearing in Middle Ages, see Saunders, (2015).

Scriptures, in both the Old and New Testament. The sense of the matter is that due to the fact that God “speaks”, it is incumbent upon man to pay attention and listen.

### 3.2 SENSES

Macpherson’s puts forth in her work on senses, that Aristotle maintains that one might learn something, by comparing it to one’s own sensory capabilities. Perceptual items can, on his account, be broken down into their most basic perceptual shapes, where one sensory feature could be a single colour, sound, or smell.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, each perceptual trait corresponds to a distinct sensory modality, or “genus” of perception, making it a perceptual capacity. Aristotle argues that what can be perceived and what is really perceived are one and the same thing, yet different “in being” (or “in definition”), since one is the observed object and the other the perceiving subject.<sup>36</sup> Macpherson notes in her work, that Aristotle puts a great deal of confidence in a causal connection between things that share features.<sup>37</sup>

Hildegard claims that senses have the faculty or power of perceiving and receiving. Senses, which she discusses in particular in the fourth vision of the first book under the title *Sensus*, “is that to which the work of the inner powers of the soul adheres, so that they are understood through him by the fruits of each work”<sup>38</sup>. By this, Hildegard equates senses with the emotion or propensity for affection that is responsible for producing the “fruitful” work, that results from sensation, as interpreted by man in the outcome of each activity of the senses. For Hildegard, man is subject to senses because they lead him to work, function and act. However, the senses do not impose work on the soul’s interior power

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<sup>35</sup> Macpherson (2011).

<sup>36</sup> See (DA426a15-17) and (Yrjönsuuri & Silva, 2014), pp. 33–34.

<sup>37</sup> (Macpherson, 2011), p. 29

<sup>38</sup> *Sensus euro est cup opus interiorum uirium animate adhaeret, ita quod ipsae in fructibus cuiusque operas per eum intelleguntur.* (CCCM, 43, 1, 4.24; p.82).

since they are their shadow [*quoniam umbra earum est*]<sup>39</sup>. The analogy to the vegetal is immanent. The power of becoming is intrinsic. In Hildegard's writings, *umbra* becomes not only the fading shadow, but it is also the foreshadowing, the sheltering, the seeding that has the ever-becoming force, like that of a vegetal power.<sup>40</sup> Unfailing light, heavenly wisdom, plants, and the elements are some of the things brought to light here.

Marder argues that within Hildegard's psychophysiology, "the soul expresses themselves in the power of the body indexed to that kind of soul".<sup>41</sup> With Hildegard's ecology, the soul vivifies the body and breathes the senses, and the body attracts the soul to itself and opens the senses.<sup>42</sup> Her work expounds on the concept of the development of the soul, situating humanity within a larger cosmic framework. According to Hildegard's writing in *Scivias*, the human being is comprised of three distinct components: the soul, the body, and the senses. These notions define human existence and experience.

Hildegard gives an explanatory sentiment for the powers of the soul; arguing that they remain in secret before man is born. The outer first perishes with the senses in the mother's womb before man is born, the other powers of the soul remain in secret.<sup>43</sup> From that follows a discussion of the natural powers of soul and body in *Scivias*, whether it be the intellect or moral judgement, the will, the reason, and/or the senses. Hildegard's perception on soul and body are that they are meant to cooperate harmoniously.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> *Et ille eis subiectus est, quia eum ad opus perducunt, non autem ipse eis opus imponit, quoniam umbra earum est, faciens secundum quod ipsis placuerit.* (CCCM, 43, 1, 4.24; p.82).

<sup>40</sup> *umbra*: Verb 2nd sg pres imperat act – sometimes understood as planting; symbolic for foreshadowing; sheltering; covering as a protection.

<sup>41</sup> Marder, Saint Hildegard's Vegetal PsychoPhysio-Theology (2018), p. 2.

<sup>42</sup> *Anima corpus uiuificat est sensus exspriat; corpus autem animan sibi attrahit et sensus aperit;* (CCCM, 43, 1, 4.18; p.79).

