

QUEER SPACES: An Atlas of LGBTQIA+ Places and Stories

Edited by Adam Nathaniel Furman and Joshua Mardell, RIBA Publishing, 2022



What defines a space as queer? This volume, formulated as an atlas or collection of different examples, traverses history and the globe in search of those spaces in which queer people have found themselves and their community. From architectural follies to institutional spaces to re-appropriated environments, the book celebrates an intangible

language of architecture. Above is the fantastical neo-Gothic facade of Plas Newydd, the home of the so-called "Ladies of Llangollen", Lady Eleanor Butler (1739–1829) and the Hon. Sarah Ponsonby (1755–1831), who lived in this eclectically decorated cottage orné, a monument to their life together. ◦



TEXT BY FINLAY CLARK | ART BY KRISH RAGHAV



To transcend is to go beyond.

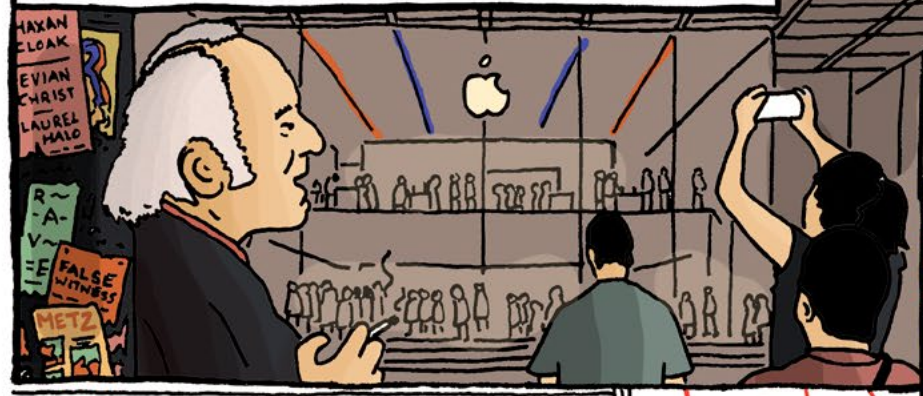
To experience something more than our immediate and material human lives.

Historically, in the West, the idea of transcendence was understood as vertical, with the heavens above and humanity below on Earth...



...whereby the cosmos and everything contained within it is given and ordered by an ultimate, otherworldly source.

In contrast, for French philosopher Gilles Deleuze, the modern worldview of transcendence is not overseen by an otherworldly source, nor is it out of reach - it is here on Earth. It is horizontal.

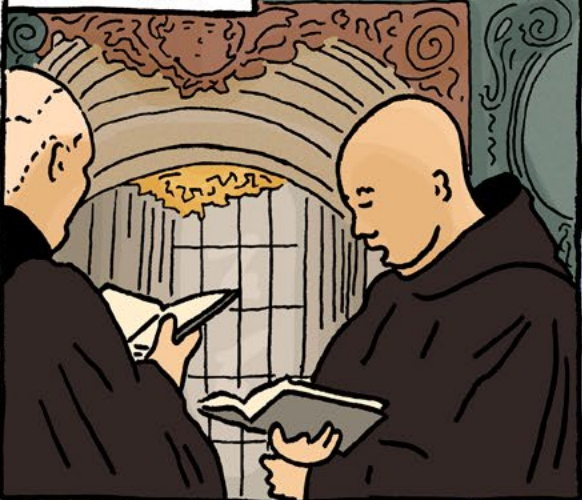


"The universal and particular, eternal and temporal, immaterial and material very often gesture towards and even integrate aspects of the other..."

However, rather than thinking of these two planes of transcendence as being disconnected or negating each other, American philosopher Calvin Schrag thought of them as "transversal".



