ABSTRACT

AMANDA OGEA. Songs of Nowhere: Beach House, the She, and Atopian Transcendence. (Under the direction of Professor Rebecca Walsh.)

Victoria Legrand and Alex Scally, the creative minds behind the indie band Beach House, have been the critical darlings of their contemporary music scene due to their ability to craft hauntingly beautiful soundscapes. Their use of genre elements from psychedelia’s offshoots, dream-pop and shoegaze, has allowed the band to create what they call the She, a (re)generative space that offers unlimited inspiration. Built through a carefully strategized mode of gender essentialism, the She is the embodiment of transformative energies, the result of a cyclical interplay through binary opposition. These energies channel the pathways to moving outside of the confines of language and, in this way, offer a mode of secular spirituality and transcendence. Beach House is able to invoke the She through their artful use of dream-pop’s trademark experiments with language as well as shoegaze’s subject-dissolving waves of noise, each allowing the band to create rapturous soundscapes that allow their audiences to momentarily leave the limitations of subject-object relations.

Understanding the underlying apparatus of the She is only possible through a holistic, interdisciplinary approach. To further explore the phenomenological considerations of Beach House’s use of dream-pop and shoegaze elements, a consideration of Julia Kristeva’s concept of the semiotic chora was applied to further understand the maternal and creative spaces that those genres inhabit and, in turn, how they are made manifest within the She. To further this inquiry, incorporating T. S. Eliot’s theories of poetic tradition and the art emotion became necessary in order to fully map out the She’s trans-temporal and trans-spatial qualities and their relationship to creativity. Synthesizing the related visions of each theory became possible through interacting with the emerging discourse surrounding the concept of atopia. Represented by scholars Marcel Cobussen and Frédéric Neyrat, atopias are the non-place between the oppositions i.e. difference itself. This difference which atopias emphasize is the very same which energizes the chora. Their intrinsic connection offers an exciting recontextualization of the chora through a phenomenological orientation, and, ultimately, produces a more thorough understanding of how bands like Beach House are able to produce sublime experiences for their audience.