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DOSSIER: VOCAL PERFORMANCE: NEW PERSPECTIVES IN THE STUDY OF VOCAL MUSIC

Notre Dame's New Clothes

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Resumen

Sulla base delle numerose contraddizioni che caratterizzano quanto sappiamo delle pratiche vocali di Notre Dame (ca 1200), lo studio riconosce la volontà del Novecento di ricondurre le prime testimonianze mensurali nell'alveo del 'gotico' speculativo, in quanto 'origine' di un presunto processo di evoluzione polifonica. Al contrario, restituendo alla vocalità di Notre Dame il ruolo di pratica prevalentemente estemporanea, non scritta e, soprattutto, espressione ultima di un'enfasi liturgica 'romanesca', è possibile sanare alcuni frantendimenti storiografici e offrire una chiave di lettura alternativa alle notazioni superstiti del *corpus* polifonico parigino. Il contributo si completa con quello di Livio Giuliano in questa stessa rivista.

Abstract

Starting from the numerous contradictions that characterize what we know about vocal practices of Notre Dame (ca 1200), the article acknowledges the Twentieth century the will to interpret the mensural sources as a Gothic speculative product, that is the 'origin' of a supposed evolution process of Western polyphony. The study attempts to give back to the Notre Dame chant the role of extemporaneous unwritten practice and, above all, try to read the last production as the result of a redundant Romanesque liturgy. In this way, it attempts to heal some historographical misunderstandings and offer an alternative reading to the surviving notations of polyphonic Paris *corpus*. This contribution is complemented by Livio Giuliano's article in this journal.

Palabras clave

Modal notation, sources: Notre Dame, Friedrich Ludwig

Keywords

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Before explaining the title of this essay, I would like to outline the idea that stands behind it. As I argue in what follows, the narrative which places the school of Notre Dame at the origins of the great season of Western polyphony needs to be reassessed. Failing to do so, scholars will continue thinking of the vocal features of twelfth- and thirteenth-century Parisian liturgy as something that, in fact, do not explain the cultural context of the time.¹

Let me put it this way: the polyphonic practices of Notre Dame make sense if we recognize that they are nothing but the refined expression of the end of a long process of vocal experiments. Instead, they look obscure if we consider them as the early steps of the process eventually leading to the Ars Nova experience.

As many objections might arise to the point of view I suggested (just an example: no one still thinks of Notre Dame as the kick-off of Western polyphony), I will take advantage of them and get to the meaning of the essay's title. It is true that no one still approaches the history of music through an evolutionary interpretation such as Heggebrecht's,² but it is also a matter of fact that its ghost haunts collective imagination. The most popular textbooks seem not to be worried about linking the 'birth of polyphony' to the School of Notre Dame, and this is true of other more thoughtful contributions.³

It is clear that the School of Notre Dame has nothing to do with the birth of polyphony; at least this is clear to me. Nonetheless, I would like to discuss this self-evident truth. The main reason why I wish to do this is because someone should cry out, like the child in *The Emperor's New Clothes*, that "the Emperor is not wearing anything at all" so as to restart the mechanism of historiography and give a new identity to the sound of an era.

¹ The term 'school' is used here as is widely accepted, but I keep thinking that the practice of Parisian polyphony around 1200 was limited to a group of cantors that were committed to enrich the most solemn feasts. The school, as we label it today, was more likely to develop in the following decades—that is not before the mid-thirteenth century—when mensural theories probably spread in connection with university activities. For a wide overview on this subject, see Wright 1989.

² One may think particularly, of the stimulating yet controversial book *Musik im Abendland* (Eggebrecht 1991), whose author cannot help but share the idea of artistic progress that affected musical criticism following the appearance of Darwin's theories (see Parry 1983) in the age of Positivism and historicism.

³ Histories of music usually begin by considering early treatises on polyphony as the evidence of a new practice (although treatises themselves do not present polyphony in these terms) and then move on to Notre Dame: Hoppin does the same in 1978 (published by Norton) as well as the 12 volumes of the Società italiana di Musicologia (Italian Musicological Society) (*Storia* 1982). Even a thorough and brilliant essay on polyphonic manuscripts such as Everist 2004 identifies Notre Dame with the birth of polyphony. We need to turn to ethnomusicological studies in order to seize the existence of polyphony before the use of mensural notation. The "Polyphony" entry in the Grove itself (Oxford Music Online) suggests the existence of polyphonic practices before 1200 only in its *Non-Western* section.

The teleological idea that burdens the history of Medieval polyphony is unconsciously at work when scholars try to give an account of the vocal practices of Notre Dame: musicology has never updated the modern interpretation of thirteenth-century mensuralism, and the same can be said about early music performers, as Livio Giuliano highlights in his contribution that is paired with this essay. Performers do not seem to have developed an informed and independent approach to the 'real' sound of Parisian liturgy at the time of Philip II of France.

Discomforts

Since these notes aim to propose questions before suggesting a solution, I shall begin with my personal discomforts towards the polyphony of Notre Dame.

1. *Addiction to the compound binary metre* · The opportunity to attend a live concert entirely devoted to the music of Perotinus and his acolytes is quite unusual. I have probably attended a couple of them, and remember both as ponderous experiences. After an initial feeling of excitement for what sounded timeless, I recall the inability to distinguish one piece from the next, a sense of bore for the restless reiteration, and the eventual feeling of undergoing the same iambic pattern from the very beginning to the end. Thus the question to ask would be: how was an entire century of music was written in a 6/8 form?

The shrewdest palaeographers have already admitted that the modern bar is just a conventional sign; yet, the musical practice of the last century has devotedly entrusted this convention. Furthermore, the 6/8 meter has identified it as the main characteristic of thirteenth-century polyphony.

2. *The schizophrenia of chant* · The form of *organum* is simple: only a few parts of the liturgical intonation of the celebrant become polyphonic. When the plainchant becomes *tenor* and backs up the additional voices, it expands in order to bear the rhythm of a dense, melismatic polyphony. In the monodic sections it goes back from being *tenor* to simple plainchant. The result is a contrast of two sound surfaces: the polyphonic, reiterative and rhythmic (floating around the slow *tenor*), and the monodic singsong.⁴

The anamorphic shifts of the liturgical chant leave their mark in the way they are represented. This is not true if we consider the absolute differences we can find between mensural polyphony and monody, which are noted by identical forms.

⁴ A clearer example created for didactic purposes can be found in *Temporum stirpis musica* (www.examenapium.it/meri → Thesaurus → Viderunt omnes).

So here is the question: why do *currentes* have a metric role in the *duplum* (although not univocal) while they do not have one in plainchant? Why do the *ligatureae* of the Gregorian chant lack a metric quality, even though their marks are superimposable to the mensural ones? At the time of Solesmes,⁵ a debate took place around the rhythmic potential of Gregorian notation, but the discussion did not lead to any final verdict. Dogmatic solutions to the problem that were later proposed affected the research on Parisian polyphony.⁶ A historical reconstruction based on unsolved gaps is unlikely to produce any effective judgment.