<sup>43</sup> *Sed et exterior homo in primis cum sensu in enter matrix antequam homo nascatur euigilat, ceteris uiribus animae adhuc in abscondito.* (I. 4.24; CCCM 43, p.83)

<sup>44</sup> Newman (1990), p. 29

### 3.2.1 Traditional Notions on the Perception of Sound

In terms of perception, there are two schools of thought that have emerged over the course of philosophical history. The receptive model of Aristotle is arguably the view that is most widely embraced.<sup>45</sup> According to that view, the perceiver picks up a shape from some external body, or perceived item. The body's form is fully and properly realized in the mind, albeit without the body's physical components, if the transmission from the external body to the perceptible organ and the organ itself are both functioning "normally".<sup>46</sup> With its focus on the relationship between experience and knowledge, one may argue that this one principle serves as the foundation for the entire empirical tradition. Few proponents of the "reception" paradigm would contest the role of the mind in perception, particularly when interpreting sensory information. How much of the contents of perception one is aware of depends on both the external object and the activity of the perceiving mind.<sup>47</sup>

The alternative rendition may lack empiric appropriate construction. In that theory, the individual who is engaged in the act of perception is the focal point of attention within this thinking, which primarily pertain to the nativist perspective on the mind, positing that certain facets of human cognition are not amenable to external scrutiny. The origin of concepts and information is commonly attributed to the mind, which is believed to possess either inherent knowledge or innate abilities. The act of observation is primarily focused on familiar or meaningful aspects of the environment, including objects that are recognizable, and fulfill personal needs or expectations, as well as objects that elicit curiosity. Upon venturing into the external environment, consider this: We tactually explore our surroundings, scan for stimuli, and selectively attend to stimuli that are recognizable, salient or personally meaningful. The differentiation lies in the extent to which either the perceived object or the perceiving mind's activity plays a more significant role in understanding the contents of perception.

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<sup>45</sup> Remes, (2015), p.9.

<sup>46</sup> For more on this see Richard Sorabji's writing: *Aristotle on Demarcating the Five Senses* in Macpherson (2011), pp. 64–100.

<sup>47</sup> Yrjönsuuri & Silva (2014), pp. 9–10.

The notion of active perception is often traced back to Plato's *Timaeus*, where the depiction of a line of sight extending from the observer's eye to the object in question is frequently referenced (42e–47e, 64d–69a).<sup>48</sup> Plato is frequently acknowledged as the originator of the notion that perception is not solely a passive process of receiving stimuli from the environment, but rather an active faculty that enables comprehension of it. For Hildegard, there seems to be a close connection between the perceiver and the object being described. Vision thirteen, titled “Symphony of the Blessed,” contains some of her most overt assertions regarding the importance of music, i.e., sound, in her work, and the use of Platonic allegory in Hildegard's sermons has been linked to the *Timaeus*.<sup>49</sup>

### 3.2.1 The sense of hearing

*But he who sees with watchful eyes and hears with resounding ears, let him here offer a kiss of embrace to My mystical words, a living emanation from me.*<sup>50</sup>

The issue of hearing is more convoluted than it may appear at first glance. For instance, many confuse hearing and listening to be one and the same. But there is a major difference between these two notions. When we claim that we “hear” a sound, we are able to conceptually disentangle the experience from its materialization. The ability to hear, in its most basic definition, is the capacity to detect and process audial sensory data, i.e., it is a form of audial coding, which is the power of perceiving sounds. The term “sound” however encompasses not only audible signals, but also those that are interpreted or uninterpreted, heard or unheard.<sup>51</sup>

Aristotle states that the movement of the medium (often air, but water is allowed as well) is transmitted to the ear when something is struck (DA 420a4ff.).

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<sup>48</sup> Remes (2015), p.9.

<sup>49</sup> Macpherson (2011), p.67 and Remes (2015), pp. 9–11.

<sup>50</sup> *Sed qui uigilantibus oculis uidet et sonantibus auribus audit, hic mysticis uerbis meis osculum amplexionis praebeat, de me uiuente eman.* (CCCM, 43; pp.123; 132; 158;171; 224; 306; 325)

<sup>51</sup> O'Callaghan (2021).

According to Plato, sound is not the same as hearing. For Plato, sound is “the percussion of air through the ears upon the brain and the blood and transferred to the soul” (67b1–4). On his account, when we hear percussions or the drumming, we experience a physical response that begins in the ear and continues all the way to the liver (67b4–5).<sup>52</sup> An issue arises: Is there any significance to the fact that the objects of hearing are always treated as if they had no relation to the sense that receives them? And what about the thought, that sound is produced physically when percussion instruments impact objects? If we differentiate the senses based on types of “proximal stimulation”, then the use of such abilities should not be considered as the utilization of truly distinct senses, but rather as the expansion or refinement of the senses.