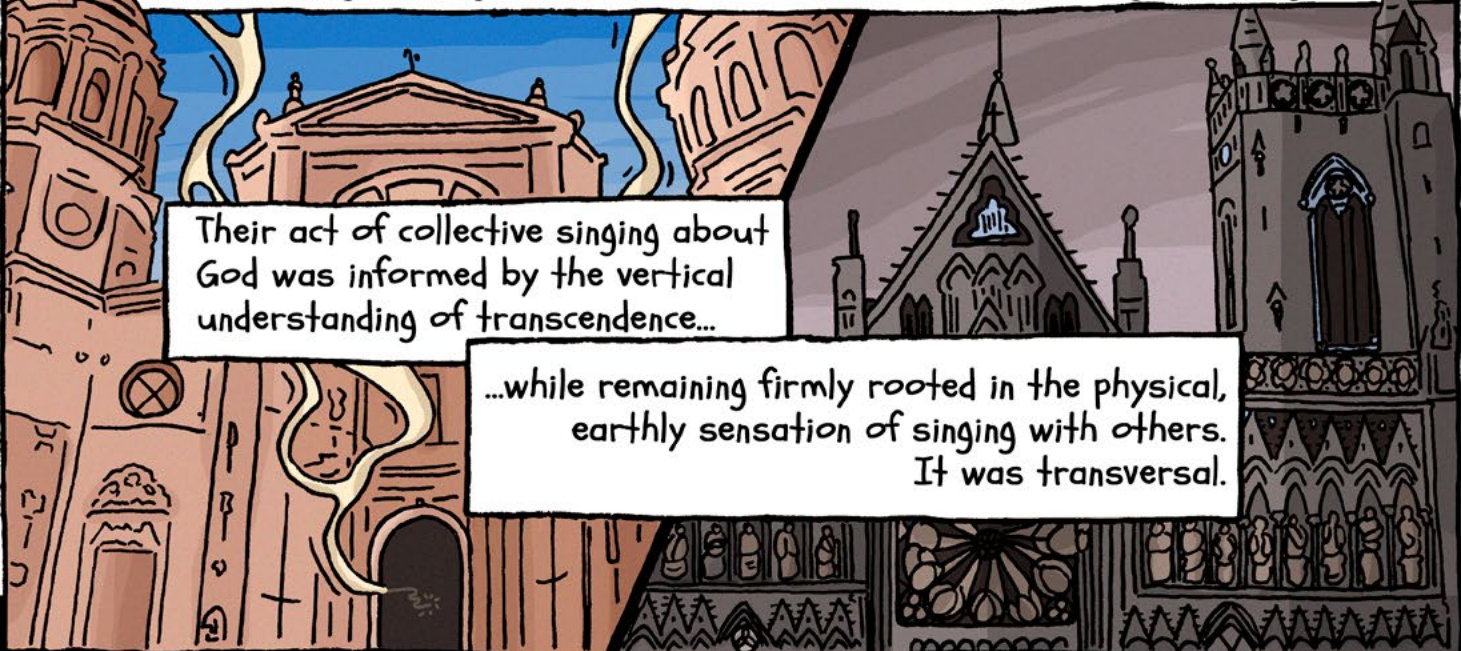
Gregorian chant arose within the premodern world view of vertical transcendence.



By the 1200s, Gregorian chant had spread throughout much of Latin Europe



From Cadiz in Western Spain to Trondheim in Norway, by 1300 monks, nuns, clergy and friars were gathering in churches, several times a day, to sing plainsong...



Their act of collective singing about God was informed by the vertical understanding of transcendence...

...while remaining firmly rooted in the physical, earthly sensation of singing with others. It was transversal.

The singers breathed as one and resumed, after each pause, as one.