3. *Incommunicability between coeval contexts* · The common modern conception of the Middle Ages—knights and mistresses, ancient castles, dragons and witches—is the result of a simple equivalence: Middle Ages = Crusades. Yet, this is just a temporal synecdoche. Accordingly, the troubadours have become the musical symbol of the Middle Ages because they were in full swing during the Crusades.⁷ Hence, although secular monody is still mostly unknown, we can easily pair the battles of the Saladin with courtly *chansons*.⁸

The age of the Crusades, though, is not just about troubadours: it also corresponds to the full bloom of the School of Notre Dame. Nonetheless, we do not seem to be eager to use its music as the soundtrack of the chivalrous Middle Ages. In some rare cases Perotinus' *organa* come out from the eclipse of scholars; but when this happens, it is just to place them in a later collective imagery meant to feed some Neo-Gothic appetites.⁹

⁵ The Benedictine Congregation of Solesmes was founded in 1833 by Prosper Guéranger. Solesmes became the French mother house of the Congregation after obtaining abbey rank in 1837 and quickly assumed a pivotal role in nineteenth-century research on liturgical chant. In Solesmes, based on palaeographic studies, Gregorian chant was given the standard forms that are still in use today. At the Paris Music Conference of 1860, building on Gontier's *Méthode* (Gontier 1859), the Congregation stressed the necessity of rediscovering the original Gregorian chant. According to this project, Gregorian chant needed to rid itself of the rhythmic and harmonized forms in use at the time. After two decades of research, Dom Joseph Pothier (1835–1923) published *Les mélodies grégoriennes* (Pothier 1880), which was highly praised at the Cecilian-oriented Arezzo Conference of 1882. One year later, the new edition of the *Liber gradualis* (Pothier 1883) was published, but the Vatican did not allow the printing privilege that had already been renovated until 1898 to the *Graduale romanum* of Regensburg (Pustet 1871). In order to support Pothier's edition, André Mocquereau (1849–1930) promoted the titanic publication of the facsimiles of the *Paléographie musicale* (1889), the first example of grey-scale photographic print. As a documentary copy, the publication contrasted the editorial reconstruction of the *Liber*. The contrasting approaches combined with disagreements on the rhythmic features of chant (whereas Pothier tended to privilege the text, Mocquereau focused on neumatic morphology). The application of a French state law that required government approval for the foundation of religious congregations forced the Solesmes monks to move to England in 1903 (they would eventually go back to France, but not until 1922). Political troubles unexpectedly revived collaboration among the members of the Congregation, and fostered the support of the newly elected Pope Pius X who, in 1904, commissioned Pothier to arrange what would eventually become the *Editio Vaticana* (1908). The music school of the abbey promoted various recordings; the record collection of 12 discs (78 rpm) published by His Master's Voice became a classic. See Bergeron 1998 and Ellis 2013.

⁶ In opposition to the equalist theory of Pothier commonly accepted today, Mocquereau devoted volume 7 of his *Paléographie musicale* to the illustration of his rhythmic theory, which proves as artificial as his colleague's. On the controversy, see: Kosch 1927, Caiter 1995, Ostrowski 2008, Waddle 2010.

⁷ Research on the so called “Medievalism”, i.e. the modern reinterpretation of the past, primary reference book is Cantor 1991 (but it is worth mentioning the important role of the journal *Studies in Medievalism*, founded in 1979). As for musicological studies, beside the general overview of Leech-Wilkinson 2002, a brilliant reconstruction of the way the troubadouric *corpus* is perceived today can be found in Haines 2004.

⁸ *Kingdom of Heaven* by Ridley Scott (2005) uses both a brand new music score by Harry Gregson-Williams as well as the reinterpretation of some original Medieval melodies from the troubadouric tradition. In the final scene of the movie, one can also recognise Raimon de Miraval's *Chansoneta farai vencut* performed by Convivencia, a music group specialising in the Medieval repertoire.

⁹ The Parisian cathedral where, since *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*, the modern imagery would spontaneously settle Perotinus' house, is a privileged location for plots à la Dr. Phibes. Benjamin Britten draws on the modal *organa* when sketching the ghosts of *The turn of the screw* (see Giuliano in this issue). In the *The name of the rose*, a ‘monastic’ thriller set in the early 12th century, Umberto Eco makes the choir of brothers sing *Sederunt principes* 130 years after the alleged death of Perotinus. The overlap of Notre Dame's architectural ‘Gothic’ with the polyphonic ‘Gothic’ of the *organa* is a charming idea that seduced many scholars (among recent examples, see Duhamel 2012). Murray has convincingly demonstrated that

Apparently, there is a problem here: two contemporary vocal styles sound very different, and, moreover, they seem to belong to distant cultural environments. Is a similar divide reasonable? The traditionally alleged differences between the sacred and the secular are a simplistic explication, because it is only the modern era that separated them. If attempts were made to compare Gregorian chant and the *chansons*,¹⁰ the proximity of Northern European *trouverès* to polyphonic *organa* from the same regions has been deliberately ignored.

However, it is well known that many *chansons* stemmed from polyphonic *clausulae*.¹¹ It is likely that the term ‘troubadour’ or ‘tropadour’ derives from ‘trope’, the generic noun used to define the forms of ‘swap’ composition (*clausulae* included).¹² Polyphony itself, when considered as an *amplificatio* of the sound of the liturgy, is nothing but a form of trope.¹³

4. Witnesses suffering from an identity crisis · I am not sure that the direct analysis of sources vouches always for the quality of research: it is not enough to know the documents, we need to make them talk to us. And we certainly cannot rely on others’ accounts, as some cultural trends would suggest.¹⁴ The description of the surviving manuscripts of Notre Dame was made upon the belief that they were partial copies of an original *magnus liber organi*. The perspective changes radically if we admit that the *liber* was a repertoire of music rather than a codex.¹⁵ The belief that those witnesses, which were at least a century late, were the extant evidence of a wider and longer lasting manuscript tradition

the modernist enthusiasm of Eugène Viollet-le-Duc (1814-1879) identified the birth of Gothic style with Notre Dame, whereas the building, work in progress *par excellence*, was more likely to have a Romanesque look around 1200.

¹⁰ Cf. musical compendia recently produced by Jordi Savall (*Jérusalem* 2008 and *Le Royaume oublié*, 2009, both published by Alia Vox) as well as the attempt made by Christopher Page, musicologist and performer, to consider Gregorian chant and the *chansons* as informed by the same musical aesthetics (the relevant template, though, remains in the end the one of Solesmes).

¹¹ Ludwig’s 1910 *Repertorium* (whose posthumous edition was only completed in 1978), although not really focused on the production of *chansons*, links some of them to the liturgical model. For instance, among the 17 “Go” *clausulae* which were troped on a *tenor* fragment from the Gradual *Benedicta et venerabilis*, the second one produces a motet for two voices (called ‘b’ by Ludwig) with Latin (“Crescens incredulitas”) and French texts (“Por conforter mon corage”). The *duplum* of this motet is then copied (without the *tenor*) with two new verses in the well-known *Chansonnier du Roi* (F-Pn, Fr. 844, f. 102v). The codex ascribes this *pastourelle* to Ernoul le Vienne de Gastinois, a troubadour probably responsible only for the lyrics.

¹² The idea of a connection between tropes and troubadours builds on the morphological similarities of some *cansos* with the Aquitanian tropes by Saint Martial (Fernandez 1986). This theory is confirmed by the aforementioned connections between motets and chansonniers. Furthermore, anonymous motets are also usually attributed to the trouvères.

¹³ As an element that is added to the liturgical text, the idea of trope can be applied to any form of *amplificatio*. The *vox organalis* is itself a trope and as is the whole motet production. Polyphony based on a *tenor* is thus a trope, as is the case with the entire *corpus* of Notre Dame.

