SPECTRAL MEDIEVALISM: COMPOSING IN THE MIDDLE

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I, Thomas Fournil confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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I extend my heartfelt gratitude to James Weeks, Julian Anderson, Marcel Pérès, and Nye Parry for their unparalleled depth of knowledge, steadfast encouragement, and unwavering belief in this project.

James has consistently nurtured my enthusiasm for early music; his commissioning and performance of my recorder concerto stands as a true highlight of my undergraduate years. Intriguingly, this composition already featured chants from Hildegard von Bingen and spectral harmonies derived from the gongs and tam-tams of the percussion department. Little did I know that I would one day develop a deep intimacy with Hildegard's manuscripts. James celebrated my idiosyncrasies, and without his appreciation, I would not have had the courage to challenge expectations within the conservatoire. His support extended beyond the institution, helping establish my medieval ensemble professionally, and his supervision in the final stages of writing proved invaluable.

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My artistic maturation is indebted to Marcel Pérès, whose influence on my outlook was profound. He equipped me with the skills to read medieval manuscripts, investigate obscure repertoires and critically evaluate scholarly literature. This culminated in the formation of the Idrîsî Ensemble and the transmission of his scholarship to Noémie Ducimetière, Alexandra Pouta, Elsa Hackett Esteban, and numerous others. Much of my creativity is rooted on the lifework of Marcel; I am grateful for his learned yet spirited exploration of medieval music. On multiple occasions, my efforts have been dedicated to rendering his voice: through English translations of his writing, creative interpretations of his scholarship, and compositional transmutations of his vocal artistry.

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SUBMITTED WORK

Accompanying this thesis are the scores and recordings of the subsequent compositions, with the exception of “Sound Installation”, which exists only as a recording:

Se vous n’estes (2017), 22’36”, performed by Thomas Fournil (piano, singing bowl), Madeline Claire de Berrié (voice), Simon Williams (flute), Sarah McCabe (viola), Tom Widdicombe (viola), Myles Wakelin-Harkett (clarinet), Gwen Reed (contrabass) and Nicholas Hennell-Foley (electronics).

Quintina (2022), 17’, performed by Ka Wing Karen Wong (flute).

subtiliorbeats (2018), 2’43”, performed by Helena Ricci (harps), Ben Comeau (keyboard), Adam Merrell (percussion), Ábel Misha Gille Esbenshade (electronics) and Aubrey Lavender-Cook (electronics).

Dieus sal la terra (2020), 4’56”, performed by Elsa Hackett Esteban (terza), Noémie Ducimetière (segonda), Alexandra Achillea Pouta (bassu), and Thomas Fournil (medieval portative organ).

Sound Installation (2022), 25’58”, performed by Simeon May (saxophone) and Thomas Fournil (medieval portative organ, electronics).

ABSTRACT

This dissertation, along with its accompanying musical scores and recordings, explores the intersection of medievalism and spectralism in my creative practice. Through composition, I ask: How might spectral(ist) and medievalist conceptions of time, sound, melody, harmony, thresholds, and hierarchy be entwined and transfigured? How might new medievalisms inform contemporary classical music practice and open creative and pedagogical pathways for composers? My project also highlights the unique opportunity that medievalism provides for merging spectralism and spectrality: perhaps for the first time, this conflation formally situates spectralism within a queer philosophical context. The idea of *composing in the middle* serves as both a creative methodology and a critical lens, positioning the Middle Ages as a site of liminality where creators may forge tools to engage with the present. Inhabiting this space has led me to develop a peripatetic, holistic practice that moves between eras, intellectual traditions, and disciplines such as musicology, performance, pedagogy, and visual art.

The works encompass diverse forms, including spectral settings of Machaut ("Se vous n'estes"), original insights into Old Roman chant structure ("Greu m'es a durar"), spectral transcriptions of chant ("Quintina"), medievalist interpretations of lofi hip hop ("subtiliorbeats"), new performance strategies for trobairitz and Corsican traditions ("Dieus sal la terra"), and sonic representations of architecture and spectral memory ("Sound Installation").

By embracing the *middle* – between tradition and innovation, theory and practice, written and oral traditions, male and female identity, northern and southern cultures, politics and poetics, legitimacy and marginality – this dissertation demonstrates how composition can function as a tool for exploring, negotiating, and reimagining tradition.

1 – Preface

In this project, I engage with non-standard, regional, and decolonial forms of medievalism, examining their queerness and political implications within composition and classical music settings. To situate this discussion, the first section of this preface (1.1) defines conventional forms of medievalism in composition, examines their political charge, and addresses their relationship with recent musicology. This provides a foundation for considering why a practice-as-research methodology is particularly suited to investigating these complexities, and how what I have come to describe as "composing in the middle" functions as a framework and metaphor for a holistic approach to compositional practice. Section 1.2 explores how modernity and medievalism are historically intertwined, reinforcing narratives of progress, difference and superiority that may inform contemporary compositional practice. In section 1.3, I briefly examine how medieval music – as a liminal space where antiquity and modernity intersect – resonates with the aesthetics of spectral music, also described as *liminal* music. Finally, I explore why medievalism, as a retrospective mode of creation, could be considered "spectral" in nature, drawing on alternative conceptions of time and Jacques Derrida's concept of spectrality (1.4; 1.5).

1.1 Medievalism, or settling in the "middle"

In their introduction to *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Medievalism*, Kirsten Yri and Stephen Meyer define medievalism broadly as "the postmedieval borrowing of medieval ideas, narratives, images, and sounds", tracing its origins to the end of the Middle Ages themselves.[1] The concept of a "Middle Age" as a distinct historical period was largely a creation of Renaissance thinkers. As David Matthews explains, figures like Petrarch viewed their own era as a rebirth following a "dark age", thus establishing the "Middle Ages" as a foil for Renaissance achievements.[2] However, it was in the 19th century that the Middle Ages were fully constructed as "a distinct Other" emerging alongside the development of "new science-like methodologies" for its study.[3]

In his plenary lecture "The Notion of the Middle Ages: Our Middle Ages, Our Selves",

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[1] For instance, Albrecht Dürer's 1512 depiction of Charlemagne could be seen as an example of medievalism. Meyer, Stephen C., and Kirsten Yri, editors. *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Medievalism*. New product ed, Oxford University Press, 2020, pp. 1-7.

[2] Matthews, David R. *Medievalism: A Critical History*. D.S. Brewer, 2015, p. 20. See also Mommsen, Theodor E. "Petrarch's Conception of the 'Dark Ages'". *Speculum*, vol. 17, no. 2, 1942, pp. 226–42, https://doi.org/10.2307/2856364.

[3] Matthews, *Medievalism*, p. 5.

Richard Utz discusses how the study of medieval culture began as a largely amateur pursuit.[4] Despite its gradual philologisation, engagement with medieval culture has remained diverse and popular, as seen in the enduring presence of medievalism in 20th- and 21st-century media, from historical novels and fantasy literature to films, television, and video games. For artists across disciplines, medievalism functions as a means of deepening their practice, and interrogating constructions of identity, tradition, and belonging. It also constitutes an ideological space – a fantasy realm for "reformers of all types" – through which one may critically engage with contemporary paradigms.[5] For instance, Laura Dolp interprets the medievalisms of Estonian composer Arvo Pärt as both a political and aesthetic mode of resistance[6] – an approach that Shenton classifies as "metamodernism"[7] and Paul Griffiths describes as a "deep present".[8] Medievalism has continually functioned as a catalyst for radical new sounds and ideas, as Lisa Colton observed:

> Interest in medieval culture and society impinged on a significant proportion of twentieth-century theoretical writing outside the strictly musical and lay at the heart of those helping to define and theorise the avant-garde.[9]

Kirsten Yri similarly observes that critical theorists have turned to medievalism as a source of "philosophies, social and cultural models, and 'systems of thought' that, in their premodern condition, could be wielded to counter the modern beliefs in evolutionary progress, universalism, and structuralism".[10] As we briefly touched on in relation to Arvo Pärt, composers, like critical theorists, have engaged with the medieval as a means of critiquing, enriching and reimagining their contemporary societies. The following examples further illustrate how composers have employed medievalism as a tool within broader progressive ambitions.

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[4] Utz, Richard. "The Notion of the Middle Ages: Our Middle Ages, Our Selves". *Medievally Speaking*, May 2015, https://medievallyspeaking.blogspot.com/2015/05/the-notion-of-middle-ages-our-middle.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

[5] Heckert, Deborah. "Hucbald's Fifths and Vaughan Williams's Mass". Meyer and Yri, *Oxford Handbook*, p. 337.

[6] Dolp, Laura. "Miserere: Arvo Pärt and the Medieval Present". Meyer and Yri, *Oxford Handbook*, p. 367-388.

[7] Shenton, Andrew. *Arvo Pärt's Resonant Texts: Choral and Organ Music 1956–2015.* Cambridge University Press, 2018, pp. 280–284.

[8] Griffiths, Paul. "Now, and Then". *Tabula Rasa*, ECM Records/Universal Edition AG, ECM Records, 2010.

[9] Colton, Lisa. "Past Tense: Creative Medievalism in the Music of Margaret Lucy Wilkins". Meyer and Yri, *Oxford Handbook*, p. 322.

[10] Yri, Kirsten. "Medievalism and Antiromanticism in Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana*". Meyer and Yri, *Oxford Handbook*, p. 275.

Liszt is often regarded as one of the most forward-looking composers of his time, famously "hurling his lance into the infinite space of the future".[11] Yet, he cultivated "an almost scholarly interest in plainchant", actively supported the reformative work of Solesmes, and criticised conservatoires for their failure to appreciate "old art as an indispensable stirrup for the present".[12] Similarly, Brahms viewed medievalism as a mirror of the present, engaging with it as a space of renewal rather than retreat.[13] Fromental Halévy employed medievalism as a tool for national critique,[14] while Schumann and Wagner used it as an instrument of historicist nationalism, shaping a shared cultural identity.[15,16] Moving into the 20th century, Carl Orff drew on medievalism to counter the perceived excesses of Romanticism,[17] while Vaughan Williams engaged with medieval themes as a means of addressing the anxieties of modernity.[18] Aleksandra Vojčić links the compositional innovations of Ligeti, Carter, Lutosławski, Crumb, Davies, and Adès to the experimental notational, metric, and rhythmic practices of late 14th-century music.[19] Finally, composers such as Pärt, Tavener, Wilkins, MacMillan, and Gubaidulina turned to medieval forms to reframe modern ritual spaces, cultivate specific musical attitudes, and advance philosophical ideas, among other aims.[20,21] We have seen that medievalism often reflects broader artistic, ideological, and cultural concerns. It is now necessary to examine how it typically takes shape in practical and compositional terms – serving as a counterpoint to my own approaches throughout this dissertation.

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[11] Sayn-Wittgenstein, Carolyne, and La Mara. *Franz Liszt's Briefe an die Fürstin Carolyne Sayn-Wittgenstein*. Theil 3, edited by La Mara, Breitkopf & Härtel, 1902, vol. 7, pp. 57–58. Quoted in Mikusi, Balázs. "Liszt's Medievalist Modernism". Meyer and Yri, *Oxford Handbook*, p. 63.

[12] Mikusi, Balázs. "Liszt's Medievalist Modernism". Meyer and Yri, *Oxford Handbook*, pp. 63-65.

[13] Lott, Marie Sumner. "From Knight Errant to Family Man". Meyer and Yri, *Oxford Handbook*, p. 38.

[14] Hallman, R. Diana. "The Distant Past as Mirror and Metaphor: Portraying the Medieval in Historical French Grand Operas". Meyer and Yri, *Oxford Handbook*, pp. 112-119.

[15] Richardson, S. Michael. "Romantic Medievalist Nationalism in Schumann's *Genoveva*, Then and Now". Meyer and Yri, *Oxford Handbook*, 2020, p. 169.

[16] Eichner, Barbara. "Richard Wagner's Medieval Visions". Meyer and Yri, *Oxford Handbook*, p. 174.

[17] Yri, Kirsten. "Medievalism and Antiromanticism in Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana*". Meyer and Yri, *Oxford Handbook*, pp. 269-295.

[18] Heckert, Deborah. "Hucbald's Fifths and Vaughan Williams's Mass". Meyer and Yri, *Oxford Handbook*, p. 332.

[19] Vojčić, Aleksandra. "The Return of Ars Subtilior? Rhythmic Complexity in the Chantilly Codex and in Selected Twentieth-Century Works". Meyer and Yri, *Oxford Handbook*, pp. 340-361.

[20] Colton, Lisa. "Past Tense: Creative Medievalism in the Music of Margaret Lucy Wilkins". Meyer and Yri, *Oxford Handbook*, p. 322.

[21] Dolp, Laura. "Miserere: Arvo Pärt and the Medieval Present". Meyer and Yri, *Oxford Handbook*, pp. 367-388.

Aleksandra Vojčić identifies three categories of medievalism: evocation, adaptation, and assimilation.[22] Evocation is a cursory resemblance, often relying on ancient languages and visual cues such as "novel or rudimentary notation". [23] Adaptation could take the form of quotation, parody, pastiche, new settings of medieval texts, and the use of just intonation.[24] Assimilation, on the other hand, may involve a deeper engagement with numerology and symmetry, incorporating structural devices such as cantus firmus, ratios, tactus, and isorhythm.[25]

Musical signifiers of the medieval often stem from contemporary reinterpretations of plainchant and organum, incorporating "paraphony", "archaic harmonies, simple melodies, and largely uniform durations" [26] as well as "a general feeling of prayerfulness".[27] The specific handling of silence, responsorial textures, and ethereal sonorities may also evoke spirituality or other-worldly realms, as heard in Sofia Gubaidulina's "Sieben Worte". Similarly in "Musica Angelorum", Margaret Lucy Wilkins employs "tremolandi, glissandi, *sul ponticello* bowing, and harmonics" to depict the fluttering wings of angels.[28] Composers may also incorporate broader early music elements, such as Landini and Picardie cadences, brass choruses, historical instrumentation, or an open approach that privileges "pitch and rhythm over instrumentation".[29]

Arvo Pärt belongs to this lineage and could be said to promote a traditional understanding of plainchant in his compositions. For instance, his writing systems are generally based on single pitches, devoid of ornamentation or micro-intonation, fulfilling audience expectations of "directness, transparency, and austerity".[30] This asceticism aligns with his ambition of effacing the creative self and deferring to a higher authority. As Paul Hillier observes in his biography of Pärt:

> With Gregorian chant as his source, he [Pärt] studied how to write a single line of music. Writing semi-automatically, page after page, filling book after book, he sought to enter a

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[22] Vojčić, Aleksandra. "The Return of Ars Subtilior? Rhythmic Complexity in the Chantilly Codex and in Selected Twentieth-Century Works". Meyer and Yri, *Oxford Handbook*, pp. 340-361.

[23] Vojčić, "Return of Ars Subtilior", p. 342.

[24] Vojčić, "Return of Ars Subtilior", p. 345.

[25] Vojčić, "Return of Ars Subtilior", p. 340.

[26] Yri, Kirsten. "Medievalism and Antiromanticism in Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana*". Meyer and Yri, *Oxford Handbook*, p. 282.

[27] Dolp, Laura. "Miserere: Arvo Pärt and the Medieval Present". Meyer and Yri, *Oxford Handbook*, p. 376.

[28] Colton, Lisa. "Past Tense: Creative Medievalism in the Music of Margaret Lucy Wilkins". *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Medievalism*, edited by Stephen C. Meyer and Kirsten Yri, New product ed., Oxford University Press, 2020, p. 308.

[29] Dolp, Laura. "Miserere: Arvo Pärt and the Medieval Present". *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Medievalism*, edited by Stephen C. Meyer and Kirsten Yri, New product ed., Oxford University Press, 2020, p. 372.

[30] Dolp, "Miserere", p. 376.

different sense of time, to fully assimilate all that might be meant by the idea of 'monody'.[31]

Similarly, Maurice Duruflé, Olivier Messiaen, Benjamin Britten, John Tavener, Henryk Górecki, Giya Kancheli, James MacMillan, Morten Lauridsen, and Pascal Dusapin, amongst many others, utilise small intervals, stepwise motion, simple repetitive rhythms, syllabic text-setting, and modal harmonies to evoke liturgical, meditative, and mystical atmospheres.[32] Tavener, however, incorporates more ornamentation than many of his contemporaries, though this remains primarily an orientalist aesthetic, drawing on Orthodox and Byzantine chant rather than engaging with a new understanding of Gregorian chant. In Chapter 3, I will explore how recent writings on plainchant have helped contextualise specific medievalist aesthetics and narratives within my practice. To conclude this section, and in preparation for my discussions on modernism and modernity, it is important to consider the framework in which conservatoire composers may find themselves positioned, the ways medievalism can unsettle a potential divide between practice, musicology, and critical theory, and how this project seeks to engage with that divide in a personal and non-systematic way.

I began this research assuming that medieval music had been thoroughly explored, that composers engaging with early music could depend on stable scholarship, and that cross-fertilisation with spectralism might yield new perspectives. This is especially evident in Chapter 2 of this thesis, and the first composition of my portfolio "Se vous n'estes". However, I soon realised that the landscape is far from settled, and that new medieval musicology shared significant parallels with queer and postcolonial studies. Musicologists and performer-researchers are revolutionising our understanding of plainchant, introducing new analytical and performance techniques, questioning the legacy of Solesmes, and problematising Gregorian aesthetics as embodying a specific set of values and narratives rooted in 19th-century society. We have seen that the political dimension of medievalism is immanent and cannot be separated from the act of composition. However, in my experience of French and British conservatoires, I have found a disconnect between contemporary medieval scholarship, critical theory, postcolonial studies, and compositional training. Several musicologists have examined this gap, offering insights that could help conservatoire-creatives bridge it.

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[31] Hillier, Paul. *Arvo Pärt.* Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 74. Quoted in Dolp, Laura. "Miserere: Arvo Pärt and the Medieval Present". Meyer and Yri, *Oxford Handbook*, p. 372.

[32] Relevant works include Duruflé's "Requiem"; Messiaen's "O sacrum convivium", "Le Banquet céleste", and "La Nativité du Seigneur"; Britten's "A Ceremony of Carols" and "Hymn to St Peter"; Tavener's "Funeral Ikos", "The Protecting Veil", "Song for Athene"; Górecki's "Totus Tuus", "Beatus Vir", "Symphony No. 3"; Kancheli's "Caris Mere", "Exil"; MacMillan's "Miserere", "Stabat Mater", "Seven Last Words from the Cross"; Lauridsen's "O Magnum Mysterium"; and Dusapin's "Granum Sinapis".

Georgina Born's concept of a social and aesthetic split suggests that conservatoire education remains apolitical (or rather, operates under the guise of apoliticism), evolving in autonomy despite the growing impact of critical musicology.[33] In his doctoral thesis, "Case Studies in Queer Listening and Queer Performance Practice", Nicholas Bonadies summarises the situation:

> Musical "works" and the "autonomy" thesis have been extensively historicized, situated, and critiqued in what is now mainstream conservatoire-musicology – once called "New" musicology – as highly (cis)gendered, heterocentric, white-Eurocentric, and colonial ideals.[34]

New Musicology has examined this phenomenon at length, yet conservatoires continue to operate within a framework that isolates music from broader cultural, historical, and political enquiries. Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus is particularly useful here, as it describes not only a shared set of skills but also ingrained modes of thinking, behaving, and valuing certain forms of knowledge over others.[35] Nicholas Bonadies identified similar disciplinary gaps between theory and practice, noting "the odd reality that in conservatoire-music, it's not inherently obvious that music would be studied socially".[36] This perceived disconnect led him to introduce the term "conservatoire-land" as a framework for understanding conservatoire-specific epistemologies:

> I've been using "conservatoire-land", and derivatives like "conservatoire-musicianship", "conservatoire-discourse", and so on, as a catch-all for a broader habitus surrounding "conservatoire-music": the people, practices, discourses, material realities, and socio-cultural ecosystems involved in its (re)production, its sale and consumption, and of particular concern, its aesthetics.[37]

Conservatoire training may lead composers to approach medieval music as a fixed, neutral object, prioritising the written note over other readings of the score. However, recent scholarship has foregrounded the political implications of this stance, especially in respect to the embodied, regional, layered and fluid nature of medieval traditions. Practice-as-research provides the perfect methodological framework to intervene in-between disciplines, making space for the integration of musicological and critical perspectives into contemporary composition. New understandings of

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[33] Born, Georgina. "For a Relational Musicology: Music and Interdisciplinarity, Beyond the Practice Turn". *Journal of the Royal Musicological Association*, vol. 135, no. 2, 2010.

[34] Bonadies, Nick. *Case Studies in Queer Listening and Queer Performance Practice: or, To Aunt Glenn (Gould), My Drag Mother*. Doctoral thesis, Guildhall School of Music & Drama, 2022, p. 36.

[35] Bourdieu, Pierre. "Social Space and Symbolic Power". *Sociological Theory*, vol. 7, no. 1, 1989, p. 18.

[36] Bonadies, *Case Studies in Queer Listening,* p. 46.

[37] Bonadies, *Case Studies in Queer Listening,* p. 17.

identity, vocal technique, ornamentation, micro-intonation, and improvisation in medieval music may offer composers previously overlooked values, narratives, and techniques to draw from – a subject explored especially in Chapters 3 and 4 of this thesis. By composing in the middle, creators can expand the boundaries of how medieval music informs the practice, teaching and reception of composition. This form of "presentism"[38] is inherently multidisciplinary, often requiring "a blend of personal academic interest, practical experience of early repertoire during higher-level study, and theoretical engagement with ideas that could be used as the basis for radical new sounds".[39] Constantly blurring the boundaries between medievalism and medieval studies, composers must therefore settle in a space of intersection; perhaps in what Umberto Eco described as "a curious oscillation between fantastic neomedievalism and responsible philological examination".[40]

In an era defined by the growing fragmentation of disciplines and the sharpening focus of critical discourse, inhabiting such an intermediary space may be viewed as uncomfortable, or even illegitimate. Through my discussions on composition, ethics, musicology, modernity, and spectrality, I seek not to provide a systematic study of these topics, but to reveal the motivations that shape my work, and offer a set of tools – imperfect, provisional – for other curious creators to go further.

1.2 Ending worlds: modernity and medievalism

A holistic approach to medievalist composition must consider the historical and ideological forces shaping both our modernist and medievalist frameworks. In this section, we briefly examine how narratives of progress, difference, and superiority may inform contemporary creative practices, using two historical events – the fall of Constantinople and the so-called discovery of the New World – as symbols of our inherited sense of modernity.

According to the most established Eastern Roman calendar, doomsday would come in the seven-thousandth year since Creation, or 1492 AD. For the Romaioi, or Byzantines, the fall of Constantinople was also "a necessary precondition for the end of the world";[41] its eventual collapse to the Ottoman forces of Mehmed II in 1453 was therefore right on schedule. A few decades later, the Latin church (which benefitted from a different Anno Mundi) was less preoccupied with the

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[38] Vojčić, "Return of Ars Subtilior", pp. 340–61. See Coote, Leslie. "A Short Essay about Neo-Medievalism". *Studies in Medievalism* XIX, edited by Karl Fugelso, Boydell & Brewer, 2010, p. 25; Kaufman, Amy S. "Medieval Unmoored". *Studies in Medievalism* XIX, p. 5.

[39] Colton, Lisa. "Past Tense: Creative Medievalism in the Music of Margaret Lucy Wilkins". Meyer and Yri, *Oxford Handbook*, p. 305.

[40] Eco, Umberto. *Travels in Hyper Reality : Essays*. Translated by William Weaver, Harcourt, Inc., 1986, p. 63.

[41] Magdalino, Paul. "The End of Time in Byzantium". *Endzeiten: Eschatologie in den monotheistischen Weltreligionen*, edited by Wolfram Brandes and Felicitas Schmieder, De Gruyter, 2008, pp. 119-133.

apocalypse than with the persecution of Muslims and Jews,[42] bringing about the fall of Granada in 1492. That same year, the ships of Columbus would make landfall in the Bahamas.

In her recent study *The Conquered: Byzantium and America on the Cusp of Modernity*,[43] Eleni Kefala shows these momentous events as complementary landmarks in the constitution of modernity. From a secular perspective, the Byzantines had indeed "foretold with uncanny precision the end of the world as they knew it",[44] the collapse of old empires, and the rise of a new global order. This cognitive remapping was in part spearheaded by the carracks of Christopher Columbus:

> His arrival in the Caribbean [...] symbolically inaugurates the end of the world as it was known up until that moment. Columbus' journey across the Atlantic paves the way for Europe's expansion in the so-called New World or West Indies. In other words, it opens the way for the conquest of America and the rise of Eurocentric modernity.[45]

These words by Eleni Kefala were taken from the podcast "Byzantium & Friends", where she was invited to discuss her work. Host Anthony Kaldellis noted that many regarded the fall of Constantinople as a "fitting punishment" for centuries of vacillation and disobedience to the church of Rome. Their version of Christian Roman civilisation was in some way discredited as "a false path out of antiquity", and "the correct path was the one that led to Western modern Europe".[46] These attitudes survived into contemporary culture, and served to validate the rising notion of a Western European supremacy:

> Outside modernity's exceptionalism, the premodern and non-modern were relegated to the sphere of the underdeveloped, regressive, belated, or simply inferior. Byzantium and America […] are complementary strands in the mirror of a narcissistic modernity, and both represent its "underside" – coloniality.[47]

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[42] Del Mar, Alexander. *The Worship of Augustus Caesar Derived from a Study of Coins, Monuments, Calendars, Aeras, and Astronomical and Astrological Cycles: The Whole Establishing a New Chronology and Survey of History and Religion*. Cambridge Encyclopedia, 1900, p. 221.

[43] Kefala, Eleni. *The Conquered: Byzantium and America on the Cusp of Modernity*. Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2020.

[44] Kefala, *The Conquered*, p. 3.

[45] Kaldellis, Anthony, and Eleni Kefala. "Laments for the Fall: Constantinople and Tenochtitlan in Counterpoint, with Eleni Kefala". *Byzantium & Friends*, 23 June 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PGi3_PTU5qs. Accessed 9 Dec. 2023.

[46] Kaldellis, "Laments for the Fall".

[47] Kefala, *The Conquered*, p. 14.

The "irrational myth of modernity"[48] as Enrique Dussel puts it, is reliant on exogenous and endogenous inferiorisation, or the framing of what is external in space (non-European cultures) and time (the Middle Ages) as primitive. The word "modern", initially used to distinguish between contemporary and earlier events, would eventually acquire a more specific flavour, as belonging to a linear conception of history and progress:

> Free from the burden of the Greco-Roman past, which until then was thought of as superior to the present and therefore as a standard that should be emulated, the Enlightenment heaved anchor and sailed headlong into its modern future. In this way Europe set itself up as scientifically, technologically, and culturally superior to the past and to other parts of the world.[49]

Voltaire, quintessential author of the Enlightenment, described indigenous people such as the Caribs and Iroquois as "plunged into barbaric stupidity for the most part" without "reasoned knowledge",[50] and Byzantine history as "a worthless collection" of "declamation and miracles" and "a disgrace to the human mind".[51] While Romantic medievalism brought about a partial form of "rehabilitation", this particular fascination for distant epochs (and lands) was also dependent on the perpetuation and stylisation of longstanding prejudices.

Popular culture medievalisms still elaborate on these archaic paradigms: they remain indebted to 19th century constructions of ethno-national identities, and often sustain dreams of a white, heteronormative, Christian Middle Ages. Fantasy author Saladin Ahmed suggested that representations of race in this new age of medievalism can also be traced back to influential works such as Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*.[52] The problematic elements in Tolkien's writings, explains Dr Helen Young, probably originated from his medievalism:

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[48] Dussel, Enrique D., and Eduardo Mendieta. *The Underside of Modernity: Apel, Ricoeur, Rorty, Taylor, and the Philosophy of Liberation*. Humanity Books, 1998, p. 52.

[49] Kefala, *The Conquered*, p. 11.

[50] Voltaire. *Les Œuvres complètes de Voltaire*. Vol. 26A, *Essai sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations*, Voltaire Foundation, 2012, pp. 212-13. Quoted in Kefala, *The Conquered*, p. 13.

[51] Gibbon, Edward, and David Womersley. *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Routledge/Thoemmes, 1997, vol. 5, p. 515. Quoted in Kefala, *The Conquered*, p. 13.

[52] "The men of the global East and global South ("black men like half-trolls with white eyes and red tongues") are monstrous and evil, naturally and culturally inclined to bow to Sauron, and to make war on the good men of the North and West. The bestial visages of orcs bear a striking resemblance to racist caricatures of African and Asian facial features. Above all, to be dark-skinned in Middle Earth is to be part of a savage horde – whether orcish or human – rather than to be a true individual". Ahmed, Saladin. "Is 'Game of Thrones' Too White?" *Salon*, 1 Apr. 2012, https://www.salon.com/2012/04/01/is_game_of_thrones_too_white/.

> The philological thinking which connects language with culture and biology in Middle-earth derives directly from Germanic thought of the nineteenth century which not only shaped the medievalist academy, but underpinned global Anglo-Saxonism, the British Empire, American expansionism, and taken to extremes, ultimately also inspired the racist excesses of the Nazi regime. Tolkien-the-scholar lends authority to Tolkien-the-author even as the former's studies shaped the latter's novels.[53]

Composers are in constant dialogue with the medieval – whether through the foundational training acquired in classical music institutions, our inherited sense of genealogy, or our various excursions into imagined pasts. The very constitution of modernity relies on this relationship – a simultaneous movement of rejection and appropriation of the past. Through this research project, I observed how contemporary aesthetics, timbres, musical textures, structures, notation styles, vocal techniques, and poetic influences often trace back to medieval and medievalist practices. This enquiry raises the possibility that such influences are inherently political, deeply ingrained in the substructure of our thinking, and that developments in musicology may offer different frameworks for interpreting them. Rather than attempting a comprehensive overview of this complex field, the project foregrounds insights that emerged organically through the creative process. In this practice-based enquiry, my role was to let ideas take shape through making, allowing the research to unfold intuitively. As a result, my commentary serves to contextualise this process of research-creation.

1.3 Spectral medievalism

> It is a texture of utmost subtleness and refinement, consisting, as it were, of extremely loose threads which from time to time only, frequently at wide distances, are bound together in full coincidence and consonance, while in between they move with a considerable degree of independence, rhythmic as well as harmonic.[54]

In this description, the author does not refer to the pacing, orchestration and rhythmical fluidity of 20th-century spectral music, nor to its composers' attention to timbre and resonance, but to the texture of Ars Subtilior songs.

Defining spectralism is challenging; as highlighted in Philip Singleton's "Spectralism Today"

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[53] Young, Helen. "Re-Making the Real Middle Ages". *In the Middle*, 24 Aug. 2014, https://www.inthemedievalmiddle.com/2014/08/re-making-real-middle-ages.html.

[54] Apel, Willi, quoted in Leech-Wilkinson, Daniel. *The Modern Invention of Medieval Music: Scholarship, Ideology, Performance*. Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 180.

the term has often been used vaguely, even by musicians.[55] While the term originated in a 1979 article by Hugues Dufourt,[56] the composers most associated with it, such as Gérard Grisey and Tristan Murail, expressed discomfort with the label. In a 1980 letter to Hugues Dufourt, Gérard Grisey suggested "liminal music" as a more suitable term to encapsulate the core principles of his work.[57] Grisey viewed spectralism not as a set of techniques but as an approach that treats sound as a living entity:

> Spectralism is not a system… it's an attitude. We consider sounds not as dead objects that can be easily and arbitrarily permuted in all directions, but as though they were living objects which are born, live, and die.[58]

For his glossary definition, Leigh Landy refers to spectral composition in the most general terms, as the observation of sound phenomena.[59] In his "Guide to the Basic Concepts and Techniques of Spectral Music", Joshua Fineberg avoided defining spectralism altogether, instead focusing on the key techniques that shaped its practice.[60] In a later publication, he observed that "spectral composers can have vastly different styles and some even prefer to reject the label", but noted that "all of these composers share a central belief that music is ultimately sound evolving in time".[61] Indeed, the spectral conception of sound as living rather than inert results in specific treatments of time and transformation:

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[55] Singleton, Philip D., et al. *Spectralism Today: A Survey of the Consequences for Contemporary Composition of the French Spectral School of the 1970s and 1980s*. University of Surrey, 2016, p. 8. http://epubs.surrey.ac.uk/811164/.

[56] Dufourt, Hugues. "Musique spectrale: Pour une pratique des formes de l'énergie". *Bicéphale*, no. 3, 1981, pp. 85–89.

[57] Grisey, Gérard. *Ecrits, Ou, L'invention de La Musique Spectrale*. Edited by Guy Lelong and Anne-Marie Reby, MF, 2008.

[58] "Le spectralisme n'est pas un système… c'est une attitude. Nous considérons les sons non comme des objets morts que l'on peut aisément et arbitrairement permuter dans toutes les directions, mais comme des objets vivants qui naissent, vivent et meurent". My translation. Grisey, *Écrits ou l'invention de la musique spectrale*, pp. 265–66.

[59] Landy, Leigh. *Making Music with Sounds*. Routledge, 2012, p. 196.

[60] "One central approach is the derivation of pitch from spectral models, where harmonic structures emerge from frequency relationships rather than traditional intervallic organisation. Instrumental synthesis involves distributing the individual partials of a sound across different instruments so that, when played together, they recreate or transform a timbre. This technique transformed harmonic thinking, as timbre and harmony are no longer separate domains but rather two aspects of the same sonic phenomenon. Time also functions as an extension of timbral evolution, shaping form through gradual morphological transformations and resonance-based timing". Fineberg, Joshua. "Guide to the Basic Concepts and Techniques of Spectral Music". *Contemporary Music Review*, vol. 19, no. 2, 2000, pp. 81-113.