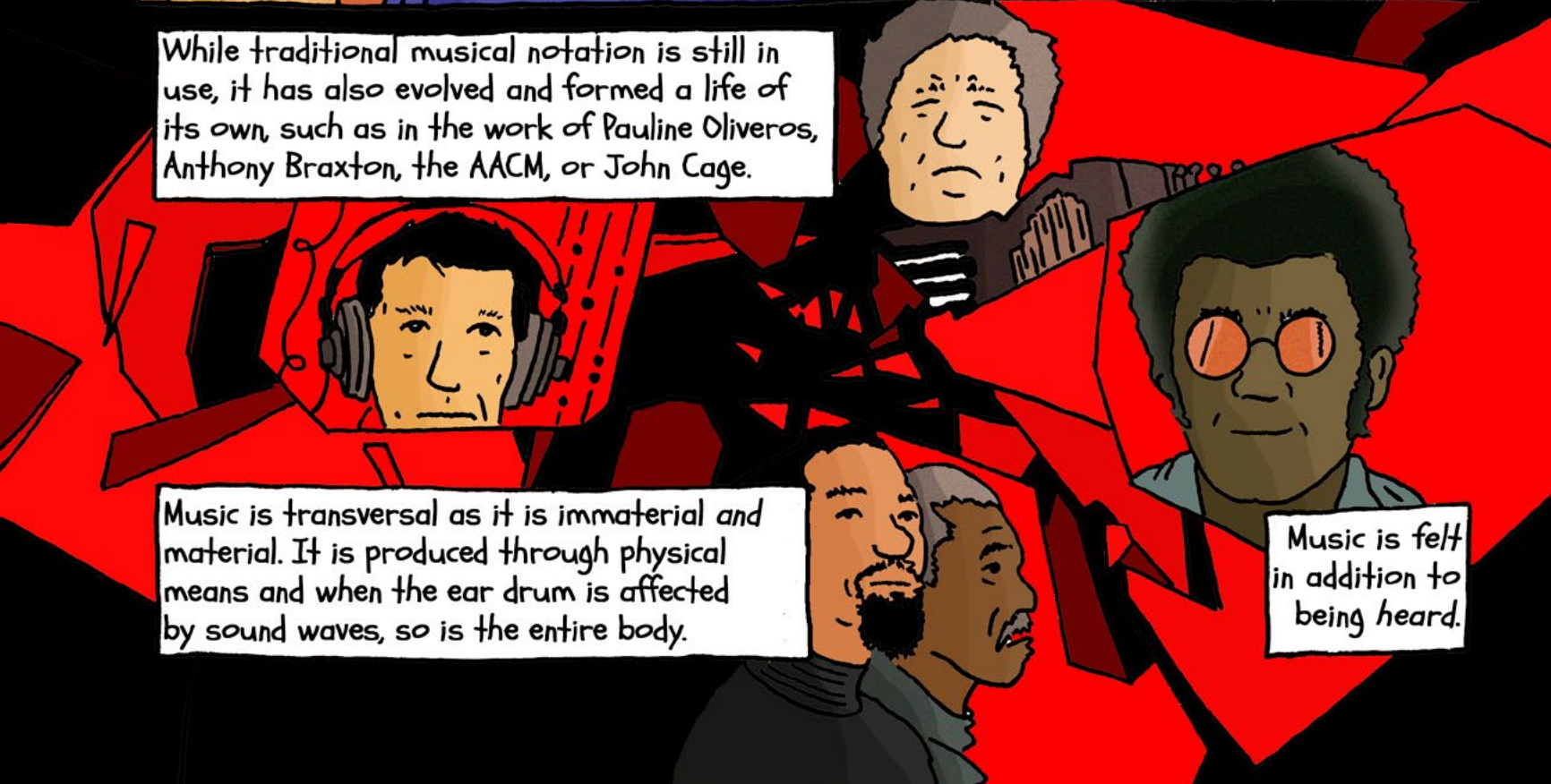


It helped them transcend the varied and disorganised breathing that marks any gathering of individuals with equally scattered minds...

The ancestor of the five-line staff that is still in use today is recognised as having been invented by Italian monk Guido of Arezzo, who died around 1060.



While traditional musical notation is still in use, it has also evolved and formed a life of its own, such as in the work of Pauline Oliveros, Anthony Braxton, the AACM, or John Cage.



Music is transversal as it is immaterial and material. It is produced through physical means and when the ear drum is affected by sound waves, so is the entire body.

Music is felt in addition to being heard.

HARE KRISHNA HARE KRISHNA KRISHNA KRISHNA HARE HARE HARE RAMA HARE RAMA RAMA RAMA HARE HARE

Kirtan is an Indic devotional musical practice that involves the repetitive chanting of the names of deities Krishna and his lover Radha.