Hildegard holds, in the sixth vision, in the second book of *Scivias*, that there are five ways of communication, and she contest that those who wish to receive the divine mystery from their cleric, should free the five senses of their body from the dregs of their sin [*sui a faece peccatorum suorum*], and let them dignify and laudably guard them from the infiltrating impurity, so that they may perceive the same, wholesomely, i.e., healthfully.<sup>53</sup>

The integration and muddle of *Scivias's* senses is likened to Hildegard's synesthesia.<sup>54</sup> God, Lucifer, and human actions are all associated by the reader (or listener) with their own bodily senses and functions. The significant motivations from both Redemption's and humanity's pasts are illuminated by this connection.<sup>55</sup> Hildegard's figurative language becomes a representation of abstract ideas, and when one contrast sensory experiences, discernible differences between different characters in the History of Salvation are revealed.

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<sup>52</sup> Remes (2015), p. 20.

<sup>53</sup> *illi qui per ceptionem diuini mysterii a sacerdote suo accipere, quinque sensus corporis sui a faece peccatorum suorum emun dent et eos a surripiente immunditia digne et laudabiliter custodiant, ut tantum salubrius idem percipiant.* (II. 6. 51, CCCM 43, p. 273).

<sup>54</sup> The phenomenon of synesthesia is characterized by the occurrence of involuntary experiences in a second sensory or cognitive pathway as a result of stimulation of one sensory or cognitive pathway.

<sup>55</sup> Mews (1998).

### **3.3 NATURAL PHILOSOPHY**

Our understanding of evolutionary mechanisms has advanced, and we have gained the ability to articulate their impact on the interconnected and interrelated spectrum of life, varying all from the macrocosmic scale to the subatomic and quantum levels. The empirical perspective has become the most common way to understand the world, people, and the scientific method. Under these conditions, non-renewable and ecologically detrimental energy sources, pesticides, and synthetic materials have been introduced, and is persistently being discharged into the environment without adequate consideration. Because of the way the universe and our place in it are currently understood, it can be challenging for scholars to formulate a cogent argument for the existence of a higher power that can create and sustain life in the face of serious cosmological, and anthropogenic affliction. However, there has been a discernible change in Western consciousness towards a novel, interrelated, and comprehensive understanding of our world.

A deeper comprehension of the interconnections between people and their surroundings, as well as the historical and non-human aspects of the world, has the potential to lead to an advancement in ecological awareness and ethical behaviors, that is in reconciliation with our ecosystem. That is why, in the current sifting ecological crisis, Hildegard's insight becomes of particular interest. Not only was she renowned for her visions, but she was given the responsibility of overseeing the medicinal herb garden and infirmary at the monastery, and her approach to treating patients involved a combination of Western medicine and spiritual healing. Her insight is grounded in 12th century real-world experiences, which encompasses spirituality as a given.

#### **3.3.1 Ecological Theology**

According to the White's ecological complaint, and critics agreeing with him, theology, and in particular, Christianity, is intrinsically anthropocentric, and has become disconnected from the natural world.<sup>56</sup> The conceptual framework of

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<sup>56</sup> Lynn White (1967).



Hildegard's natural (ecological) philosophy can survive such critique.

Hildegard's "theology," emerges from the intersection of her unique personal experience, and the general milieu of twelfth-century intellectual life, specifically monastic life. Understanding Hildegard's theology as a direct response to her immediate community reframes it and highlights its similarities to twelfth-century methods of theological instruction. Analysis of her writings reveals a systematic methodology of theological instruction, including her use of classical rhetoric. Additionally, her concerns for spiritual welfare are reflected in a customized presentation of theological topics. For Hildegard, Christ is the fundamental element, whereas the divine and malevolent forces are illustrated as dynamic phenomena.<sup>57</sup> Within her theology, the Creator is identified with the Incarnate Word. In contradistinction to the entities of Father and Satan, Christ is imbued with sensory capabilities.<sup>58</sup> The theological notions pertaining to the Son of God as portrayed in the Gospel, and the apprehension of His corporeal presence in the Eucharist, carry equivalent weight in this conception of divinity, signifying an emphasis on empirical understanding. On Hildegard's account, the human form is inscribed into the center of the cosmos, just as Christ, or incarnate Love, is written into the center of time. Hildegard's brilliant allegories and intricate numerological links are used to elaborately lay out the consequence of her visions.<sup>59</sup> Hildegard's dialectical process in *Scivias* resulted a comprehensive philosophy that encompasses the entirety of the human being and all that is around us.