¹⁴ The lack of interest in documents that is typical of cultural studies (at least in their more superficial trends) proves the – understandable – response to a certain kind of philology focused too much on the editorial output (Kerman 1985) and responsible for the rise of a problematic notion of authorship (Taruskin 1995). Rather than suggesting hermeneutic interpretations, academic philology is fostering skepticism. One of the results of this process is the disappearance of Medieval studies in musicology departments, which is also due to the radicalization of the fetishist approach towards documents (just think of the critical editions of great Italian opera composers or, for the Middle Ages, the suggestions of the new philology proposed by Caraci 2009, II, ch. VII).

¹⁵ The monumental description of all the extant manuscripts of Notre Dame and of correlated sources (Ludwig 1910) did not leave any space for counter-arguments (at least until Busse Berger 2005, Ch. I). The main issue with such a project was that the description was based on the belief that the “*magnus liber organi*” mentioned by the Anonymous IV was the archetype codex for the four principal extant manuscripts (W1, F, Ma and W2). The structure of cod. F, the largest one, was the foundation for a rather chaotic classification of pieces. Not only the complexity of Ludwig’s *Repertorium* created an ‘aura of initiation’ around musical studies; it was responsible for the poor knowledge of the wide corpus of documents gathered together (in particular those related to the evolution *organa-motets-chansons*). For an on-line guide to the *Repertorium*, see the *Temporum stirpis musica* website (www.examenepium.it/meri → Thesaurus → Scuola di Notre Dame).

The theory of a primarily oral tradition for Parisian polyphony explains the reason why it is not possible to find any earlier scores. It also sheds new light on the sources. From this point of view, we have preserved in the earliest manuscripts an out-dated musical practice by means of a likewise out-dated notation, thus revealing their antiquarian aim. In any case, the reasons behind the production of similar codices are likely to be far from current interpretations.¹⁶

5. *The autism of theory* · Anyone who has ever attempted to transcribe thirteenth-century mensuralism, relying on the rules of theorists that came a hundred years later, must have realised that it is not only complicated and redundant,¹⁷ but it cannot always be applied in the same way. Criteria change when transcribing the *tenor* or other voices, when polyphonic writing concerns the main section of the text or the *cadenza*, when the part to be transcribed is a *clausula* or a polyphony with a bourdon (this even seems to be mensural when it shifts from two to three voices).¹⁸ When one encounters the syllabic style, such as in a motet or a *conductus*, every single book published on the subject provides a different solution. The debate is over, not because of a persuasive answer, but because of a general feeling of exhaustion.¹⁹

It is unlikely that such a jumbled system would later become the template for European polyphony. We probably do not understand how their system worked.

Theorists, on the other hand, go on with some accepted but never applied principles. In the worst case, they seem to be talking about everything but music (Cullin 1995). Even palaeographers conceive of ‘modal rhythm theory’ as a world of its own, silent and still, where common sense is suspended and one enjoys the privileges of a club of distinguished people where music is nothing but a long hypnotic chain of mensural notations and the sum 1+1 never equals 2.²⁰

The extent of these issues is proven by the lack of modern synoptic editions of the music

¹⁶ I shall not focus on the primarily oral tradition of music produced at the time of the Notre Dame school, a topic widely discussed in the seminal book by Busse Berger 2005.

¹⁷ The six ‘rhythmic modes’ which are at the foundation of both ancient scholarship and modern ‘modal theory’ prove a hypertrophic grid where strong and weak beats alternate as follows:  or  Indeed, in 1942 Apel acknowledged the problem (cf. the last part of the paragraph *Rhythmic modes* (p. 223 in the 1953 edition).

¹⁸ The recent edition of the *organa* of Notre Dame (7 vols. under the guidance of Rosner 2009^a) adopts the modal theory for *tripla* and *quadrupla* (vol. 1), but lets editors deal with *dupla* as they wish (vols. 2-7). By doing so, especially in the *copulae*, *dupla* may be entirely non-mensural (Everist), follow modal theory (Baltzer, Payne), or even suggest modal hypotheses on non-mensural renditions (Roesner). For a brilliant synthesis of more than one century of never-ending debates on the rhythm of melismatic singing (also known as *organum purum*), see Yudkin 1983. Different solutions are suggested by Crocker in 1990 (see *infra*, note 46).

¹⁹ This *corpus* has been repeatedly classified (Gröniger 1939, Anderson 1975, Falck 1981), and was published, almost in its entirety, by Anderson 1988. After post-war contributions inclined to accept modal theory (Bukofzer 1949 and 1953, Handschin 1952, Husmann 1952, Schrade 1953), the debate resumed following Anderson’s edition (see Anderson 1972, 1973 and 1978). By then, syllabic isochrony based on the fifth mode became standard (Knapp 1979, Sanders 1985); more recently, a non-measured approach has also become popular (Everist 1989 and 2011, p. 69).

²⁰ It is puzzling to see that, rather than admitting the ineffectiveness of this system, scholars prefer to match on the same page sentences of this kind: “The observation of consonance is often the only reliable clue in transcribing pieces in modal notation whenever, as is frequently the case, writing of the ligature fails to indicate clearly the rhythm” (Apel 1953: 245); and, only a few lines above: “The three voices needn’t necessarily to be consonant; they should only form a consonance between the two of them ... with that said, we can justify such combinations as *D-E-A ... D-G-C ... or D-E-G*” (this second sentence was fortunately omitted in most recent editions, but was preserved in German and Italian translations).

corpus of Notre Dame,²¹ despite the fact that the entire Parisian tradition has been (almost) completely described for over a century, with the identification of any sources and relations between *organa*, *clausulae* and motets.

Hypothesis (first approach)

The discomforts listed above pushed me to put aside what I previously knew about the School of Notre Dame and reconsider extant documents with the same naïvété of their nineteenth-century readers, all while being aware of the stretching of previous theories. The most fruitful moment was the deconstruction²² of the historiographical process, which allowed me to seize misunderstandings and propose alternative interpretations based on the reconsideration of sources – both in terms of their theoretical contribution and codicological evidence. I argue that Parisian polyphony was, at the beginning, mostly improvised on pre-existing formulas, and that extant scores are the outcome of a later attempt to preserve some of these improvisations, if not even a sort of ‘ideal’ recreation of them. Based on these documents, theorists would establish their rules.²³

The reasons why *organa* and treatises were written at a later stage, when the tradition of Notre Dame had ended, probably has to do with the changes that affected mid-thirteenth-century culture, when intellect and speculation became the core of the creative output. The need to preserve a by-gone musical experience demonstrates the typical ‘Gothic’ urge to treasure the memory of the past at once with exploiting the educational implications of a similar effort.²⁴

The juxtaposition of the ‘Romanesque’ culture of action and the ‘Gothic’ culture of intellectual speculation is the reason why we do not understand the historical role of Notre Dame. ‘Romanesque’ Paris of 1200 was able to transform liturgical sound – traditionally referred to as plainchant, but actually born as the ‘physical core’ of the liturgical word – into a more physical and emotional singing.²⁵ There is no construction in this kind of sound, there is no math in this embodiment of a vocal style originating from men who did not resign themselves to abandon the

²¹ Roesner 2009^a (see *supra*, note 18) restored the *dupla* by using only the three principal codices which where published in different volumes (the cod. F in vols. II-V, the W₂ in VI and the W₁ in VII). Furthermore, correlated motets (although known by the editor) were not taken into account.

²² The term does not have any linguistic implications à la Derrida: to dismantle the idea we have of Notre Dame does not necessarily lead to a better understanding of the period. It should lead, instead, to understanding the reasons why the nineteenth century produced and preserved a similar variety of unsuitable interpretations.