Kirtan, or kīrtana, is Sanskrit for narrating an idea or story.

It is through chanting the names of deities Krishna and Radha that their story is kept alive.



The phonological and the divine are indistinguishable in kirtan.

Sitting close together, the skin of the individuals touch...

...and their voices merge in unison.



Like Gregorian chant,

a sonic sensuality is created by

worshippers chanting and breathing together, their bodies

touching side-by-side.

This can give a sense of deindividuation, and oneness with others.

It is widely known that music can both stimulate empathic feelings and strengthen social bonds between people. One example of this can be seen in UK rave culture during the late 1980s and early 1990s, in which a youth movement – carrying a message of hedonism, unity and communalism, radically opposed to Thatcherite ideology – swept across the country.



Estonian-American neuroscientist and psychobiologist Jaak Panksepp noted that:

"Perhaps there is an association between trance-like music and sexuality... the chills felt during musical gatherings are like skin orgasms..."

Kirtan devotees display the intense bodily reactions that music can create, often quivering to the sonic vibrations in a trance-induced dance.



It is because of the indistinguishable nature of divinity and the sung names of deities in kirtan that the singers create that which they propitiate.



In another kind of way, political song presents a foretaste of what the world is to become...



Political song, not dissimilar to the anti-hegemonic nature of rave, has a galvanising power to mobilise protest and strengthen resistance to various forms of social injustice...



In *The Realm of Music* (1910), Italian composer and virtuoso pianist Ferruccio Busoni (1866-1924) described a transcendent space he called "Ur-Musik".

"Ur-Musik emphasises the timeless, primordial and transcendent... it is poetic raw material. There is no new or old. Only known and not yet known."

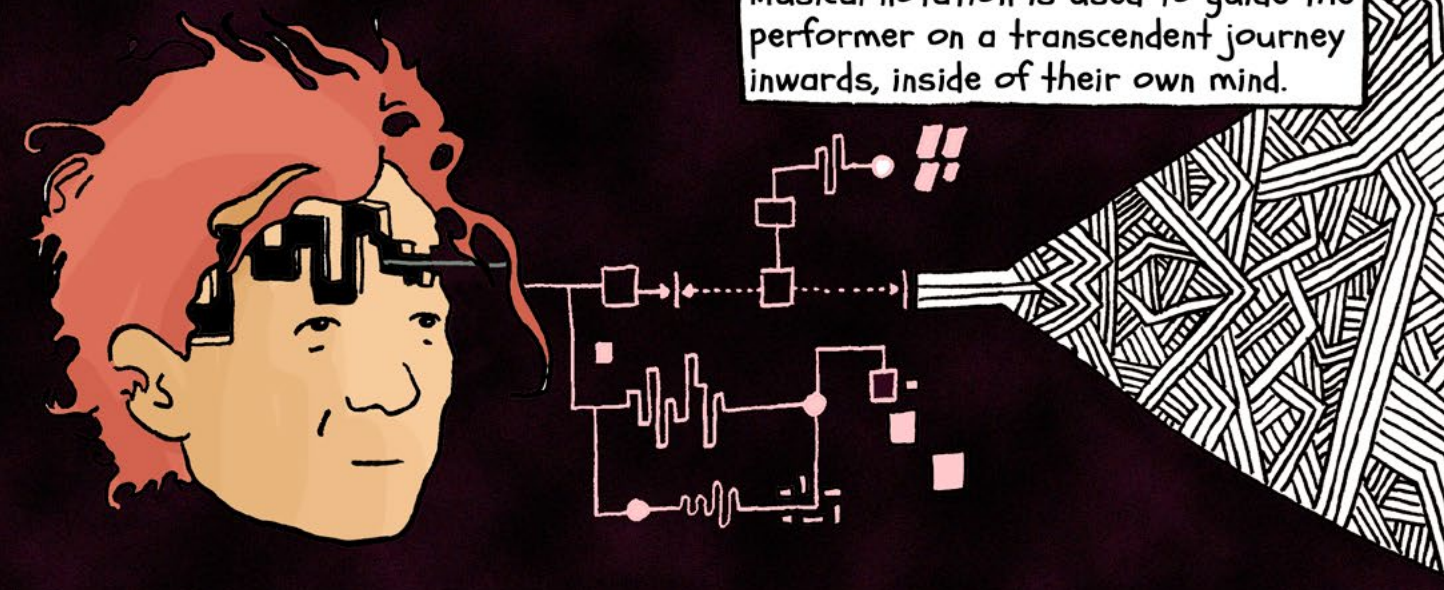


For Busoni, all music that has ever been or will ever be written comes from the infinite, transcendent, musical realm of Ur-Musik.