### **3.3.2 The Human and the Macrocosm**

Hildegard's perspective on natural science is based on her original synthesis of Christian philosophy and classical Greek and Roman medicine, which she incorporated into her conventional methodology. She is credited for progressing the Galen four-fluid theory, as well as the doctrine of the four elements, which

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<sup>57</sup> Ginther (2021), pp. 85–104.

<sup>58</sup> Mews (1998).

<sup>59</sup> Newman (1990), p. 16.

are fire, air, water, and earth. According to Hildegard, a person's blood, phlegm, black bile, and yellow bile must all be in a balance for their health to be at its best.

In contrast to the ancient physicians, who accorded equal importance to all four humours, Hildegard classified light bile and blood as superior humours, called *flegmata*, while designating dark bile and phlegm as inferior humours.<sup>60</sup> This involved separating the ethereal fire and air from the corporeal water and earth. Along with these quartets, Hildegard developed a methodical justification for the relationship between the universe and the human cosmos. According to Hildegard, the overpowering of lower humours is to blame for the development of diseases.<sup>61</sup> A person is said to be in good health if their body's fluids and elements are in a condition of equilibrium.

Hildegard asserts to the understanding of the human body as a "microcosm", in which each element represents a certain quality of the material, ethical, and spiritual worlds.<sup>62</sup> Her interest accounts for an extraordinary uniformity with that which everything was connected. By the words of Hildegard, the body is drawn to and touched by the senses. The soul gives life to the body, having to principal powers, namely, understanding and will, and so through these powers, the soul manifests itself, as the sun manifests itself by its brightness. Therefore, man is not mere a bundle of marrow, and should pay attention to the knowledge from the Scriptures.<sup>63</sup> Reason is revealed as the sound of the soul, which originates all works, whether they be of God or of man, in both understanding and will.<sup>64</sup> In the first book, forth vision and eighteenth passage, Hildegard expresses:

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<sup>60</sup> Jaeger (2023), p. 19.

<sup>61</sup> Jaeger (2023), pp. 19–22.

<sup>62</sup> Newman (1990), p.23.

<sup>63</sup> *Homo autem tres semitas in habet. [...] Animam, corpus et sensus. In his uita hominis exercetur. Quomodo Anima corpus uiuificat est sensus exspriat; corpus autem animan sibi attrahit et sensus aperit; sensus uero animan tangunt et corpus alliciunt. Anima enim corpori uitam praebet, uelut duo brachia habens; non quod anima brachia se ad mouendum habeat, sed quod in his uiribus se manifestat uelut sol per splendorem suum se declarat. Vunde, o homo, quae non es sacina medullalarum, in scientia Scripturarum attende.* (CCCM, 43, 1, 4.18; p.79).

<sup>64</sup> *Sed et in intellectu et in uoluntate ratio uelut sonitus animae ostenditur, quae quodque opus siue Dei siue hominis sit profert.* (I. 4. 23; CCCM, 43, p. 82).

*And these two other lines are in the form of a crown. This is because those faithful who direct the five senses of their body to heaven, knowing that they have been redeemed by the five wounds of the Son of God, attain to the love of God and of their neighbor with every year and circuit of their mind, when they ignore the lust of their hearts and put their hope inward.*<sup>65</sup>

Her account requires contemplation of the cosmos and its proportions, which may be approached with veneration.

### **3.3.3 The Nature of Sound**

In contemporary time of Hildegard, it was commonly believed that sound and music was everywhere, whether or not anybody could hear it. This included the heavenly spheres and the innermost parts of a person's soul. The language we use to describe what we hear is illustrative of the paradoxical duality of sound. What is it that we hear when we say that have an auditory experience? When we say that "we hear the wind whistling through the treetops", we are not only referring to the perceptible features of sound, but also the sources of such; and so, the meaning of it all. In the first book, forth vision and twenty-third passage, Hildegard's notion on sound, and its contingency, is expressed in the following manner:

*For the sound lifts the word aloft, as the wind lifts the eagle so that it may fly. So also, the soul emits the sound of reason both in the hearing and in the understanding of men, in so far as its powers are understood and that every work is brought to perfection. But the body is the tabernacle and relief of all the powers of the soul, since the soul remaining in the body works with the body and the body with it, whether it be good or bad.*<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> *Quod autem et acies istae alias duas in modum coronae cir-hoc est quod fideles illi qui quinque sensus corporis sui ad superna dirigunt scientes quia per quinque uulnera Filii Dei redempti sunt, ad dilectionem Dei et proximi sui omni annisu et circuitione mentis suae perueniunt, cum uoluptatem cordis sui neglegunt et spem suam ad interna ponunt.* (CCCM 43, 1.6; 8, pp. 105–16.)