²³ I do not exclude the fact that the compilation of the *corpus* of *organa* and *clausulae* might have been directed to the composition of motets.

²⁴ The phenomenon of preservation, which is typical of European culture, has been studied mainly by literary scholars; among the most recent contributions, see Witt 2000.

²⁵ This is where Sanders (1980) leads: polyphony is not different from plainchant, for it is a form of ‘organised’ chant (hence the term *organum*).

physiological rhythm of their bodies, from devotees who created a hypertrophic liturgy that dazes the body to persuade the mind. On the other hand, the intellectual ‘Gothic’ abstraction introduced at the end of the thirteenth century, frightened by bodily experiences, belongs to the ‘Thomistic’ stage of the history of liturgy, based on an ascetic vocal style which considers polyphony as the apex of intellectual and rationally constrained satisfaction. This is the polyphony that, theorised by Franco of Cologne and Philip of Vitry, would lead – through the *Ars Nova* – to the Flemish composers.

Early theorists of mensuralism credited Notre Dame out of kindness or because the comparison magnified their progress after many years of music practice. It was not an homage to the fathers; on the contrary, the uneasiness towards a past they no longer understood is quite tangible.²⁶ Above all, it is clear that for these theorists, their assumptions could apply to any period of time. The retrospective application of fourteenth-century theories produced a flattening of differences that has confused twentieth-century scholars.

How we got there

Nineteenth-century interest in the Middle Ages originates from a sort of Northern-European payback to the Latin and Greek south whose ‘renaissance’ had deeply informed the culture of the *ancien régime*. Post-revolutionary Romantic spirits striving for nobility based on actions (and not on juridical rights) considered themselves as sons of the expanding European continent that fought against Muslims and created its *epos* by drawing from chivalric *romances*.²⁷

This context of renovation frames the rendition of the ‘authentic’ Gregorian chant promoted by the monks of Solesmes. Though stating the unalterable nature of liturgical chant (evolution was considered a form of decadence), the Benedictine scholars aimed at the reconstruction of its ‘monumental nature’ by looking at its roots. Yet the notion of an ideal form where vocal traditions are concerned is problematic and abstract; furthermore, to think of it as expressing itself at its best as of the beginning is rather naïve. The wishful thinking peculiar to the

²⁶ With the exception of the Anonymous IV, which seems to collect miscellaneous sources (a combination of the memory of a legendary past and some later musical codices), it is likely that mensural treatises do not relate to the Notre Dame *praxis*, but to a later period, although prior to Franco of Cologne’s theories. In fact, it is reasonable that the six modes were in use only by the time of the codices of Bamberg (Ba) and Montpellier (Mo).

²⁷ Romanticism focuses on North European traditions (matters of Britain and France, Germanic and Norse mythology) not only for nationalistic purposes, but also with the aim to reconstruct a cultural identity able to replace rationalistic trends peculiar to classicism. Diverse personalities such as Novalis (1772-1801) or Chateaubriand (1768-1848), labelled as reactionaries by Marxist critics, embodied the renewal of an era. In his fragmentary novel *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, Novalis identifies himself with a *Minnesänger*, thus outlining a quest for a poetical identity that, later on, would be the same of Wagner’s. As for Chateaubriand’s *The Genius of Christianity* (1802), the work was destined to become the seminal book for the renovated religious spirit that informed the research of Solesmes.

Solesmes scholars did not look for these 'roots' in early Christianity, but found them in the age made so popular by the Crusades. The modern Gregorian notation invented in Solesmes draws on the most advanced forms of notation produced in Aquitaine, and privileges codices from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the same period called into question by nineteenth-century philological enthusiasm. It is a matter of fact that those centuries produced the easiest texts to decipher; to consider them as representing the 'ancient model', though, is a very questionable option..

Edmond de Coussemaker's four-volume *Scriptorum musica* (1846-76) represents the turning point for research on polyphony. The publication collects most of the ancient treatises on mensuralism, which is the first sign of a bias that privileges theory over music. The following episode of the story is represented by the first volume of Friedrich Ludwig's *Repertorium* (1910), a wide description of the codices written in polyphonic notation before 1300, soon to be followed by the first notation handbook, completed by Johannes Wolf.²⁸ The so-called 'modal rhythm theory' started to circulate among scholars in Strasbourg, where in 1905 Ludwig replaced his mentor Gustav Jacobsthal, thus becoming the main *auctoritas* for Medieval polyphony and influencing the study of secular monody as well.²⁹

Ludwig did not seem to be worried that treatises and musical sources he referred to belonged to the end of the thirteenth century, and that even the *Discantus positio vulgaris*, the only theoretical text datable before 1250, was not only the result of a combination of at least two sources, but – above all – it originates from a copy by Jerome of Moravia (*ca.* 1300) who altered the section referring to the older tradition.³⁰

In the second half of the nineteenth century, thirteenth-century musical activity in France was used to revive the purity of Gregorian chant (Solesmes), as well as to rediscover the roots of Western polyphony (Ludwig).³¹ The expression of national rivalries (Morent 2009), the theories

²⁸ Wolf 1904. In spite of his publications on mensuralism, Coussemaker did not outline a theory of transcription. In his *Art harmonique* (Coussemaker 1865), the author simply repeated the theoretical principles of Franco of Cologne, and his transcriptions of the *organa* of Notre Dame show a rather insecure approach to the matter. Wolf's handbook – which beat Ludwig to the punch – did not deal with music notation prior to Franco of Cologne. Ludwig accused Wolf of inadequate knowledge of the sources (Ludwig 1905) and outlined his own 'modal rhythm' theory in the second *Excursus* of his *Repertorium* (Ludwig 1910, I, p. 42-57). Eventually, in 1942 Apel was the first to talk specifically about the 'six rhythmic modes' (from Johannes de Garlandia).

²⁹ The widely debated authorship of the use of modal theory for secular monody led Pierre Aubry (1874-1910) and Jean Beck (1881-1943) to court, and became a nationalist conflict (Haines 2001). Yet once again, the authorship hailed from Ludwig's theories (Chailley 1953), although Ludwig himself did not extend it to monody. The application of that theory to the troubadours was soon challenged (from Carl Appel's editions in the 1930s to the excellent contribution by van der Werf 1979), but was applied to the monumental critical edition of the *corpus* of the *trouvères* published fifteen years ago (Tischler 1997). Despite the fact that only a few scholars keep considering modal rhythm suitable for monody (and many doubts remain for two-voice polyphony), it curiously continues to be applied to the few surviving three or four-voice *organa*.

³⁰ Cserba 1935. The second part of the essay refers to codex Mo, written not before 1280 (Rokseth 1939). The *Discantus*, based on the *unicum* contained in F-Pn, Lat. 16663, ff. 64v-66v, had already been edited twice by Coussemaker (1852: 247-253, with French translation; then Coussemaker 1876, I, pp. 94-97).

³¹ The overestimation of Leoninus and Perotinus – whom we only know through the account of Anonymous IV – is emblematic of the Romantic urge for the identification of the first hero-artists. Although Anonymous IV mentions other names (Robertus de Sabilone, Petrus 'notator optimus', and

developed on the two frontlines are completely different and so are their renderings of sound. Nonetheless, they draw on the same cultural premise that informed World Wars I and II: a mixture of rigour, colonial arrogance, sense of duty, decadent exoticism. The flourishing North European culture of the twelfth century created the ‘Matter of Britain and France’ in order to identify itself with a noble and ancient tradition. The same thing happened at the end of the nineteenth century, when grand editorial *monumenta*, meant to combine Positivist rigour and the revival of historical identities, were produced with a general trust in scientific progress.