One of British musician Mica Levi's most recent compositions * * * (star star star) involves a performer closing their eyes and imagining their day in reverse while seated on stage, accompanied by a trance-like combination of cymbals, piano, and percussion...

Musical notation is used to guide the performer on a transcendent journey inwards, inside of their own mind.



This is an example of a composer attempting to use notation to express something that isn't fully possible with notation.

Gestural marks are instead adopted as a platform for the performer to realise fully an idea that cannot be expressed on paper alone.

"What the composer's inspiration necessarily loses through notation, his interpreter should restore by his own."

"Every notation is, in itself, the transcription of an abstract idea. The instant the pen seizes it, the idea loses its original form."

Busoni's attitude prefigured a range of later 20th-century musical practices that promoted multiple authorship and emphasised music as process rather than product...

such as free jazz...

...experimental improvisation...

... and Fluxus

One could say that Guido's original invention of notation - that allowed music to be disseminated across Europe for the first time - echoes Fluxus scores being sent to fellow artists in the mail.

Both the original invention and its subsequent, experimental developments, though worlds apart...



...are attempts to capture an abstract idea on paper, which requires a performer to be the final piece of the puzzle to bring it to life.

Guido of Arezzo was aware of the significance of capturing the transcendent, immaterial nature of music in the form of musical notation.



Busoni, though aware of the flaws of musical notation in fully expressing an idea, was also a proponent of the power of musical notation.

Transcendence is integral to every aspect of music: it enables its production...

...is fundamental to the experience of it...

...and is evident in responses to and reflections upon it.



Music has the capacity to function as a reminder of that which cannot be expressed or represented in any language, form or genre.

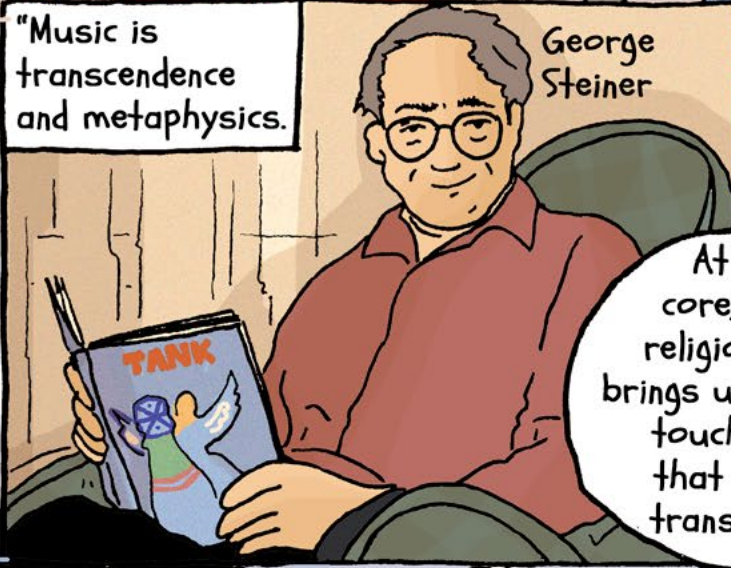


In an important way, music arises from and feeds the human desire to go beyond.

That is how it acts transformatively and becomes a powerful means of locating ourselves within the world and so making sense of it.

"Music is transcendence and metaphysics."