[61] Fineberg, Joshua. *Classical Music Why Bother? : Hearing the World of Contemporary Culture through a Composer's Ears*. Routledge, 2006, pp. 150-151.

> From its beginnings, this music has been characterized by the hypnotic power of slowness and by a virtual obsession with continuity, thresholds, transience and dynamic forms.[62]

Similarly, medieval time expands and contracts following natural cycles, moon phases, sundials, and religious offices.[63] In the context of sacred music, cantors embrace a different way of being in time, one that transcends the boundaries of modern clock divisions and opens onto the idea of eternity. The musical act hence becomes contemplative and augural. Spectral composers, too, create dynamic and transient spaces where time seems to pause, revealing the nature and inner structures of sound. Like cantors, their musical approach seeks to offer glimpses of eternity, and insights beyond the ordinary.

Instrumental synthesis is also representative of another threshold; blurring the distinction between separate voices and a unified timbral entity, it explores the liminality between the individual and the collective. Similarly, sacred singing dissolves the boundary between self and the world, reflecting a spiritual aspiration toward unity and transcendence. In *Liminality as a Framework for Composition*, experimental saxophonist Steve Lehman demonstrated the connection between spectral liminality and Afrological improvisation;[64] it is no surprise, then, that spectral music would resonate with medieval and medievalist aesthetics. Medieval music, as a liminal space between Antiquity and Modernity, reflects explorations between modality and tonality, monophony and polyphony, precision and fluidity, orality and literacy, performer and composer, realism and fantasy, and science and spirituality. Finally, Medieval and spectral composers share an interest in process-based composition and long-range structural planning. This is particularly evident in Gérard Grisey's "Talea". The title directly references a term from medieval isorhythmic motets, where a repeated rhythmic structure (*talea*) interacts with an independent but similarly recurring melodic pattern (*color*). Grisey adopts this principle, applying a dissociation between pitch and rhythm while also engaging with *talea* in a more literal sense – Latin for 'cut' or 'segment'. He explores rhythmic phase shifts, rapid contrasts, and interruptions, fracturing continuity like "wildflowers and untamed grasses" breaking through structured order.[65]

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[62] Grisey, Gérard, and Joshua Fineberg. "Did You Say Spectral?" *Contemporary Music Review*, vol. 19, no. 3, 2000, pp. 1-3.

[63] Monelle, Raymond. *The Sense of Music: Semiotic Essays*. Princeton University Press, 2000, p. 93.

[64] Lehman, Stephen H. *Liminality as a Framework for Composition: Rhythmic Thresholds, Spectral Harmonies and Afrological Improvisation*. 2012, p. 41.

[65] Grisey, Gérard. "Talea". Composed 1985–86. Ricordi. *Brahms Online*, IRCAM, https://brahms.ircam.fr/fr/work/talea.

Boethius' *De Institutione Musica* was the vessel through which the Greek complex of ideas concerning *Musica Mundana, Humana* and *Instrumentalis* was transferred to the Middle Ages.[66] When faced with the unfathomable harmony of the cosmos, medieval composers turned to reason. Like spectral composers, their technological understanding reached beyond realms of audibility and generated specific ways of thinking about time and resonance. Through the numerical relations of intervals and rhythm, both spectral and medieval music exist in a liminal space between science and spirituality, as a scientific endeavour and a living symbol of *harmonia mundi*.

1.4 Spectral time

This section explores how medievalism intersects with spectrality as a queer and utopian impulse beyond normative time schemes. Drawing on Aristotle, Saint Augustine of Hippo, Carolyn Dinshaw, and Bruno Latour, it examines how embracing anachronism can unfold other ethical, political, and creative possibilities.

In her chapter "Time is Not Change but Something of Change", Ursula Coope contemplates an Aristotelian conception of time. If time is not change but – as she mentions the more appropriate French expression – "quelque chose du changement",[67] a relationship arises. This relationship, multiple and intricate, still gives grounds for debate,[68] but Aristotle illustrates his preliminary observations with a simple tale:

> When we ourselves do not alter in our mind or do not notice that we alter, then it does not seem to us that any time has passed, just as it does not seem so to the fabled sleepers in [the sanctuary of] the heroes in Sardinia, when they wake up; they join up the latter now to the former, and make it one, omitting what is in between because of failure to perceive it.[69]

Aristotle's tale of magical sleep points towards the transgression of ordinary temporal boundaries. In her book *How Soon is Now?*, Carolyn Dinshaw finds a framework for similar conceptions of time

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[66] Pérès, Marcel, Catherine Homo-Lechner, and Jacques Le Goff. *La Rationalisation du temps au XIIIe siècle: Musique et mentalités: Actes du colloque de Royaumont, 1991*. Éditions Créaphis, 1998, p. 126.

[67] Coope, Ursula. *Time for Aristotle: Physics IV. 10–14*. Clarendon Press, 2011, p. 31.

[68] Roark, T. "Why Aristotle Says There Is No Time Without Change". *Apeiron*, vol. 37, 2004, pp. 227–46.

[69] Aristotle. *Aristotle Physics: Books III and IV*. Translated by Edward Hussey, Clarendon Press, 2006, p. 43. Text reference location 218b21. Simplicius identified the heroes of Sardinia as descendants of Heracles who died colonising the island, and whose bodies were unnaturally preserved. See Urmson, J. O. *Simplicius on Aristotle's Physics 4.1–5, 10–14*. Cornell University Press, 1992, p. 116. Sleeping alongside them may have been thought to be therapeutic or a rite of passage. See Renberg, Gil H. *Where Dreams May Come: Incubation Sanctuaries in the Greco-Roman World*. Brill, 2017, pp. 107–8.

through *asynchrony*: "a motif that demonstrates the constant presence of other kinds of time in the *now*".[70] According to *Physics* commentator Simplicius, she points out, this expansion may even be experienced in everyday life, as emotions of joy and sorrow distort our experience of time.[71] Similarly, Saint Augustine mentions a multiplicity of temporalities inhabiting his sense of now, as for him past and future only exist through memory and expectation:

> There are three tenses or time: the present of past things, the present of present things, and the present of future things.[72]

Spirituality can also generate further complexities, as time becomes a painful reminder of the fracture between earthly life and eternity. In his introduction to Augustine's *Confessions*, David Meconi summarises: "temporal creatures can enjoy stability and permanence only when united with the timeless".[73] Augustine's threefold distention of the soul (*distentio animi*) is therefore further entangled in the conception of a divine and timeless realm, of which our position of exile only provides fleeting impressions.

By collecting tales of temporal warps, Dinshaw inspires readers to think of *now* as full and attached rather than empty and free-floating. She argues that historical work is motivated by a form of desire, an impulse for something other. Svetlana Boym similarly describes nostalgia as an active stance, "a rebellion against the modern idea of time, the time of history and progress".[74] For Dinshaw, this impulse for something other, this nostalgia, this rebellion, this longing away from the homogeneity of scientific or historical time, can also be understood as a form of queerness. Outside a normative or dominant time-scheme, artists, philosophers and historians may find some form of ethical salvation: hoping to connect people, times and worlds toward a more just society.[75]
In his *Politics of Nature,* Bruno Latour explains:

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[70] Dinshaw, Carolyn. *How Soon Is Now?: Medieval Texts, Amateur Readers, and the Queerness of Time*. Duke University Press, 2012, p. 43.

[71] Simplicius. *Simplicius on Aristotle's Physics 4.1–5, 10–14*. Translated by J. O. Urmson, Cornell University Press, 1994, pp. 115–16.

[72] "Tempora sunt tria, praesens de praeteritis, praesens de praesentibus, praesens de futuris". Augustine. *The Confessions: With an Introduction and Contemporary Criticism*. Translated by Maria Boulding, David V. Meconi, and Joseph Pearce, Ignatius Press, 2012, p. 350.

[73] Augustine. *The Confessions: With an Introduction and Contemporary Criticism*. Translated by Maria Boulding, David V. Meconi, and Joseph Pearce, Ignatius Press, 2012, p. xvii.

[74] Boym, Svetlana. *The Future of Nostalgia*. Basic Books, a member of the Perseus Books Group, 2016, p. xv.

[75] Dinshaw, *How Soon Is Now?*, p. 38.

> Whereas the moderns always went from the confused to the clear, from the mixed to the simple, from the archaic to the objective, and since they were thus always climbing the stairway of progress, we too are going to progress, but by always descending along a path that is, however, not the path of decadence: we shall always go from the mixed to the still more mixed, from the complicated to the still more complicated, from the explicit to the implicit. We no longer expect from the future that it will emancipate us from all our attachments; on the contrary, we expect that it will attach us with tighter bonds to more numerous crowds of *aliens* who have become fully-fledged members of the collective that is in the process of being formed. "Tomorrow", the moderns cry, "we shall be more detached". "Tomorrow", murmur those who have to be called nonmoderns, "we shall be more attached".[76]

The *aliens* of Bruno Latour are not entirely dissimilar to the *spectres* of Dinshaw's tales: ghosts blurring the boundaries between the material and the immaterial, the real and the fictional, the present and the past.[77] Spectrality, explains Carla Freccero, is a term used by Jacques Derrida to describe a mode of historical attentiveness, a way of calling and being called to accountability.[78] It works against a model of history that Michel de Certeau describes as "cannibalistic", or a way of entombing the past:

> The other is the phantasm of historiography, the object that it seeks, honors and buries… "The sole historical quest for 'meaning' remains indeed a quest for the Other", but, however contradictory it may be, this project aims at "understanding" and, through "meaning", at hiding the alterity of this foreigner; or, in what amounts to the same thing, it aims at calming the dead who still haunt the present, and at offering them scriptural tombs.[79]

For Carla Freccero, spectrality suggests the possibility of a queer historiography: it describes a more ethical relation to the past and the future than our current models permit, and operates against the urge to identify, and thus stabilise, the meaning of an event or a person. Dinshaw consequently aims to rehabilitate the medievalist act, not as 'merely nostalgic, naively, uncritically, and irresponsibly yearning for an idealised past'[80] but as a much-needed exercise in spectrality. Certeau described the

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[76] Latour, Bruno. *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy*. Translated by Catherine Porter, Harvard University Press, 2009, p. 191.

[77] Dinshaw, *How Soon Is Now?*, p. 131.

[78] Freccero, Carla. *Queer Early Modern*. Duke University Press, 2006, pp. 69–70.

[79] Dupront, quoted in de Certeau, Michel, and Tom Conley. *The Writing of History*. Columbia University Press, 2005, p. 2.

[80] Dinshaw, *How Soon Is Now?*, p. 34.

contradictory process following which aiming to understand the past eventually results in betrayal. Dinshaw presents a no less surprising mirror image where creative engagement with the past becomes a subtle and complex instrument of historical analysis.[81] Nurturing grief, incoherence, subjectivities, changing narratives and timelines may create an ethical space where communication is possible. Out of the tombs, away from the conclusions of historians, dressed up and dancing, these spectres cease to frighten and may finally be heard.

Bruno Latour has made similar observations, as he explains that our relationship to time is crucial in defining the constitution of our society. The adjective "modern", he explains, designates "a new regime, an acceleration, a rupture, a revolution in time".[82] It creates winners and losers by defining an archaic and stable past. The irreversible arrow of modern time could even be described as a capitalisation, a theory of savings banks[83] encouraging compulsive historicism and "maniacal destruction":

> Historians reconstitute the past, detail by detail, all the more carefully inasmuch as it has been swallowed up for ever. But are we as far removed from our past as we want to think we are? No, because modern temporality does not have much effect on the passage of time. The past remains, therefore, and even returns. Now this resurgence is incomprehensible to the moderns. Thus they treat it as the return of the repressed. They view it as an archaism. 'If we aren't careful', they think, 'we're going to return to the past; we're going to fall back into the Dark Ages'.[84]

Latour does not exclude postmodernism from this criticism, which he qualifies only as a symptom: a form of reactionary scepticism based on – and re-enacting – the modern constitution. Trapped in a modernist framework, the "post"-moderns cannot provide positive solutions; hence they remain "suspended between belief and doubt, waiting for the end of the millennium".[85] Instead he suggests that the modern constitution – based on a form of purification separating past and present, nature and society, human and thing – was never grounded in reality. For him, the dichotomy between nature and culture is only possible through the negation of the hybrids it generates. Paradoxically, "the more we forbid ourselves to conceive of hybrids, the more possible their interbreeding becomes".[86] Our world

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[81] Dinshaw, *How Soon Is Now?*, p. 35.

[82] Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, p. 18.

[83] Péguy, Charles. *Clio: "Dialogue de l'histoire et de l'âme païenne"*. *Œuvres en prose*, Gallimard, 1961, p. 129.

[84] Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, p. 18.

[85] Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, p. 9.

[86] Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, p. 12.

hence becomes saturated with monsters that increasingly threaten its values and existence. The solution, he explains, could take the form of a "nonmodern" reconciliation with premodern models:

> While the moderns insure themselves by not thinking at all about the consequences of their innovations for the social order, the premoderns – if we are to believe the anthropologists – dwell endlessly and obsessively on those connections between nature and culture. […] By saturating the mixes of divine, human and natural elements with concepts, the premoderns limit the practical expansion of these mixes. It is the impossibility of changing the social order without modifying the natural order – and vice versa – that has obliged the premoderns to exercise the greatest prudence.[87]

Bruno Latour calls for the acknowledgement and meticulous sorting of hybrids: not as another rupture from the past, but as a retrospective attitude, underlining what is already discernible in current practices.[88] He therefore joins spectralists, medievalists and queer historians in a similar impulse; away from the glamour of revolutions, from fully stable and constituted objects, they adapt our relation to the Other.

1.5 Spectral spectralism

I close this preface by examining spectralism's complex positioning within modernist and post-modern thought; showing how, from its inception, it played a "double-game" that may resonate with spectral and nonmodern creators.

The terms "spectrality" and "spectralism" were coined twelve years apart (respectively Jacques Derrida[89] and Hugues Dufourt)[90] yet their philosophical lineage appears conflicting. The former could be defined as a nonmodern conception of the past (see previous section), while the latter is associated with modernist or post-modern intents[91] (which, Latour incidentally pointed out, are two sides of the same coin).[92] However, I believe that certain features of spectralism are nevertheless compatible with

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[87] Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, pp. 41-42.

[88] Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, p. 44.

[89] Derrida, Jacques. *Specters of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*. Routledge, 2006.

[90] Dufourt, Hugues. "Musique spectrale: Pour une pratique des formes de l'énergie". *Bicéphale*, no. 3, 1981, pp. 85–89.

[91] Heile, Björn, and Charles Wilson, editors. *The Routledge Research Companion to Modernism in Music*. Routledge, 2019, p. 28.

[92] Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, pp. 9-62.

the spectral aims of queer historians and medievalists.

Eric Drott argues that the ambivalence of spectralism was apparent from the outset in the early writings of Dufourt, Grisey and Murail. He describes a "double-game" (modernist ideals and post-industrial awareness) allowing spectral composers to harness the power of established values (and a progressive vision of music history) while investing their artistic aims with fresh political valence.[93] Faith in progress, in technology, in the continuing importance of *écriture* and ideals of structural autonomy may indeed be the apparatus of a modernist style; Daniel Albright however, in his introduction to *Modernism and music*, states:

> Perhaps the true breakthrough of Modernism is the assumption that technical liberation can lead to artistic liberation – in other words, that tinkering with the basic material of compositional technique (the scale, the rules of voice leading, all the proprieties that govern construction) is a delight in itself, an end in itself, and requires no justification.[94]

Do these ideas entirely correspond to the spectral rhetoric? Eric Drott notes that Peter Bürger, in his *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, distinguishes the avant-garde (that seeks to integrate art within social activism, instead of promoting "art as an institution that is unassociated with the life praxis of men")[95] from a more generalised modernism, mainly concerned with formal innovation. Perhaps this distinction is crucial when attempting to understand spectral composers:

> Judged according to Bürger's terms, the spectralists are arch-modernists, as their music makes few demands that cannot be satisfactorily met by the conventional institutional apparatus of the classical music world. However, this does not preclude their appropriation of certain stylistic and rhetorical accoutrements of the historical avant-gardes.[96]

These accoutrements are attitudes and rhetorical devices identified at the turn of the twentieth century since the inception of Futurism: the "collective" nature of the enterprise and their use of a literary genre, the manifesto, with triumphalist language "embracing technological innovation as the means of realising an imminent musical utopia".[97] This is however nuanced with distinctive anti-establishment

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[93] Drott, Eric. "Spectralism, Politics and the Post-Industrial Imagination". *The Modernist Legacy: Essays on New Music*, edited by Björn Heile, Routledge, 2009, pp. 41–50.

[94] Albright, Daniel. *Modernism and Music: An Anthology of Sources*. University of Chicago Press, 2004, p. 10.

[95] Bürger, Peter. *Theory and History of Literature*. Vol. 4, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, University of Minnesota Press, 1984, p. 49.

[96] Drott, "Spectralism, Politics and the Post-Industrial Imagination", p. 42.

[97] Drott, "Spectralism, Politics and the Post-Industrial Imagination", p. 41.

posturing, which aims to alienate dominant and established figures in the avant-garde, as Murail explains:

> […] serialism was the establishment. It certainly became the establishment when Pierre Boulez came back to Paris in the mid-1970's to establish IRCAM and the *Ensemble intercontemporain*. He was 'establishment', as he was heavily supported by the government. It seemed there was little room for anything else.[98]

When Dufourt entitles his 1986 essay "Pierre Boulez, musician of the industrial age"[99] he does not yet mean to ascertain the moral and political superiority of the spectral collective: Boulez is instead glorified as the ultimate modernist figure. In his later discourse, serial composition rests upon a fundamental violence that can be equated with an industrial exploitation and quantification of the natural environment.[100] As Drott points out, emergent ecological thought offered "a new way of conceptualising relationships, one modelled on the natural world": away from frozen forms and fixed categories, sound became a complex web of relations, a "correlated ensemble of energies".[101] In "La revolution des sons complexes", Murail writes:

> In this way, we immediately discover that a sound is not a stable and self-identical entity, as traditional notation might have us believe. Our entire musical tradition assumes a direct correspondence between the symbol and the thing. But sound is essentially variable – in the sense, of course, that a sound can never be repeated exactly, but variable also within its own lifespan.[102]

In other words, musical notation may serve as an initial framework, but it must be understood that a single note does not always signify a fixed or immutable sound. Prior to the 19th century, musical performance commonly involved deviating from the written score through ornamentation, improvisation, diminutions, cadenzas, organum, and continuo realisations. Similarly, while modern Gregorian chant performance practice typically assumes a strict link between symbol and sound,

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[98] Smith, Ronald B. "An Interview with Tristan Murail". *Computer Music Journal*, vol. 24, no. 1, 2000, p. 11.

[99] Dufourt, Hugues. "Pierre Boulez, musicien de l'ère industrielle". *IRCAM (Research Institute: France), Le Temps Des Mutations*, IRCAM, 1986, http://articles.ircam.fr/textes/Dufourt86a/index.html.

[100] Dufourt, Hugues. *Musique, Pouvoir, Écriture*. Bourgois, 1991, p. 292.

[101] Drott. "Spectralism, Politics and the Post-Industrial Imagination", pp. 50–51.

[102] Murail, Tristan. "The Revolution of Complex Sounds". Translated by Joshua Cody, *Contemporary Music Review*, vol. 24, 2005, p. 122.

comparative studies with Old Roman chant could suggest an entirely different musical psychology (see chapter 3). In the realm of spectrality, queer historians also aim to challenge the primacy of the written text on our thinking and collective imaginary, warning us of our potentially misleading attempts to assimilate and stabilise the past. Drott refers to Grisey's imagining of musical form as "a kind of federation of equal yet non-identical identities – a rainbow coalition of sounds, as it were". Instrumental synthesis, like medievalism, symbolises the attempt to acknowledge and embrace difference without betraying it, the difficult integration of diverse ghosts, medusas, and discrete "ethnicities of sound".[103] While spectral music was indeed dependent on a technological breakthrough, it resulted in a more holistic conception of sound, and endeavoured to introduce human gesture, sensibility and organology to the disincarnated world of computer analysis. Hugues Dufourt consequently criticised early spectral attitudes as "marred by a certain naturalism"[104] which is a testament to the strong modernist context against which spectral composers operated. It is possible this framework called for such dualist oppositions of nature and culture, body and spirit, man and animal; distinctions that are increasingly becoming outdated. Jean-Marie Schaeffer, as pointed out in *L'œuvre du son*, considers current social sciences to break away from the "the human exception thesis", in favour of a "biological naturalism" through which, far from advocating a primacy of "nature", we can admit that the study of mankind can only be that of a biological form.[105] This can help us resituate the social and biological dimensions of spectral music beyond a simplistic nature/culture opposition. In 2003, the *Spectral World Musics Conference* widened spectralism to encompass "any music that foregrounds timbre and the acoustical properties of sound as an important structural element of musical language".[106] In the proceedings, Dumitrescu even came to reveal Romanian folklore as a possible inspiration for his spectral stance:

> For example, the natural harmonics, as reflected in the music for alpenhorn, or for two or three alpenhorns in a polyphonic relationship, with an incredible richness in its harmonic space, formed my earliest experiences of the spectral dimension of the acoustic world.[107]

Preceding the conference by two years, Philippe Hurel similarly explained, in the booklet of *Quatre*

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[103] Grisey, Gérard. "Zur Entstehung des Klanges". *Ferienkurse '78*, 1978, p. 75.

[104] "Si je n'ai pas retenu, dans ma combinaison de hauteurs, les principes de la "musique spectrale", c'est dans la mesure où j'estime que celle-ci est encore entachée d'un certain naturalisme, qu'elle acceuille de manière acritique et anhistorique des formation d'accords issues tout droit des machines". Dufourt, Hugues. *Musique, Pouvoir, Écriture*. Bourgois, 1991, p. 335.

[105] Grisey, Gérard. *Écrits ou l'invention de la musique spectrale*. 2015, p. 14.

[106] Reigle, Robert, Paul A. Whitehead, and Michael Ellison, editors. *Spectral World Musics: Proceedings of the Istanbul Spectral Music Conference*. Pan Yanincilik, 2008, p. 1.

[107] Reigle, Whitehead, and Ellison, *Spectral World Musics*, p. 222.

chants pour franchir le seuil, that spectral music saw an evolution from using neutral sonic archetypes (in favour of process) to the re-introduction of objects for their own sonic and cultural dimension.[108] Young spectral composers, he concludes, do not want to assume a historicist position, to claim any one intellectual authority, or to limit themselves with oppositions such as harmonic/inharmonic or sinus/white noise. They aim to use heterogeneous techniques as well as culturally loaded sonic objects, to re-establish relations between melody, rhythm and harmony. More than any other – he explains – spectral music, without dogma, open to the world and to sound, allows this compositional undertaking.[109]

In their utopian impulse, flexible relation to time and memory, and cautious examination of the written text, spectralism and spectrality align. By reclaiming sound as a complex, undividable, temporally dynamic ecology, by countering the modernist framework with a more open-ended reflection, early spectral composers laid the foundations of a nonmodern legacy. As evidenced by Philippe Hurel and the *Spectral World Musics Conference*, the resonances, timbres, noises and temporal distortions of spectral music are now becoming spectres of their own, haunting approaches to musical creation situated beyond the modernist framework, and in the case of my project, haunting an era preceding their own.

[108] Hurel, Philippe. "La musique spectrale… à terme !" *Écrits*, http://www.philippe-hurel.fr/musique_spectrale.html.

[109] Hurel, "La musique spectrale… à terme !".

2 - Se vous n'estes

This piece originated as an exercise during a two-week workshop led by James Weeks. Each composer was assigned a different work by Guillaume de Machaut, which served as inspiration for a week-long composition process. The structured setting and constrained timeframe led me towards a conventional song texture, a linear musical form, and a relatively unaltered Machaut quotation. This was an opportunity to explore more traditional musical parameters in my compositional output, which marked a significant turning point in my development. Within this framework, I explore authorial fragmentation, temporal and spectral expansion, process-based transformation, spectral harmonicity, inharmonicity, and liminality through a medievalist lens. At this stage, my reflection on queer and postcolonial medievalism had not yet fully shaped the compositional process. However, the piece took on a new dimension when Conrad Armstrong invited me to contribute to his documentary *UNYCORN*, centred on transgender and transgressive performer Rose Wood.

2.1 Harmony

In the introduction to his new translation of *The Book of Marvels and Travels*, Anthony Bale describes the author Sir John Mandeville as an elusive figure.[110] Was he a knight from St Albans, a physician from Liège, a Franco-Flemish monk, or a Norman aristocrat? His stories are multi-faceted, comprising "a wide range of materials borrowed from elsewhere".[111] Being in large part a collection of travel writing, this work challenges notions of individual authorship and interrogates the idea of compilation as a creative form – a concept I engage with in this composition.

Guillaume de Machaut exemplifies the increasing importance placed on individual authorship and the gradual emergence of a more defined and authoritative canon in fourteenth-century Western Europe. Nonetheless, his work was shared and assimilated within larger authorship clusters. As Yolanda Plumley explains in *The Art of Grafted Song*:

> Poets and composers like Machaut were at once keen to stress their own authorial identity yet eager to align themselves with past traditions and predecessors and to situate themselves in relation to their peers. Machaut's renown, in turn, made his own lyric output the subject of borrowing by his younger contemporaries and immediate successors.[112]

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[110] Mandeville, John, and Anthony P. Bale. *The Book of Marvels and Travels*. Oxford University Press, 2012, pp. x–xvi.

[111] Mandeville, *The Book of Marvels and Travels*, p. xi.

[112] Plumley, Yolanda. *The Art of Grafted Song: Citation and Allusion in the Age of Machaut*. Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 18.

Machaut's *Se vous n'estes* hence became part of a new canon as a citational model,[113] and composers enriched the song with additional parts. The excerpt here-below shows a modern transcription of *Se vous n'estes*, a version recorded by The Orlando Consort in 2015:[114]

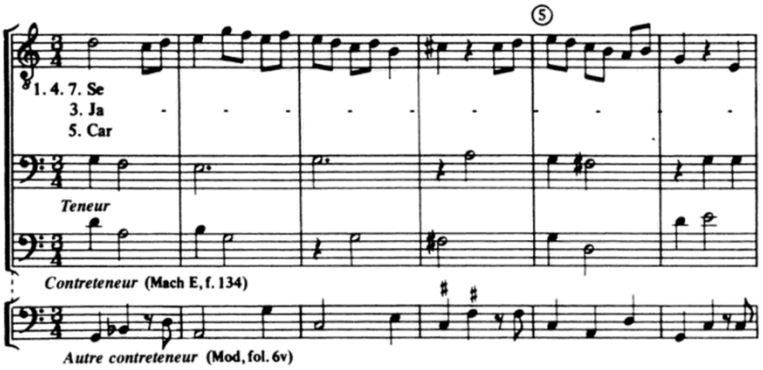

Fig. 1. Guillaume de Machaut, "Se vous n'estes": modern notation.[115]

However, Machaut's original song was written in 2 parts:

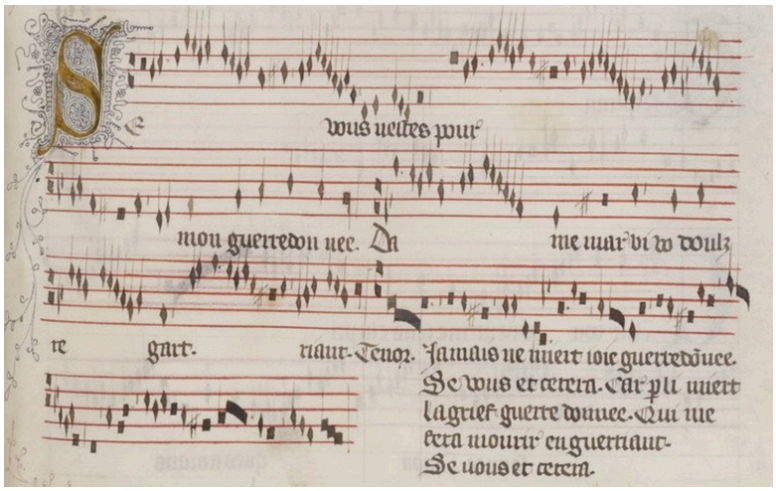

Fig. 2. Guillaume de Machaut, "Se vous n'estes": medieval notation.[116]

This rondeau accrued two different contratenor parts (Paris, Bibl. Nat., fr. 9221, f. 134; Modena, Bibl. Estense, α M. 5, 24, fol. 6v) one of which added by early fifteenth-century composer Matteo da

[113] Plumley, *The Art of Grafted Song*, p. 418.

[114] Orlando Consort. *De Machaut: The Dart of Love*. Harmonia Mundi, 2015. Sound recording.

[115] Hoppin, Richard H., and Nicolas Meeùs. *La Musique au Moyen Âge*. Vol. 2, P. Mardaga, 1991, p. 175.

[116] Machaut, Guillaume de. "Guillaume de Machaut, Poésies, Lais, Motets, Ballades, Rondeaux et Virelais". *Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits, Français 1586*, *Gallica*, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8449043q/f410.item.

Perugia.[117] My own version of "Se vous n'estes" distorts this authorial patchwork by conserving one original part, one inauthentic contratenor (Paris, Bibl. Nat., fr. 9221, f. 134) and adding a new leading voice part, rendered in the Soprano in my final score. In my re-composition of "Se vous n'estes", I sought to embody the medievalist understanding of an author as an increaser (from the latin *auctor*, which is traced through *augeo* to mean "increaser").[118] However, I soon felt compelled to introduce modifications to the pre-existing parts. This tension is what Boulez describes as a way of writing that begins with something which eliminates personal invention but eventually ends with the composer taking over.[119] This is the case of his work for two pianos "Structures", in which he uses materials from Messiaen's "Mode de valeurs et d'intensités". In conversation with Deliège, Boulez recalls:

> What interested me was to see how the "material/myself" relationship was gradually reversed to become "myself/material", so that afterwards I was completely free of complexes about the strict organisation of one's material.[120]

For me, one way to take over the original material was to dissolve its contrapuntal nature. I viewed the intervals created by the tenor and contratenor as fundamental building blocks for a harmonic foundation. These building blocks were then transposed for viola and their durations stretched. Each chord was overlapped to create a more abstract, less contrapuntal, and slowly shifting drone. Furthermore, I altered intervals to avoid triadic harmonies and produce more dissonant or stable chords that were less functional. Figure 4 demonstrates overlapping using several fifths, with the green block containing one altered pitch (the original A was changed from transposed E to transposed G#):

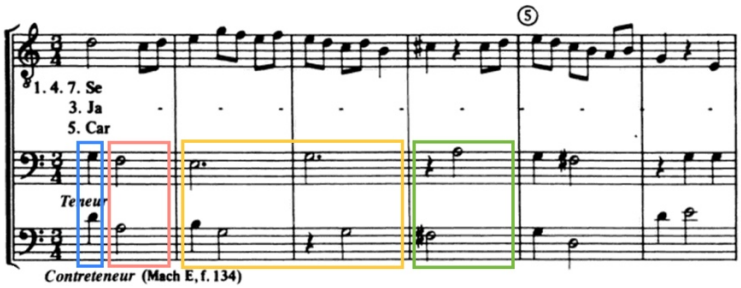

Fig. 3. Guillaume de Machaut, "Se vous n'estes": harmonic building blocks.[121]

[117] Earp, Lawrence M. *Guillaume de Machaut: A Guide to Research*. Routledge, 2012, p. 126.

[118] Rudd, Gillian. *Managing Language in Piers Plowman*. Brewer, 1994, p. 29.

[119] Boulez, Pierre, and Célestin Deliège. *Conversations with Célestin Deliège*. Eulenburg Books, 1976, p. 55.

[120] Boulez, *Conversations with Célestin Deliège*, p. 56.

[121] Hoppin, Richard H., and Nicolas Meeùs. *La Musique au Moyen Âge*. Vol. 2, P. Mardaga, 1991, p. 175.

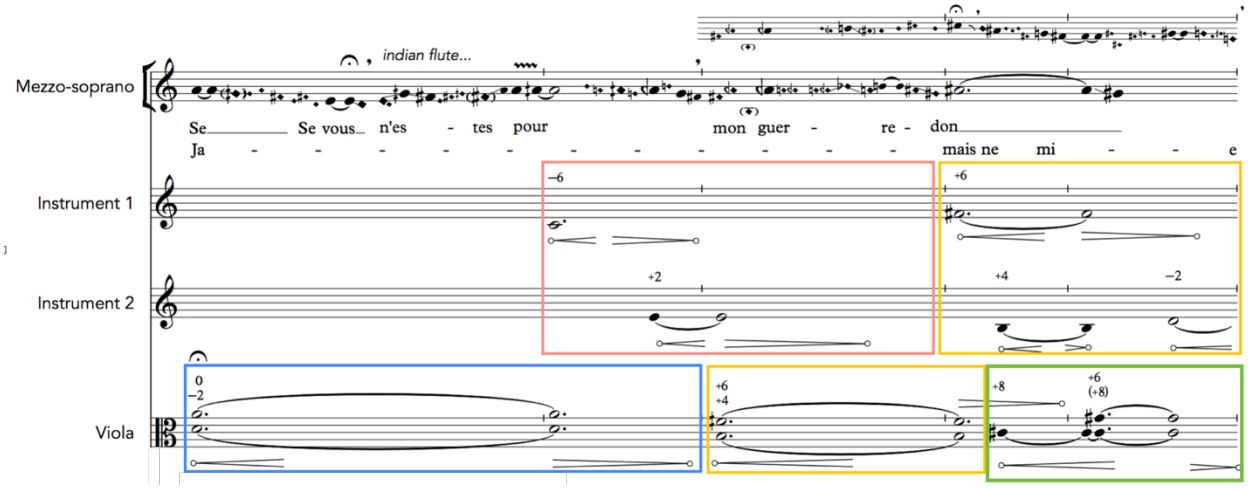

Fig. 4. Thomas Fournil, "Se vous n'estes": harmonic building blocks.