Ludwig’s rhythmical theory is based on the codices he studied: the problem is that a whole century comes between practice and the relevant theorization.³² Similarly, at Solesmes the most innovative photographic procedures were used for the duplicates of the *Paléographie musicale* (1889) so as to prove the ‘truth’ of the new liturgical chant.

Return to the origins and blind trust in the future produced veritable hermeneutic misunderstandings in other circumstances as well. On the one hand, Ludwig collated his *codices* giving special attention to the oldest ones (the ‘true ones’); on the other hand, he thought more complex sorts of polyphony (i.e. the ‘artistic one’) to be later; this is why *quadrupla* were supposed to follow two-voice *organa*.³³

Nineteenth-century rigour produced primarily rules, although made up or uselessly complicated (complexity contributed to the theoretical identity of rising musicology). Ludwig conceived a theory, built on deliberate selection of materials from ancient theorists, that was not always efficient. Furthermore, such theory did not fit with twelfth-century aesthetics of liturgy as action, not as speculation.

Rules of ‘modal rhythm’ are intricate and artificial not simply because they draw on the academicism peculiar to twelfth-century musical theory, but because of Ludwig’s normative Positivism. Similarly, the sound of ancient Parisian liturgy imagined by the late nineteenth century derives from an intellectual notion of the Middle Ages typical of the Palestrinian taste of the Cecilian Movement³⁴ later combined with mystical trends such as the *Art Nouveau* and the Pre-

Johannes Primarius, whom Coussemaker 1876, I, p. 342, writes in small caps) historiographers focused almost exclusively on Leoninus as the ‘first’ polyphonist, and Perotinus as the author of *quadrupla*, i.e. (according to many scholars) some of the highest outcomes of the School of Notre Dame tradition. Musicologists even tried to identify the two: while the identification of Leoninus by Wright 1986 seems convincing, various hypotheses about Pérotin are still debated. See Gastoué 1922, p. 19, Ficker 1930, Handschin 1932, Rokseth 1939, IV, p. 50, Birkner 1962, Husmann 1963, Tischler 1966 (a first synthesis is available in Chailley 1950: 158, with an update in Wright 1989: 291) and also, more recently, Friebel 2012.

³² Actually, Ludwig acknowledged in later years that the restoration of a method cannot rely on theoretical treatises (Busse Berger 2005, ch. I, note 99).

³³ The practice of *amplificatio*, a typical feature of 12th-century musical writing, allows the most complex figurations to stem from simpler forms, but there is no evidence that *quadrupla* originate from earlier *tripla*, originating in their turn from *dupla*. As we are dealing with improvised practices, this kind of process is not likely. On the contrary, it is probable that the various polyphonic forms were in use at the same time; nonetheless, Flotzinger 2007 (though acknowledging improvisation as relevant to *dupla* assigned to Leoninus) believes this production to precede the ‘modal’ practice of Perotinus.

³⁴ A good synthesis is found in Busse Berger 2005: 15-21.

Raphaelite movement.³⁵

There is no evidence from the oldest witnesses that Gregorian chant was slow, a cappella, arrhythmic.³⁶ The main goal of Solesmes, fostered by a reinterpretation of the Cecilian movement, was to contrast popular forms of religious fervour that incorporated the *arias* in the expression of *pietas*. Vocal asceticism, incorporeal and solemn, was informed by polemic aims, rather than focused on the idea of revival. Medievalist George Duby, aware of the ideological drive of Solesmes, did not shy away from labelling monastic chant “a stubborn struggle”:

The masculine, violent and vicious chorale – let’s try to forget the mellifluous inflexions of our time that have distorted the Gregorian melody – was thrown like a war chant.³⁷

Similarly, Ludwig’s a cappella solution, which combined impressive choral masses to dilated rhythms, is the outcome of the same notion of sacred music (at once austere and Palestrinian) developed by the Cecilian Movement in the nineteenth century. A choral rendering seems unlikely if we stick to the few contemporary witnesses;³⁸ notation itself, with its overabundance of notes, makes big masses unmanageable without dilating tempos too much. On the other hand, to admit that these musical practices were largely based on improvisation leads to assumptions that performances involved solo voices.

Where to start again?

Among the extremely rare descriptions of the use of polyphony in Notre Dame, the 1198 example shows that polyphony was an usual practice:

Rather, he [the cantor] shall put on his cope in the choir, assisted by two subdeacon canons, and, holding the staff of the cantor, shall begin the prose *Letemur gaudiis* before Vespers. When that is finished, the bishop, or the dean if the bishop be absent, or the chaplain of the bishop, if both are absent, shall begin to celebrate Vespers in the usual festal manner; with this addition, that the responsory and *Benedicamus* can be sung in two-voice, three-voice, or four-voice organum; generally the responsory will be sung by four subdeacon

³⁵ Bergeron 1998 (the title is – not by chance – *Decadent Enchantments*).

³⁶ Just an example: the vocal practice which uses the same note values is clearly in contradiction with the agogic information that is so frequent in the notation of St. Gallen.

³⁷ Duby 1976, p. 38 of the 1982 ed. Of course, this is nothing but a hypothesis on a different idea of the Middle Ages.

³⁸ See, for instance, the quote at the beginning of the next paragraph. Actually, from Ludwig (Ficker 1930) onwards (cf. Monterosso 1983) there is a firm belief that *tripla* and *quadrupla* needed large choral ensembles.

dressed in silk copes.

Compline will be sung in the usual festal manner.

After a pealing of the bells, just as on solemn fests, Matins is to be begun by the bishop, dean, or chaplain of the bishop and finished in a regular manner; with this qualification, that the third and sixth responsories will be sung in two-voice, three-voice, or four-voice organum. The cantor will appoint [those who are to sing] the responsories of Matins.

Likewise, the Mass along with the other hours will be celebrated in a regular fashion by aby one of the abovesaid [bishop, dean, or chaplain]; with this addition, that the troped epistle is to be said by two clerics dressed in silk copes, and the explanatory [lines] are to be read through nonetheless by a subdiacon.

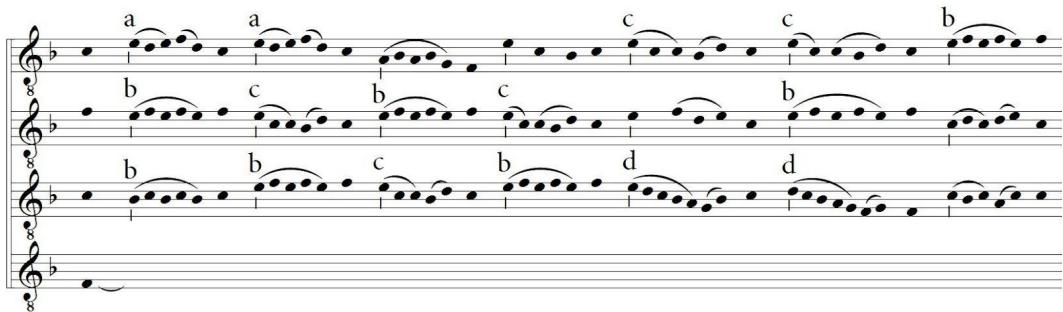
The gradual and Alleluia will be sung in two-voice, three-voice, or four-voice organum in silk cope, and four will proceed [to the center of the choir] in the Mass.