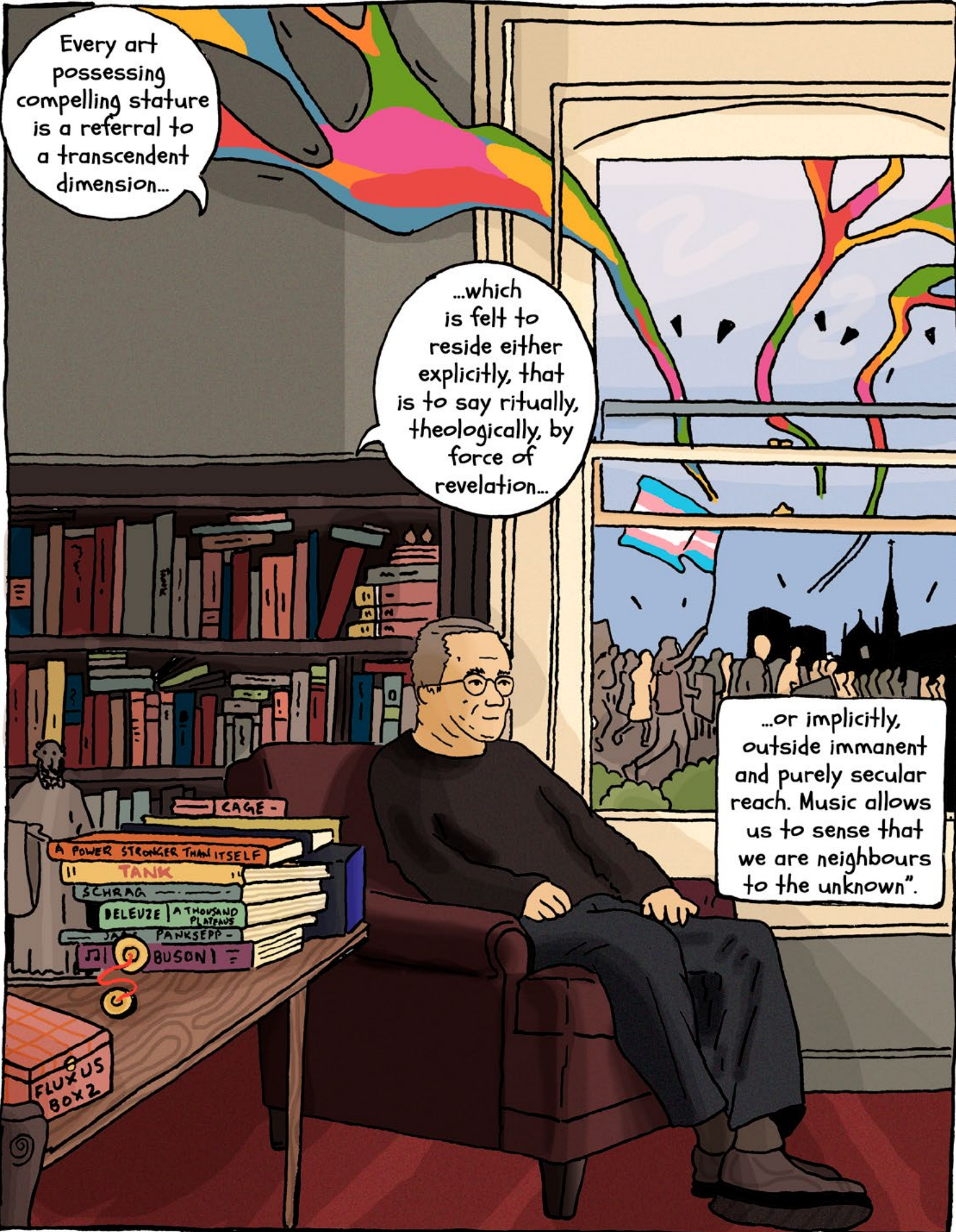
George Steiner



At its core, it is religious. It brings us in sane touch with that which transcends.



It is the making formal of epiphany.



Every art possessing compelling stature is a referral to a transcendent dimension...

...which is felt to reside either explicitly, that is to say ritually, theologically, by force of revelation...

...or implicitly, outside immanent and purely secular reach. Music allows us to sense that we are neighbours to the unknown".