This harmonic ground serves as both a cultural and aesthetic base for the song, imposing a circling and restricted pitch-set that avoids strong tonal constructs, together with an alternative form of tuning. These aspects of the piece will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

Pythagorean tuning is widely regarded as a standard system in Medieval and Early Renaissance music,[122] attributed to Pythagoras and further expounded upon by later theorists like Boethius.[123] Both Pythagorean tuning and Equal Temperament attempt to materialise the ratios 2:1 and 3:2, or the mathematical overtones produced by musical instruments. While the former features notes tuned in a succession of just fifths and octaves (resulting in one wolf fifth at the end of the circle, smaller than pure by approximately 23.46 cents) the other attempts to spread and divide this difference throughout an octave. Compared to Equal Temperament, Pythagorean intonation is characterised by perfect fifths (two cents sharper), sharp major thirds, and flat minor thirds. Using the ratios of 2:1 and 3:2, I tuned every note in a succession of fifths and octaves, starting from A=440.

Measuring the distance between theory and medieval musical practices, however, proves to be a challenging task. For example, James Haar observed that in the sixteenth century, writers continued to champion Pythagorean intonation as a theoretical foundation for all music, but also acknowledged its practical limitations.[124] According to Carl A. Huffman, Boethius' Pythagoreans sought a middle ground between perception and reason, that is, between "Plato's criticism that the Pythagoreans were too concerned with the audible realm and Ptolemy's complaint that the Pythagoreans were excessively

[122] Lindley, Mark. "Pythagorean Intonation". *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, edited by Stanley Sadie, vol. 15, Grove's Dictionaries of Music, 1980, pp. 643–45.

[123] Haar, James. *European Music, 1520–1640*. Boydell Press, 2003, p. 26.

[124] Haar, *European Music, 1520–1640*, p. 24.

theoretical".[125] My personal realisation of "Se vous n'estes" similarly engages with this theoretical rigidity by tuning electronics in Pythagorean, but allows a subjective space of interpretation with live musicians. For instance, the cent deviations indicated in my second suggestion of realisation occasionally deviate from strict Pythagorean tuning. In both instrumentals, I have chosen to tune my organ with deviations of +50 and -50 cent from equal temperament. These bold, recognisable changes serve to transport the listener into a more unusual sonic realm, emphasising our departure from standard equal temperament.

Susan McClary's book, *Conventional Wisdom*, distinguishes between harmonic movements that enact a "progress" narrative and harmony that explores alternative ways of being in time. The blues genre, for example, features chord changes, but the limited number of chords and their repetitive pattern can be perceived as a form of stasis. McClary also notes in Bessie Smith's "Thinking Blues" that the singer's use of various implied addresses throughout the verses and her ambiguous interpretation serve to downplay the narrative component of the music, resulting instead in "a series of meditations on a single situation".[126] Likewise, my reimagining of "Se vous n'estes" is a rumination upon one emotional state – the love lament – and its expression is imbued with ambivalence through the use of a relatively static form of harmonic writing.

It is arguable whether a sense of narrative progression can be conveyed through the manipulation of musical parameters such as range, timbre, or dissonance. In the case of "Se vous n'estes", I believe the changes in these parameters are so minimal and gradual that they could embody a deepening of a single moment, an exploration of its constituent facets. This form of static exploration, while in resonance with medieval repertoire, also bears a connection with spectral schools of composition. Gérard Grisey explains that "the sound object is only a process which has been contracted, the process nothing more than a dilated sound object",[127] while Hugues Dufourt emphasizes that "the stretching of time, the expansion of the sonic object are [...] characteristics of Grisey's music". [128] In the early works of Murail and Grisey, recurring harmonic spectra were often linked with rhythmic regularity, creating moments of stability that Julian Anderson points out "exist in

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[125] Huffman, Carl A. "Pythagoras Musicus: Perception and Reason". *A History of Pythagoreanism*, Cambridge University Press, 2014.

[126] McClary, Susan. *Conventional Wisdom: The Content of Musical Form*. University of California Press, 2009, p. 47.

[127] Grisey, Gérard. "Tempus ex Machina: A Composer's Reflections on Musical Time". *Contemporary Music Review*, vol. 2, no. 1, 1987, p. 269.

[128] "L'étirement temporel, la dilatation de l'objet sonore sont au contraire des caracterisriques de la musique de Grisey". My translation. Dufourt, Hugues. "Gérard Grisey: La Fonction constituante du temps". *Aspects du temps dans la création musicale*, edited by Célestin Deliège and Max Paddison, 2004, p. 57.

relation to less predictable musical flux". [129] These moments of stability serve as "clear points of rest [...] away from which progressive deviations are carefully measured, and back to which the music constantly returns".[130] The practice of 20th century spectral composers thus suggests a unique rhetoric, one that balances stability and flux to create a sense of movement and progression within a larger framework of sonic expansion. In my realisation of "Se vous n'estes", I employed a strictly linear expansion of electronic sounds, as well as parameters of predictability, unpredictability, consonance (harmonicity), and dissonance (inharmonicity), resulting in a series of regular waves of sounds that gradually inflate and wither. Electronics regularly take over the instrumental sound, offering instruments the opportunity to improvise while enriching the soundscape with harmonics and multiphonics. As a composer, opening a space for notated or improvised variation implies an engagement with notions of unpredictability similar to that of spectral composers. The following excerpt shows the main harmony being played by electronics while instruments develop improvisations: clarinet and viola introduce different sounds to the accompaniment, while the alto flute plays a variation on the original melody.

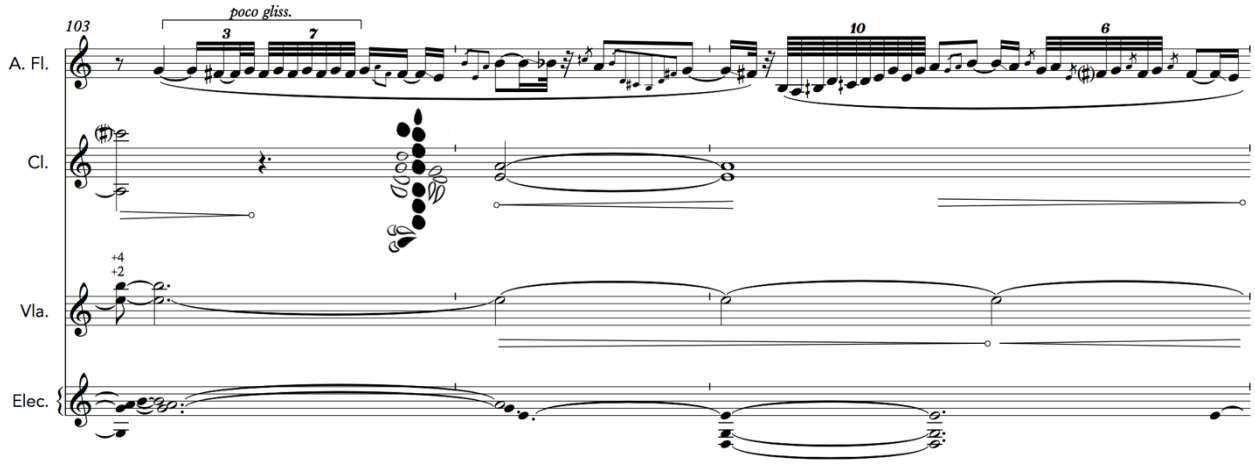

Fig. 5. Thomas Fournil, "Se vous n'estes": variations.

Here spectral concepts merge with a modern medievalist sensibility that eschews extreme contrasts and erratic musical flow. I seek to enrich the existing harmonic ground in my realisation of "Se vous n'estes", superposing harmonic series and including unstable sounds that increase dissonance or inharmonicity, while maintaining a sense of stasis. For instance, in bar 117 (see figure 6), electronics and singer embody the original harmony (B, D, G quarter-sharp), but written improvisations enrich that chord with C#, A, E and F. Although these additional notes belong to the harmonic series of B, D

[129] Anderson, Julian. "In Harmony: Julian Anderson Introduces the Music and Ideas of Tristan Murail". *The Musical Times*, vol. 134, no. 1804, 1993, p. 321.

[130] Anderson, "In Harmony", p. 321.

and G quarter-sharp, their presence and technical realisation (harmonics, multiphonic) increase harmonic complexity and textural instability.

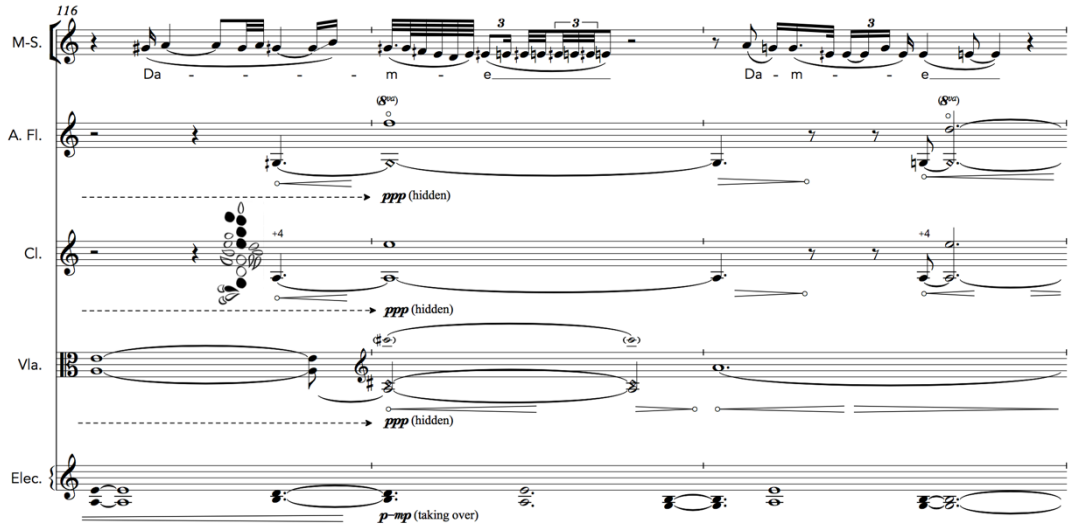

Fig. 6. Thomas Fournil, "Se vous n'estes": inharmonicity.

Blending related timbres and pitches, I attempt to blur the boundary between electronic and acoustic instruments, fusing parts into one single sound. In "La musique: le devenir des sons", Grisey refers to this type of sonic object as a synthetic spectrum, one that is re-created by instruments:

> As to the synthetic spectrum, qualified as *actual* or *macrophonic*, it belongs in a liminal zone. (…) We have created a hybrid being for our perception, a sound which is not yet a chord, but no longer a timbre, a sort of mutant of contemporary music (…) [131]

The concept of electronically replicating live instruments with pre-recorded materials opens up a realm of exploration into perception thresholds and the liminality between two nearly identical layers of sound. The question is whether my poetic engagement with these notions can be justified as spectralist, even though my technical and aesthetic goals differ from those of a traditional spectralist canon. I would like to compare this process to a medievalist attitude, in which I do not pretend to re-create a repertoire, but where my own interpretation of particular concepts, sounds and techniques inform my practice. Composition becomes a means through which to reveal distance, resonance and friction between different repertoires, and my re-imagining of it.

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[131] "Quant au spectre synthétique qualifié d'*actuel* ou de *macrophonique*, il se situe dans une zone liminale. (…) Nous venons de créer un être hybride pour notre perception, un son qui sans être encore un timbre, n'est déjà plus tout à fait un accord, sorte de mutant de la musique d'aujourd'hui (…)" My translation. Grisey, Gérard. *Écrits ou l'invention de la musique spectrale*. MF, 2008, pp. 50–51.

2.2 Melody

The melody of "Se vous n'estes" draws its main inspiration from troubadour music. Machaut himself was a prolific poet who continued the tradition of *fin'amors* established by the troubadours. Despite the diversity of his output, his exploration of forms such as *lai* and *chant royal* revealed a taste for antique aesthetics that would soon disappear,[132] prompting Deborah McGrady to describe him as "the last troubadour".[133] I was born in Corsica, and my family has roots in the Occitan region, but I pursued my studies in London: Machaut encapsulates a tension between northern aesthetics and southern traditions that resonates with my own geographical and musical journey.

"Se vous n'estes" is a plaintive love song with a lyrical quality reminiscent of troubadour cansos. My own version preserves basic qualities of troubadour music, including a repeating melody, limited range, rhythmically free notation, and shifting modal centres. Jordi Savall and Hespèrion XX often embody these modal shifts with a flexible harmonic ground.[134] For instance, in their performance of "Na Carenza Al Bel Cors Avinen"[135] (with a melody by Falquet de Romans) the medieval lute alternately emphasises harmonies based on D and C:

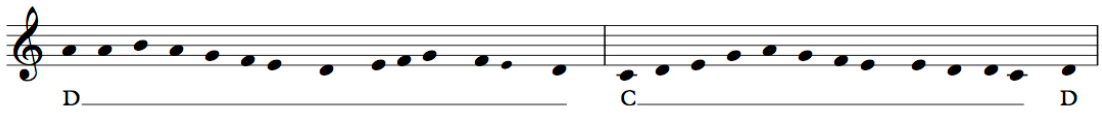

Fig. 7. Falquet de Romans, "Las grans beutatz els fis ensenhamens".

In my case, the melody shifts symbiotically with its accompanying pitches, following partials from the harmony, as illustrated in colour below:

[132] Earp, Lawrence M. *Guillaume de Machaut: A Guide to Research*. Routledge, 2012, p. xi.

[133] Gaunt, Simon, and Sarah Kay. *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval French Literature*. Cambridge University Press, 2008.

[134] *Cansos de Trobairitz: Lyrik der Trobairitz um 1200.* EMI Electrola, 1976. Vinyl, A1–A4.

[135] *Cansos de Trobairitz*, A3.

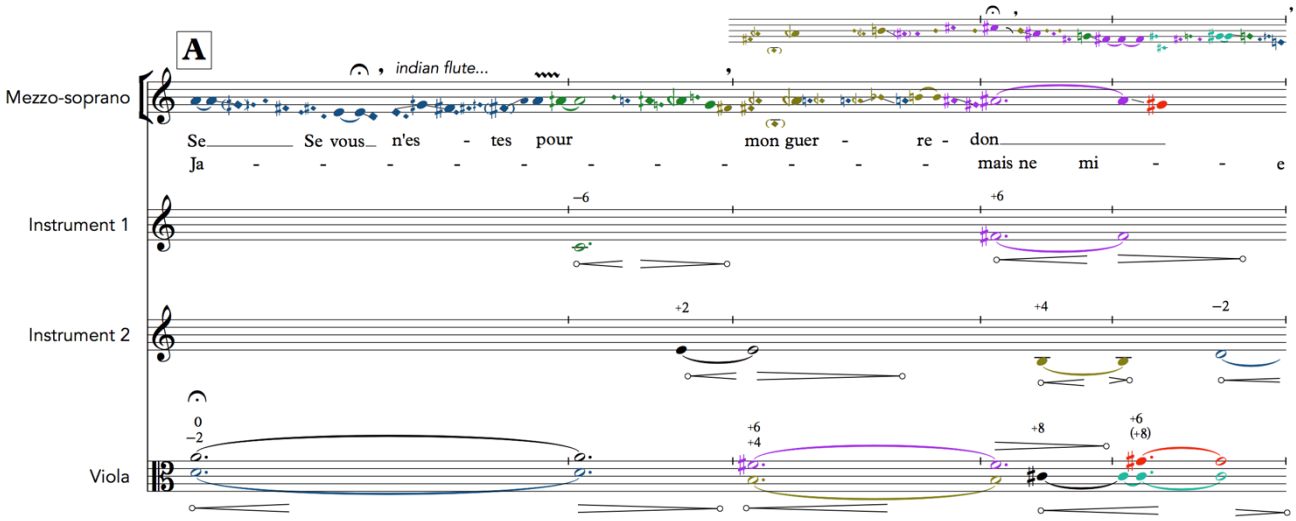

Fig. 8. Thomas Fournil, “Se vous n’estes”: colour-coded melody.

Here, the melody initially explores a spectrum of D (in blue) then a spectrum of C (in green) using A and A quarter-sharp as transition tones between both harmonic areas.

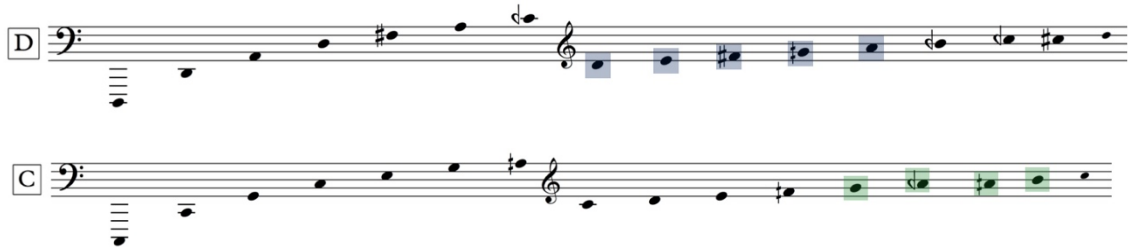

Fig. 9. Partials used in mezzo-soprano, b.1-2.

This proto-spectral[136] approach creates a form of stillness within transformation. While the compositional system remains constant, the relationship between parts evolves. For instance, the circling of different harmony and melody notes creates episodes of relative consonance and dissonance. Additionally, the text establishes a limited form of narrative that is reflected in the melody. For instance, the musical extract below (figure 10) features expressive melodic movements that may be interpreted differently depending on their place in the text. In the first verse, the dame is being praised for her sweet, smiling gaze. The word *doulz* (sweet) features expressive contours with two fast leaps followed by a downward glissando. The word *riant* (smiling) is represented by repeated ornaments that could resemble a laugh. In the second verse however, these melodic details could be

[136] I use the term ‘proto-spectral’ rather than ‘post-spectral’ to avoid implying a teleological progress narrative. This choice aligns with Bruno Latour’s nonmodern framework, which emphasises continuity, hybridity, and the coexistence of multiple temporalities (see section 1.4 of this dissertation).

interpreted differently as *doulz* turns into a vindictive *vous* (you), and *riant* becomes *grief* (painful). This playful game of ambivalence can be witnessed throughout the song on words such as *née*/*joie*, *doulz*/*guerre*, *joie*/*grief*, *marvi*/*morir*, *doulz*/*morir*, *riant*/*guerriant*.

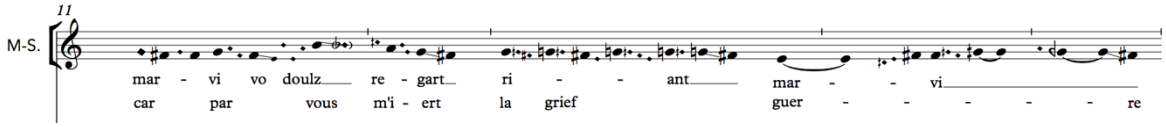

Fig. 10. Thomas Fournil, "Se vous n'estes": melodic repetition, textual opposition.

Since the early twentieth century, troubadour notation has confronted scholars and performers with a number of issues. The early modal theories of rhythm introduced by Pierre Aubry[137] and Jean-Baptiste Beck[138] attempted to apply modal rhythms (mostly used in 13th century *chansons*, *organum*, *discant*, and motets) to troubadour neumes. This contribution had a lasting impact on troubadour performance, with recordings as late as 2005 and 2012 featuring their arrangements.[139,140] However most modern scholars reject the modal theory, replacing it with various forms of isosyllabic readings (equal durations of syllables with varying tone emphasis on *arsis* and *thesis*) or declamatory principles (flexible interpretation following the sonority, syntax and meaning of the text).[141] Meanwhile, Elizabeth Aubrey argues that no theory has yet been proven and none is universally convincing. Despite this debate, most scholars agree on the centrality of the text.[142] Indeed, the diversity inherent to the repertoire, the duplicates and contrafacta found in manuscripts reveal a flexible relationship to the musical material, almost subordinate to the poetry. This mutability offers a multiplicity of perspectives that modern scholarship does not face without struggle, as Albert Lord points out:

> Our real difficulty arises from the fact that, unlike the oral poet, we are not accustomed to thinking in terms of fluidity. We find it difficult to grasp anything that is multiform. It seems to us necessary to construct an ideal text or seek an original, and we remain dissatisfied with an ever-changing phenomenon. I believe that once we know the facts of oral composition we

[137] Aubry, Pierre. *Rythmique musicale des troubadours et des trouvères*. H. Champion, 1907.

[138] Beck, Jean. *Die Melodien der Troubadours*. Trübner, 1908.

[139] *Mirabilis*. Nettwerk America, 2005. Sound recording.

[140] McQuaid, Sarah. *The Plum Tree and the Rose*. Waterbug Records, 2012. Sound recording.

[141] Aubrey, Elizabeth. *The Music of the Troubadours*. Indiana University Press, 2000, pp. 240–54.

[142] Aubrey, *The Music of the Troubadours,* p. 240.

must cease trying to find an original of any traditional song. From one point of view each performance is an original.[143]

This question lead Paul Zumthor to introduce the idea of *mouvance* in medieval literary production like the *Chanson de Roland*, suggesting that the text is never a finished product, but always in progress.[144] The textual variations found in troubadour notations (compared by Elizabeth Aubrey in her chapter *Concordances*)[145] could therefore reflect potential variations in performance as well. This idea of *mouvance* is encapsulated in my score through an alternative form of notation and a written suggestion of realisation. For instance, diamond-shaped notes are useful in helping the singer move between different vocal tones, but it also provides a hierarchy between pitches. This may prove useful during the learning process, or while researching ornamentation. The suggestion of realisation, provides examples of variation (figures 12-14) and allows an open relation to the written text; encouraging the singer to engage with the materials in a creative way. The examples below show different versions of the same melodic line:

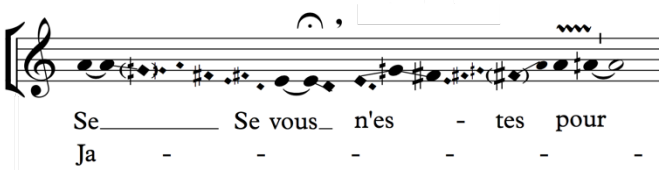

Fig. 11. Thomas Fournil, “Se vous n’estes”: b.1.

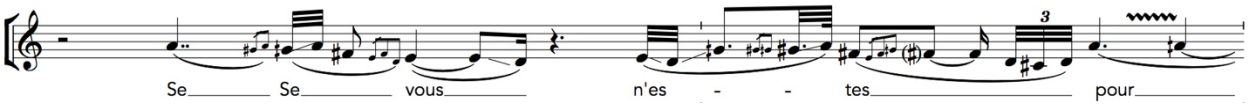

Fig. 12. Thomas Fournil, “Se vous n’estes”: example of realisation, b.1

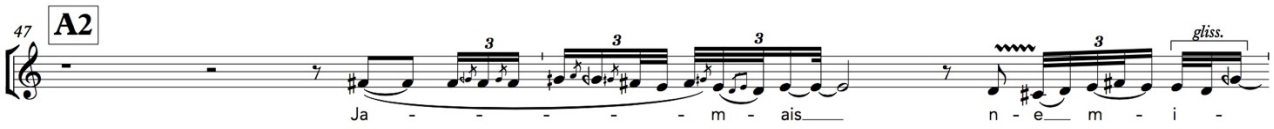

Fig. 13. Thomas Fournil, “Se vous n’estes”: example of realisation, b.47

[143] Lord, Albert B. *The Singer of Tales*. Harvard University Press, 1960, p. 100.

[144] “[…] plutôt qu’un sens accompli, une pratique constamment renouvelée de signification”. My translation. Zumthor, Paul, and Michel Zink. *Essai de poétique médiévale*. Éditions du Seuil, 2000, p. 94.

[145] Aubrey, Elizabeth. *The Music of the Troubadours*. Indiana University Press, 2000, pp. 49–65.

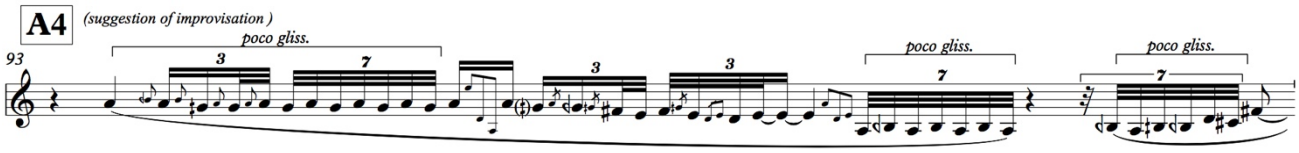

Fig. 14. Thomas Fournil, "Se vous n'estes": example of realisation, b.93 (Alto Flute)

This manner of working is not entirely dissimilar to Monteverdi's, when in the third act of L'Orfeo, he presents the singer with two possible versions of the same tune:

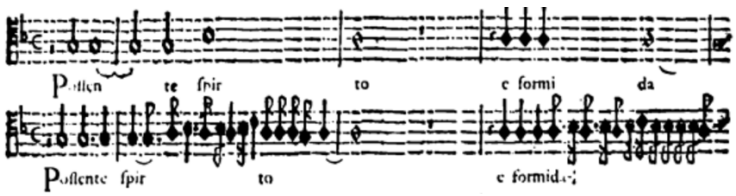

Fig. 15. Claudio Monteverdi, *L'Orfeo*, Act 3, "Possente Spirto"[146]

In the case of troubadour repertoire however, the problem remains unsolved. We have seen that scholars applied musical principles that are now considered outdated, or attempted to explore monolithic theories that do not cater for the complexity of this repertoire. As Elizabeth Aubrey points out:

> The troubadours were a peripatetic and diverse group of men and women. […] They came from all strata of the social fabric: upper and lower nobility, the clergy, knights, the bourgeois, and unpropertied classes. […] Some were amateurs, while others made their sole living as composers. Some were better regarded as poets, some as musicians, some as singers, some as composers. Some explored sophisticated, obscure, or novel styles, genres, and structures; others kept within predictable and sometimes narrow forms.[147]

The political and geographical situation of the Provençal area may have played a role in creating such a strong and yet diverse group of artists. The exchange with Nothern Italy and the Aragon Crown was significant,[148] but cultural influences from the North scarcely felt.[149] Occitans did not have political

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[146] Monteverdi, Claudio. *L'Orfeo, Favola in Musica*, 1609, http://hz.imslp.info/files/imglnks/usimg/1/10/IMSLP297158-PMLP21363-Monteverdi_-_L'Orfeo,Favola_in_Musica(1609).pdf.

[147] Aubrey, *The Music of the Troubadours*, p. 25.

[148] Gaunt, Simon, and Sarah Kay. *The Troubadours: An Introduction*. Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 127.

[149] Aubrey, *The Music of the Troubadours*, p. xvii.

borders, but the distinctness of their language, religious inclinations and moral values created an increasingly threatening cleavage with the North. The Albigensian Crusade therefore marked the end of the troubadour era, and the beginning of a more centralised culture. This unique historical position hinders modern re-imaginings, as scholars and conservatoire students are distant inheritors of this centralisation. Marcel Pérès however believes that surviving forms of oral traditions carry information that medieval musicologists should not dismiss. His research on regional liturgical practices enriched my understanding of Mediterranean aesthetics, which in turn influenced my own re-imagining of troubadour music through "Se vous n'estes".

There is evidence to suggest that the development of paraliturgical song was intimately linked with troubadour production. As early as 1955, Jacques Chailley revealed striking coincidences of rhetoric, text and text setting between the *versus* of the Aquitaine school and troubadour repertoire.[150] In 1992, Margaret Switten presented an analysis of *Reis Glorios* by Guiraut de Borneill and *S'anc fui belha ni prezada* by Cadenet. She suggests that their almost exact similitude with the hymn *Ave maris stella*, and the versus *O Maria Deu maire* was a conscious signifying choice from the troubadours.[151] Therefore, liturgical manuscripts from that period might offer unconventional insights into the interpretation of troubadour notation.

The Romano-Frankish corpus (often called Gregorian)[152] was created as a synthesis between Gallican and Old Roman chant traditions during the Carolingian era. In Rome however, Old Roman chant survived in pontifical liturgies until the 13th century, before disappearing in large part due to the Avignon Papacy. In *Gregorian and Old Roman Eighth-mode Tracts*, Emma Hornby allows readers to compare closely related melodies from both rites. This study considers the possibility that Old Roman chant is a highly elaborate interpretation of melodies otherwise notated without ornaments in the Frankish corpora.[153] These Roman manuscripts, at odds with current liturgical aesthetics, are largely overlooked by musicians, scholars, and clerics alike, and represent an invaluable insight into the art of medieval ornamentation.

Marcel Pérès also noted that these written texts could resonate with regional, living, and oral traditions. His work has revealed that brotherhoods in geographically secluded areas often found themselves at odds with the modern Church, as they sought to protect and maintain ancient

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[150] Chailley, Jacques. "Les Premiers Troubadours et les versus de l'école d'Aquitaine". *Romania*, vol. 76, 1955, pp. 212–39.

[151] Switten, Margaret L. "Modèle et variation: Saint Martial de Limoges et les troubadours". *Contacts de langues, de civilisations et intertextualité*, no. 3, Université Paul Valéry, 1992, pp. 679–86.

[152] "Gregorian chant" here refers to the 19th-century reimagination and reform of Romano-Frankish chant, rather than the diverse medieval traditions it seeks to stabilise.

[153] Hornby, Emma. *Gregorian and Old Roman Eighth-Mode Tracts: A Case Study in the Transmission of Western Chant*. Ashgate, 2000. Appendix 2.

practices.[154] Corsican chants, for instance, explore principles of ornamentation, improvisation, and voice placement that may be rooted in medieval practices,[155] and that challenge modern liturgical aesthetics; but would such practices have been confined to Southern Europe? Indeed Jean Diacre, in the 9th century, already acknowledged the ornamental subtleties of the Romans, and the struggle of the Franks to reproduce it.[156] However examples of improvised polyphony could be found in Paris Cathedral as late as the 18th century,[157] and medieval theorists such as Jerome of Moravia confirmed that French cantors used enharmonic quarter-tones, augmented seconds, and often performed tones as semi-tones or reversely semi-tones as tones.[158] Similarly Al Tîfâshî, Tunisian chronicler from the 13th century, claimed that Arabic singers had a very ascetic musical practice, and were originally shocked by the ornaments of French Christians.[159]

The investigation of Marcel Pérès is crucial in understanding the cultural weight behind the deceivingly modest neumes of medieval manuscripts. His work also emphasises the importance of avoiding the pressure to conform to a romanticised, monolithic or whitewashed vision of medieval culture. New scholarship in medieval music performance is allowing a more diverse range of perspectives, and other dimensions of otherness to enrich our understanding of these repertoires. By engaging with them, I am able to frame the use of microtonal ornamentation in contemporary medievalist compositions not as a mere orientalist tendency but as a way to reclaim my heritage.

2.3 UNYCORN

This third and final iteration of the piece does not include a score; it is a partial recording of *Example of Realisation II*, restructured for the documentary *UNYCORN*. Conrad Armstrong contacted me through contrabass player Gwen Reed (featured in the recording of "Se vous n'estes"). He was working on a documentary about performer Rose Wood and was considering adding medieval music to his soundtrack. His approach was indeed to draw parallels between Rose's status as a rare and mythical NYC artist, *The Unicorn Tapestries*,[160] and a remaining parcel of Manhattan's old-growth forest. His perspective resonated with me, and I shared my thoughts on how medieval music could

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[154] Pérès, Marcel, and Jacques Cheyronnaud. *Les Voix du Plain-Chant*. Desclée de Brouwer, 2001, pp. 8–9.

[155] Pérès, Marcel. *Le Chant Religieux Corse: État, Comparaisons, Perspectives; Actes du Colloque de Corte, 1990*. Créaphis, 1996.

[156] Pérès, Marcel, and Jacques Cheyronnaud. *Les Voix du Plain-Chant*. Desclée de Brouwer, 2001, pp. 39.

[157] Pérès and Cheyronnaud, *Les Voix du Plain-Chant*, p. 73.

[158] Pérès and Cheyronnaud, *Les Voix du Plain-Chant*, pp. 34-35.

[159] Pérès and Cheyronnaud, *Les Voix du Plain-Chant*, pp. 44-45.

[160] *The Unicorn Tapestries* are a set of seven late-medieval tapestries, woven in the South Netherlands between 1495 and 1505, and currently housed at *The Cloisters*, a branch of *The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York*.

play a role in rethinking notions of otherness, challenging national narratives, shifting power dynamics, and reimagining the future. It became clear that our artistic sensibilities were closely aligned, and that medieval music could serve as a powerful vector to convey his message. Conrad used live recordings from Idrîsî Ensemble including a trobairitz song, a Corsican Kyrie Eleison, and a never-before recorded Old Roman chant in Greek.[161] These pieces were performed by female leads (typically male-dominated and male-exclusive repertoire) and a choir featuring queer and trans singers. In our performance of it, all three pieces resituated conventional signifiers of otherness (specific vocal techniques, timbres, micro-intonation, ornamentation, heterophony), elements that often lead audiences to describe our music as "Oriental" and "Arabic", as essential components of West-European musical culture. Conrad also incorporated my composition throughout the film, serving as a bridge between modern and medieval worlds, while providing a non-intrusive soundscape for his footage. Some elements of the documentary are undeniably provocative; however, it is precisely this sense of discomfort that lends our collaboration its power and significance. This venture with Conrad brought the work to life in ways I am truly proud of, finally bringing my doctoral project full circle – or, as Machaut would say, "Ma fin est mon commencement".[162]

2.4 Conclusion

The spectral quest for realms beyond immediate audibility could be compared to a transcendental act. In their will to represent temporal expansion, the hidden geometry of nature and elementary aspects of vibration, spectral composers could be deemed medievalists. A practice-based cross-fertilisation can help us understand such subtle resonances between repertoires, while tying together past and future imaginings of it. Here the spectral composer's obsession with "the hypnotic power of slowness", "thresholds" and "transience"[163] is filtered through medievalist parameters: rondeau form, linear behaviours, minimal development, a melody with a small range, a free approach to notation, logogenetic interpretation (following the meaning of the text), and the coexistence of multiple, contradicting manuscript sources – reflected in the creation of two distinct scores.