[...] Given in the year of our Lord 1198.³⁹

The quote shows that liturgical interest was in polyphony – whose employment seems to be a long-lasting practice – and not in specific songs. Several voices were used in solemn services. On every single occasion, voices were organized in a unique and unrepeatable way. Actually, the polyphony of Notre Dame is concerned with the *proprium*, that is, the texts peculiar to a particular feast (i.e. only once per year). The idea of the polyphonic *corpus* as part of a repertoire in the modern sense of the word is unacceptable.⁴⁰ Extant polyphonies clearly exhibit the high level of modular combinations that is typical of the compositional process of oral traditions:

³⁹ From the letter of papal legate Peter of Capua (trad. in Wright 1989: 239) aimed at regulating celebrations at Notre Dame during the Feast of Fools of January 1st (Paris, Archives nationales, I 498, n. 310), published in Guérard 1850, I, pp. 74-75: "In choro autem induet capam suam, assistentibus ei duobus canoniciis subdiaconis, et tenens baculum cantoris, antequam incipiunt Vespere, incipiet prosam *Letemur gaudiis*; qua finita, episcopus si presens fuerit, vel decanus absente episcopo, vel capellanus episcopi utroque absente, incipiet Vesperas ordinate et sollempniter celebrandas; hoc addito quod responsorium et *Benedicamus* in triplo, vel quadruplo, vel organo poterunt decantari; alioquin a quatuor subdiaconis indutis capis sericis responsorium cantabitur. Complectorium ordinate et sollempniter cantabitur. Pulsato autem unico classico ante Matutinos, sicut in summis sollempnitibus, Matutini ab episcopo, vel decano, vel capellano incipiunt ordine debito consummandi; hoc adjecto, quod tertium et VI responsorium in organo, vel triplo, vel quadruplo cantabuntur. Cantor Matutinorum responsoria ordinabit. Missa similiter cum ceteris Horis ordinate celebrabitur ab aliquo predictorum; hoc addito quod Epistola cum farsia dicetur a duabus in capis sericis, et postmodum a subdiacono nichilominus perlegetur. Responsorium et Alleluia in triplo, vel quadruplo, vel organo, in capis sericis, cantabuntur, et erunt in missa *iiii^{or}* procedentes ... Actum anno Incarnati Verbi m^o c^o xc^o viii^o".

⁴⁰ Anonymous IV contributes to this confusion by providing titles and names (from Leoninus and Perotinus onwards). Yet, he relates older practices, for he belongs to a later tradition (the early fourteenth-century), the same practices that give names to the troubadours, illuminate their portraits, and conceive musical composition as an authorial activity. The only ancient draft of his essay (GB-Lbl, Royal 12.C.IV, ff. 59r-80v) was copied and annotated around 1440 (*Tiberius* B.IX); from this version, composer Johann Christoph Pepusch (1667-1752) copied his personal transcription (*Add. 4909*); see Hughes-Hughes 1909, III, p. 302. The first edition was published by Coussemaker 1876, I (1864), pp. 327-364, and later in a critical edition by Reckow 1967; two English translations of the Anonymous are available (Dittmer 1959 and Yudkin 1985).



Incipit of Viderunt omnes according to the proofs by F, f. 1r (letters refer to the superimposable forms).

The survival of this mnemonic practice⁴¹ at the end of a long and glorious tradition is due to the conservative purpose that led to the collection of drafts from scattered pages.⁴² This was made for study purposes or for the same conservative idea that informs the *chansonniers*, which were produced in the same period. The study of the Notre Dame manuscripts remains invaluable, but it would be misleading to consider the extant repertoire as a reliable picture of Parisian liturgy.

Notation · The fact that the polyphony of Notre Dame is preserved as a score, and not as independent parts as was typical of the Middle Ages, not only suggests the documentary nature of the source, but also compensates for metric uncertainty through the graphic overlap of the voices. Later on, polyphony would be noted on separate parts, thus acknowledging the autonomy of the voices. The music *praxis* of Notre Dame does not produce independent voices, but projects chant onto three dimensions.

It is likely that only later copies, which seem to record solemn celebrations, offered the foundation for a theory of the metric potentials of musical texts. Yet, relations between these theoretical outputs and earlier practice remain unknown. Some elements of metric congruence can be still highlighted and, if we admit a constant update of mensural notation, it is clear that later solutions could be witnesses to older practices.

If we try, for instance, to make sense of the combination of the *ligaturae* as is suggested by the 'modal theory' and based on the number of notes, we can clearly see that the same *ligaturae* end almost every time on a strong beat.⁴³ A direct comparison with the polyphony of Notre Dame

⁴¹ This was not off-the-cuff polyphony. The liturgy of important religious feasts was prepared in detail (both *tripla* and *quadrupla* were in fact linked to festivities such as Christmas and Easter). Polyphony required much time to be prepared, thus embodying an important celebrative function.

⁴² This is probably the practice behind the term "abbreviavit" used by Anonymous IV when referring to the musical activity of Perotinus (Reckow 1967, i, p. 46), and widely discussed by scholars (Roesner 2001).

⁴³ A similar theory had been foreseen by Treitler 1979 and Crocker 1990 (see next footnote), and expressed with some contestable arguments by Lera 1989 and 1992. Treitler's theories fostered a debate with Sanders in the "Journal of the American Musicological Society" (XXXIII/3, 1980); some other (not final) arguments, suggested by Tischler 1982, led to a reply by Treitler in 1983. Lera's was the most radical statement. His theories were rejected (Pesce 1995, Sabaino 1995) because he argued a connection between the obviousness of the final consonance and the allegedly typical articulation of plainchant. By means of this prescriptive move, Lera aimed to dictate a "grammar" and not just to suggest the possible meanings of signs, as is the goal of this essay. As an outsider, Lera was soon forgotten, but his ideas, at least as an explanation of musical signs, would have

shows that most consonances privilege the last note of every *ligatura* as a meeting point, or standing point, which produces an isochronous series of accents.⁴⁴ Only final accents ending on the second-to-last note of the phrase generally avoid a consonance.⁴⁵

After all, we should not be surprised if the end of a neumatic group suggests a pause. People who tried to teach children music know that before learning musical notation, this group of notes:  is often interpreted as: 

The union of the first three notes – as if it were a *ligatura* – pushes to dwell on the last note of the first group.

Rhythm · However, if we want more voices to go together, it is more important to stick to a rhythmic grid rather than being concerned with the duration of sounds. If one wishes to be synchronized, he does not need to know the duration of sounds. What he needs is to emphasize the beat in order to keep time. To create accents is the easiest way to do this, and this is why Johannes de Garlandia mentions three ways of singing:

But any *tempo* could come up in three different types: with a full voice, with a closed voice, with a blown voice.⁴⁶

The third case permits the right tuning of the *plicae* (probably *in glissando*); the first two adjectives offer a nice description of the opposition between weak and strong beat, suggesting a rhythmic beating. If the melodic relation between *virga* and *punctum* (pitch) has switched into the metric contrast between *longa* and *brevis* (duration), we can not exclude that the intermediate stage might have been an accentual one (intensity):

deserved a less defensive debate.