<sup>66</sup> *Sonitus enim uerbum in altum tollit, sicut uentus qui aquilam subleuat, ut uolare possit. Ita et anima sonitum rationis et in auditu et in intellectu hominum emittit,*

Hildegard focused heavily on auditory experience, and her auditory experience highlights the unpredictability and pervasiveness of sound's ability to reach us. Sometimes against our own choice.

### 3.3.4 The Nature of Hearing

The physiological act of receiving and processing sound is more fundamental to the idea of hearing, than the cognitive process of understanding and empathizing with the body of that voice. Listening however, becomes the notion about actively attending to the transmission of sound waves in order to decode and interpret them. Listening is also about the acquired ability to process auditory information and generate conclusions about what it means. Simply put, listening is a process through mind or awareness. Even though hearing and listening are two separate activities, they both require the use of a sensory organ. To what extent and under what circumstances does the human ear actively interact in the realm of sound, becomes an interesting matter. Hildegard's writing stresses an importance of attentive listening.<sup>67</sup> For her, to listen is to be ardent, to be dedicated. In twelve entries, all in the third book of *Scivias*, she puts forth:

*But he who has sharp ears of inner understanding, here in the ardent love of my mirror, yearns for these words and writes them down in the consciousness of his soul.*<sup>68</sup>

In its most effective form, the history of the understanding and perception on the senses is explanatory. It enables historians and philosophers to elaborate by

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*quatenus uires ipsius intellegantur et ut quodque opus ad perfectum ducatur. Corpus autem omnium uirium animae tabernaculum et subleuamen est, quoniam anima in corpore manens cum corpore operatur et corpus cum illa, siue bonum siue malum sit.* (CCCM, 43; 1.4,23; p. 82)

<sup>67</sup> This is also argued by Marder. For example, see Marder, *Green Mass: The Ecological Theology of St. Hildegard of Bingen* (2021), p.57–58.

<sup>68</sup> *Qui autem acutas aures interioris intellectus habet, hic in ardente amore speculi mei ad uerba haec anhelet et ea in conscientia animi sui conscribat.* (CCCM, 43; p. 347; 370; 388; 407; 431; 461; 476; 514; 544; 573; 603; 613; 636.

referencing both visual and non-visual senses on a phenomenon that makes little or no sense if understood solely as an orthoscopic phenomenon, and historians have recently begun to apply their findings to Western medicine, clarifying their relationship to the socio-cultural ecologies from which they developed. Rather than focusing solely on one sense's past, sensory historians often look at how that of senses has been constructed socially and culturally, and how it has had a part in texturing earlier eras.<sup>69</sup> This is where Hildegard work becomes important for further research. The psychophysical scaling in *Scivias* is prevalent, putting certain tension to hearing. The judgement of attributes or objects of perception is understood under the soul's ability on her account, by which perceptions are linked. For Hildegard, the soul's power is mixed with the ability to think and reason; but it has its own direction and goal; a power that gives us access to the world and its comprehensible order; a power that can be developed and be finetuned by continuously perceiving and rationally developing on what is perceived. It is a power through which human beings learn some of the most basic things in the world.

### 3.4 ECOLOGICAL WISDOM

The precise nature and origins of the potential sources and influences that Hildegard may have consulted are not well-established, given that St. Disibod suffered significant damage in a fire in 1504, and was deserted by 1560. The library which was deemed as the primary repository of her literary sources has become untraceable. However, Disibodenberg and the adjacent monasteries are renowned for having exceptional libraries in the Middle Ages, and the nearby cities, such as Mainz and Frankfurt, were home to some of the greatest minds.<sup>70</sup> Nevertheless, her notions of ecological literacy diverge significantly from the literacy connoted by refined Latin, the Scholastics, and the cultural paradigms that have been established to facilitate comprehension of the natural world, and Hildegard herself continuesly lays forth that she is uneducated:

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<sup>69</sup> Yrjönsuuri & Silva (2014).