In the present project, the idea of liminality expands beyond notions of timbre and harmony. My version of "Se vous n'estes" belongs in a hybrid zone: it is at once temporally and regionally anamorphic, both a strictly regulated open score and yet an authorial patchwork. By establishing an

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[161] This chant is now available on streaming platforms. *Oty Theos*. Idrîsî Ensemble. *Spotify*, released by Idrîsî Ensemble, 2024, https://open.spotify.com/track/44PHS9czuW3dhDcBeX0gV3.

[162] "My end is my beginning". Machaut, Guillaume de. *Poésies*. *Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits, Français 1585*, fol. 309r, 15th century, *Gallica*, Bibliothèque nationale de France, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8449032x/f626.item. Accessed 20 Jan. 2025.

[163] Grisey, Gérard, and Joshua Fineberg. "Did You Say Spectral?" *Contemporary Music Review*, vol. 19, no. 3, 2000, pp. 1-3.

alternative leadership dynamic, the performers involved can experience what Steve Lehman would describe as an extended form of liminality, a "collaborative model that is at once hierarchical and non-hierarchical".[164] In this context, instrumental synthesis encapsulates larger aesthetical notions and stands as the embodiment of an imaginary ideal, as Eric Drott points out:

> By failing either to synthesize fully or to dissolve into a collection of discrete instrumental timbres, such "hybrid beings" not only manage to negotiate the razor-sharp line separating differentiation from integration, but in doing so they also acquire a utopian charge. That is, they offer a fragile, fleeting glimpse of a situation where difference may be respected and integrated at one and the same time.[165]

In the world of early music, similar insights may be gained through what the *Cambridge Companion to Medievalism* terms "queer medievalism".[166] Engaging creatively with the past often involves reimagining the boundaries of contemporary social constructs, norms of desire, and musical performance. The queer medievalist intentionally seeks to expose inconsistencies within sociological and musicological discourse, questioning contemporary beliefs and the nature of "modernity" itself.

Through this marriage of apparently unconnected areas, I attempt to transgress aesthetical boundaries and scholarly limitations. In this context, conservatoire students encounter alternative forms of hierarchies, performance practices and tunings; it initiates a discussion on their role as co-creators. Ignoring these limits enables me to find composition strategies that reflect on the representation and misrepresentation of medieval repertoire. The form of authorial dissolution found in "Se vous n'estes" is called to evolve throughout the project, transitioning from medievalist performances to more conventional compositional output. By settling in this space of in-between, my practice attempts to enshrine speculative and idealistic qualities that are difficult to embody in concrete form. The recordings featured in this submission capture early stages in that process of actualisation.

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[164] Lehman, Stephen H. *Liminality as a Framework for Composition: Rhythmic Thresholds, Spectral Harmonies and Afrological Improvisation*. 2012, p. 41.

[165] Heile, Björn. *The Modernist Legacy: Essays on New Music*. Ashgate Publishing, 2009, p. 56.

[166] D'Arcens, Louise. *The Cambridge Companion to Medievalism*. Cambridge University Press, 2016, p. 210.

3 - Greu m'es a durar / Quintina

"Greu m'es a durar" emerged from my immersion in Old Roman chant under Marcel Pérès and my engagement with trobairitz repertoire. It features a vocal score written in medieval notation, "Greu m'es a durar", and a solo flute piece proto-spectrally derived from the melody, "Quintina". These pieces can be performed simultaneously, or separately; the current audio submission features solo flute only. Together, they function as a complex hybrid that blurs distinctions between historical boundaries, philosophical ambitions, and textual significations. "Greu m'es a durar / Quintina" is an example of how the histories we inherit can be reclaimed, enriched, and reimagined through composition.

My creative process has been deeply influenced by writings on medieval music from musicologists, liturgists, performer-researchers, and medieval theorists. While this commentary does not provide an in-depth exploration, it offers a brief reflection on how chant scholarship has shaped my understanding of melody, text setting, ornamentation, orality, and West European identity.

3.1 The troubadour question

Medieval music occupies a contested space of identity, ideology, and power – historically and presently. The appropriation of medievalisms by extremist groups, such as the alt-right's fascination with Viking-inspired narratives and visuals, demonstrates how deeply these historical imaginaries can resonate with contemporary ideologies. Setting a political text in Old Occitan offers an opportunity to investigate a people's journey from radical and heretical "otherness" (during the Albigensian crusade) to subjugation and re-appropriation. The interpretation of troubadour compositions is therefore an inherently political act. This ideological charge is starkly illustrated in the rhetoric of Nazi politician Baldur von Schirach, who sought to integrate medieval music into a racial framework:

> The song that once upon a time filled the valleys of Provence; that same song that is today the triumphal song of Europe and its civilisation; the song of the troubadours as expression of those superior sentiments that distinguish us from the Jews and from the Black American's jazz – that song is something that the Jewish mind will never be able to understand.[167]

Such statements highlight the necessity to engage critically with medieval music – its performance and interpretation are acts of political agency. Nietzsche, too, recognised the troubadours' influence, proclaiming that "love as passion" was the quintessence of Europe, a "specialty invented by the poet-

[167] Quoted in Dainotto, Roberto M. *Europe (in Theory)*. Duke University Press, 2007, p. 233.

knights of Provence, splendid, inventive men of the *gai saber* to whom Europe owes so much and, indeed, almost itself".[168] Often considered "the most exemplary, the most central flower in the history of lyric",[169] the art of the troubadours persists as a battlefield of controversies. As María Menocal argues, conquering this repertoire meant gaining authority over a whole branch of European literature and perhaps even the idea of *song* itself.[170] Unsurprisingly, with such political valence, theories abound on the origin of courtly love alone: whether it be considered Hispano-Arabic, Chivalric-Matriarchal, Crypto-Cathar, Neoplatonic, Bernardine-Marianist, Feudal-Sociological, a spring folk ritual, or dismissed as a nineteenth-century construct.[171] Often implied in the Hispano-Arabic theme is the notion of influence from Byzantium, which may have introduced themes of romance and courtly ideals through cultural interactions during the Crusades. Indeed, in Byzantium, ideals of military virtue, religious devotion, and noble conduct were deeply rooted in classical Roman and Hellenistic traditions, evolving within the highly sophisticated court culture of Constantinople.[172]

In *Exchanges in Exoticism: Cross-cultural Marriage and the Making of the Mediterranean in Old French Romance*, Megan Moore shows the importance of exoticism and Hellenism in the display, definition, and development of nobility in the medieval period.[173] Southern Italy and Sicily, for instance, hosted rulers eager to construct their identities beyond fixed categories – Norman-Arab-Byzantine rather than simply Norman. Troubadour Raimbaut de Vaqueiras travelled to Greece,[174] while Peire Vidal lived for a considerable period in Cyprus and married a Greek.[175] This sensibility is at times evident in troubadour verse: in her song "Estat ai en greu cossirier", La Comtessa de Dia promotes the characters of Floire and Blancheflor as an ideal couple.[176] This particular romance ties Western nobility to a genealogy of Hellenic glory and constructs an image of heroic masculinity that

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[168] Nietzsche, Friedrich W. *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*. Translated by R. J. Hollingdale, Penguin Books, 1973, p. 260.

[169] Menocal, María R. *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History: A Forgotten Heritage*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987, pp. 71–72.

[170] Menocal, *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History*, pp. 71–72.

[171] Boase, Roger. *The Origin and Meaning of Courtly Love: A Critical Study of European Scholarship*. Manchester University Press, 1977, pp. 62–89.

[172] Stratikis, Leon. *Byzantium and France: The Twelfth-Century Renaissance and the Birth of the Medieval Romance*. 1992, p. 172.

[173] Moore, Megan. *Exchanges in Exoticism: Cross-Cultural Marriage and the Making of the Mediterranean in Old French Romance*. University of Toronto Press, 2014.

[174] Kountouras, Dēmētrēs. *Mousikē Tōn Trovadourōn: Sto Latiniko Vasileio Tēs Thessalonikēs Meta to 1204 = Music of the Troubadours: In the Latin Kingdom of Thessalonica After 1204*. Nephelē, 2016. King Roger II and his regime was subsequently the topic of an opera by Szymanowski, *Król Roger* (1924), though the relation of the events in the libretto of this opera to the historical King Roger is elusive, to say the least.

[175] Stratikis, Leon. *Byzantium and France: The Twelfth-Century Renaissance and the Birth of the Medieval Romance*. 1992, pp. 138–74.

[176] "[...] and I am more pleased with him than Floris with his Blanchaflor [...]" Bruckner, Matilda T., Laurie Shepard, and Sarah M. White. *Songs of the Women Troubadours*. Routledge, 2011, p. 11.

is not dependent on martial prowess but rather on the exchange of exotic goods and stories. In a later Medieval Greek version of the romance (*Florios kai Patziaflora*), a joust is added as an exotic element, illustrating how "tropes of exoticism circulate between cultures" – Mediterranean nobility is not about "the figuring out of any particular cultural referent" but about "obtaining, trading, and showing off exotic goods and narratives".[177]

Perhaps the vision of Europe so cherished by composers, philosophers, and audiences today owes less to the troubadours themselves than to the appropriation – and later re-appropriation – of Occitan lands, wealth, and culture. In this composition, I aim to imagine the Occitan region as belonging to the Mediterranean as a whole, presenting a rich cultural identity that was eventually deemed heretical and eradicated. "Greu m'es a durar" is a violently political poem; in my composition, I aim to present a similarly radical image of Occitania – one that affirms its plural identities beyond the confines of French dominion.[178]

3.2 The voices of plainchant

Composers evolving in the experimental and contemporary classical music milieu are often expected to champion the project of modernity, with always stronger emphasis on the idea of progress. "Originality" is at the forefront of conservatoire marking criteria, independently of grade or degree level – for instance, the Durham University Final Year UG Composition Portfolio marking criteria listed the concept 14 times. As British conservatoires are now discussing the decolonisation of their curriculum, it is imperative that we investigate the global implications of the modern "constitution",[179] its fundamental dialogue with the medieval and the Other.[180] John Dagenais asserted that "colonisation of the past is an indispensable companion of empire", and he described the Middle Ages as "a vastness of time ripe for colonial exploitation".[181] The articulation of modernity is dependent on

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[177] Moore, Megan. *Exchanges in Exoticism: Cross-Cultural Marriage and the Making of the Mediterranean in Old French Romance*. University of Toronto Press, 2014, p. 65.

[178] For a practical exploration of these topics in troubadour performance, see Appendix 2: a new contrafactum for the *trobairitz* song "Ar em al freg temps vengut". Drawing on multiple existing versions of the melody across the troubadour corpus, I developed an evolving contrafactum rooted in historically informed variations. Our approach to ornamentation, tuning, and heterophony is influenced by Old Roman chant, as well as Corsican and Greek traditions.

[179] See section 1.3 of this dissertation; see also Latour, Bruno. *We Have Never Been Modern*. Pearson Education, 2000.

[180] See the preface of this dissertation.

[181] Dagenais, John. "Decolonizing the Middle Ages: Introduction." *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, p. 431.

the appropriation and negotiation of medieval and non-European mythologies: in the context of classical music, nowhere is this more apparent than in the field of plainchant.

Romano-Frankish chant (sometimes called Gregorian chant)[182] is not an unbroken tradition but a product of continual revision, suppression, and ideological reinvention – continuously appropriated within imperial, nationalist, and colonial discourses.[183] The 19th-century Solesmes restoration, later officialised by the Vatican, stripped plainchant of its ornamentation, micro-intonation, and dissociated it from oral traditions, aligning it with contemporary aesthetics and ideologies.[184] Old Roman chant, a more complex tradition arguably reflecting its oral origins, was marginalised and dismissed as decadent.[185] Plainchant reforms are inseparable from evolving attitudes toward tradition, singing, power, and authorship - historical shifts that would shape modern classical music paradigms. Acknowledging the complexity of plainchant (and the many aspects still under active research and debate) has transformed my creative practice. By uncovering alternative legitimacies, aesthetics, and techniques, composers may find new creative pathways, and carve out new spaces for diversity and possibility within classical music institutions.

The rationalisation of chant has deep roots, particularly in the 12th-century Cistercian reforms, which prioritised cohesion over complex performance practices, reinforcing an emerging reliance on theoretical logic. The conflict between these Cistercian generations is a pivotal moment between worlds, as oral transmission came to be considered unreliable, and rational thought became the only connection to a potential "mythic archetype":[186]

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[182] "Gregorian chant" here refers to the 19th-century reimagination and reform of Romano-Frankish chant, rather than the diverse medieval traditions it seeks to stabilise.

[183] For a non-exhaustive selection of studies on plainchant development and reception, see Marcel Pérès and Jacques Cheyronnaud, *Les Voix du Plain-Chant* (Desclée de Brouwer, 2001); Eduardo Aubert, "When the Roman Liturgy Became Frankish: Sound, Performance and Sublation in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries", *Études grégoriennes*, vol. 40, 2013, pp. 57–160; Lawrence Earp, *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Music*, ed. Mark Everist (Cambridge University Press, 2013); Katherine Bergeron, *Decadent Enchantments: The Revival of Gregorian Chant at Solesmes* (University of California Press, 1998); Emma Hornby, *Gregorian and Old Roman Eighth-Mode Tracts: A Case Study in the Transmission of Western Chant* (Routledge, 2018); and Peter Jeffery, *Re-Envisioning Past Musical Cultures: Ethnomusicology in the Study of Gregorian Chant* (University of Chicago Press, 1992).

[184] See above; also see Pothier, Joseph, and Jacques Chailley. *Les Mélodies Grégoriennes*. Stock, 1980.

[185] See Pérès, *Les Voix du Plain-Chant*; also see Mocquereau, André. *Paléographie Musicale, II*. Société de Saint-Jean L'Évangéliste/Desclée, 1924, p. 4.

[186] Maître, Claire, and Georges Duby. *La Réforme Cistercienne du Plain-Chant: Étude d'un Traité Théorique*. Cîteaux, Commentarii Cistercienses, 1995, p. 409.

> In the history of Occidental thought, it was the first time a traditional practice was entirely reformed based on a fabricated theory. [...] In this, one might see a break between the musical universe of the Occident and that of the Orient. The reference value stopped being tradition, orally transmitted by a living authority, but logic, of which the principal vector was writing. In the name of logic, the most venerable traditions could be shoved, transformed and even erased.[187]

Without access to a living tradition, theorists attempted to manufacture their own, developing an entirely different approach to musical creation. This marked a critical step in shaping modern concepts of pitch hierarchy, progress, originality, and individual genius. As Roman political alliances shifted from Byzantium to Francia, these transformations were not without symbolic or political implications – they reflected the Frankish ambition to establish a new centre of power. Similar nationalist redefinitions occurred in modern history; for example, Bulgarian music was reshaped to erase Persian, Byzantine, and Turkish influences.[188]

Comparative readings of Old Roman and Gregorian (or Romano-Frankish) chant suggest that Old Roman notation may preserve insights into an earlier oral tradition.[189] Marcel Pérès has similarly argued that Old Roman manuscripts serve as a "recording" of elaborate performance practices that were never fully notated in Romano-Frankish and Gregorian chant.[190] These ornamentation practices align with Hyeronimus of Moravia's descriptions of diverse performance traditions, including mordents and trills (*flores harmonici*), appoggiatura-like attacks from below (*reverberatio*), filled-in intervals (*mediata*), and other forms of improvisation.[191] Colette and Jolivet, in their translation of

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[187] "Dans l'histoire de la pensée occidentale ce fut la première fois qu'une pratique traditionnelle fut réformée sur les bases d'une théorie élaborée de toutes pièces. [...] C'est peut-être là qu'il faut voir la cassure entre l'univers musical de l'Occident et celui de l'Orient. La valeur de référence cessa d'être la tradition, transmise oralement par une autorité vivante, mais la logique dont le vecteur de transmission fut l'écrit. Au nom de la logique, les traditions les plus vénérables pouvaient être bousculées, transformées, et même extirpées." My translation. Pérès, Marcel, and Jacques Cheyronnaud. *Les Voix du Plain-Chant*. Desclée de Brouwer, 2001, pp. 55–56.

[188] See Slobin, Mark. *Retuning Culture: Musical Changes in Central and Eastern Europe*. Duke University Press, 1996, pp. 200–30; also see Kirilov, Kalin. *Bulgarian Harmony: In Village, Wedding, and Choral Music of the Last Century*. Ashgate, 2015, p. 31.

[189] Hornby, *Gregorian and Old Roman Eighth-Mode Tracts*; also see Ricossa, Luca. "Hyeronimus de Moravia: Ornamentation and Exegesis in Gregorian, Old Roman, and Byzantine Chant". Lecture, International Congress on Medieval Studies, Kalamazoo, MI, May 7, 2006, https://www.academia.edu/853498.

[190] Pérès, Marcel. Interview by Bernard D. Sherman. *Inside Early Music: Conversations with Performers,* Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 32.

[191] Ricossa, "Hyeronimus de Moravia". As will become evident, the ornamentation of Old Roman chant is not only more complex but also conveys greater semantic significance than these examples initially suggest.

Guido d'Arezzo's 11th-century treatise, emphasise ornamentation as a way of disguising degree changes, allowing melodies to flow like liquid so that intervals appear continuous, without a boundary.[192] Unfortunately, a full discussion of ornamentation, micro-intonation, and their cultural implications would sit well beyond my word count. Suffice is to say, the enduring influence of 19th and 20th century liturgists ensured that these elements were dismissed, often with orientalist undertones – Nisard, for instance, infamously described microtones as "monstrosities" akin to the "meowing" of Arabic music.[193] In *Microtones According to Augustine,*[194] Leo Lousberg offered new insight on the possible relation between liturgical micro-intonation and rhetoric. He also gave an overview of scholarly research on liturgical microtones, and deplored:

> Froger's rejection of microtonality in medieval Romano-Frankish chant reverberates in publications to this day. Still, authors are reluctant to mention microtones without the epithet "presumed"; some present their analyses as if the new insights gained after 1978 do not exist.[195]

Addressing these implications fully would require an extended discussion, but it is worth noting that chant – far from being a neutral or stable foundation – remains a contested site of ideological negotiation. The dominance of *cantus firmus* in counterpoint education exemplifies the ideological function of chant today, shaping perceptions of melody and structure in pedagogical contexts.[196] The rationalisation of chant has left present-day composers with inherited attitudes and aesthetics that require active consideration. In my relationship to liturgical ornaments and microtones, I investigate my relationship to the multiple stratifications constituting my heritage.

Maria Rosa Menocal reminds us of the "myriad pretensions to objectivity" that obscure the

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[192] "En de nombreuses occurrences, les notes deviennent liquides, comme des lettres, de sorte que l'on passe l'intervalle séparant une note d'une autre de manière fluide, sans qu'il semble être délimité." My translation. d'Arezzo, Guido, Marie-Noëlle Colette, and Jean-Christophe Jolivet. *Micrologus*. La Villette-Paris: Éd. impmc, 1993, p. xv.

[193] "Si c'est là ce que M. Raillard propose à l'admiration des archéologues et à la pratique des chantres pour rendre aux mélodies grégoriennes LEUR BEAUTÉ NATIVE; nous croyons, nous, que l'adoption de pareilles monstruosités, dignes des miaulements de ce qu'on appelle la musique arabe, amènerait la chute immédiate et définitive de notre chant liturgique européen...!" Nisard, Théodore. *L'Archéologie Musicale et le Vrai Chant Grégorien*. Lethielleux, 1890, p. 174.

[194] Lousberg, Leo A. G. *Microtones According to Augustine: Neumes, Semiotics and Rhetoric in Romano-Frankish Liturgical Chant*. Utrecht University, 2018, https://dspace.library.uu.nl/handle/1874/369247.

[195] Lousberg, *Microtones According to Augustine*, p. 33.

[196] As a student, my primary reference was a Schenker-based study: Salzer, Felix, and Carl Schachter. *Counterpoint in Composition: The Study of Voice Leading*. Morningside ed., Columbia University Press, 1989.

writing of our history as a myth-making activity, and our mistrust of foreign indigenous histories.[197] Musicians are now gradually relinquishing the illustrious parentage of Pope Gregory, the unwavering firmness of *cantus firmus*, the incontrovertible primacy of the written note, and the very title of "Western" in their imaginary. Meanwhile additional fantasies enter the narrative: Old Roman chant is the vector of new musical, institutional and cultural ideals. Here, the words of María Menocal on the relationship between Arabic and European medieval literary history seem *à propos*:

> I have few delusions that it is any less a myth than those I am attempting to modify in the process, but I think it is a myth that has several advantages. The first is that it does not shy away from the concept of a mixed ancestry for Western Europe that until recently has seemed largely unimaginable and insupportable. The second is that I believe that it enriches rather than impoverishes the recounting of the story we already work with, the readings of texts we have already agreed on.[198]

3.3 Romanising Gormonda

Gormonda's *sirventes* is a rare example of a political poem written by a female troubadour, sometimes described as the first French political poem by a woman. The prosperous and sophisticated society that sustained troubadour culture was about to decline, and Rome represented both a force of persecution and salvation. Here Gormonda answers attacks against Rome with ardent fervour, following the rhymes featured in Guilhem Figueira's equally virulent poem *D'un sirventes far*. Gormonda's text is shunned by present-day performers, not only because it advocates the coming of troops into Occitania, but because it survived without music. Giving Gormonda a voice is not a matter of personal conviction: it is about engaging with difficult topics, and diversifying predominantly male perspectives on this historical event.

In Gormonda's poem, most verses start with the word "Roma". Her relentless haranguing of Rome evoked parallels with my own obsession with Old Roman chant, and my dream of one day hearing it sung by women. We have seen that Old Roman chant is an invaluable resource on medieval ornamentation, and provides musicians with powerful, disruptive strategies in the performance of identity. Old Roman chant also demonstrates that with sufficiently refined micro/macro structures and performance practice, it is possible to create engaging music with only a handful of notes – a composer's Grail? It is difficult to describe my admiration for this music and its structural qualities, which in many ways speak to my queer sensibility. The different musical materials of Old Roman

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[197] Menocal, María R. *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History: A Forgotten Heritage*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987, p. 1.

[198] Menocal, *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History*, p. 16.

chant can never fully be stabilised or analysed in modern terms; continuously re-contextualising each other, immobile and yet ever changing, they exist in the middle. Between antiquity and early modernity, colonial and decolonial forces, diverse geographic and cultural affiliations, it dwells in spaces of possibilities.

Imbued with fascination (and a good amount of pride) I set out to compose my own Old Roman chant melody, merged with characteristics from troubadour song. Two years of sustained and committed work later, I had not solved this equation. It seemed these repertoires were irreconcilable: the Roman tetrachords with the troubadours' fifth-based structures, the rhythm inherent to Latin and Occitan melodic formulae, Gormonda's versification and rhyme schemes with the through-composed chant. I was not closer to understanding Old Roman chant alone, which prepares modal changes with effortless grace, gradually shifting colours like a kaleidoscope, or efficiently launching them with magical formulae. I was set on producing a satisfying result on the sole foundations of my training as a composer: in retrospect, it is clear my modernist mindset was holding me back.

Musicologists have given much attention to the relationship between Old Roman and Romano-Frankish chant, but very few have attempted to understand the internal structure of Old Roman chant. I was aware of Edward Nowacki's examination of the 8th mode tracts,[199] and Joseph Dyer's overview of the offertories,[200] but I was not yet capable to apply their findings to my endeavour. Within these two years however, I became fluent in reading and singing the Roman manuscripts. I also began to question the limitations I believed a conservatoire would impose on my compositional practice – pastiche without subversion may not have been appropriate, but what about the re-creation of a lost musical language, a language that could, perhaps, transform how composers think about their craft? Eventually, I was able to acknowledge Edward Nowacki's ground-breaking results. In his study, Nowacki demonstrated that the Old Roman 8th mode tracts[201] are structured following principles of rhetoric and text declamation:

> [...] within subsets characterised by identical textual conditions, melodic shape is uniform, or thrifty, to a degree that is as remarkable as it is unexpected.[202]

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[199] Nowacki, Edward. "Text Declamation as a Determinant of Melodic Form in the Old Roman Eighth-Mode Tracts". *Early Music History*, vol. 6, 1986, pp. 193–226, https://www.cambridge.org/core.

[200] Dyer, Joseph. "Tropis Semper Variantibus: Compositional Strategies in the Offertories of Old Roman Chant". *Cantus Planus 1998*, 2001, pp. 387–414, https://www.cambridge.org/core.

[201] Eighth-mode tracts are transmitted in four sources of the Old Roman manuscript tradition: MSS Vat. lat. 5319, San Pietro F22 and San Pietro F11, and MS Bodmer C74.

[202] Nowacki, Edward. "Text Declamation as a Determinant of Melodic Form in the Old Roman Eighth-Mode Tracts". *Early Music History*, vol. 6, 1986, p. 1, https://www.cambridge.org/core.

In other words, melodic formulae hold rhetorical meaning, and their inner variations can be traced back to formal characteristics from the text (especially syllable sonority and count). As a result of this study, Nowacki incidentally confirmed the "aesthetic superiority" of the Old Roman versions, and the caution one must exercise in "accepting Frankish manuscripts as witnesses to a pure tradition".[203] I chose not to use the eighth-mode melodies for my composition, particularly as his study contained several transcription errors that affected its reliability. I therefore decided to create my own study, investigating the plagal D tracts featured in Bodmer C74, the earliest of the six main Old Roman sources. I notated them in their entirety (cf. Appendix 1) however my categorisation was not that of a musicologist: it simply allowed me to share the data across A4 pages, to provide adequate information for my purposes as a composer, and to quickly reach the next stage of my endeavour.

Phrase types were labelled following Nowacki's system: V (for verse-initial), M (for medial), P (for post-medial), and K (for cadential). In the first verse, V is replaced by tract-initial phrases (I). In the final verse, K is replaced by tract-final phrases (F). I also arbitrarily decided to single out not only tract-initial phrases (T.I), but their following sections (T.I medial, T.I post-medial, and T.I final). Similarly, post-medial sections immediately preceding F were notated as F post-medial phrases. More unusual phrases such as R, K1 and K2 were replaced by the more generic term ALT. to signify alternate melodic forms.

In ecclesiastical fashion, the melody begins with a short intonation – this traditionally allows the chanter to recall characteristics of the mode while providing the rest of the choir with a tonic. While this is a conventional practice within liturgical music, it constitutes an interesting device in the context of contemporary classical composition: a focused gesture that dramatically "spells" the song into existence. Figure 16 provides all versions of this initial phrase, and provides strategies for openings with 2, 3, 4 or 9 syllables. The poem opens with the word "greu": in terms of syllable count and sonority, the closest equivalent in my table is "deus". Figure 17 shows my own notation of this melodic formula, including the illuminated initial G. As we will see later, the requirements of Gormonda's versification forced me to use a D cadence at this point, similar to intonations IV and V.

[203] Nowacki, "Text Declamation as a Determinant of Melodic Form", p. 2.

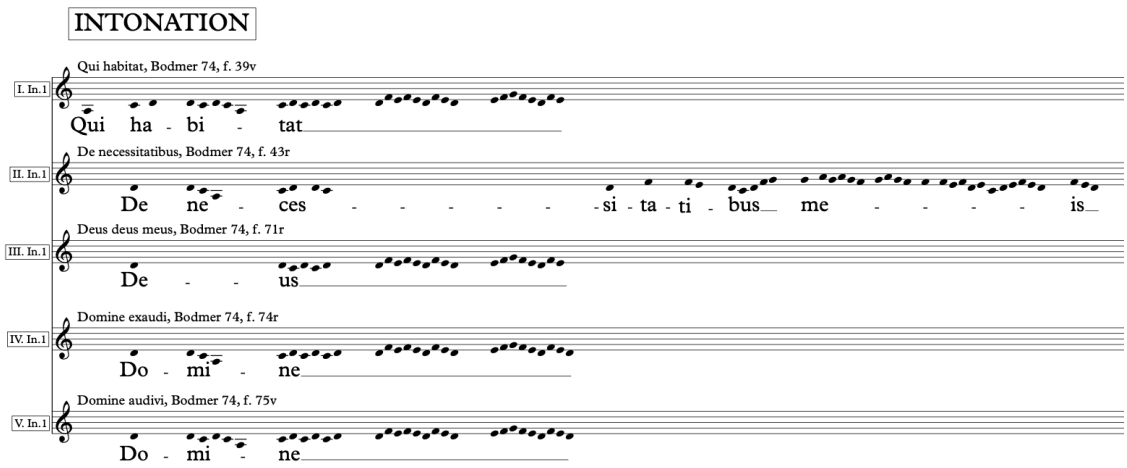

Fig. 16. Comparative analysis of the Plagal D Tracts in *Cod. Bodmer C74* (excerpt).

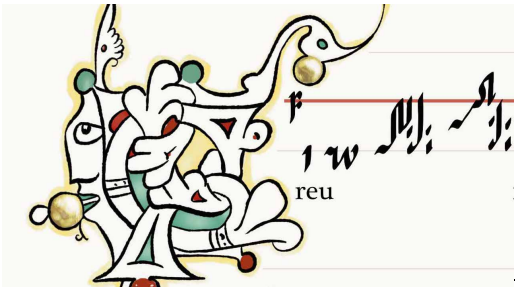

Fig. 17. Thomas Fournil, “Greu m’es a durar”: intonation formula.

The notation process required much trial and error. I initially produced Sibelius scores with a double notation “translating” the medieval neumes. This required me to train my hand to write these shapes, and then produce 255 pictures of individual neumes, each digitally processed to unify their colour and remove their background. Figure 18 shows a hand-written intonation: it was composed before my systematic analysis of plagal D tracts.

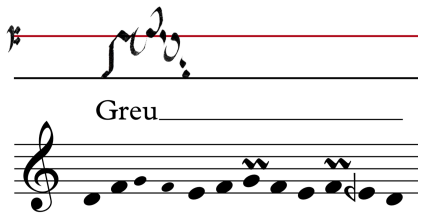

Fig. 18. Initial sketch for the intonation formula.

This however proved problematic as singers relied on modern notation to sing, preventing their learning of subtle performance details, and the Roman notation itself. Making these calligraphic figures work for my left hand was also challenging and resulted in arguably overly creative shapes. Eventually, Idrîsî Ensemble became confident enough with Old Roman chant notation, and I decided

to produce a purely graphic score: with the digital illustration application Procreate, I could program the inclination of the quill to replicate that of a right hand. I also wanted the illuminated initial to be a convincing cross-fertilisation between Roman and Occitan manuscripts. I borrowed the colour scheme and design of a Roman G and extended it with Occitan ornaments and figurations (figure 19). Occitan initials sometimes depict faces extending their tongues, with a sphere resting upon them. Though their exact meaning is unclear to me, I personally associate the tongue and sphere with song. This inspired my decision to replicate the sphere as if floating in the direction of the musical notation (figure 20).

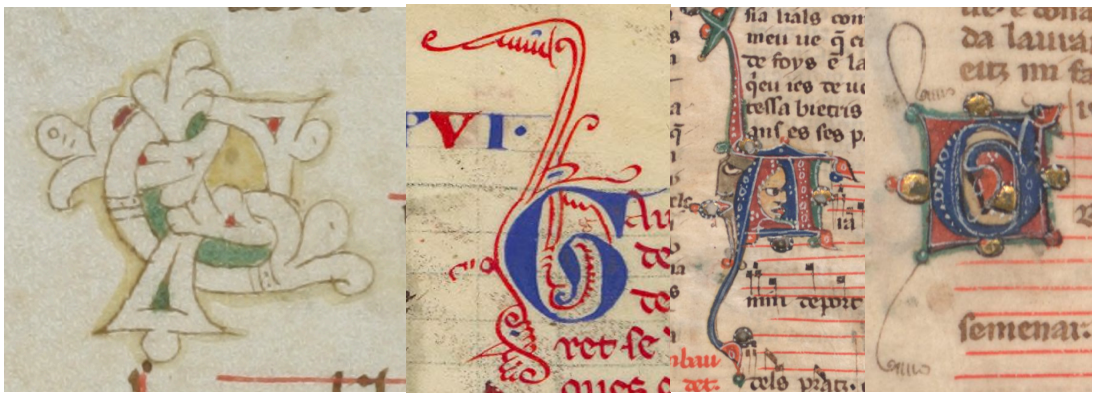

Fig. 19. Illuminated initial ‘G’: Roman model (first image) and Occitan models.

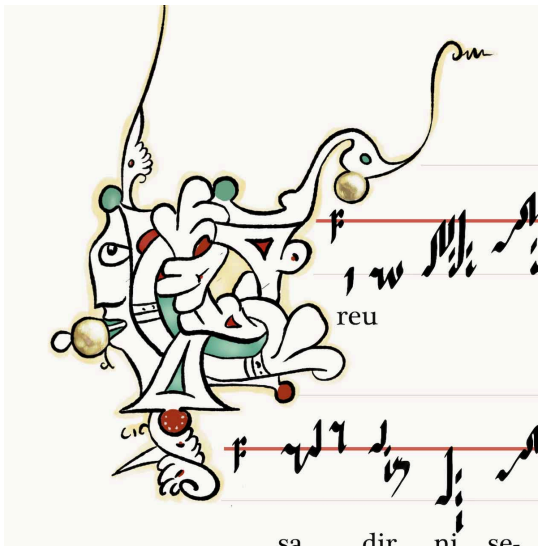

Fig. 20. Thomas Fournil, “Greu m’es a durar”: Romano-Occitan initial.