⁴⁴ This characteristic was partially acknowledged by Treitler 1979: “the resolution of a dissonance by a consonance ... itself defines an accent, whether the duration of the consonant note is long or short” (p. 529); furthermore: “the demand for a prevailing consonant sonority is to be satisfied by the principle that downbeats ... jointly constitute a chain of consonances equidistant in time” (p. 530). Even Cocker 1990, although starting from the restitution of the *organum purum*, recognises – in what he calls the “the two-note problem” (p. 160) – that the overlap of the last notes of a *ligatura* produces regular consonances (p. 166). Moving from Treitler 1979 and Fassler 1987, Crocker (pp. 174-175) expands the principle to the *copulae* (where the *tenor* opts for a measured style) by suggesting a solution quite similar to the hypothesis I suggest in this essay: “This beat, represented exactly by the single notes in the tenor, would regulate the notes of the duplum according to the now usual way of aligning the end of each *ligaturae* with the next tenor note”.

⁴⁵ Guido of Arezzo already acknowledged that the part preceding the conclusion (*occursus*) could have the function of signalling the dissonance (*Micrologus*, XVIII-XIX). Modern scholars recognised a moment of delay in the second-last note, possibly meant to contrast the general trend of the phrase, both in syllabic (Sanders 1985: 461) and melismatic style (Yudkin 1983: 373-374).

⁴⁶ “Sed huiusmodi tempus habet fieri tripliciter: aliquando enim per rectam vocem, aliquando per vocem cassam, aliquando per vocem amissam”. Hieronimus de Moravia reports it as follows: “Omnium aliorum sonorum triplex est modus, unus in plenitudine vocis, alter est sub voce cassa, tertius sub voce amissa” (Reimer 1972, I, p. 38).

symbol: *punctum-virga* → *brevis-longa*

 sound: deep / sharp → weal / strong → short / long

It might thus be possible that, at the beginning, the terms *brevis* and *longa* referred to a rhythmic quantity, rather than a metric one, thus repeating the ambiguity between duration and *ictus* typical of Medieval Latin, where the quantitative *longa* became a synonym for strong beat.⁴⁷ Later theorists suggested a univocal mensural interpretation.⁴⁸ Notation itself seems easier to be stressed than measured. As an example, see the case of the *clausulae* based on *Mors*:



Incipit of the clausula based on *Mors* in F, ff. 7v-8r.

The reading is instant if we consider the *ligatureae* as the support unit for an isochronous beating (a *neuma* matches a unit). In this way, we will find the accent on the single notes or on the final note of the binary *ligatureae*.⁴⁹

If there is a group of more than two sounds, the first note may take on a rhythmic role as

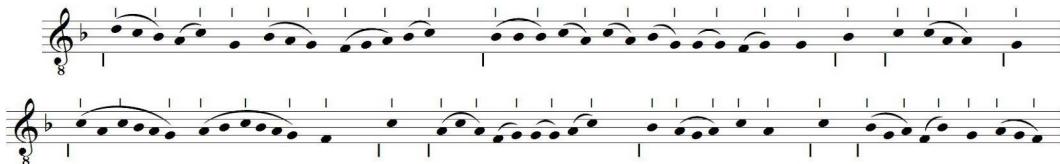
⁴⁷ Fassler 1987 gives a precious suggestion on this subject: she expands the poetical stress practice (not the metric one) to music tuning.

⁴⁸ It is worth remarking that the trochaic meter of "Stabat mater dolorosa" is performed as $\underline{\underline{d} \underline{d} \underline{s} \underline{s}}$ not as $\underline{d} \underline{d} \underline{d} \underline{d} \underline{d}$ – Treitler (1979:542) recalls that (although explicitly stated only by Odington) the poetical metric model was likely to be the foundation for the formulation of the six rhythmic modes; he also reports that, in his *Doctrinale puerorum* (ca. 1199) Alexander de Villadieu identified metrical forms in six combinations corresponding to the rhythmic modes.

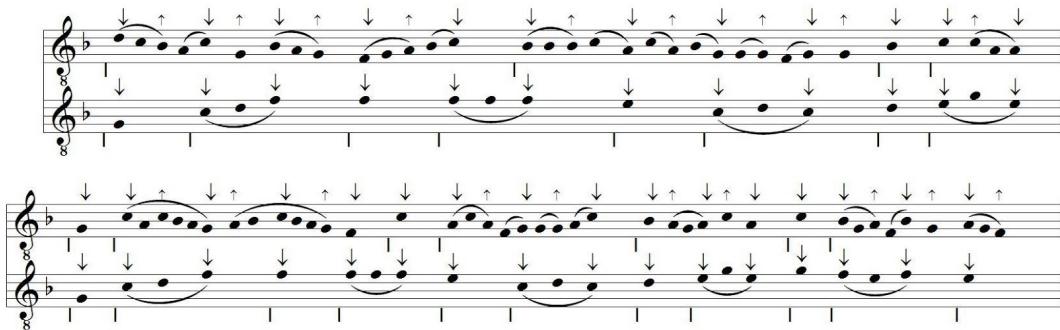
⁴⁹ Remarks on the supporting role of the second note of the *pes* (already sated in Fischer 1980) deserve to be applied to the *clavis*; they also help to explain the reason why the *currentes* are only descending. After all, the use of Franco's *proprietas* builds on a pristine sign that coincide with the short-long binary *ligatureae* (BL;  ); for the rest of the combinations (BB, LB, LL), it is necessary to change the morphology of the *ligatureae*. This form, the only one used in the earliest *organa*, is a BL one because this was the relation that was usually used at Notre Dame for two *ligati* sounds. There is no other way to understand the otherwise incomprehensible theory of Franco's *proprietas*.

well.⁵⁰ *Strophici* will behave as *ligaturae* and the *plica* will identify a weak sound.

If we reproduce the same *quadruplum* in modern notation, with beats marked above and *divisiones* below, we will obtain the following:



As usual, the *tenor* follows a double *tempo*. It might be that the ‘double measure’ trend of the *tenor* could relate to the ambiguous contrast between *mensurabilis* and *ultra mensura*.⁵¹ So, supposing that rhythm sticks to the beat of the *tenor*, we should admit a metric unit of two *mensurae* – a sort of an upbeat-downbeat sequence. This explains the presence of the *divisiones*⁵² that stress the beat, following the rhythm of the *tenor*:



It is not difficult to restore ancient polyphony in a more compact and modern form. The purpose, though, is not the mere restoration of chant through symbols; rather to highlight the overlap of the

⁵⁰ The reason why this option, although predominant, does not always occur depends on the context. The ambiguity (as shown by Treitler 1979, p. 535 ff.) is not even solved by modal rhythm theory. I will devote a forthcoming article to an in-depth analysis of this topic. However, it is worth stressing that the main supporting sound is always the last one, even in presence of a double accent. This would explain the different writing of the *currentes* where, on the contrary, the strong sound is the first one (a possible leftover of an archaic notation, where the *virga* and the *longa* corresponded).

⁵¹ The distinction stated in the first lines (i.e. the oldest part) of the *Discantus positio vulgaris* (where the six rhythmic modes are not mentioned at all) is rather difficult to understand: “Mensurable est quod mensura unius temporis vel plurium mensuratur. Ultra mensuram sunt que minus quam uno tempore et ampliori quam duobus mensurantur” [‘A *misura*’ corresponds to one or more *tempos*; ‘Ultra mensuram’ corresponds to less than one *tempo* and more than two]. The examples made by Hieronymus de Moravia have brought some scholars to suppose a difference between binary and ternary trends (Sanders 1962). Johannes de Garlandia limits the use of ‘ultra mensura’ so as to distinguish modes III-IV-V (which actually manage the rhythmic unit on two *tempos*) from modes I-II-VI (which need only one *tempo*). See Reimer 1972, II, p. 47, whose interpretation is not accepted Sanders (1980: 278).