<sup>70</sup> Jaeger (2023).

*O you who are a miserable earth and in the name of a woman uneducated from any doctrine of carnal teachers, that is to say, to read letters through the understanding of philosophers, but only touched by my light, which touches you internally with a fire like the burning sun, cry and tell and write these mysteries of mine which you see and you hear in a mystical vision.*<sup>71</sup>

According to others, Hildegard desired to distinguish herself from the secular writers she had to read, in order to uphold her assertion of divine inspiration, as well as do to the fact that Bernard of Clairvaux, one of her correspondents, had been so critical of Peter Abelard for his materialistic outlook.

The introductions and conclusions of Hildegard's autobiographies typically place a greater emphasis on her femininity, poor health, and lack of education than on the actual discoveries. The disclaimers are intended to strengthen Hildegard's legitimacy by revealing her lack of worldly traditions and training, rather than just as simple modesty topos. We should look at Hildegard's illumination also in the perspective of medieval female history. For instance, the gifts of wisdom [*sapientia*] were frequently given to males to aid them in their knowledge [*scientia*], but in women's lives *sapientia* is more frequently said to come to the absolutely illiterate, who are empty canvases waiting for God to write on them. For Hildegard, the key was to demonstrate that she had not had an education in line with societal norms, and that she relied alone on God to sustain her foolishness. Hildegard grounded herself in a form of unlearned wisdom [*indocta sapientia*].<sup>72</sup> The drawbacks of Hildegard's "ill"-literacy, associated with "non-polished language", stem from the fact that her wisdom is non-analytical and not just focused on the mind. She is different from the learned men around her in that she has a synesthesia, a whole-body experience of

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<sup>71</sup> *'O quae es misera terra et in nomine femineo indocta de ulla doctrina carnalium magistrorum, scilicet legere litteras per intellegentiam philosophorum, sed tantum tacta lumine meo, quod tangit te interius cum incendio ut ardens sol, clama et enarra ac scribe haec mysteria mea quae uides et audis in mystica uisione.* (II.1. CCCM 43), p.112

<sup>72</sup> For more on her "ill"-literacies", see Marder, *The Ecological Literacies of St. Hildegard of Bingen* (2021), p. 3, and Jaeger (2023).

knowledge that gives her a special connection to the heavenly, elemental, and vegetative realms.<sup>73</sup> Hildegard’s sapiential theology, is like an interactive web, where value of her “ill”-literacy can be seen as a different kind of literacy.<sup>74</sup>

### 3.4.1 Traditional Ecological Knowledge

Hildegard is credited with espousing the earliest rationalist concepts, which some scholars contend initiated a progressive trajectory culminating in contemporary scientific methodology.<sup>75</sup> Although Hildegard had acquired a remarkably broad cultural background by the time she wrote *Scivias*, her pragmatic approach to her work necessitated her disavowal of any education beyond “simple reading”. Hildegard highlights the prophetic status of her hearing, while simultaneously expressing disapproval towards the scholarly clerics whom she believed were responsible for the need for her mission. In the third book, second vision, twelfth passage, she contends:

*And in the very agitation of his desires he has the choice of the will of that cause which he desires, and he turns himself to this with the will of the work, as if extending his hand to it, that is, accomplishing the good work by helping God through grace, and accomplishing the evil by lying in wait for the devil through the suggestion of his arts, man himself observing these things in the science of rationality. For in the same knowledge, he looks at good and evil, and from this arises in him the desire to choose from two causes, the visible good and the evil according to his own will.*<sup>76</sup>

Hildegard’s perspective on her role as a speaker may suggest a lack of attentiveness to the human element, as she viewed herself as a conduit for another voice, rather than an independent speaker. She seamlessly switches from

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<sup>73</sup> Hildegard and synaesthesia, see for example Henderson (2003), p. 143.

<sup>74</sup> For more on this, see for example Marder, *The Ecological Literacies of St. Hildegard of Bingen* (2021), p. 1-7.

<sup>75</sup> Anderson (2021).