The first verses were the hardest to set to music: just as the intonation encapsulates the spirit of a piece, it was important for me to present the main modal patterns within the tract-initial phase. The only opportunity for a cadence comes at the end of line 3, and scarcity of words required an unusually efficient transition through initial, medial and post-medial phrases (figure 21).

Greu m'es a durar	V/M	It's hard to bear it
quar aug tal descrezensa	P	when I hear such false belief
dir ni semenar,	K	spoken and spread around;
e no.m platz ni m'agensa,	V	it doesn't please or suit me,
qu'om non deu amar	M	for no one should approve
qui fai desmantenensa	P	a person who dismantles
a so don totz bes	M	that from which all good
ven e nay et es	P	comes, is born, and is
salvamens e fes,	K	salvation and faith itself.
per qu'ieu faray parvensa	V,M,P	Therefore, I will show
e semblan que.m pes.	F	what grieves me.

Fig. 21. Roman phrase types in my setting of "Greu m'es a durar", stanza 1.

In order to negotiate this transition, I used melodic fragments that can assume characteristics of both verse-initial (V) and medial (M) phrases. Instead of ending "m'es a durar" with a verse-initial cadence, I chose a medial formula on the subtonic, which prepares phrases P and K, and is particularly suited to the accentuation of the word "durar" (figure 22).

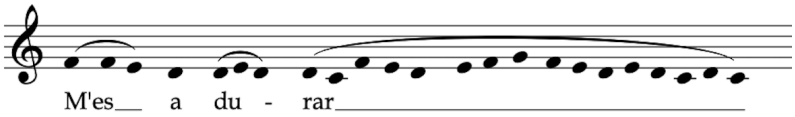

Fig. 22. Verse-Initial/Medial hybrid in my setting of "Greu m'es a durar".[204]

Since the cadence on the subtonic comes earlier than expected, it is important to repeatedly anchor the tonic beforehand: an intonation in D (rather than E) doubles as a verse-initial ending, while "m'es a du-" simultaneously fills the role of verse-initial (figure 23) and medial (figure 24). Furthermore, I elected a form of M cadence which first emphasises the tonic before moving down to C (figure 22).

The attentive reader will notice that in each given situation, only very few choices are ever possible. For instance, starting "m'es" on C (see models in figure 23) would have required much longer patterns to circle back to a subtonic cadence, effectively forcing us to complete a verse-initial phrase. After the intonation in D, a *repercussion* on F and descending *clivis* to D is the most elegant way to launch the piece. It provides relief and movement but enables an efficient transition back to our most pressing needs: anchoring the tonic, preparing the cadence, and allowing this particular movement towards the subtonic to feel meaningful.

[204] My early Sibelius notations included vibration signs and micro-intonation (as shown in figure 18). While these parameters have influenced my compositional choices, they primarily belong to the realm of orality, and I have chosen not to notate them here. Fixing elements such as rhythm, drone changes, breathing, ornamentation, and micro-intonation in modern notation would be problematic for this repertoire, as these details emerge within a system of orality. They are better conveyed through recordings, where they can remain a fluid and evolving aspect of the music. Additionally, changes to performance practice in my recent music might also reflect the advances of scholarship in relevant areas.

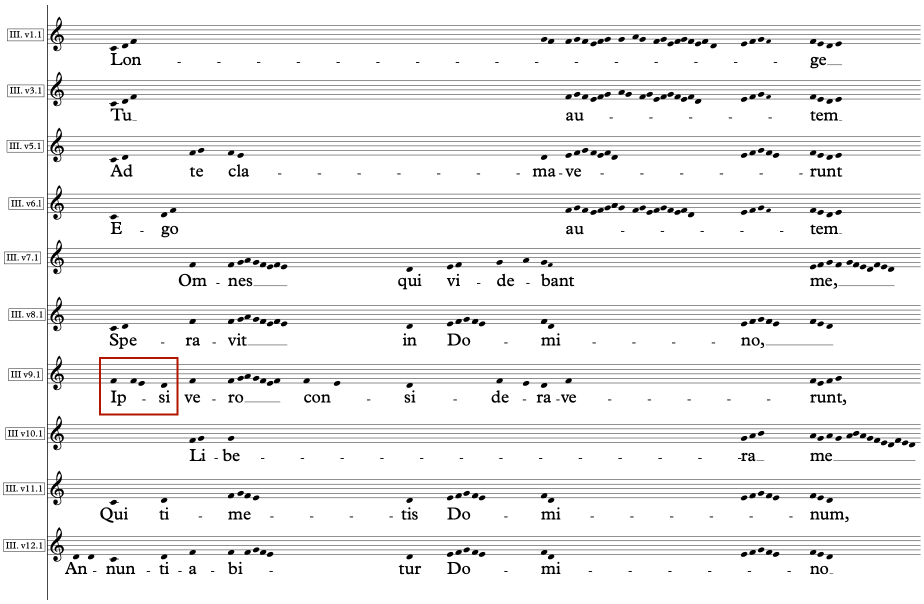

Fig. 23. Comparative analysis of the Plagal D Tracts in *Cod. Bodmer C74*: Verse-initial phrases (excerpt). The box indicates a formula used in my setting of "Greu m'es a durar".

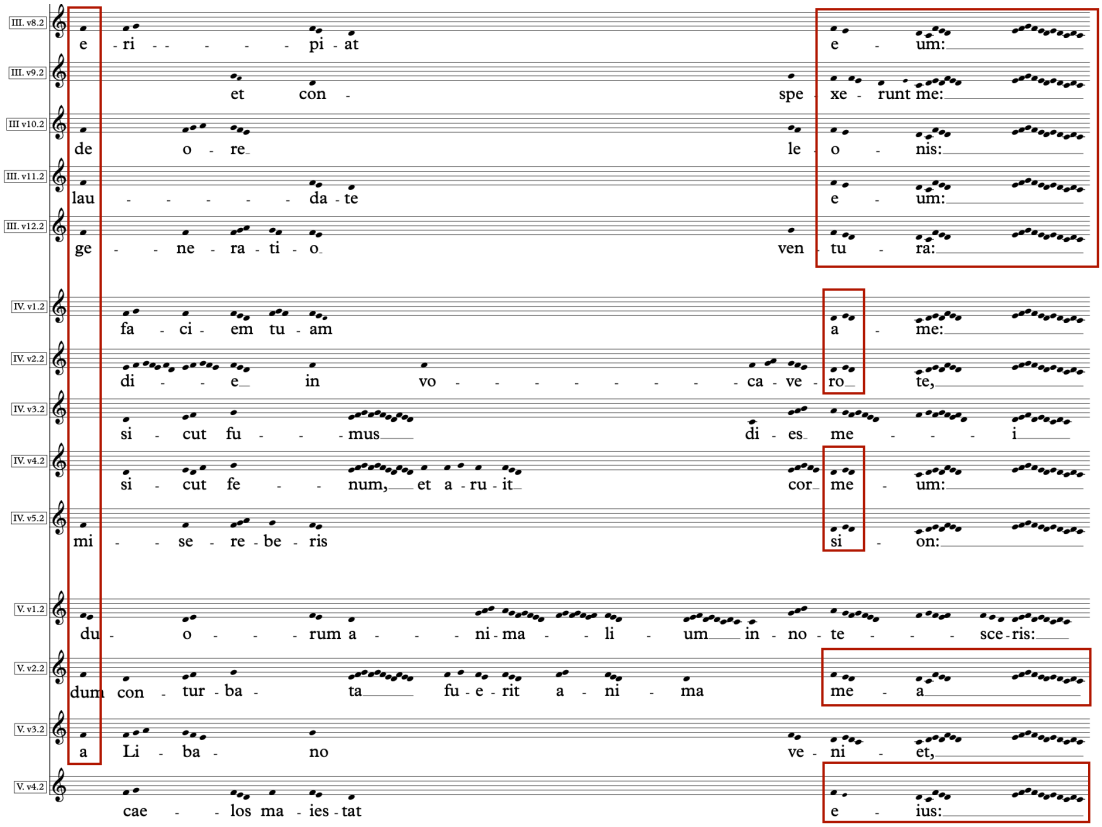

Fig. 24. Comparative analysis of the Plagal D Tracts in *Cod. Bodmer C74*: Medial phrases (excerpt). The boxes indicate formulae used in my setting of "Greu m'es a durar".

The second line must now quickly find its way towards a post-medial ending in F. Post-medial patterns are especially stable: the boxes in figure 25 show formulae that are present throughout, but that feature liquescent neumes (indicated by smaller notes). Liquescences are ornamental variations usually associated with clusters of consonants, they are more often necessary in the setting of Occitan language.

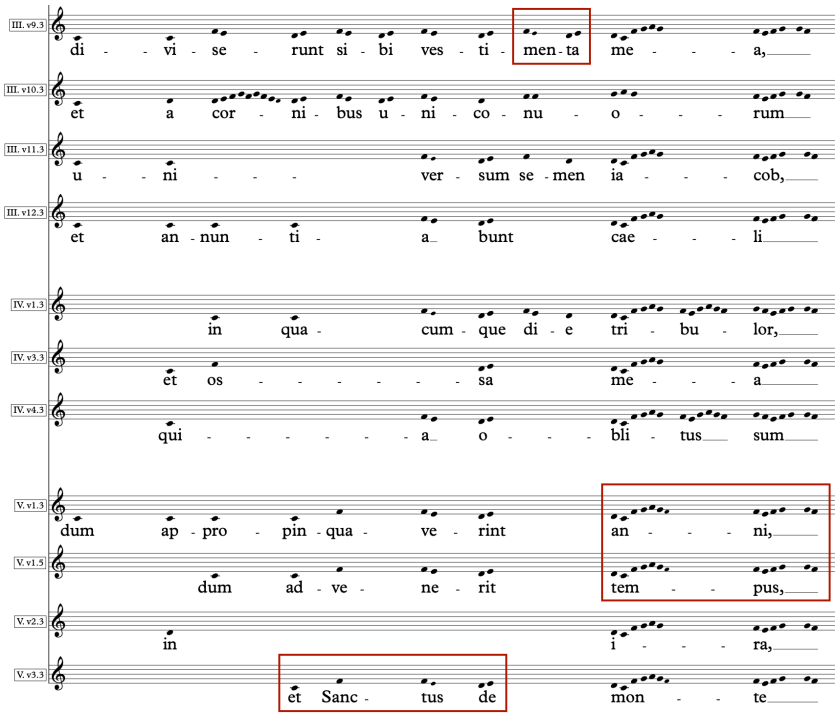

Fig. 25. Comparative analysis of the Plagal D Tracts in *Cod. Bodmer C74*: Post-medial phrases (excerpt). The boxes indicate formulae used in my setting of "Greu m'es a durar".

While it would have been possible to use the formulae above without any alteration, the slight changes in figure 26 once again facilitate a more efficient transition. The C placed at the end of "tal" recalls the previous cadence: it brings a bolder modal colour to such a concise phrase, creates a stronger sense of pendulum from medial to post-medial, and a resting point enabling singers to breathe before "descrezensa". The E at the beginning of "des-" is one way of transitioning back from C while avoiding an exact repetition of the liquescence on "aug".

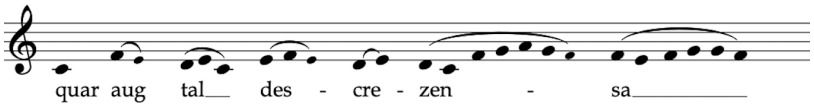

Fig. 26. Post-medial variation in my setting of "Greu m'es a durar".

Finally, “dir ni semenar” constitutes our first true cadential phrase. The only deviation from the model below is the first note of “dir” (figure 27) which picks up from the previous cadence on F and softens an otherwise relatively high entry for traditional voices. Once again, the boxes below indicate formulae that are commonplace, that often lead into one another, and could easily accommodate my particular text setting requirements.

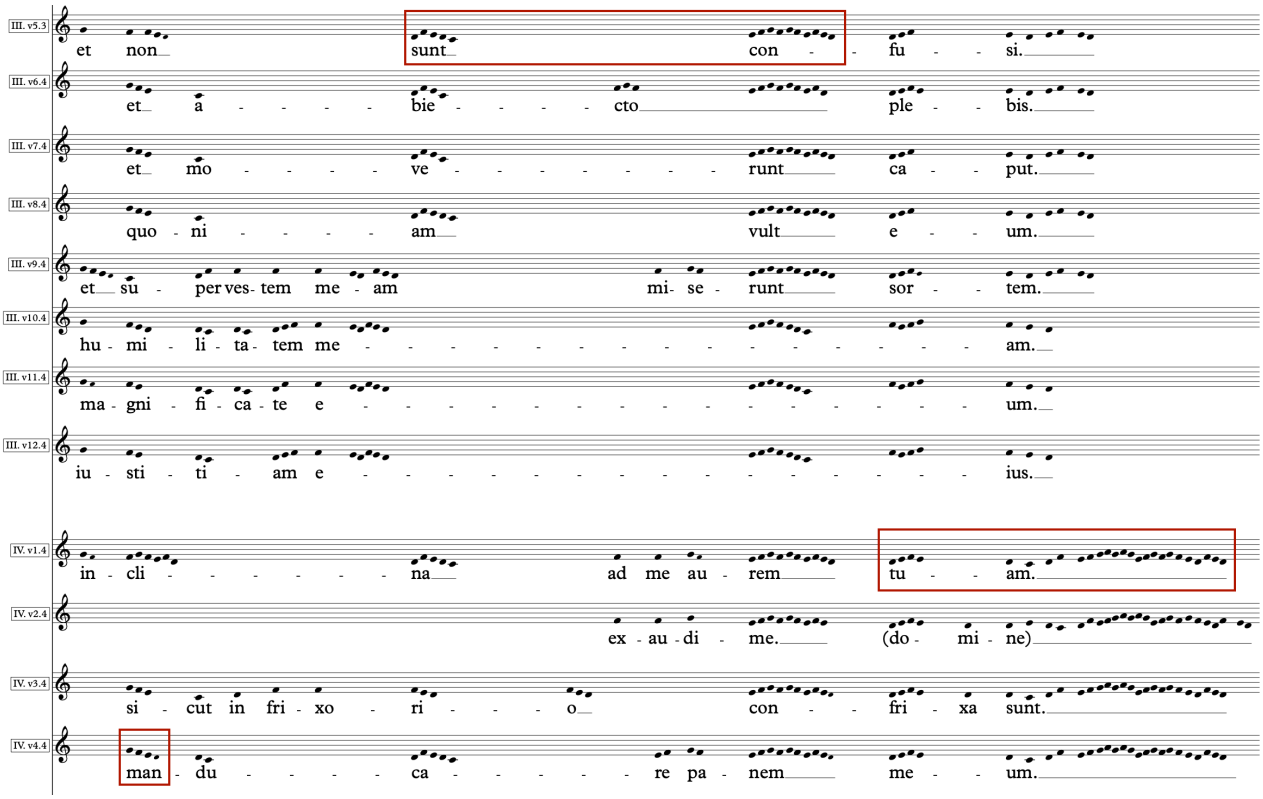

Fig. 27. Comparative analysis of the Plagal D Tracts in *Cod. Bodmer C74*: Cadential Phrases (excerpt). The boxes indicate formulae used in my setting of “Greu m’es a durar”.

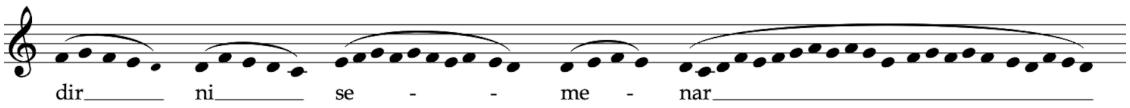

Fig. 28. Cadence based on figure 27.

This system of writing was not entirely straightforward: creating this unusual relationship between both traditions required much thought, musicality and experimentation. However, I noticed a clear improvement in the composition as my choices gradually became smarter and less intrusive. Eventually, my sense of self disappeared, my only concern was to respect a musical tradition. It was a meditative and deeply satisfying experience: at last I was an “auctor”, one who increases, one who is accountable to tradition. Gormonda’s poem imposed its own rules, rhythms and sonorities on the

composition: with many consonant clusters and penultimate stresses, her tongue shaped the florid formulae of the Roman chant. Most strikingly, text versification resulted in a particular sense of swing between cadences, together with bolder melodic movements, both indeed reminiscent of troubadour song. Should anyone want to understand this composition further, the figure below shows my musical structure for the three following stanzas:

En Roma es complitz	V	In Rome all goodness
totz bes, e qui.ls li pana	M	is accomplished; he who disagrees
sos sens l'es fallitz	P	lacks any sense,
quar si meteys enguana,	M	for he deceives himself;
qu'elh n'er sebellitz	P	he will be brought down for it
don perdra sa ufana.	K	and will quit his boasting;
Dieus auja mos precx	V	may God hear my plea;
que selhs qu'an mals becx,	M	let those, young and old,
ioven e senecx,	M	who cackle viciously
contra la ley romana,	P	against the law of Rome
caion dels bavecx.	F	fall from its scales.
Roma, veramen	V	Rome, I know for sure,
sai e cre ses duptansa	M	believe, and do not doubt
qu'a ver salvamen	P	that you will lead all France
aduretz tota Fransa,	K	to sure salvation –
oc, e l'autra gen	V,M	Yes – and other people
que·us vol far aiudansa.	P,K	who want to serve you.
Mas so que Merlis	V	But the thing that Merlin,
prophetizan dis	M	prophesying, said
del bon rey Loys,	M	of good King Louis,
que morira en Pansa,	P	that he would die in Pansa,
ara s'esclarzis.	K	is now becoming clear.
Roma, per razo	V	Rome, by your justice,
avetz manta destorta	M	you have straightened
dressad'a bando	P	many crooked things
et oberta la porta	M	and opened the portals
de salvatio	P	of salvation
don era la claus torta.	K	whose key was bent.
Que ab bon govern	V	By good government
bayssatz folh esquern,	K	you bring down folly.
qui sec vostr'estern	V,M	The one who takes your path
l'angel Michel lo.n porta	P	is born up by Saint Michael
e.l garda d'ifern.	K	and kept away from Hell.

Fig. 29. Roman phrase types in my setting of "Greu m'es a durar", Stanzas 2-4.

3.4 Roman-ian-ising Gormonda

Romanian inspiration originally came from Radulescu's "Das Andere" and "Cinerum". My intention was to compose a spectral accompaniment for the choir on flute and viola. When the pandemic hit, much of this work came to a halt. Two years after, I was eventually able to start working with talented flautist Ka Wing Karen Wong and could envisage the possibility of a free-standing solo flute piece. The writing process was a collaborative one, yet it happened entirely online. I want to express my gratitude for her kindness, reliability, and commitment in developing this piece; without her extraordinary human and musical qualities, none of it would have been possible.

The *quintina* is a sonic phenomenon and a form of aesthetic developed by Corsican and Sardinian singers. Ethnomusicologist Bernard Lortat-Jacob wrote several studies on the *quintina*,

focusing mostly on Sardinian theory. He described it as "any fusion of harmonics whose cycles match", which results in an additional voice "born from the perfect harmony of the singers (in every sense of the word)".[205] Literally translated as "little fifth", the *quintina* does not necessarily embody a relation of fifth with the singers, it is rather a complex and variable psycho-acoustic phenomenon:

> But depending on the timbre of the different voices and the dynamics of their own harmonics, we perceive one or the other of the fusional cycles. Often, while listening, the ear "switches" from one cycle to another, following the register where the resulting harmonic is the best audible. [...] When the *quintina* is sufficiently formed, both as a physical object and a mental representation, it even manages to strangely obscure the voices that produce it. A virtual song then replaces the four real voices and the listener is literally absorbed by its airy, unique timbre, soon to be omnipresent.[206]

Corsican singers sometimes describe the *quintina* as the voice of the ancestors, or the voice of the angel: their search for harmony reflects a spiritual impulse. The music I have composed similarly bridges the realms of spectralism and spectrality, seeking to shape the subtle "spectral" dimensions of a song in both senses of the word. It does not replicate the physical reality of partials evolving in a spectrogram; rather, it organises natural overtones following Old Roman chant, as if recalling a distant memory of it. My focus lies more in poetics than analytics – promoting a medievalist or traditional spectral sensibility grounded in elementary and perceptible scientific principles. It is as if the flute gave form to the lingering resonances gathered in the stones of ancient Mediterranean architectures – at once a negative and a positive outline, representing an alternate dimension, a spiritual other.

My pitch sets were based on drones C and D, the two fundamentals underpinning the first verse of "Greu m'es a durar". However, I decided to use B and C# to open my range of harmonics and enjoy a richer sound world. Played together with "Quintina", the medievalist score would then have to be performed a semitone down.

Each degree of the mode was paired with a set number of partials. The figures below show a

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[205] Bernard, Lortat-Jacob. "En Accord: Polyphonies de Sardaigne: Quatre Voix Qui N'en Font Qu'une". *Cahiers de Musiques Traditionnelles*, 1993, pp. 69–86.

[206] "Mais selon le timbre des différentes voix et la dynamique de leurs harmoniques propres, l'on perçoit l'un ou l'autre des cycles fusionnels. Souvent, en cours d'écoute, l'oreille 'bascule' d'un cycle à l'autre en suivant le registre où la résultante harmonique est la mieux audible. [...] Lorsque la quintina est suffisamment formée, à la fois comme objet physique et comme représentation mentale, elle parvient même à occulter étrangement les voix qui la produisent. Un chant virtuel se substitue alors aux quatre voix réelles et l'écoute est littéralement absorbée par son timbre aérien, unique, bientôt omniprésent". My translation. Bernard, Lortat-Jacob. "En Accord: Polyphonies de Sardaigne: Quatre Voix Qui N'en Font Qu'une". *Cahiers de Musiques Traditionnelles*, 1993, pp. 69–86.

straightforward “cadential” phrase type from “Greu m’es a durar” (figure 30), and its translation in the flute score (figure 31). The letters below the melody indicate drone changes, and the numbers above are corresponding fragments in both figures.

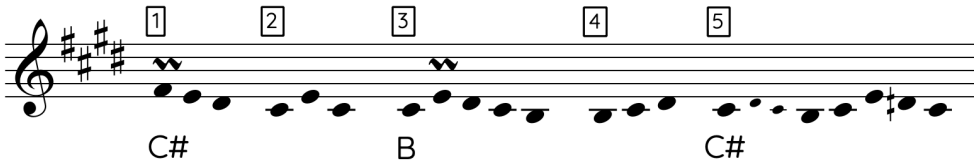

Fig. 30. Cadence from “Greu m’es a durar”.

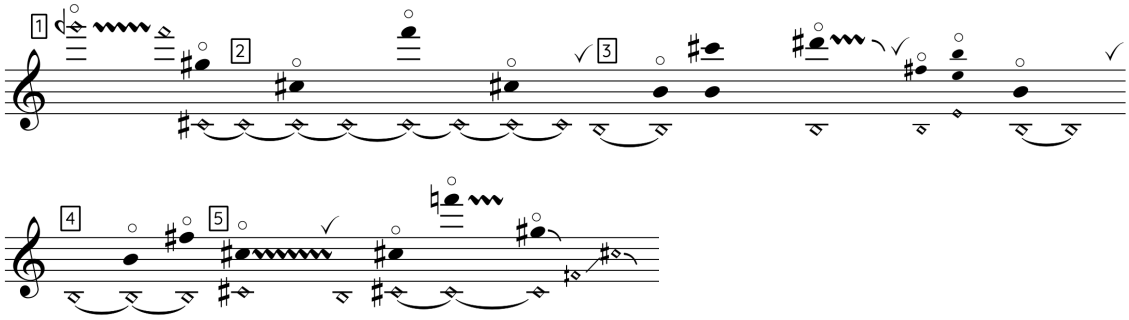

Fig. 31. Thomas Fournil, “Quintina”: creative interpretation of Fig. 30.

In figure 31, the first note of the original melody (F#) is played on the flute as the 11th harmonic of C# (the drone), the second note (E) as the 5th harmonic (F), and the third note (D#) as the 3rd harmonic (G#). These translations are not meant to approximate the original chant pitches but rather to serve as spectral formulae in their own right. At number 2, the tonic is performed as an aeolian low C#, out of which emerges a C# harmonic. The second pitch (E) is once again translated as the 5th harmonic of C#. At number 3, the tonic is performed alongside a drone on the subtonic: this dyad (B-C#) introduces a tension which is embodied in the flute as a B-C# multiphonic. Because of the change of drone, E, D#, C# and B follow the same pattern as before, but on a different fundamental, as the 5th, 3rd and 2nd and 1st harmonics of B. C# is translated as a composite gesture including a multiphonic on E. This gesture was first created as a cadential device upon C# which could accommodate for micro-intonation and seamlessly transition to a higher C# (see variations below, figures 21-23). Instead of going down to the tonic, this upward line creates a lighter cadence akin to a natural phenomenon, yet its subtle inflections recall the vocal flicks and the swing of *kataba tromikon* or *climacus* as I have learned to perform it with Marcel Pérès.

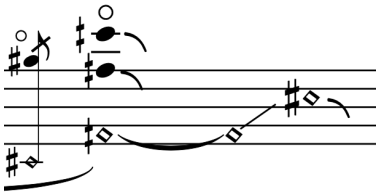

Fig. 32. Cadential gesture on C#: variation 1

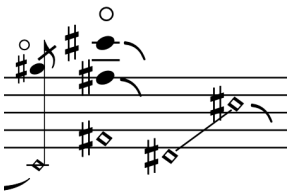

Fig. 33. Cadential gesture on C#: variation 2

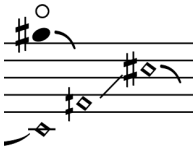

Fig. 34. Cadential gesture on C#: variation 3

At the end of number 3, this composite gesture is varied and transposed down to fit the drone. It does not end with an upward glissando, but enables the performer to imitate an octave relation between two "natural" B harmonics back to the subtonic. The following section is straightforward: number 4 follows B harmonics 1, 2 and 3. Number 5 features small ornaments that are translated as a vibrated harmonic on the flute. Once again, C# and E are notated as the 2nd and 5th harmonic of C#. Finally, D quarter sharp and C# are translated as another composite cadence, the variation from figure 34.

Below are notations indicating how each pitch from the medieval melody (starting with C#) are translated for flute. Each stave is divided into two or three sections separated by thick bar lines: first the original pitch, then translations based on C#, third translations based on B:

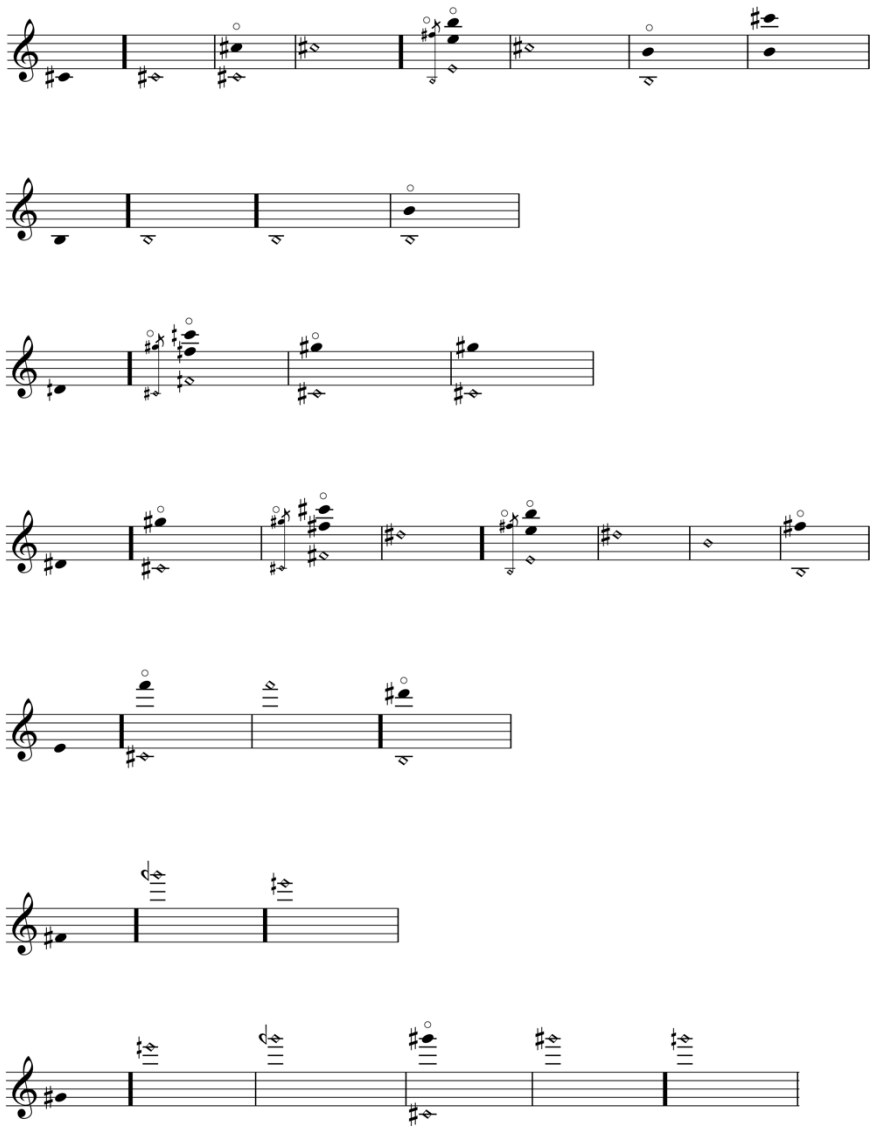

Fig. 35. Modal pitches and spectral translations used in “Quintina”.

From the start, my intention was to avoid reliance on technology or overly abstract systems. Here the flute translates the structure of Old Roman chant in a limpid and perceptible way: each cadence, each change of modal center, each melodic movement is replicated. My hope is to have evolved a unified, coherent language that combines qualities of stillness and ever-varying motion. The materials used are inherently difficult to tame – harmonics, multiphonics, and high aeolian sounds impose their own dynamics and pacing on the performer. However, many aspects of the performance remain open to interpretation. By discarding irrelevant elements, the notation provides the performer with greater focus and agency.

3.5 Conclusion

In collaboration with Karen, performance principles inherited from Marcel Pérès and medieval treatises were translated for flute: trills and vibrations, attacks from below, enharmonic microtones, liquefying of the sound, and Guido d'Arezzo's previously discussed idea of disguising degree changes. To stimulate our imagination, I also included graphics of medieval neumes above each corresponding section of the working score. Perhaps unsurprisingly, our research resulted in sonic behaviours not unlike those of traditional repertoires played on instruments such as ney, shakuhachi, danso, or kaval. Our focus on natural harmonics, together with techniques and pitch sets imitating natural harmonics, recalls overtone flutes such as the Romanian tylynka. Karen primarily concentrated on the life, inner-energy and inertia of these sonic events, hence further emulating the spectral qualities of a traditional overtone flute.

My study of Old Roman chant, following the ground-breaking insights of Edward Nowacki, led to an entirely different way of thinking about text setting. By combining a troubadour poem with Old Roman logogenetic devices, I developed a chant in which the melodic contours truly emerge organically from the phonetic qualities, syllabic and rhetorical patterns of the text. The result is a composition where Occitan versification directly informs modal behaviour, cadential gestures, ornamental structures and melodic development, yielding a regionally, temporally and stylistically anamorphic chant. This study may also serve as a useful model for singers or musicologists seeking to reconstruct missing notations in Old Roman Plagal D tracts.

From pre-Christian times, Occitania was the "back garden" of Rome. This *Provincia Romana*, the troubadours called *proenza*, an appellation which survived into modern-day: Provence. Occitania is rich in Roman deities still breathing in the secretive vaults of our basilicas, and it is perhaps something of this sensibility and heritage which the Albigensian crusade erased. Gormonda believed in the future project of Rome, but "Greu m'es a durar" and "Quintina" undermine these narrow temporal orientations. The memory of a syncretic Christianity permeates our daily lives, and the many spiritualities that inhabit medieval Occitania still resonate in my music.

4 - subtiliorbeats

In 2018, I began composing "subtiliorbeats" to capture my personal sense of dislocation, nostalgia, and cultural hybridity in an era marked by the emergence of new medievalisms and digital experiences. As the title suggests, the piece is a cross-fertilisation between Ars Subtilior and lofi hip hop aesthetics. Through a practical exploration of this intersection, I reveal common threads amongst medievalists, spectralists, and beatmakers alike, particularly in their shared approaches to circular temporality, nostalgia, vintage, illustration, improvisation, rhythmic flow, and tuning.