⁵² I prefer to use the term *divisio* (as suggested by J. de Garlandia) for the line that precedes some *ligaturae* (other scholars use the term *pausa* or *sospirium*) in order to avoid it to be interpreted as an interruption of singing. Its function seems to be mostly the mark of the *strong* beat, no matter whether it is preceded or not by a breath. Occasionally the *divisio* takes on a different role (e.g. separation of the equal in rank; identification of a syncopation; etc.); I will discuss such cases in my next essay.

upbeats. I am not suggesting a new form of transcription, but a new employment of transcription aimed to explain the rhythmic combination of the voices. As is the case in any form of musical improvisation, singing will be independent from writing so as to express its own *swing* according to the nature and emphasis that the performance will eventually choose:



Or (if the unusual writing does not prove too uncomfortable):⁵³



The rhythmic sequence outlined above the *quadruplum*, according to the usual modal transcription in 6/8, shows that the use of stresses (strong-weak) instead of durations (long-short) is not only quite similar in its outcome, but also solves some ambiguities.⁵⁴ Similarities between the accentual hypothesis proposed here and the metric (modal) one suggest that scholars tried an interpretative approach. The *a posteriori* theory, although unaware of the pristine reasons of the chant, attempted to explain its features. The ‘modal rhythm theory’ must not be rejected completely; it should be understood in those inner reasons that theorists themselves did not understand. Let’s now push the argument a little further: it is unlikely that the accentual taste of some polyphonic practices was really perceived as a iambic or trochaic sequence just because of

⁵³ This solution explains better the foundation of melodic modules (and their improvisational origin) that characterises polyphonic forms.

⁵⁴ It is important to observe that the *divisio* is unclear with the traditional notation, as its value oscillates between dotted quarter and eighth rests (see the two rests at the end of the example). On the contrary, when *divisio* is considered as the start of the strong beat, it becomes the indispensable mark for the comprehension of rhythm.

the rhythmic emphasis. If one sings a series of notes that are alternatively stressed and unstressed:



the weak sound, because of the nature of singing, will be unlikely equidistant from the upbeats, thus producing – eventually – longer or shorter stressed notes:



The *inégale* series of accents was probably peculiar to the Parisian ‘style’ – and we can talk about a Parisian ‘style’ because of its local production. Theorists have subsequently tried to ‘explain’ this – probably late – way of singing through the so-called ‘modal system’, where the long-short sequence is used in the first mode, whereas the short-long one (rare and artificial) refers to the second mode (along with the third and fourth).⁵⁵ The transcription of this ‘mood’ in the common 6/8 *tempo* locks its potential *swing* in a stiff ternary trend.⁵⁶

Back to the roots · Even though sharp alternatives might be seen as a simplification, it is worth distinguishing ‘rhythmic’ and ‘mensural’ approaches as a metaphor for the contrast between ‘body’ and ‘mind’, between real ‘practice’ and ‘abstraction’. The polyphony of Notre Dame, which was the expression of the Romanesque culture of ‘action’, was still focused on the body, and its trend was rhythmic, that is to say based on physiological pulsations. Thirteenth-century polyphony – the polyphony of the *ars nova* – was based instead on *mensura* and calculation; its vocal parts are written separately because they are based on rigorous, rational, and combinatorial durations.

This dichotomy, although Manichean – actually, things are less contrasting and in constant evolution – helps in understanding differences. The moment when Perotinus’ *organa* are written down is not the moment when they were sung; it is the ‘scientific’ stage leading to the abstractions of the thirteenth-century, when the solemn liturgical forms of the past are noted on parchments by means of the ancient notation, as happened with the *chansonniers*.

⁵⁵ Sanders 1962 had already shown that time articulation on a weak beat is not regular when he acknowledged the existence of an ‘alternative’ trochaic trend for the *brevi* in the third mode. At the beginning of his essay, Sanders gathers some examples that have forced scholars to admit the binary trend among the rhythmic forms practiced in Notre Dame, thus implicitly undermining the founding principle of the ‘rhythmic theory of modes’; see also Treitler 1979, p. 541, and Göllner 1995 and 1997.

⁵⁶ Sanders 1962 recalls the three ways of performing modal rhythm evoked by Petrus Le Viser in the *Regule* (ca. 1320) by Robert de Handlo (*more longo, mediocri e lascivo*). Although a late contribution, such a hint seems to overlap the considerations by Jacobus de Liège (*Speculum musicae*, VII, ch. XVII) who, while listing the styles of singing (*mensuratio morosa, media, cito* and *citissima*), matches the *citissimus* with the Handlo’s *lascivus* as a binary practice typical of previous periods.

In other words, Notre Dame has been interpreted and understood through the lens of the thirteenth-century. It was easy to match the old practice with the earliest signs of the great polyphonic season, thus considering the former as part of the latter. On the contrary, Notre Dame looks like a mature culture, almost decadent in its richness. The anamorphic expansions assigned to the *tenor* and the rhythmic repetitions of the other voices might be seen as a sort of ‘mannerism’, the outcome of a redundant and hyper-refined taste for complication. Cistercian abbot Bernard of Clairvaux – the emblem of the new Gothic trends – criticised in a similar way the ‘old’ Benedictines of Cluny, the last expression of a Romanesque clergy that focused on ritual emphasis in order to balance out the-by then-forthcoming end of an era.⁵⁷

Avoiding the focus on debates around the moral values of chronological distinctions, a reassessment of the polyphony of Notre Dame in terms of sound amplification (i.e. the reverberation of an embodied chant) invites us to reconsider those musical practices as relevant to the vocal style that Duby assigned to Gregorian chant. In this way, it is easier to see polyphony and plainchant as informed by less schizophrenic aesthetics.

I do not claim that I know what Notre Dame’s polyphony sounded like, for this is something that musical ensembles specialised in medieval music should deal with. However, moving from different ideas about the role of music at the time, it is easier to imagine a more dense vocal style that dwells on the end of the *ligatureae*, creates rhythms, or rather rhythmic streams that, drawing in the other notes, might suddenly slip, almost a decoration to the harmony.

The charm of that chant probably lied in its size and in the mnemonic effort required by those musical expansions. To sing *Viderunt omnes* today with a score deprives music from the wonder of thousands of sounds memorised by the human mind, expression of a religious devotion that pushes mankind to its limits. On the other hand, to get rid of the prescribed intonation and to juxtapose melodic fragments just as sound reflections of the bourdon does not seem the most effective way to perform *texts* as they were transmitted by the extant codices (sources that a lifeless approach to philology keeps overestimating). Yet, an attempt of this kind would regain the unaffectedness of the chant, a component completely neglected by current performances of twelfth-century *organa*.

“The emperor is not wearing anything at all”. We know this. Kids will keep telling the truth but adults still have a powerful instrument: creativity”, a critical tool that can be precious if paired with experience. If we have to imagine embroidered clothes, we should do it by acknowledging

⁵⁷ This is the brilliant theory proposed by Duby 1976.

that all information from the past is important and should be understood no matter how it has reached us. Although free to imagine new wardrobes anytime – our ideas as well as Ludwig's are subject to time – research remains an irreplaceable tool to understand the material our history is made of: the past is worth our best attention because it is where we come from, it is the reason we are here.

Translation by Francesco Fusaro and Brianne Dolce

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Cita recomendada

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