<sup>76</sup> *Et in ipsa commotione desideriorum habet optionem uoluntatis illius causae quam desiderat, et ad hanc uertit se cum uoluntate operis quasi manum ad hoc porrigendo, scilicet bonum opus perficiens adiuuante Deo per gratiam, et malum peragens insidiantem diabolo per suggestionem artium suarum, ipso homine haec inspiciente in scientia rationalitatis. Nam in eadem scientia inspicit bonum et malum, et inde oritur in ipso desiderium optionis de duabus causis, boni uidelicet et mali secundum uoluntatem ipsius.* (CCCM. 43), 3. 2:12, p. 358.

preaching about God to speaking in God's behalf in the first person. She also asserts that God is the author of her entire work and threatens terrible divine retribution on anyone who dares to change a single word. By contrasting her own voice with God's, Hildegard achieves a level of credibility and strength that was unheard of for a woman in the Middle Ages.

*And thus heaven receives the elect into the glory of eternity, because they themselves loved the ruler of heaven; and hell will absorb the reprobate, because they did not cast off the devil; so with all the joys resounding in the heavenly glory, and all the groans with so many howls in hell, beyond what the human understanding can grasp: because they possess eternal life, and these have eternal death, as my Son speaks in the Gospel saying.*<sup>77</sup>

The prophetic self-awareness that permeates all of Hildegard's works, explains not only their particularly objective or outward-directed substance, but also many of their stylistic characteristics. In a letter written in 1175 to Guibert of Gembloux, Hildegard explains that "Whatever I see or learn in this vision I retain for a long period of time, and store away in my memory. And my seeing, hearing, and knowing are simultaneous, so that I learn and know at the same instant. But I have no knowledge of anything. I do not see, because I am unlearned"<sup>78</sup>. Hildegard further goes on to explain that the man flies with the two wings of rationality, where the right wing is good knowledge, and the left wing is bad knowledge, and evil serves the good, and good is practiced and controlled by evil, and by it all this is made wise<sup>79</sup>. For Hildegard, the contemplative perspective is distinguished by the significant advancement of receptive

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<sup>77</sup> *Et sic caelum electos in gloriam aeternitatis recipit, quoniam ipsi dominatorem caelo dilexerunt ; et infernus reprobos absorbet, quia diabolum non abiecerunt ; ita omnium gaudiorum tantis laudibus in caelesti gloria resonantibus, et omnium gemituum tantis ulu latibus in inferno exortis ultra quam humanus intellectus capere ualeat : quoniam illi uitam aeternam possident, et isti mortem aeternam habent, quemadmodum in euangelio Filius meus loquitur dicens.* (CCCM, 43), 3. 13, p. 612.

<sup>78</sup> *quod autem non uideo, illud nescio, quia indocta sum.* See Baird & Ehrman, *The Letters of Hildegard of Bingen* (1998). Letter 103r, p.23; 202.

<sup>79</sup> *Dextera alla scientia bona est et sinistra mala scientia est, et mala bone ministrat bonaque per mallam acuitur et regitur, atque in cunctis per illam sapiens efficitur.* See Baird & Ehrman, *The Letters of Hildegard of Bingen* (1998), p. 24; 202.



consciousness, which includes intuitive-empathic perception and judgment capabilities. These capabilities complement and enhance the more active faculties of sensing and thinking. The mystical or contemplative viewpoint is predominantly non-dual in nature, wherein active and receptive consciousness are expressed. However, there is an inclination towards active rational consciousness.

### 3.4.2 *Viriditas*

What distinguishes Hildegard, from her contemporaries, is her notion on *viriditas*. In 1148, Hildegard made a request to Pope Eugenius in a letter, stating: “Prepare this writing for the hearing of those who receive me and make it *viridem*<sup>80</sup> with the juice of sweet flavor, and you will have eternal life”.<sup>81</sup> In *Scivias*, Hildegard’s idiosyncratic concept *viriditas* describe the interdependence of nature’s well-being and human wellness, which is an enigmatic “green” life energy that is in plants, that is essential to people and the source of all healing: It is a “green power”, and in the forshadow of all her writing.

Marder’s account on the matter is illustrative to all the aspiration on plant intelligence that can be seen in Hildegard’s natural philosophy. He argues that the plant’s expansion is evidence of its special receptivity to diversity; rather of turning inside, as it has no self to return to, it continues to look outward and protect the uniqueness of others. Through the using of *viriditas*, the dynamic force that imparts vitality and growth, all living entities existing within the spaces of both the physical and metaphysical dimensions of existence, whether in a state of introspective reflection or active engagement, are empowered on Hildegard’s account.

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<sup>80</sup> *Viridem*, can be understood as: the most general designation for every shade of that color; or/and cause to grow.