4.1 Off-grid and out of time

Lofi hip hop is a musical genre that traces its roots back to experimental hip hop and the pioneering work of artists such as J Dilla, Madlib, and Flying Lotus. In his article on experimentalism in hip hop after the golden age, Mike D'Errico outlined several key compositional trends that have influenced the development of the genre, including side-chain compression, "off-the-grid" rhythmic sequencing, and the intentional omission of a traditional rap element – all of which are notable characteristics of lofi hip hop.[207] Producers within the genre typically strive for a relaxed, mellow, and often melancholic atmosphere, featuring a combination of vintage and contemporary sounds, with a heavy emphasis on samples from old jazz, soul, and funk music records. Lofi hip hop tracks frequently incorporate slow beats, vinyl crackle, tape hiss, and low-pass filtering to achieve an intimate and vintage sound. The instrumentation is usually sparse, with understated melodies often featuring keyboards, guitars or harp. Ryan Celsius, the creator of the eponymous lofi hip-hop YouTube channel, shared his personal definition of the genre with *Genius*:

> The whole idea [of lo-fi hip-hop] is sonic nostalgia, but not in an overly aggressive or ironic way like vaporwave or retrowave […] It's usually beat production that can sound undermixed, containing intended or unintended imperfections with a heavy focus on creative sample use and authentic sounding drums kits. It's usually a tape hiss or some analog distortion set against a simple set of drum loops and an incredible sample selection.[208]

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[207] D'Errico, Mike. "Off the Grid: Instrumental Hip-Hop and Experimentalism After the Golden Age". *The Cambridge Companion to Hip-Hop*, edited by Justin A. Williams, Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. 280–81.

[208] *"YouTube & Chill: A Glimpse Into The World Of Lo-Fi Hip-Hop".* Quoted in Kevin Cortez, *Genius*, 24 Apr. 2018, https://genius.com/a/youtube-chill-a-glimpse-into-the-world-of-lo-fi-hip-hop.

Lofi hip hop emerged in the 2010s, and YouTube channels dedicated to it have amassed millions of subscribers, with some channels featuring 24-hour live streams of the music. Lofi Girl (previously ChilledCow) was created in 2015: it currently boasts 12.3 million subscribers, and received 34,622,006 views in the last 30 days (Socialblade, Apr. 2023). In addition, Spotify and other music streaming platforms have created dedicated lofi hip hop playlists, which have been streamed billions of times.

Despite its immense popularity, lofi hip hop is often overlooked by critics and scholars as a subgenre of minor significance. In fact, as Emma Winston and Laurence Saywood pointed out in 2019, it remains largely unexamined in academic publications.[209] The authors' initial categorisation of lofi hip hop as a "microgenre" was eventually discarded as they recognised its widespread appeal, acknowledging that it was much more than a niche or underground style of music. The perceived simplicity of lofi hip hop, its reliance on internet mediation, and cultural bias may be contributing factors to its undervaluation and lack of mainstream recognition. Indeed, some people may view lofi hip hop as unsophisticated or easy to produce, due to its use of samples and its emphasis on a laid-back, unpolished sound. Additionally, the association with Japanese anime and video game culture, as well as the predominance of white, male producers within the style, may also contribute to a perception of it as a niche or outsider genre, further limiting recognition and respect from within the hip hop community.

Crafting lofi hip hop requires a high level of skill, a meticulous attention to detail and a maximalist approach to minimalism. Through extreme concision and economy of materials, timbre takes centre stage and is imbued with meaning, creating a museme that is carefully crafted through sophisticated editing techniques. The apparent simplicity and understated quality of the final product belie the meticulous attention and effort dedicated to refining each component and their subtle interactions. Experimental hip hop, freed from the verbal elaborations of an MC, was able to dequantise its rhythms. Similarly, lofi hip hop producers slice and dice materials in uneven and ambiguous ways, embracing transience and imperfection in a sensibility that I personally associate with principles of wabi-sabi (a Japanese concept celebrating beauty in impermanence and imperfection). In this context of subtle variation, repetition plays a crucial role in validating these characteristics, effectively canonising imperfections. Rhythmic and harmonic accompaniment is also a way of enshrining the sample and offering a sense of stability in what Tricia Rose called "equilibrium inside the rupture".[210] Through the artful combination of disparate instrumental parts and the manipulation of temporal signifiers, producers blur the boundaries between past and present, imbuing

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[209] Winston, Emma, and Laurence Saywood. "Beats to Relax/Study To: Contradiction and Paradox in Lofi Hip Hop". *IASPM Journal*, 24 Dec. 2019, https://iaspmjournal.net/index.php/IASPM_Journal/article/view/949.

[210] Rose, Tricia. *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*. University Press of New England, 1994, p. 70.

their music with a captivating sense of ambiguity and asynchrony. Finally, lofi hip hop tracks often incorporate speech, sounds, and music taken from popular media, resulting in layered aesthetic experiences. Drawing from Svetlana Boym's concept of "reflective nostalgia",[211] Winston and Saywood suggest that lofi hip hop listeners are drawn to the idea of distance rather than the referent itself. Lofi hip hop embraces an elaborated form of reflective nostalgia that engages with "hyper-specific memories of popular media which may have been consumed during, or at least associated with, a listener's childhood" and yet with an "abstract longing for a past which the listener *is fully aware never existed*; its impossibility is accepted, even cherished, and is valued in its own right".[212] Winston and Saywood contend that the appeal of lofi hip hop can be attributed to its ability to resonate with the material realities of late capitalism, where contemporary life is marked by non-linearities, dense temporal layering, and the blurring of boundaries between work and leisure, among other things. They conclude that "lofi hip hop is characterised by a series of complex paradoxes navigated effortlessly by its listeners, highlighting a shift in everyday reality amongst a generation of young people for whom the social internet is simply an ordinary part of life".[213]

4.2 Retro medievalism: maximum vintage!!!11

Lofi beatmakers and medievalists share a common tendency to fictionalise the past, transgress historical boundaries, and unabashedly embrace the contradictions and complexities that ensue from this creative process. Both are captivated by the idea of distance and unattainability, and enjoy seeking out antiquated musical experiences. Additionally, they both exhibit a marked affinity for circular temporality, as evidenced by the cyclical and repetitive structures prevalent in much of their music. Interestingly, while medievalism is frequently visually depicted in illustrations accompanying lofi hip hop videos, it is notably absent from the musical expression of the genre.[214]

The frequent utilisation of harp in lofi hip hop, along with its intricate textures, rhythmic ambiguities, and precisely composed looseness, all evoke for me the musical sensibilities of late 14th century music. Instead of sampling a pre-existing recording however, I opted to compose a unique harp "sample" that reimagines the sounds of Ars Subtilior. During a conversation with Julian Anderson about the direction of my composition, he introduced me to "Le greygnour bien" by Matteo

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[211] Boym, Svetlana. *The Future of Nostalgia*. BasicBooks; Plymbridge, 2002, p. 82.

[212] Winston, Emma, and Laurence Saywood. "Beats to Relax/Study To: Contradiction and Paradox in Lofi Hip Hop". *IASPM Journal*, 24 Dec. 2019, https://iaspmjournal.net/index.php/IASPM_Journal/article/view/949, p. 41.

[213] Winston and Saywood, "Beats to Relax/Study To", p. 40.

[214] At the time of composition (2018), this observation held true; however, since 2022, medievalist and fantasy-themed lofi hip hop has grown significantly.

da Perugia. This piece features relatively distinct rhythmic flow between its various parts, creating a sense of independent movement that culminates in harmonious alignment at cadences. I was also inspired by Johannes Ciconia's "Le ray au solely", a prolation canon that utilises speed ratios of 4:3:1. Though I did not strictly adhere to this compositional procedure, I aimed to capture the surreal sense of layering that makes this music feel so modern. The figure below shows my musical sentence, constructed in rhythmic cycles of 6 crotchets and 7 quaver triplets, which only align at the final cadence. The middle part is a slower version of the top part; however, it stretches both ways like a flexible prolation canon, and in two occasions races ahead of the main melody.

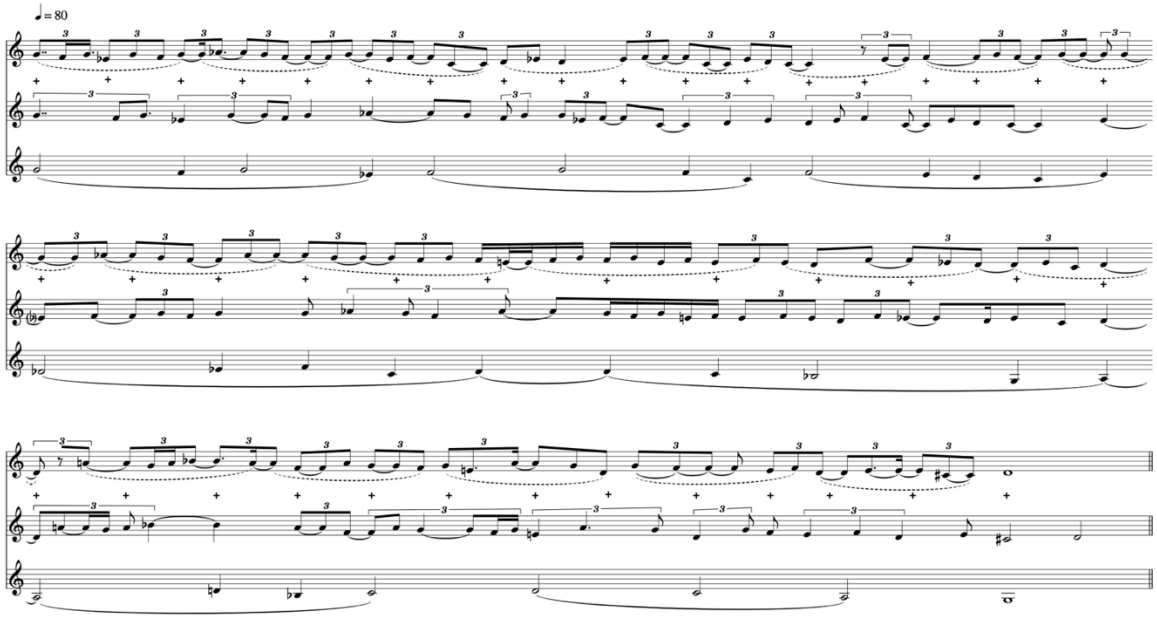

Fig. 36. Thomas Fournil, "subtiliorbeats": harp introduction.

My main lofi inspiration was "The Girl I Haven't Met" by Kudasaibeats, which features distinctive sound design and a relatively complex drop at 0'11"-0'15". I was also influenced by the trumpet improvisations of "Lodeon" by G Mills, and his harp beat "Milk & Honey".

A common trope of spectral music involves the slowing down of time, which allows for the detailed exploration of a single moment through harmonic, timbral and textural expansion. Similarly, I wanted to compose a harp introduction of which only a small portion would be stretched, looped and harmonised. I settled on using the final cadence as a loop: I originally hoped to record it at crotchet 80, and digitally slow it down. However, the challenging nature of these rhythms resulted in micro-variations which altered the groove of the loop, and it had to be re-recorded at crotchet 40. Talented harpist Helena Ricci recorded the top part on Celtic harp and the bottom parts on concert harp; this combination of instruments not only created a more transparent texture (thanks to the Celtic harp's lighter, less resonant tone) but also added historical ambiguity to the overall sound.

To enhance the loop sample, I also chose to introduce a semiquaver triplet rest at the beginning. This was my way of creating a more interesting groove, while also mimicking the effect of a vinyl skip. I took into account that the notation system of Ars Subtilior is especially appropriate for representing single triplets, as the colour red can be used to indicate a duration division by a third. By contrast, my notation software (Sibelius) does not allow for the creation of tuplet fragments, necessitating the use of graphic workarounds (such as adding custom staff lines derived from bracket elements).

To compose the drum part, I used the production software FL Studio, which features a pattern-based music sequencer designed for the intuitive creation of complex rhythms. Sounds can be assigned to a grid of any length, making it easy to refine rhythmic patterns. Using my harp sample as a starting point, I aligned the pattern grid with the sample's duration, independent of its musical structure. This approach allowed the harp and drum parts to evolve with relative independence, converging only at their beginning and ending points. In this way, I achieved an intriguing interplay between both parts – perhaps exemplifying what Simon Reynolds described as "pushing 'off-beat' to the edge of plain wrong".[215]

When harmonising the sample, I drew inspiration from the chord progressions often found in lofi hip hop music. I experimented with different combinations and eventually found myself gravitating towards chords consisting of fifths and fourths, reminiscent of both jazz and medieval music. Rather than overanalysing my options, I trusted my instincts and went with the first chord sequence that felt right. Throughout the composition process, I made a conscious effort to maintain a light and playful approach, aiming to capture the immediacy, freshness, and fun that are central to this style of music. Here is an early sketch of my harmonisation in G clef. I eventually removed this arrangement from the final score to keep performance options open – indeed, our recording featured real musicians, as will be explained soon.

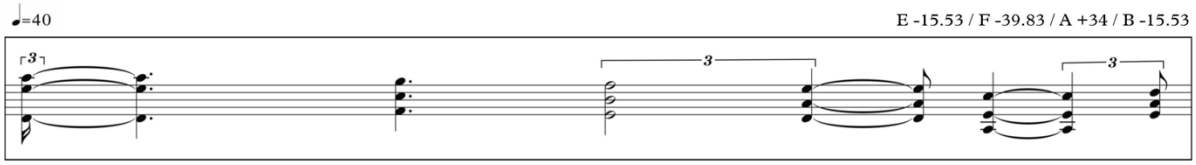

Fig. 37. Harmonisation for the "subtiliorbeats" loop.

The numbers in the top right corner indicate a tuning derived from my spectral analysis of the Celtic harp, based on a single string. Jazz keyboardist Ben Comeau recorded this accompaniment under the

[215] Reynolds, Simon. "The Cult of J Dilla". *The Guardian*, 16 June 2009, https://www.theguardian.com/music/musicblog/2009/jun/16/cult-j-dilla.

supervision of composers Aubrey Lavender-Cook, Ábel Misha Gille Esbenshade, and myself. For the percussion, I enlisted jazz drummer Adam Merrell to record the drums on an acoustic kit. To approach this task with a medievalist sensibility, it was crucial to involve human musicians and establish a framework that allowed for improvisation. Similarly, it was important for me to position myself within a tradition and honor the roots of lofi hip hop rather than deviate from it with a modernist approach. In my mind, doing so would implicitly undermine the legitimacy of lofi hip hop, and as discussed in previous chapters, perpetuate conservatoire values that I reject.

I initially created a basic electronic version of this composition, which served as a blueprint for recording the acoustic parts and developing a more polished track. The architects behind this production were Aubrey Lavender-Cook and Ábel Misha Gille Esbenshade, who provided invaluable expertise in sound design and technical execution. The process of designing and articulating different compositional elements required creativity: for instance, transitioning from the main harp performance to the loop at 0'34". This moment could be called a "drop", a sudden shift in the music that often marks the beginning or end of a specific section, creating a sense of tension and release. Their design was inspired by the drop used in "The Girl I Haven't Met" by Kudasaibeats. To encourage meta-reflection through popular media references (in typical lofi hip hop fashion), I also provided them with extracts from "Monty Python and the Holy Grail" (the sound of coconuts imitating horses), and a recording from Idrîsî Ensemble (a never-recorded Greek alleluia from the Old Roman chant repertory: https://www.instagram.com/p/CckYGrigNrM/). These sounds were incorporated into the final production, with the coconuts being used at 2'11" and the choir at 1'58" and 2'32". I also shared recordings of crackling fire with Aubrey and Ábel, as a medievalist alternative to the typical vinyl crackle sound usually found in lofi hip hop. Other challenges included editing the keyboard improvisation (of which we had many versions) and diversifying rhythms during the second half of the track. As previously discussed, I believe the disappearance of oral tradition in medieval Europe significantly contributed to the emergence of a modernist impulse. I perceive lofi hip hop as rooted in the cultures of the African diaspora, and it was essential for me to honour its codes. Finding creative freedom within strictly regulated aesthetics is a process that could be compared to performing ancient music or composing within an oral tradition. Although modern composers might resist such constraints, this form of humility need not hinder creativity: it is merely a different way of situating oneself in the world. In conversation, Abel noted that his customary approach to working with electronic music is highly freeform, which made this particular endeavour challenging:

> Realising Thomas' concept involved much more adherence to preexisting materials (the score) than is commonplace to my process in electronic music production. Coupled with the constraints imposed by lofi hip hop conventions, this proved a limited bandwidth to work within; but I can appreciate that a challenging process is a requisite of achieving new results.

> What we have created with Thomas seems to be highly unique and in a genre of its own. Relative to most lofi hip hop, it seems remarkably information-dense, addressing numerous objectives; I hope that more polytemporal, meta-referential electronic music is yet to come.[216]

Perhaps counter-intuitively, it is precisely because we have observed the codes of lofi hip hop, and avoided a modernist transfiguration of it, that our creativity could be perceived as "highly unique".

4.3 Ye olde beats in your eye ･ ゜*° ̃. ゜･* °

I was thrilled at the idea of recreating the visually stunning works of Baude Cordier, and particularly of updating his canon "Tout par compas suy composés" into a mesmerising lofi hip hop loop.

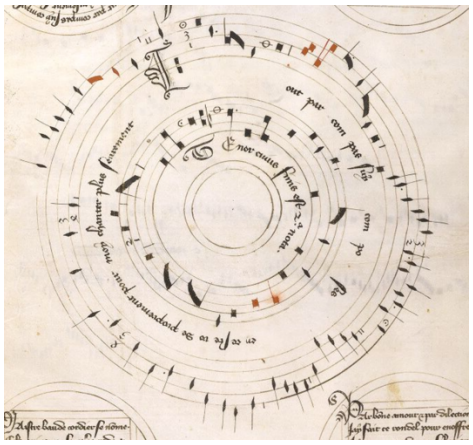

Fig. 38. Baude Cordier, "Tout par compas suy composés"[217]

The earliest neumatic notation relied on calligraphic gestures to convey vocal performance subtleties; this was often accompanied with representations of extraordinary creatures, theatrical scenes, illuminated text, eccentric and clever marginalia. Working hand in hand with calligraphers, musicians situated their work within a larger conception of art, spirituality, and storytelling. Ars Subtilior composers, in particular, fully understood the mythologising powers of eye music and produced remarkable scores that still inspire and captivate us today.

Similarly, lofi hip hop producers often incorporate visuals such as pixel art, anime scenes, and retro-style video game graphics to accompany their tracks. These visuals not only enhance the

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[216] Esbenshade, Ábel Misha Gille. *Interview*, conducted by Thomas Fournil, 21 April 2023.

[217] Cordier, Baude. "Tout par compass suy composés". *Chantilly Codex*, Bibliothèque du Musée Condé, MS 564 (RISM F-CH 564), fols. 12v–13.

listener's experience with additional atmosphere and layers of meaning, but they also help to establish a recognisable brand or identity for lofi hip hop professionals. For instance, the YouTube channel Dreamwave is well-known for its use of animations, photographs, and artwork that pay homage to the imagery of the 1980s and 1990s. It depicts retro-futuristic cityscapes, neon lights, sunsets, and fantasy worlds, often referencing Japanese culture, particularly the aesthetics of anime and video games. By utilising a distinct colour scheme often consisting of shades of pink and blue, along with loop animations, digital glitches, VHS distortion effects, and other retro motifs, these otherwise static videos transform into incredibly evocative visuals. The overall effect is a dreamy, immersive, and somewhat surreal experience that simultaneously extends nostalgia towards impossible pasts and futures. Interestingly, these scenes are often set in moments of in-between, where it is difficult to differentiate between dusk and dawn, sunset or sunrise. Once again, we observe a taste for liminalities and ambiguities which resonates with my conception of music and self; here the resonances between genres, histories and identities become opportunities for exploration and self-discovery.

My score is a creative development of Ars Subtilior notation: like its predecessors, it is intentionally enigmatic and requires a certain amount of reflection to understand. However, it follows strict space-time notation, which allows for the precise determination of durations. Notable departures from the conventions of the period include my use of line thickness and length as rhythmic signifiers. For instance, rests are shown as dashes, and their increasing thickness or length indicate longer durations. Similarly, percussion is notated as rays of different sizes outside the circle, accompanied by subtle subdivisions at their base. Transparent or faded notes are not played but tied to the previous one. We have seen that the structural relationship between harp and percussion is not conventional. This score provides an immediate visual representation of it, which is also embodied in decorative geometric lines with two different subdivisions. The asymmetrical interplay between musical parts results in an intricate geometric web, as both layers converge at the centre. Finally, Ars Subtilior colouration is surprisingly adequate for the representation of the "vinyl skip" mentioned earlier: the initial semiquaver triplet rest, notated at 12 o'clock as a red dash. The G clef, situated just before this dash (and resembling a little spiral), was used in late 15th century notation[218] and therefore represents another anachronism in this design.

[218] Rifkin, Joshua. "The Creation of the Medici Codex". *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, vol. 62, no. 3, 2009, pp. 517–70, https://doi.org/10.1525/jams.2009.62.3.517.

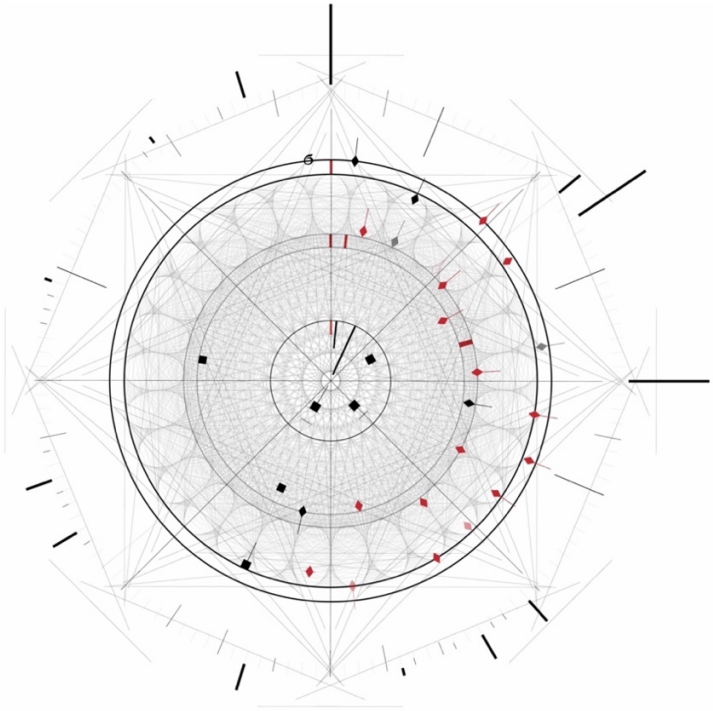

Fig. 39. Thomas Fournil, “subtiliorbeats”: medievalist score.

This score could be used practically, but it is primarily an invitation to engage with the music visually and symbolically. Although not hand-drawn, achieving this design required monk-like patience, involving multiple iterations and the manual adjustment of over two thousand elements in Adobe Illustrator. The image below offers a snapshot of that process:

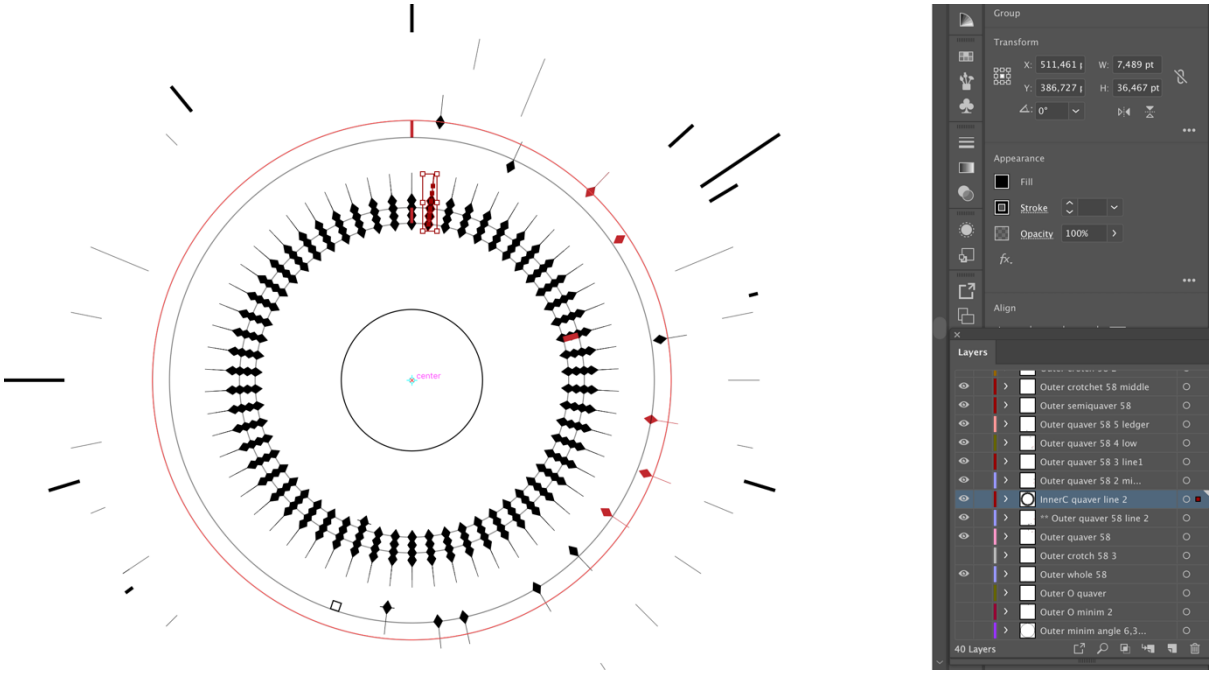

Fig. 40. Score creation in Adobe Illustrator.

As the track will eventually be presented through YouTube, my final task was to create a pixel art animation. I turned to the AI image generator Midjourney, which had recently introduced the ability to produce a 16:9 aspect ratio. However, creating the precise image that I had envisioned still necessitated a certain amount of determination. Midjourney does not generate true pixel art, but provides approximations which can then be turned into pixel art. My goal was to create a scene that was deliberately ambiguous in terms of historical period, culture and time of day. However, I encountered several challenges along the way, such as the AI's tendency to blend visual styles or create unwanted objects in the scene. Moreover, Midjourney had difficulty with overly lengthy and detailed prompts, which made it impossible to generate all the elements I wanted, such as a character playing a medieval harp. Eventually, I had to learn how to use weightings: numbers which assign a degree of importance to words within a prompt. Presented below are the winning prompt, the resulting image (figure 41), and a sample of the 410 iterations that were necessary to produce it (figure 42):

> pixelart of small androgynous figure sitting next to small campfire::7, meditating in front of pixelart setting sun from high vantage point::4 with pixelart ruins, expansive landscape, beautiful pink clouds, mountains in the background reaching far into the horizon, plants, pink pastel colours, cute, epic, medieval, pixelart::8, --no dark colours --no birds --ar 16:9 --v 4

Fig. 41. Final AI-generated image using Midjourney.

Fig. 42. Selection of iterations leading to the final image.

The image was then animated using pixel art software Aseprite. I painted a more detailed fire, and managed to create a seamless loop in 9 frames. During this process, I was confronted with my desire to produce a more realistic animation, with intricate details and a longer sequence. It became clear that finding the right balance between polished and raw visuals required both intention and skill. I also encountered difficulties in animating light around the fire, resulting in barely perceptible touches on the grass, near the ruins, and on the character. Unfortunately, this was animated in 45 frames, a long sequence which did not yield significant results.

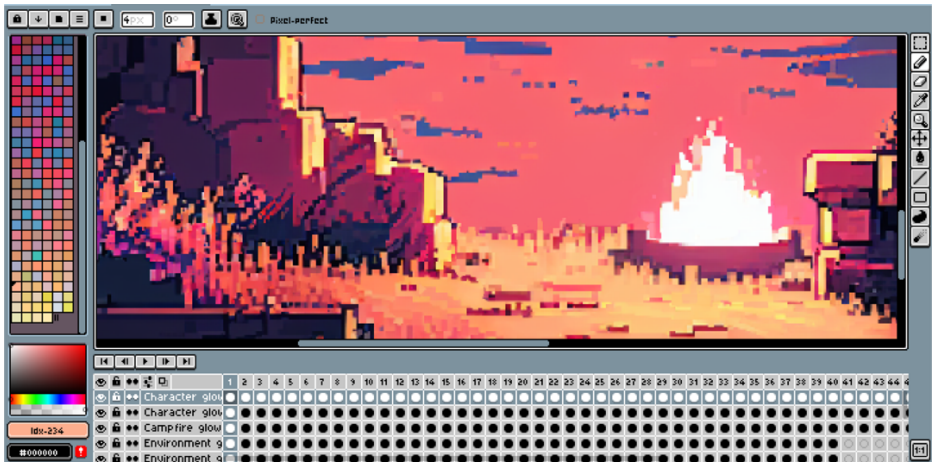

Fig. 43. Fire animation in Aseprite.

4.4 Conclusion

At the core of this research project lies the deliberate mediation of seemingly opposing attitudes and values, exploring their boundaries and creating a sense of "in-betweenness". This approach to lofi hip hop challenges the conventional dichotomy between popular and art music. The track may be brief, and may not "present" as modernist, but it is undeniably innovative in its fusion of influences, sophisticated in its layering of meanings, while requiring exceptional talent to perform. Although its compositional elements are intricate, it eschews the conventions of art music and challenges the expectations of its audiences. In respecting a modern tradition and its communities, it becomes a stronger aesthetical and political object, which demands reflection.

Structurally, the piece may be considered spectral. It opens with an Ars Subtilior pastiche before shifting into a loop derived from a slowed-down fragment (cadence), which is re-harmonised, varied, and improvised upon. This process mirrors a common trope in spectral composition, where decelerated musical material exposes inner details, allowing for heightened harmonic and textural complexity. Rhythmic ambiguity in "subtiliorbeats" recalls the notated yet "approximated fluidity"[219] of late 14th-century Ars Subtilior song, where intricate rhythms create an impression of elasticity. This approach resonates with Steve Lehman's exploration of rhythmic thresholds in Afrological improvisation, in which musicians blur rhythmic perception.[220] The circular score reflects a holistic medievalist approach, intertwining visual art with musical structure and philosophical intent. Its counterpart, an accompanying pixel art animation, bridges past and future, medievalism and digital culture. Finally, the recording subverts expectations by integrating human performance and improvisation into a predominantly digital style.

Lofi hip hop enables the seamless navigation of complex paradoxes and experiences: in this way it may *itself* represent a form of equilibrium within rupture.[221] As Winston and Saywood suggested, if twenty-first-century normality is defined by systemic impossibility, then "perhaps, engaging with the impossible through popular culture is simply a way to make sense of everyday life".[222]

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[219] Vojčić, Aleksandra. "The Return of Ars Subtilior? Rhythmic Complexity in the Chantilly Codex and in Selected Twentieth-Century Works". *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Medievalism*, edited by Stephen C. Meyer and Kirsten Yri, New product ed., Oxford University Press, 2020, p. 340.

[220] Lehman, Stephen H. *Liminality As a Framework for Composition: Rhythmic Thresholds, Spectral Harmonies and Afrological Improvisation*. 2012, pp. 10-20.

[221] Rose, Tricia. *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*. University Press of New England, 1994, p. 70.

[222] Winston, Emma, and Laurence Saywood. "Beats to Relax/Study To: Contradiction and Paradox in Lofi Hip Hop". *IASPM Journal*, 24 Dec. 2019, https://iaspmjournal.net/index.php/IASPM_Journal/article/view/949, p. 42.

5 - Dieus sal la terra

In previous portfolio items, I have explored the connection between imagined identities and performance practice of Gregorian chant, Old Roman chant and troubadour song. "Dieus sal la terra" is an opportunity to expand this reflection to my native island. Here the complexities, ambiguities and composite textures of Corsican culture offer composers alternative pathways for being and surviving in modernity. Setting sail to Corsica means entering a world of "liquid materiality",[223] a liminal space between North and South, East and West, rural, urban, colonial and subaltern forces. It is an opportunity to lose our bearings, to follow currents towards manifold voices, shimmering vocalisations of a mutable and multiple Europe. Mediterranean islands have played "a significant role" in recent ethnomusicology, "shaping the way we think about what constitutes 'our music', its history, and its others".[224] Their metaphorical force, afforded by centuries of representation in the stories that western culture has told about itself, is always already harnessed from the margins, questioning the nature of European modernity. The archipelago is a site of transnational, conjoined and disjunctive narratives that resist the objectifying procedures of historiography; they remain incomplete, inconclusive – their irreducible heterogeneity acts as a force of resistance, an imaginary mobile home for a postcolonial Europe.

5.1 Corsican Polyphonies

"In Britain, 'polyphony' is hardly an everyday word", acknowledges Caroline Bithell, in contrast to Corsica, where "barely a day goes by without 'polyphony' being referred to at least once in the pages of the daily newspaper".[225] The plural form is commonly used, pointing towards a multivocality of both style and repertoire. I shall follow her lead in naturalising the unusual English designation "polyphonies" in my discourse.

Corsican traditions can shed light on the intricate relationship between oral and written transmission in classical music. The dominant models of counterpoint and polyphony, shaped by notated traditions, can impose frameworks that marginalise embodied, improvisational, and traditional forms of knowledge. When this occurs, the exclusion of orality in compositional pedagogy is not

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[223] Chambers, Iain. *Mediterranean Crossings: The Politics of an Interrupted Modernity.* Duke University Press, 2008, p. 5.

[224] Bithell, Caroline. *Transported by Song: Corsican Voices from Oral Tradition to World Stage.* Scarecrow Press, 2007, p. ix.

[224] Bithell, Caroline. *Transported by Song: Corsican Voices from Oral Tradition to World Stage.* Scarecrow Press, 2007, p. ix.

[225] Bithell, *Transported by Song*, p. xxxviii.

incidental – it reflects a broader neglect of epistemologies that could be reclaimed within classical institutions.

If musicologists initially denied the possibility of polyphonic singing before the 7th or 8th centuries,[226] a number of historical sources have since contradicted this assumption. From Augustine of Hippo's potential allusion to heterophony in the 5th century,[227] to 6th century historian Isidore of Seville's account of consonant, non-consonant and non-simultaneous singing amongst different cantors (*praecantor, succentor, concentor*),[228] or the 9th century mention of *organum* in Paul de Léon's biography (9th c.),[229] and parallel harmonies between adults and children with *paraphonistae* and *paraphonistae infantibus* in Roman *Ordo* (10th c.),[230] one can discern a long history of improvisation that would eventually be written down – perhaps for pedagogical purposes, and then aesthetical reasons.

Described by Marcel Pérès as "the hidden face of European vocal history",[231] these traditions recently enjoyed an upsurge of interest from medieval musicologists and ethnomusicologists, yet they remain confined to the margins:

> Today oral tradition polyphonies have almost disappeared in Western Europe and only survive in certain environments, generally rural, in Italy, Corsica, Sardinia, Sicily and Portugal. This popular aspect of oral tradition polyphonies should not make us forget that in previous centuries this art was practiced in urban environments, cathedrals, princely courts, by sometimes highly qualified professional musicians. These practices have disappeared not only because of the evolution of taste, but also because very few theorists have raised their voices to defend this music from another time.[232]

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[226] Hughes, Anselm. *Worcester Medieval Harmony of the Thirteenth & Fourteenth Centuries.* Nashdom Abbey, Burnham, Bucks: Plain Song and Medieval Music Society, 1928, p. 12.

[227] Synan, Edward A. "An Augustinian Testimony to Polyphonic Music?" *Musica Disciplina*, vol. 18, 1964, pp. 3–6.

[228] Huglo, Michel, Marcel Pérès, and Christian Meyer. *Polyphonies de Tradition Orale: Histoire et Traditions Vivantes : Actes du Colloque de Royaumont 1990.* Créaphis, 1993, p. 15.

[229] Huglo, Michel. *L'Organum à Landévennec au IXe Siècle.* Éditions du CNRS, 1986.

[230] Huglo, Michel, Marcel Pérès, and Christian Meyer. *Polyphonies de Tradition Orale: Histoire et Traditions Vivantes : Actes du Colloque de Royaumont 1990.* Créaphis, 1993, p. 18.

[231] Huglo, Pérès, and Meyer, *Polyphonies de Tradition Orale*, p. 7.

[232] "Aujourd'hui les polyphonies de tradition orale ont à peu près disparu en Europe occidentale et ne subsistent que dans certains milieux, en général ruraux, en Italie, en Corse, en Sardaigne, en Sicile et au Portugal. Cet aspect populaire des polyphonies de tradition orale ne doit pas nous faire oublier que dans les siècles précédents cet art fut pratiqué dans des milieux urbains, des cathédrales, des cours princières, par des musiciens professionnels parfois hautement qualifiés. Ces pratiques ont disparu non seulement à cause de l'évolution du goût mais aussi parce que bien peu de théoriciens de la musique ont élevé leur voix pour défendre ces musiques d'un autre temps". My translation. Huglo, Pérès, and Meyer, *Polyphonies de Tradition Orale*, p. 6.

Following this preface to the conference proceedings of *Polyphonies de Tradition Orale*, Hendrik van der Werf, James Grier, Michael Adamis and other contributors revealed the importance of oral tradition polyphonies in medieval performance practices, notation and composition processes. "It comes as a surprise to learn that polyphony was routinely extemporized"[233] admits Fabrice Fitch in *Renaissance Polyphony*. Philippe Canguilhem explains that "counterpoint pedagogy, as numerous contemporary treatises attest, was an oral practice that children studied along with plainchant and mensural music".[234] Counterpoint was hence twofold, vocal and written: fifteenth century theorists understood musical creation as either "a collective action in [live] process" or "an individual activity resulting in a written product".[235] The ability to sing and improvise polyphony was integral to a composer's education; while this is not common anymore, the techniques of ornamentation and faux-bourdon described in the treatises are still alive in Mediterranean oral traditions. However instead of reclaiming the central place of orality in our heritage, it would seem that musicologists prefer minimising the evidence.[236] As Canguilhem deplores, "the subject has been and continues to be problematic for music historians".[237] Oral tradition polyphonies must be re-introduced in our collective imaginary, research and practices, but they present us with a chronological problem: they escape the categories of conventional musicology and historiography, for their musical form was often documented post natum, while their practice survived and evolved beyond their immortalised counterparts. The limits of our pedagogical and research frameworks are therefore brought about:

> The theme of oral tradition polyphonies and their relationship with written polyphonies condenses all the problems of a new approach to the history of music. To understand the extent and complexity of these phenomena, a linear and continuous conception of the life of musical forms and facts cannot suffice. We must develop a new perception, explode the artificial frameworks of an event-based history and accept the disconcerting and prodigious challenge of a discontinuous history of music. In short, to take up the brilliant intuition that André Malraux had developed for the history of the plastic arts, we must establish timelessness as a factor in the global understanding of musical forms and facts.[238]

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[233] Fitch, Fabrice. *Renaissance Polyphony.* Cambridge University Press, 2020, p. 18.

[234] Canguilhem, Philippe. "Improvisation as Concept and Musical Practice in the Fifteenth Century". *The Cambridge History of Fifteenth-Century Music*, edited by Anna Maria Busse Berger and Jesse Rodin, Cambridge University Press, 2015, p. 156.

[235] Canguilhem, *The Cambridge History of Fifteenth-Century Music*, p. 149.

[236] Fitch, *Renaissance Polyphony*, p. 18.

[237] Canguilhem, *The Cambridge History of Fifteenth-Century Music*, p. 149.

[238] "Le thème des polyphonies de tradition orale et leur rapport avec les polyphonies écrites présente en condensé tous les problèmes d'une nouvelle approche de l'histoire de la musique. Pour comprendre l'étendue et la complexité de ces phénomènes, une conception linéaire et continue de la vie des formes et des faits musicaux

Oral traditions confront the positivist, elitist, seemingly neutral assemblage of data that constitute Western music history, "in which the main points of reference – periodisation, canonical composers, the emergence of genres, styles, and so on – appeared obvious and unquestionable".[239] Lydia Goehr and Georgina Born have explored how the concept of the "musical work" became especially prominent around 1800, shaping a mindset in which compositions were regarded as "perfectly formed, finished and 'untouchable', and transcended any particular performance". [240,241] This shift, which Goehr calls the "separability principle", positioned musical works as eternal, existing independently of their social and performative contexts. It also reinforced a division between composers – positioned as creators of fixed, perfect works – and performers, whose role was reduced to faithful reproduction. Conservatoire traditions continue to privilege such hierarchical binaries, as Leech-Wilkinson observes, "in which one term is dominant through having moral superiority, being more correct or higher-status than the other, always the term which is more associated with masculinity (capitalized here): Score/interpretation, Composer/performer, Structure/expression, Technique/expression, Composition/improvisation, Instrumental/vocal, Modernist/romantic, Structural/rhetorical performance and, fundamentally, as highlighted by Suzanne Cusick, The Music/an interpretation, a distinction dependent in turn on the 'master' distinction Work/performance". [242]

These values reflect the predominantly white, male, and upper-class individuals who historically shaped conservatoire ideology and still predominantly enforce it today.[243] Consequently, Georgina Born critiques the ongoing "dominant conceptual boundary" in musicology – one that assumes music's essential nature as distinct from the social.[244] This entrenched perspective limits engagement with broader socio-political concerns such as gender, class, and cultural heritage, further reinforcing the exclusion of oral traditions, non-Western and non-canonical musical expressions.

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ne peut suffire. Il nous faut développer une perception nouvelle, faire exploser les cadres artificiels d'une histoire événementielle et accepter le déroutant et prodigieux défi d'une histoire discontinue de la musique. En somme reprendre l'intuition géniale qu'André Malraux avait développée pour l'histoire des arts plastiques, en posant l'intemporalité comme facteur de compréhension globale des formes et des faits musicaux. " My translation. Huglo, Pérès, and Meyer, *Polyphonies de Tradition Orale*, p. 8.

[239] Bushnell, Cameron F. A. E. *Postcolonial Readings of Music in World Literature.* Routledge, 2017, p. 15.

[240] Goehr, Lydia. *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music.* Rev. ed., Oxford University Press, 2007.

[241] Born, Georgina. "On Musical Mediation: Ontology, Technology and Creativity". *Twentieth-Century Music*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2005, p. 8.

[242] Leech-Wilkinson, Daniel. "Moral Judgement in Response to Performances of Western Classical Music". *Remixing Music Studies: Essays in Honour of Nicholas Cook*, edited by Ananay Aguilar et al., Routledge, 2020.

[243] Leech-Wilkinson, Daniel. *Challenging Performance: Classical Music Performance Norms and How to Escape Them.* 2021, https://challengingperformance.com/the-book/, p. 10.

[244] Born, Georgina. "For a Relational Musicology: Music and Interdisciplinarity, Beyond the Practice Turn". *Journal of the Royal Musicological Association*, vol. 135, no. 2, 2010, p. 208.

Conservatoires hence can perpetuate a distinction between orality and textuality, tradition and progress, which is customary in distinguishing civilisation from wilderness. It belongs to a tradition of separating "the order and discipline of Western music from the disorder and imbalance of the 'music of the savages', heard as 'a kind of vague wail or howl, which is on the borderland between music and informal expression of feeling'".[245]

Corsican polyphonies assumed comparable adjectives in the accounts of audiences and musicologists alike, whether described as "primal and searing", "rich harsh clashing music", or a "raw outpouring of emotions".[246] Lucien Auguste Letteron, late 19th century priest and historian of Corsica born in mainland France, said of the Corsican *voceri* (laments for the dead) that "they are not sung, they are howled, and have nothing whatsoever to do with the art of music".[247] Caroline Bithell suggests they belong to the "anachronistic voice" of Grant Olwage, a category modelled after the Victorian desire to create a space that is "prehistoric, atavistic, and irrational, inherently out of place in the historical time of modernity, and into which various "others" were projected in disavowal".[248] Once again, similar structures persist in the aesthetic norms and conventions of the conservatoire – they remain unexamined, their legitimacy being "guaranteed by praxis".[249] The voice culture described by Grant Olwage is a conscious effort "to refashion identity at the most fundamental level"; at home and overseas, it not only provides "an argument for, but powerfully perform[s], the erasure of difference".[250] Let us emphasise that the "classical" practice of permanently lowering the larynx, which prioritises volume over detail, is only a recent and localised phenomenon:

> Historical evidence from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries shows that a free-floating larynx, which allowed for greater flexibility in the execution of rapid or otherwise difficult passages, was the norm in earlier times.[251]

Similarly, an extensive study of medieval treatises and musical notations allowed Timothy McGee to conclude that North African vocal techniques were "basically the same as that promoted by Rome",

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[245] Bushnell, *Postcolonial Readings of Music in World Literature*, p. 15.

[246] Bithell, Caroline. *Transported by Song: Corsican Voices from Oral Tradition to World Stage.* Scarecrow Press, 2007, pp. 57–58.

[247] Bithell, p. 59.

[248] Olwage, Grant. "The Class and Colour of Tone: An Essay on the Social History of Vocal Timbre". *Ethnomusicology Forum*, vol. 13, no. 2, 2004, p. 219.

[249] Bushnell, *Postcolonial Readings of Music in World Literature*, p. 14.

[250] Olwage, "The Class and Colour of Tone", p. 207.

[251] Haines, John. "Lambertus's 'Epiglotus'". *The Journal of Medieval Latin*, vol. 16, 2006, p. 162.

and that in certain areas of Europe "many elements of that vocal style are still in practice today".[252]

Corsican songs have been likened to the pastoral chants of North Africa and to Byzantine chant,[253] although musicologists come up short on the question of origins. One theory sees Corsican chant as the development of Italian sacred music practices, borrowed and assimilated since the middle-ages, as illustrated, in part, by the Franciscan manuscripts discovered in the island. Others reject the liturgical thesis in favour of a more elusive genealogy. Philippe-Jean Catinchi explains: "like all specific languages, polyphony could not have a single origin, but would be located at a crossroads of composite, plural traditions [...]".[254] Franck Tenaille also argues that although the sinuous phrases of the *paghjella* may recall Gregorian chant, there is no proof that Corsican polyphony derived from liturgical practice. Instead it must have preserved more archaic features from pre-Christian traditions:

> The study of the Christianisation of the island shows that, at the very least, it was done hither and yon, and that the missionary, whatever his obedience, had to largely come to terms with a pagan reality. Thus, a number of musicological elements plead in favor of an earlier secular chant which imposed its codes, forms and dynamics on religious chant as much as it was able to draw inspiration from them.[255]

These attributes may have survived if not in basic musical forms, at least in the physical (voice placement, ornaments), in the oral, psychosocial, and transcendental dimensions of polyphonic singing. Such aspects belong to what Marcel Pérès calls long-term processes, timeless elements related to bodies and geographies that survive even the eroding of tradition. Our understanding of Corsican polyphonies is also informed by later Renaissance and Baroque theory, for instance with the *falsobordone* technique, or false bass.[256]

Corsican liturgical music practices, nearly extinguished by the reforms of Vatican II, found

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[252] McGee, Timothy J. *The Sound of Medieval Song: Ornamentation and Vocal Style According to the Treatises.* Clarendon Press, 1998, p. 152.

[253] Herrgott, Catherine. *Le Chant Polyphonique Corse: Patrimonialisation d'une Pratique Vocale Collective.* L'Harmattan, 2019, pp. 157–58.

[254] "Comme tous les langages spécifiques, la polyphonie ne pourrait avoir une origine unique, mais se situerait au carrefour de traditions composites, plurielles [...]" My translation. Catinchi, Philippe-Jean. *Polyphonies Corses.* Actes Sud, 1999, p. 41.

[255] "L'étude de la christianisation de l'île montre que, pour le moins, cela s'est fait à hue et à dia et que le missionnaire, quelle que soit son obédience, a dû largement composer avec une réalité païenne. Ainsi, nombre d'éléments musicologiques plaident en faveur d'un chant profane antérieur qui a autant imposé ses codes, formes, dynamiques, au chant religieux qu'il a pu s'en inspirer". My translation. Tenaille, Frank. *Corse - Polyphonies et Chants.* Éditions du Layeur, 2001, p. 29.

[256] Pérès, Marcel. *Le Chant Religieux Corse: État, Comparaisons, Perspectives ; Actes Du Colloque De Corte, 1990.* Créaphis, 1996, pp. 69–82.

new life in the ground-breaking recordings of Corsican Franciscan manuscripts (13th, 17th, 18th c.) by Marcel Pérès; thereby establishing a clear link between written sources and tradition:

> We have in Corsica a rare case for Western Europe of early music from the 17th and 18th centuries, of which the keys to interpretation still exist in the know-how of the singers. These keys make it possible to decipher everything that the notation does not take into account: the quality of the vocal emission, its dynamics, the value of the intervals, the tempi, the ornamentation, and especially in the case of Corsica, the polyphony.[257]

Corsican oral traditions could be introduced within conservatoire education as formidable strategies for historically-informed performance (and analysis) of early music repertoires. Feeding into our imagining of classical aesthetics, it would provide creators with new techniques, sounds, values, images and stories to draw from.

5.2 Fà una / cantà a / canta in paghjella

To make, to sing a *paghjella*, and to sing in *paghjella* involves the polyphonic treatment of secular or sacred texts, spontaneously "created" each performance through improvisation. Building on the previous discussion of Corsican polyphonies and their challenge to notated traditions, the following sections (5.2, 5.3, and 5.4) examine the paghjella as both a site of resistance and a framework for rethinking classical composition and polyphony.

In 2009, the *paghjella* was enscribed on the "List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding" by UNESCO, and described as such:

> The *paghjella* is a male Corsican singing tradition. It combines three vocal registers that always enter the song in the same order: *a segonda*, which begins, gives the pitch and carries the main melody; *u bassu,* which follows, accompanies and supports it, and finally *a terza*, the highest placed, which enriches the song. The paghjella makes substantial use of echo and is sung a capella in a variety of languages including Corsican, Sardinian, Latin and Greek. [...] Despite the efforts of its practitioners to

[257] "Nous avons en Corse un cas rare pour l'Europe occidentale d'une musique ancienne des XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles, dont les clés d'interprétation existent toujours dans le savoir-faire des chanteurs. Ces clés permettent de décrypter tout ce dont la notation ne rend pas compte : la qualité de l'émission vocale, sa dynamique, la valeur des intervalles, les tempi, l'ornementation, et surtout dans le cas de la Corse, la polyphonie". My translation. Marcel Pérès, *Le Chant Religieux Corse: État, Comparaisons, Perspectives ; Actes Du Colloque De Corte, 1990* (Paris: Créaphis, 1996), 10.

> revitalize its repertoires, the paghjella has gradually diminished in vitality, due to a sharp decline in intergenerational transmission caused by emigration of the younger generation and the consequent impoverishment of its repertoire.[258]

It does not require an audience, a stage, a composer, or even a written text, it does not have a specific purpose and can therefore speak of any subject. In its strictest form, the *paghjella* is an octosyllabic sixain, divided into three couplets. The musical sentence or melostrophe is improvised over the first couplet, and repeated/varied over the second and third couplets. The word *paghju* refers to a pair, which could be related to the couplet. However the *paghjulu* documented in Sermano and Pianello only involves two voices, *bassu* and *secunda*, which could be representative of an archaic form of *paghjella*.[259] If the *terza* enters on the 5th syllable or 7th syllable of the verse, it may respectively be called a *versu cortu* or *versu longu*.

In addition to the English concept of verse however, the Corsican *versu* is better understood as a "version", acknowledging differences in tempo, tessitura, melody and harmony often unique to specific regions, villages, and even families. Confusingly, a *versu* may also be connected to a particular village by virtue of its text, for instance "Quandu lu monte di Tagliu" ("When the mountain of Tagliu"), and "Ùn ti ne scurdà di u Tagliu" ("Do not forget Tagliu") can be referred to as *versi di Tagliu*. "Dieus sal la terra" could also be called "paghjella di armonici" because of its proto-spectral tuning, or perhaps "u versu di Londra". I expect performers would simply call it "a paghjella di a trobairitz" – in which case the role of the trobairitz could be shared amongst Anonymous and myself. Caroline Bithell identified general features of Corsican polyphonic songs: "staggered voice entries, labile pitches and untempered intervals, lack of strict meter, distinctive melismatic elaboration, and a final *tierce de Picardie* ending".[260] These melismatic figures are known as *rivuccate*, or ricochets that – together with the lagging and tiling of voices – have the effect of dilating sonic space. Despite this metrical freedom, Caroline Bithell's interviews established rhythm as "the most fundamental component of the singer's art".[261] Like spectral and medievalist composers , Corsican singers disregard mechanical, metronomic divisions in favor of naturalistic movements; they do not arise from an inert system, but are energetically launched by diverse events and organically interlinked:

> At the level of discrete musical figures, experienced singers have a finely developed sense of balance. "A syllable that is too long or a syllable that is too short, that doesn't work", says

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[258] UNESCO. "Cantu in Paghjella, a Secular and Liturgical Oral Tradition of Corsica". 2009, https://ich.unesco.org/en/USL/cantu-in-paghjella-a-secular-and-liturgical-oral-tradition-of-corsica-00315.

[259] Catinchi, Philippe-Jean. *Polyphonies Corses.* Actes Sud, 1999, p. 59.

[260] Bithell, *Transported by Song*, p. 33.

[261] Bithell, *Transported by Song*, p. 66.

> Acquaviva (interview 2004). In the performance as a whole, the singers need to achieve an equilibrium between dense melismatic activity and sustained notes. The vocal line should be delivered as dynamically as possible, allowing for a judicious interplay of suspense and propulsion.[262]

The neutral third, or *terza mezana*, although gradually falling into disuse, also points towards a certain microtonal sensibility. In 1949, Felix Quilici recorded a young François Bianconi. At 14 years old, Bianconi used a tuning based on the harmonic series; his intervals are confident and systematically approximated to the nearest quartertone:

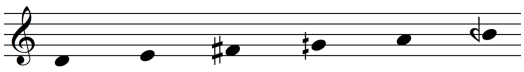

Fig. 44. Tuning used by François Bianconi in "L'Alcùdina", 1949.[263]

Bianconi was also captured singing the same tune at 78 years old, and although pitches are more difficult to analyse, one can often discern the very same intervals.[264] There is only one step from these practices to my own *paghjella di armonici*, although my tuning may require more explanation.

Making a *paghjella* means not composing with pen and paper, following dreams of novelty, in hope to "pass" in the society of the moderns. *Fà una paghjella* means situating oneself within tradition, and conjuring up diverse dimensions of orality through embodied knowledge, memory, and recordings. In this particular case, it is also a process of encounter with voices other than my own: Noémie Ducimetière, Alexandra Achillea Pouta and Elsa Hackett Esteban. It is our relationship that forms the fabric of this music, for without friendship, the *paghjella* in its fullest sense cannot be.

5.3 Corsican-Occitan ornaments

I have already explained the problems relating to modern performance practice of liturgical and troubadour music. In my quest towards alternative performance (and composition) strategies, Corsican and Old Roman chant offered untold riches. My Corsican-Occitan heritage certainly facilitated such a reflection, as despite being geographical neighbors, Corsican and troubadour music belong to distant institutional spheres. I have not yet found a publication exploring these repertoires in

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[262] Bithell, *Transported by Song*, p. 66.

[263] Quilici, Félix, Ghjuvanteramu Rocchi, Petru Grimaldi, Jean-André Culioli, and Charles Rocchi. *Corsica: Chants De Tradition Orale : 73 Documents Sonores Inclus.* Éd. Alain Piazzola, 2018.

[264] "FRANCESCU BIANCONI Di Zicavu canta l'ALCUDINA". *YouTube*, uploaded by Diana Saliceti, 13 May 2013, https://youtu.be/k68enuLsyVU.

tandem, and yet one cannot but marvel at the Corsican *chjam' è rispondi* (call and answer) and its resonance with the fundamentally dialogic sensibility of the troubadours, most obviously embodied in their *partimen*. Similarly, the affinities between *planh* and *voceru* (laments), or the sacro-secular aesthetics of troubadour songs and equally liminal position of the *paghjella* deserve some attention.

It would seem that, after their persecution, Occitan survivors found protection in the mountains of Corsica.[265] It is unclear whether they belonged to the *giovannali* (or *ghjuvannali*), a sect of spiritual Franciscans that spread throughout the island. Both certainly condemned the materialism of the Church, advocating a return to the doctrine of poverty of Christ. In 1866, romantic historian Alexandre Grassi gave a luxuriant account of his travels and findings; he would remain one of the few to experience, first-hand, Corsican memory of this final chapter of Catharism. For him, the revolt of Corsican/Occitan heretics (against the violence of Catholicism) found echo in the struggle of local populations against another oppressive power: the lords and partisans of the king of Aragon. Only four years after the final eradication of the Corsican Cathars, Corsican populations rose up and fought for the dismantling of feudalism:

> If, in the district of Alesani, the ideas of freedom spread with the greatest success, it was because the ground was better prepared than anywhere else by the presence of the sect.[266]

The music I have chosen to explore for the trobairitz text "Dieus sal la terra" therefore belongs to this part of the island; it is a form of improvisation specific to the village of Taglio-Isolaccio, first sung on record by Jules/Ghjuliu Bernardini. "Quandu lu monte di Tagliu" and "Ùn ti ne scurdà di u Tagliu" follow a similar structure, although the labile third (G) can assume multiple tunings.

Given my classical training in music analysis, it is perhaps inevitable that Heinrich Schenker would emerge as a key reference. As David Carson Berry observes, Schenker's ideas contributed to the 1930s Anglo-American drive for greater objectivity in music criticism and became foundational to the disciplinary music theory that emerged in the second half of the 20th century.[267] Indeed in 1937,

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[265] "In 1395, Boniface IX prescribed Francesco Bonacorsi, bishop of Gravina, to 'destroy' the Cathars. In the same document (*REG. VAT. 314, fol. 376 r*), he recommends him to all the local authorities of Corsica and Sardinia, asking them to facilitate his task". Grassi, Alexandre, and Antoine-Dominique Monti. *Les Cathares Corses: Une Conférence: D'Alexandre Grassi En 1866 Avec Une Biographie D'Alexandre Grassi Et Des Notes Par Antoine-Dominique Monti.* 3rd ed., A.D.E.C.E.C, 1996.

[266] "Si, dans la pieve d'Alesani, les idées de liberté se répandirent avec le plus grand succès c'est que le terrain était préparé mieux que partout ailleurs par la présence de la secte". My translation. Grassi and Monti, *Les Cathares Corses*.

[267] Berry, David Carson. "Schenkerian Analysis and Anglo-American Music Criticism in the 1930s: A Quest for 'Objectivity' and a Path Toward Disciplinary Music Theory". *Theory and Practice*, vol. 41, 2016, p. 143.

Ernest Newman regarded Schenker as "undoubtedly the greatest of modern analysts of music". [268] Still today, Philip Ewell underscores Schenker's lasting presence in contemporary music theory:

> It would be hard to overstate Heinrich Schenker's influence on American music theory. Whether one specifically studies Schenker and Schenkerian analysis, tonal music generally, popular music or post-tonal topics, Schenker in many ways represents our shared model of what it means to be a music theorist. If Beethoven is our exemplar for a music composer, Schenker is our exemplar for a music theorist.[269]

However, one must understand that a Schenkerian analysis of the *paghjella* would be inappropriate. Subtle variations of *rivuccate* are considered structural changes in that they motivate larger harmonic movements (through improvisation), and are crucial in the creating, singing and identifying of different musical styles. For instance, the opening syllable of each *versu* below reveals stylistic differences amongst performers, while launching distinct harmonic behaviors for the rest of the piece:

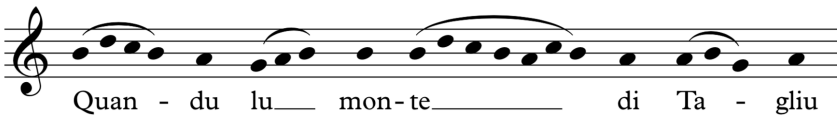

Fig. 45. *Secunda*, "Quandu lu monte di Tagliu", as performed by Jules Bernardini/Philippe Vesperini/André Ciavaldani (transposed).[270]

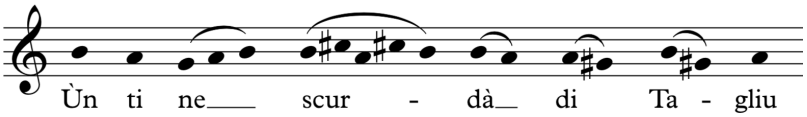

Fig. 46. *Secunda*, "Ùn ti ne scurdà di u Tagliu", as performed by Canta U Populu Corsu (transposed).[271]

"Quandu" features an upper figure that reflects the tonal and rhythmic inflection of the word, with a higher pitch and more notes on the first syllable. This seemingly superficial difference to the opening gesture of "Ùn ti ne scurdà di u Tagliu" is a structural choice, in that it prepares the exploration of

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[268] Newman, Ernest, qtd. in David Carson Berry. "Schenkerian Analysis and Anglo-American Music Criticism in the 1930s: A Quest for 'Objectivity' and a Path Toward Disciplinary Music Theory". *Theory and Practice*, vol. 41, 2016, p. 152.

[269] Ewell, Philip. "Plenary Talk, Society for Music Theory, 2019". *YouTube*, uploaded by Michael, 15 Oct. 2023, https://youtu.be/q1yYR-VLpv0?si=nNgsHk4UStTfAFFf. Accessed 21 Jan. 2025. Timestamp: 9:53.

[270] Quilici, Félix, Ghjuvanteramu Rocchi, Petru Grimaldi, Jean-André Culioli, and Charles Rocchi. *Corsica: Chants De Tradition Orale : 73 Documents Sonores Inclus.* Éd. Alain Piazzola, 2018.

[271] *Eri Oghje Dumane: Le Premier Album : Versions Originales 1975.* Ricordu, 1996.

specific modal colours throughout the song. Similarly, the avoidance of C natural in "Ùn" enables a swift transition towards major harmonies. The music between both *versi* is theoretically interchangeable, and the alternation between major and minor harmonies is extremely common. However, each performance must be approached as a separate creation, and a strict exchange would not naturally occur within Corsican oral tradition.

Conservatoire musicians have been trained to understand such bold harmonic differences as structural, distinguishing features between compositions, and ornaments as surface detail. To the classically trained ear, minute differences in Corsican ornamentation may not only be difficult to hear, but also difficult to *value*. I believe this lack of familiarity may be a result of music theory's white racial frame demonstrated by Philip Ewell. Perpetuating the belief that "music theories of whites from German-speaking lands of the eighteenth, nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries represent the pinnacle of music-theoretical thought", it prevents the meaningful integration of nonwestern and nonwhite forms of music theory in conservatoire curricula.[272] A case in point is the overwhelming predominance of Schenker in classical music textbooks, who "argued explicitly that his views on race and music were to be considered together". He associated a philosophy of dominance and "annihilation" (Schenker's words), of "inferior", "primitive" races and foreign "animals", together with a "biological factor in the life of tones" which requires hierarchical structures of "govern[ance]" and "control".[273] It is no surprise therefore that Schenker stripped the negro spiritual of its artistic beauty and integrity, reducing it to thievery.[274] I borrow once again from Philip Ewell who, for the first time in 2020, broke away from a long tradition of whitewashing Schenker in particular, and rigorously examined the symbiotic relation between his racial and musical thinking.

Corsican singers exhibit practices of heterophony, ornamentation, extemporisation, and voice placement that, as scholars such as Haines, Pérès, and McGee suggest, may share common ground with medieval vocal techniques.[275] Over time, these features have endured while incorporating harmonic conventions such as false bass motion and tierce de Picardie cadences. Although the *paghjella* may be representative of medieval, renaissance and baroque traditions, Corsican singers embody values and modes of thinking that are often regarded as outside the framework of contemporary Western classical music theory. Understanding this highly ornate form of singing requires not only anti-Schenkerian modes of analysis, but also the questioning of long-standing assumptions about what it means to "write", "perform" and "receive" classical music. I argue that such psychological shifts can be identified and implemented as keystones of decolonial pedagogy, and

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[272] Ewell, Philip. "Music Theory's White Racial Frame". *Music Theory Spectrum*, vol. 43, no. 2, 2021, pp. 324–29.

[273] Ewell, "Music Theory's White Racial Frame", pp. 324–29.

[274] Ewell, "Music Theory's White Racial Frame", pp. 324–29, par. 4.2.3.

[275] See section 5.1. of this dissertation.

can enable a deeper understanding of (and creative engagement with) classical repertoire.

In *Postcolonial Readings of Music in World Literature*, Cameron Fae Bushnell proposes a theory of *ornamentalism*, which "involves supplementing a dominant theme in order to change the way it is perceived".[276] She describes Bernard MacLaverty's novel *Grace Notes*, in which Irish ornaments are displayed as a strategy for political reform in Northern Ireland. Here the single note is interrupted by pitch alterations, staccato textures and repeated embellishments; thereby unsettling and recontextualising the meaning of a text. Similarly, in reproducing the very system of thought it seeks to undermine, Edward Said's *Orientalism* could be described as "ornamental" thinking:

> Orientalism lends to ornamentalism its notion of unification and totalisation, which means this practice of improvisatory license (in the process of embellishment) might be seen to *conform* to the ideological frame of the whole. The two terms become mutually informative: Orientalism and ornamentalism, functioning metaphorically, contest (long-standing) cultural forms and, in turn, disunify or destabilise entrenched political positions.[277]

The ornament involves a textural, textual and temporal expansion, it also gestures towards particular modes of being, a dialogue between self, culture and community, a particular sense of agency once integral to West-European musical practices. Bushnell reads ornaments as a force of social change, and in the case of Corsican music, performers engage in "ornamental" conversations that negotiate the structure of the music itself. Ornamentalism here becomes not only a strategy of repetition and recontextualisation, but a creative stance that would often be considered radical in classical music culture.

As previously discussed, it is precisely in this radical form of ornamentalism that the art of the medieval cantor resides,[278] for liturgical and secular music were meant to be deployed, varied, and developed according to complex systems of orality.[279,280] In this different conception of the musical act, the non-modern composer can facilitate meaningful symbioses between diverse peoples and cultures. It inspires a truly lived-through experience that closes the gap between composer, performer, and listener (as opposed to one of distant observation and devolutive repetition, "in which slavish

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[276] Bushnell, *Postcolonial Readings of Music in World Literature*, p. 5.

[277] Bushnell, *Postcolonial Readings of Music in World Literature*, p. 104.

[278] Yri, Kirsten. *A Companion to Guillaume De Machaut.* Edited by Deborah L. McGrady, Trans. Kirsten Yri, Brill, 2012.

[279] Aubrey, Elizabeth. *The Music of the Troubadours.* Indiana University Press, 2000, pp. 49–65.

[280] Nowacki, Edward. "Text Declamation as a Determinant of Melodic Form in the Old Roman Eighth-Mode Tracts". *Early Music History*, vol. 6, 1986, pp. 193–226.

commitment to convention leads to cultural degeneration").[281] During the 2013 "Encuentro Musica – Filosofia" conference, Marcel Pérès contextualized this idea further:

> We immediately understand that between the music interpreted during a concert and that which will spring from the depths of a cave or a forest on the night of the first full moon after the vernal equinox, during which a high priest will reveal the invisible harmonies that cross the cosmos and communicate their forces to a whole community, there is a great distance. Similarly between the execution of a Requiem, like that of Verdi, and the cantillations, around a dead person, of a cantor who accompanies the deceased on his journey to the beyond, there is also a great distance.
>
> We have moved from a prophetic humanity to an allegorical humanity. The prophet experiences, expresses and communicates the invisible realities. The allegory is only a representation. Man is no longer the actor of a supernatural life, he is the spectator. [...] The musicians have become machines, the listeners tourists.[282]

According to him, only composers have preserved the function of the "daimon" (δαίμων), who "maintains contact with the memory of the future" – what we understand nowadays as the "creative act".[283] Composers can nonetheless devise adequate spaces for the collective nurturing of radical and medievalist approaches to music making. "Dieus sal la terra" is a political statement, but it is also a pedagogical pathway for people desirous of learning Corsican music. The resulting score and recording should be understood as a conversation between performers and composers (this plural form acknowledges the many creators who came before me, and kept the traditions of Tagliu alive), as well as *amongst* performers. After learning this suggestion of performance, musicians will be able to tackle traditional repertoire with better "ornamental" thinking, but they will also have acquired an important set of tools for decolonial and historically informed performances of medieval, renaissance and baroque polyphonies.