<sup>81</sup> *Et fac illam viridem in suco suavis gustus; make it a root of the branches and a leaf flying into the face of the devil [et radicem ramorum et Volans folium contra diabolum]* (Epist. II, 24-26; CCCM 91, p.8).

Hildegard's words convey a vegetal power that surpasses all of us. Hildegard's writings consistently display an interplay with the vegetal power of *viriditas*. The concept does not possess an immutable existence, nor does it serve as a fixed reference point that ensures stability to the entire system. Rather, it represents a dynamic and static force that embodies growth, vitality, and potentiality. Within this realm, *viriditas* is as a vegetal power, receptive and generating force, that touches upon all living.

Hildegard was a teacher of contemplation, and for her, ecological wisdom is fundamentally about “the right way to do the right thing” and argues for ecological justice.<sup>82</sup> Wisdom comes from the dynamic force of *viriditas*, and through the sense of hearing, it becomes an interface between all forms of life. On her account, our thoughts and action, i.e., the inner listening, in relation to voice, which all bodies have, shapes who we are and those around us. For Hildegard, humans have responsibility to use rationality wisely, and voice the living, which she so eloquently puts forth in the third book, thirteenth vision, in the thirteenth passage:

*And as the power of God, flying everywhere, pervades all things, and resists no obstacle to it, so also the rationality of man has a great power to sound in the voices of the living, and to arouse the numb souls to vigilance in symphonies.*<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Newman (1990), p.47

<sup>83</sup> *Et ut potestas Dei ubique uolans omnia circuit nec ei ullum obstaculum resistit, ita et rationalitas hominis magnam uim habet in uiuis uocibus sonare et torpentes animas ad uigilantiam in symphonia excitare.* (CCCM. 43, 3.13:13, p. p. 631).

## 4. CONCLUSION

*There can be no wisdom where there is no understanding.*

*-Proverbs 21:30*

By default, we bias our perceptions to align with our beliefs. When we establish a goal, an intention, or focus on acquiring knowledge, it is essential that it aligns with our highest values. The congruence results in our identities being centered around that goal, and our specialized knowledge in that area is emphasized, ultimately filling our teleological purpose in that area. One of the most crucial aspects that is omitted from the undisclosed information of this, pertains to the importance of refraining from expending time on activities that do not align with our utmost priorities. This is due to the fact that we will filter out sensory awareness; as a result, we will require external motivation to act. The likelihood of attaining the active role of acquiring new understanding is contingent upon the level of alignment between our values and aspirations, and our authentic pursuits. Our ontological identity is centered around this aspect and represents the epitome of our true identity, and part of the very essence of the writings of Hildegard.

This thesis analysis proposed that Hildegard's auditory awareness inspired a systematic theological work by Hildegard, from which sounds and voicehearing, her underlying "ecological theology" can be derived. Hildegard conceptualizes the roles of human and divine vocal sound in the redemption process, and her analyses of the good and negative connotations; metaphorical and concrete; of hearing references throughout her writings are present thorough out *Scivias*. Hearing on Hildegard's note is articulated through "ears of inner discernment", which is essential for her ecological wisdom, which is concerned with ethical behaviour; encouraging ecological justice.

Hildegard was remarkable in her fortitude in the transformational power of sound and hearing of such, diligently preserving the integrity of her voice and visions. She professed in her work that sound, music, and voice possess ultimate divine power. Because of Hildegard's early encounters with sounds, including that of hearing God's voice, she came to strongly believe in the transformative power of sounds and the perceptual process of aural experiences as a force of and for religious revelation. At the outset of her writing, Hildegard contrasts a wide variety of sounds, but the underlying metaphor remained constant: "noise" and "roar" always represented the presence of evil.

Ecological theology takes its bearing in humanity's relationship with the natural world, with most understanding of reality pointing to wholeness, and to the priority of all opposites and conditional experiences. And so, the philosophy turns against tide of relativism or confessional counter-reaction. It accepts that environmental problems have a substantial and reasonable basis in reality, where modern critique, more shows up as the limitations of scientific analysis and theological dogmas. The same applies for Hildegard. For her, both in the understanding and in the will, reason is shown as the sound of the soul, which brings forth every work, whether of God or of man. Her notion on aural perception inclines some sort of vegetal power as the interplay between all that surrounds us. She argues for an attentive listening to all that is around us.

Further research and discussions on Hildegard's perception on the role of contemplation, noise-pollution, and the influence on the relation between humans, plants and the more-than-human-world needs to be assessed.

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