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[281] Bushnell, *Postcolonial Readings*, pp. 97–98.

[282] "Nous comprenons tout de suite qu'entre la musique interprétée au cours d'un concert et celle qui jaillira au fond d'un grotte ou d'une forêt la nuit de la première pleine lune après l'équinoxe de printemps, pendant laquelle un grand prêtre va révéler les harmonies invisibles qui traversent le cosmos et communiquent leurs forces à toute une communauté, il y a une grande distance. De même entre l'exécution d'un Requiem, comme celui de Verdi, et les cantillations, autour d'un mort, d'un chantre qui accompagne le défunt dans son voyage vers l'au-delà, il y a aussi une grande distance. Nous sommes passés d'une humanité prophétique à une humanité allégorique. Le prophète vit, exprime et communique les réalités invisibles. L'allégorie n'est qu'une représentation. L'homme n'est plus l'acteur d'une vie surnaturelle, il en est le spectateur. [...] Les musiciens sont devenus des machines, les auditeurs des touristes". My translation. Pérès, Marcel. "¿Que podría ser la hermenéutica de la música?" *X Encuentro Música – Filosofía, Temática "Músicas orales-músicas escritas"*, Ronda, 2013.

[283] Pérès, "¿Que podría ser la hermenéutica de la música?" My translation.

5.4 Composing with tradition

Noémie Ducimetière's rare virtuosity and commitment empowered this project, and motivated many of my creative choices for the *secunda*. Similarly, this particular *versu* would not be possible without the extraordinary strength and range of Alexandra Achillea Pouta. Elsa Esteban Hackett joined after the piece was composed, but her technical proficiency and exceptional tuning abilities enabled the smooth and efficient incorporation of our thinking, process, and music within a trio formation.

Most traditional forms of *paghjella* feature very high parts (*secunda, terza*) with low cadences (the bass part is often sung by several men in unison). The first all-female ensemble in modern Corsican history, Donnisulana, succeeded in recording two traditional *paghjelle* with low cadences. Later groups such as Isulatine and Soledonna often chose compositions with a smaller range, or relinquished the final tonic altogether (sustaining the fifth instead). The *paghjella* pushes the limits of the traditional female vocal range, and we are proud to have achieved this particular style from Tagliu.

My creation process was akin to that of remembrance, hence the notion of "memory of the future", and cannot adequately be described in modernist terms. Luciano Berio engaged with similar concepts in compositions such as *Sinfonia* and *Folk Songs*, where tradition is mediated by the present, and offering insight into what lies ahead.

Throughout my education, I was encouraged to structure music in such a way that it would lend itself to intellectually stimulating, sometimes technically challenging, rigorous commentaries, based on absolute and demonstrable data. However, this composition was not created to serve as a subject for analysis; rather, it was driven by poetic ideals, with its sound emerging through intricate processes of orality. Incorporating this endangered oral tradition within my portfolio, however, helps to highlight its relevance to new medievalisms and spectralisms. Beyond its intrinsic cultural value, the piece introduces new elements, including original sections, a binary structure, gender reversal, and proto-spectral tuning. It is also the first time that medieval Occitan language has been used for such music, or that a trobairitz setting acknowledges the aesthetic, spiritual and historical links between medieval Occitania, Corsica and their struggles with oppression. The making of this piece also coincided with a collaboration with Gregor Bergmann: a new medieval portative organ (designed specifically for the microtonal needs of this piece) became a unique addition to the *paghjella* texture and its poetic affiliations. Finally, my work as a composer allows the *paghjella* to cross cultural and institutional boundaries, and to be acknowledged as a central element in the history of Western music. Its exilic nature affords it new power, potentially opening extraordinary perspectives in the realms of classical performance practice, composition curricula and decolonial pedagogy.

It was important the performers tackled this repertoire in their own terms, so that it would become a *versu di Londra* and acquire its own specific flavour. I deliberately avoided a comprehensive philological approach, and chose specific recordings as inspiration instead, therefore imitating a traditional master/student dynamic of knowledge dissemination – this results in more specific, characterful music with a human lineage. In order to make certain oral and creative processes tangible for the reader, I have decided to notate extracts of several recordings (including *rivuccate* or fast melismatic passages). *Rivuccate* will often (but not exclusively) be notated in small notes for clarity. I have also decided to transpose my transcriptions to the same key, which will help in comparing different versions to one another. While necessarily imperfect and incomplete, these notations should help readers understand such an elusive tradition and situate my own place within it.

Figures 47 to 50 constitute the earliest records of the form. Figures 47 and 48 (p.87) feature the same performers recorded by Felix Quilici in *Musique Corse de Tradition Orale,*[284] iconic triple vinyl which played an important role in the revival of Corsican traditions. Both performances are extremely coherent and suggestive of the personal style of these performers. Nonetheless the texts motivate slightly different rhythms, figures and overall sonorities which do create distinct experiences, and encourage a deep, intimate form of listening. Both recordings are perhaps especially noteworthy due to the expressive performance of the raised leading tone (D#), which recalls medieval and renaissance oral traditions. My transcriptions do not feature untempered intervals, but they are an important part of the tradition: for instance, the opening notes of both performances (B, C, D) clearly recall E harmonics 12, 13 and 14.

[284] Quilici, Félix. *Musique Corse de Tradition Orale.* Bibliothèque nationale, Paris, DL, 1982.

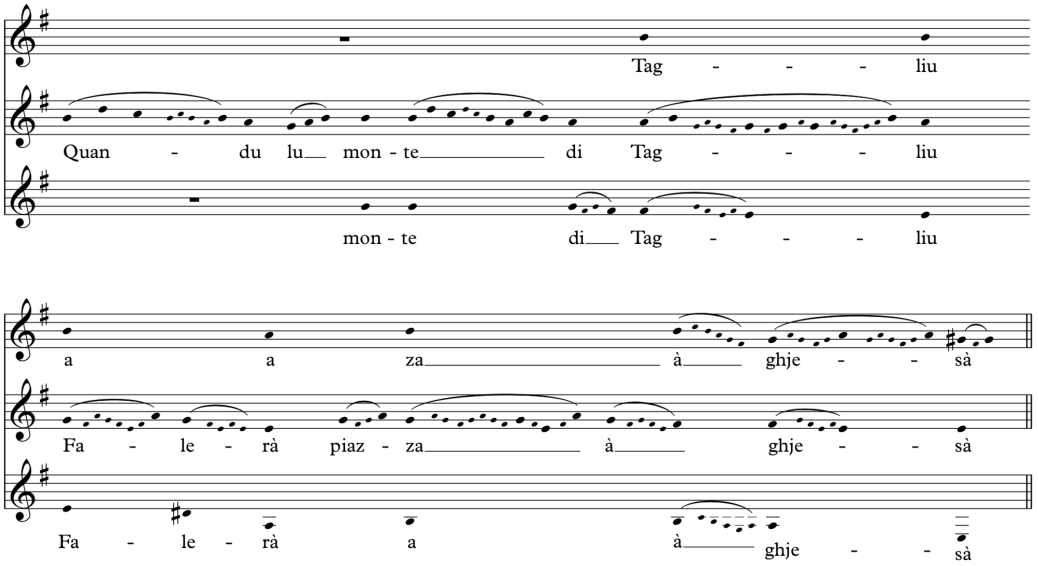

Fig. 47. “Quandu lu monte di Tagliu”, as performed by Jules Bernardini/Philippe Vesperini/André Ciavaldani (transposed).[285]

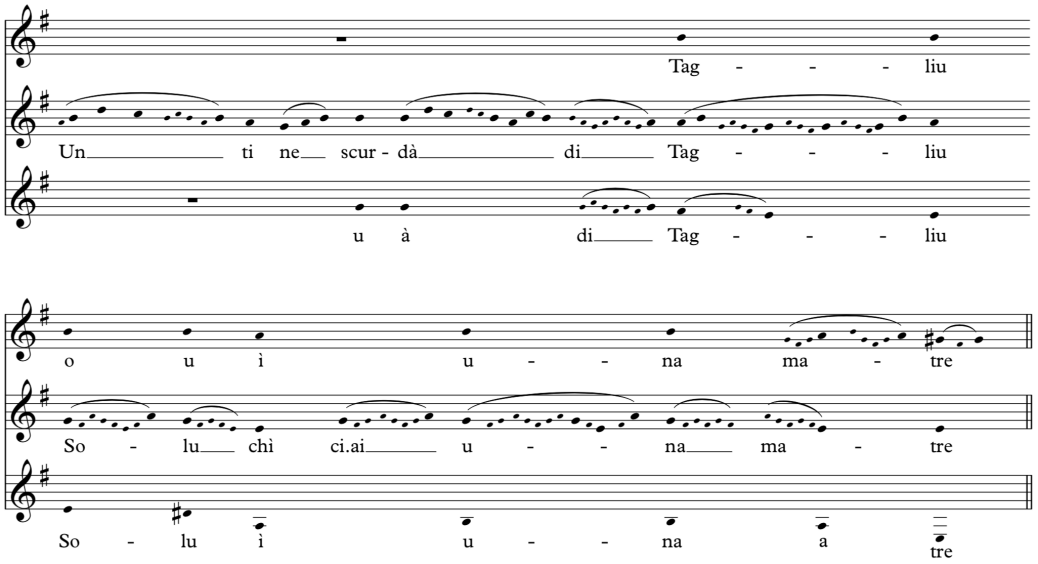

Fig. 48. “Nun ti ne scurdà di Tagliu”, as performed by Jules Bernardini/Philippe Vesperini/André Ciavaldani (transposed). [286]

Figure 49 (next page) may be the first recording to feature a major variant of this *versu*, it also features a distinct treatment of consonants and ornamentation. I did not clutter the space with accidentals which would have been more adequately representative of performer agency, but placing a

[285] Quilici, Félix, Ghjuvanteramu Rocchi, Petru Grimaldi, Jean-André Culioli, and Charles Rocchi. *Corsica: Chants De Tradition Orale : 73 Documents Sonores Inclus.* Éd. Alain Piazzola, 2018.

[286] Quilici et al., *Corsica: Chants de Tradition Orale*.

new key signature mid-sentence (instead of at the very beginning) is one way of signifying a performance choice and a cognitive shift for listeners. Interestingly, the top part (*terza*) preempts the performance of the word "chí", forcing the soloist to blend in and avoid the initial consonant. This may have been genuine enthusiasm, but as we have seen earlier, Corsican musical psychology leaves room for such hierarchy reversals. The soloist then reclaims the spotlight with an unusually bold and unadorned "ci.ai", and a clear *terza mezana* (G quarter-sharp) which remains consistent until the end of the melostrophe.

In 1994, I Chjami Aghjalesi performed many *versi* from across the island, alongside Sardinian singers, for a regional television program. Despite the pressure of performing such a vast array of pieces live, their rendition of "Un ti ne scurdà di Tagliu" (figure 50) replicates historical recordings (figure 47-49) with richer ornamentation. Their personal approach to rhythm, alignment, timbre, ornamentation, and their shifts between major and minor harmonies (sometimes in near-imperceptible ways, within *rivucatte*) are especially useful in delineating the nature of the tradition. Comparing figures 47-50, it becomes clear that strict musical parameters not only allow for an infinity of creative choices, but also provide a cultural and experiential framework where small details matter, and result in strong aesthetic pleasure.

Figure 51 was recorded on video during the Corsica-Sardinia exchange "Isule Maestre"; the opening gesture is missing and had to be extrapolated from later verses. I believe it is representative of later developments of the form, where richer ornamentation results in slightly different melodic and harmonic structures. In comparison to earlier recordings, Niculaiu Giustiniani (and his brother Sébastien Giustiniani) seem to connect various parts of the melody with additional ornaments. These ornaments introduce a greater sense of tension and resolution by delaying degree changes, and also motivate further variations of the melody. For instance, the second word "lu" leans on B and provides connecting ornaments towards the traditional upward gesture GAB. The opening gesture ("Quandu lu monte") is now centered around the fifth, hence recalling common medieval tropes such as the "Reis glorios" melodic model. Niculaiu Giustiniani counterbalances this stability by ending the first syllable ("Quan-") on a more unstable note (C) which helps shape and propel the entire opening gesture. In conversation, Niculaiu established that these choices were conscious strategies of variation, which resulted from his personal engagement with the text, and spontaneous expressions of embodied knowledge.[287] These alchemical processes are difficult to rationalise, but similar behaviour can be observed throughout his performance, and that of Sébastien (cf. boxes in figure 51).

[287] Giustiniani, Niculaiu. Interview. Conducted by Thomas Fournil, 24 Apr. 2023.

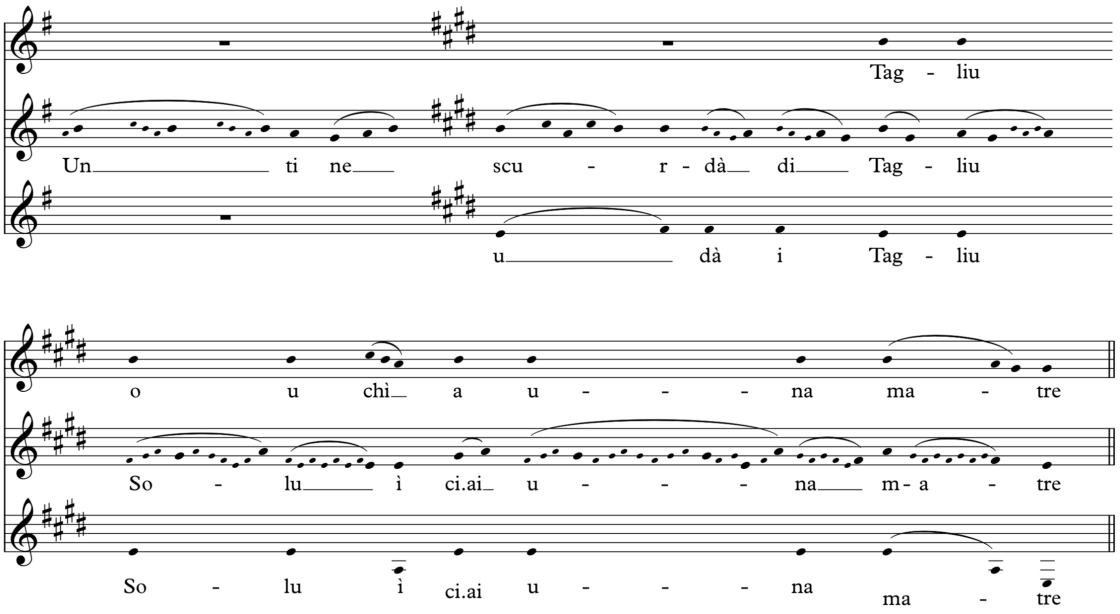

Fig. 49. “Nun ti ne scurdà di Tagliu”, as performed by Canta u populu corsu (transposed).[288]

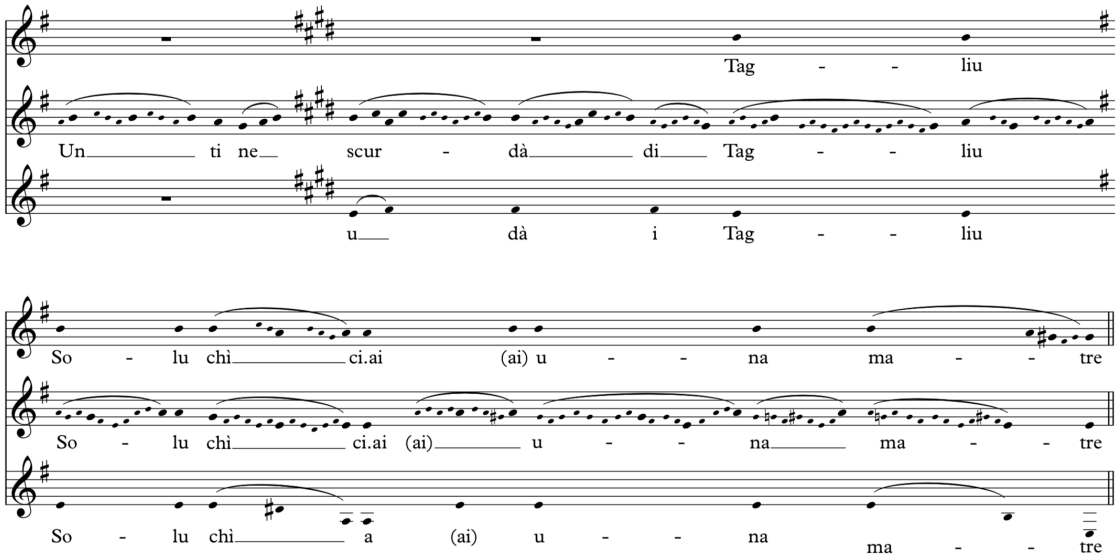

Fig. 50. “Nun ti ne scurdà di Tagliu”, as performed by I Chjami Aghjalesi (transposed).[289]

[288] Canta u populu corsu. “Paghjella di u Tagliu”. *Polyphonies corses: enregistrements de 1974 à 1990,* Ricordu, 1996.

[289] “Paghjella - u versu di Tagliu Isulacciu”. *YouTube*, uploaded by piaghjinca, 3 Sept. 2015, https://youtu.be/rV_1BU1Gop8.

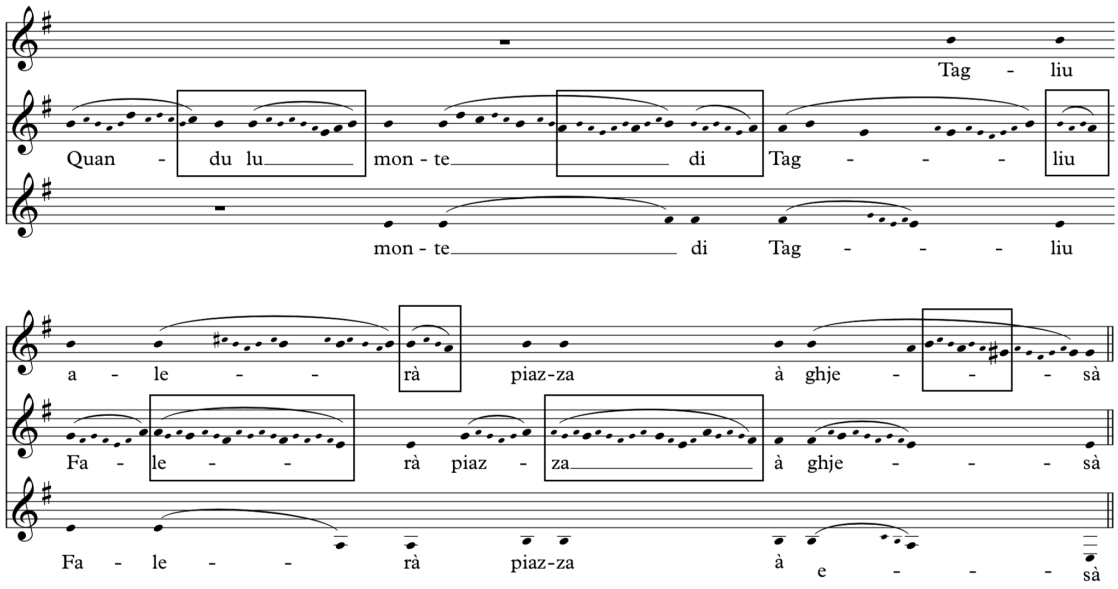

Fig. 51. "Quandu lu monte di Tagliu" as performed by Niculaiu Giustiniani (*secunda*), Raphaël Quilici, Guillaume Savelli (*bassi*), Sebastien Giustiniani (*terza*), (transposed). The boxed sections highlight ornamentations and melodic variations.[290]

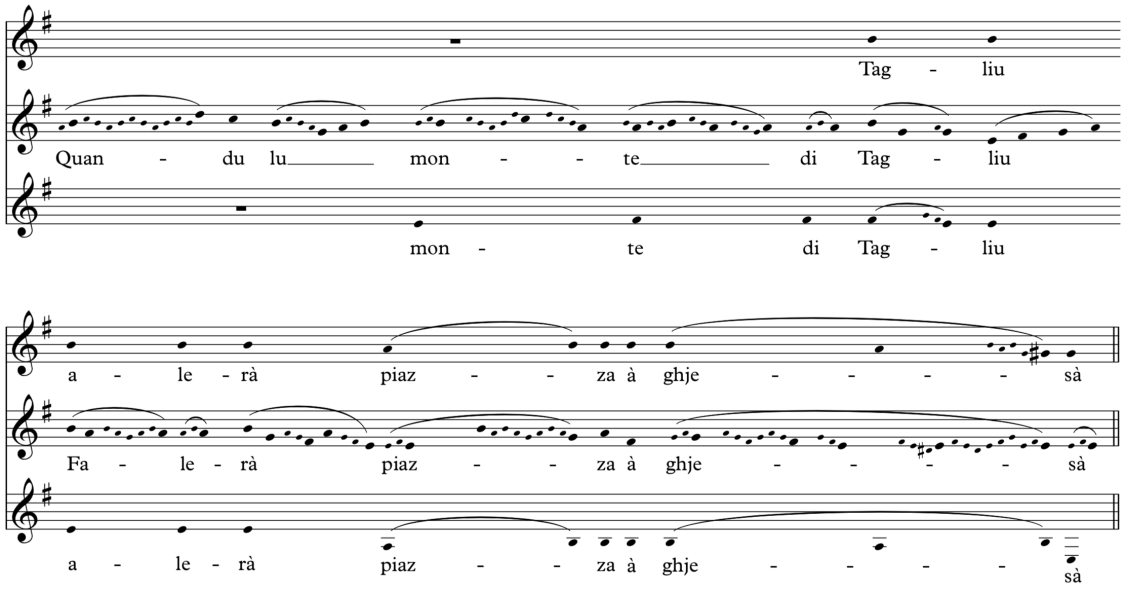

Fig. 52. "Quandu lu monte di Tagliu" as performed by Les voix de l'émotion (transposed).[291]

Les voix de l'émotion (figure 52) seem to confirm a trend in their treatment of *rivucate,* with passages similar to figure 51, and a taste for appoggiatura-like movements creating a stronger sense of tension

[290] "Paghjella isule maestre.MPG". *YouTube*, uploaded by raffaellu82, 27 July 2010, https://youtu.be/YEEEoRdk5eo.

[291] Les voix de l'émotion. "Monte di Tagliu". *Incantu Polyphonies Corses,* Ricordu, 2011.

and resolution. The performers appear to have thought about the placement of new *rivucate* in accordance to accentuation, for instance with "monte", "falerà" and "piazza". The breath in the middle of "piazza" is unusual in this particular *versu*, but a common stylistic feature otherwise. Their production values, the erasure of traditional microtonality, and subtle departures from regional style suggest that this performance is a self-aware addition to the contemporary landscape, shaped in part by concerns of marketability. Although it is now regulated as a commodity, it is important to remember this music was never meant to be shared or experienced as a performance in the modern sense. Nonetheless, this recording is an interesting chapter in the development of the *versu di Tagliu*, representative of the same expectations and struggles that regulate my own creative endeavours.

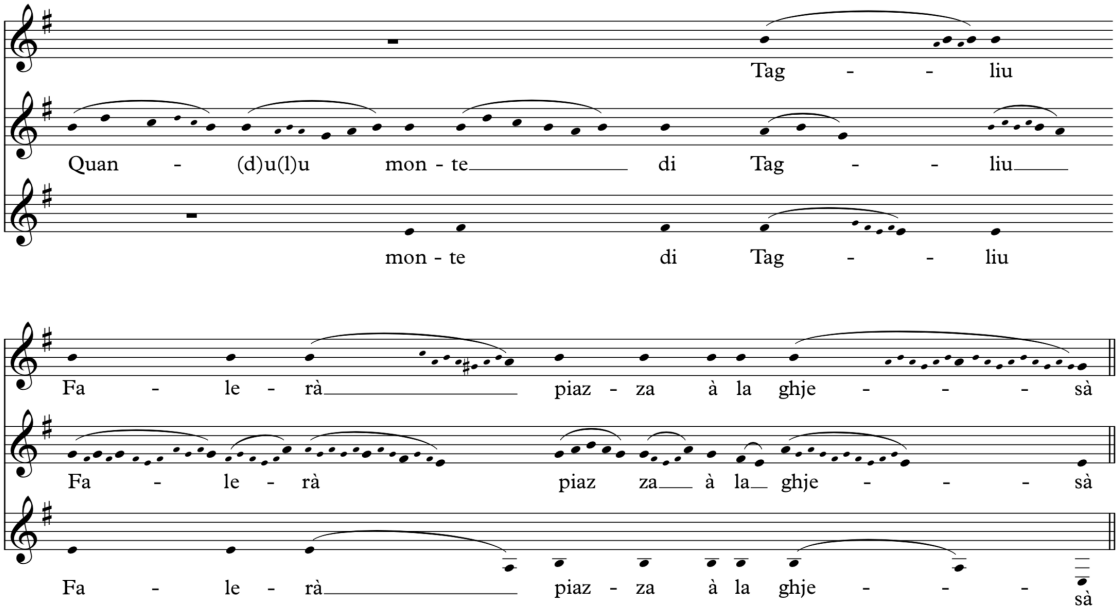

Fig. 53. "Quandu lu monte di Tagliu" as performed by A Cumpagnia (transposed).[292]

The penultimate example on my list brings back some of the humility and microtonality of our earliest recordings, immediately obvious in the quasi-spectral tuning of the opening syllable. A Cumpagnia operates an impressive synthesis between old and new aesthetics: they do not shy away from historical formulae and unadorned gestures, but also occasionally from embodying the latest fashion in ornamentation. In conversation, Jérôme Casalonga confirmed their intention of respecting this particular regional style (which is not overly ornate), rather than yielding to commercial pressures or audience expectations.

[292] A Cumpagnia. "Versu di Tagliu". *In Paghjella,* Casa Editions, 2014.

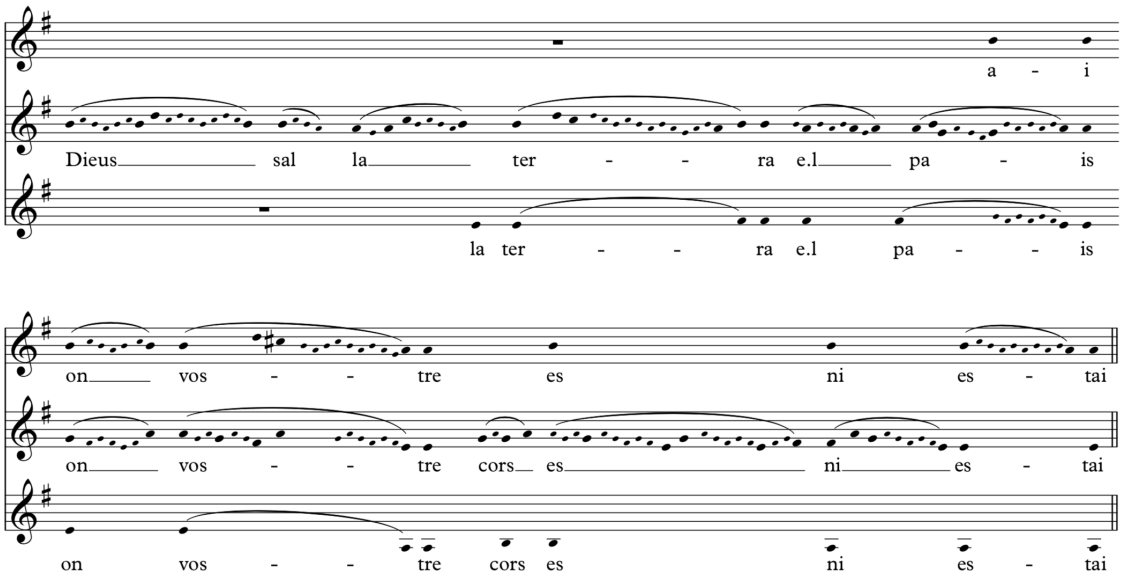

Fig. 54. “Dieus sal la terra”, as performed by Idrîsî Ensemble (Noémie Ducimetière, Alexandra Pouta, Elsa Hackett Esteban, Thomas Fournil).

This final example (figure 54) is a representation of our performance (save micro-intonation and organ accompaniment); it aims to re-situate my score as a starting point, and to acknowledge the singers as co-creators in this endeavor.[293]

It is now possible to understand our *versu* in relation to the *versu di Tagliu*. “Dieus sal la terra” is an octosyllabic poem (in keeping with the *paghjella* tradition), however it is not a sixain (6 lines) divided into three couplets, but an octave (8 lines) which must be divided into four couplets. Naturally, the poem also prompted melodic and rhythmic variations. For instance in Niculaiu Giustiniani’s version (the closest to our own) the opening syllable ends on C, while the second syllable remains unadorned (figure 55). My setting of “Dieus” and “sal” was informed by Old Roman chant: as shown in previous chapters, complex sonorities and clusters of consonants often result in liquescent formulae. I am grateful to Marcel Pérès for teaching me a number of performance strategies dependent on notation and context, as well as comparative analysis. Several of these strategies are especially consistent with Corsican singing techniques: my notation features here the most succinct form, a four-note formula (figure 56).

[293] Impossible not to have a moving thought for Adrian Thorne in this moment, professor of academic music at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama for over 50 years. He taught me that analysis must first and foremost rely on aural perception.

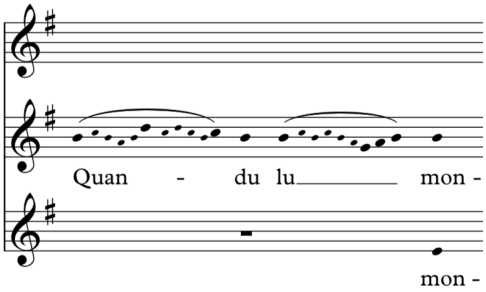

Fig. 55. “Quandu lu monte di Tagliu” as performed by Niculaiu Giustiniani.[294]

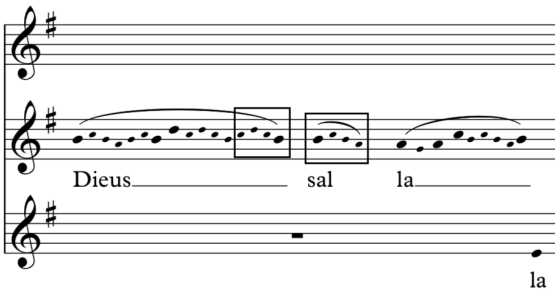

Fig. 56. “Dieus sal la terra”, as performed by Noémie Ducimetière. The boxed sections highlight melodic variations.

In our version, one could say that C “liquefies” into B, and B into A (cf. boxes above). This prompts an entirely new way of performing the following syllables: instead of the traditional rising gesture GAB (figure 55 presents a variation of this form starting on B for the syllable “lu”), my melody essentially follows ACB. Framing B in this way creates a stronger sense of balance and closure. In the original, “monte” usually features a melisma on the weak syllable (figure 57), but in the case of “terra” I placed ornaments on the strong syllable (figure 58). Hence the new melody on “la”, more cadential, enables the singer to take a breath after a more complex introduction, and before the cascade of notes that is “terra”. In the Corsican version, breathing between “lu” and “monte” would have made B redundant (see triple occurrence in box figure 57). Shifting one of these notes to the final syllable of “terra” helps avoid a moment of stasis, enables a much-needed breath, and defines another clear point of arrival.

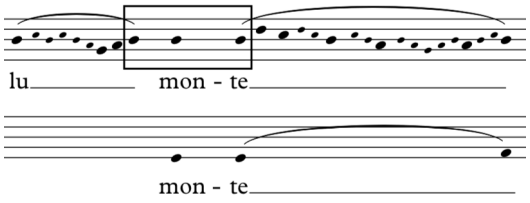

Fig. 57. Niculaiu Giustiniani.

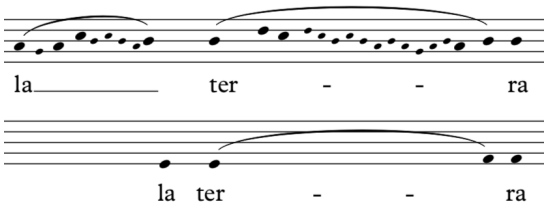

Fig. 58. Idrîsî Ensemble.

In previous recordings, the word “Tagliu” enjoys a great variety of approaches, but most recent performances place ornaments on the final syllable. I did not follow this trend with the word “pais” (figure 60), and used older recordings as my model (figure 59). In the chart of IPA vowels, [i] represents the most frontal and closed sound, it does not lend itself to florid ornamentation.

[294] “Paghjella isule maestre.MPG”. *YouTube*, uploaded by raffaellu82, 27 July 2010, https://youtu.be/YEEEoRdk5eo.

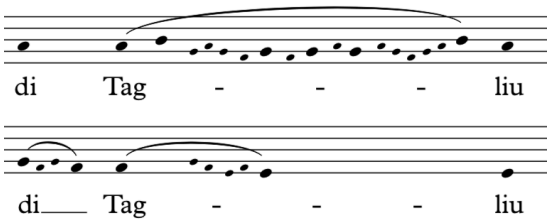

Fig. 59. Bernardini/Vesperini/Ciavaldani.

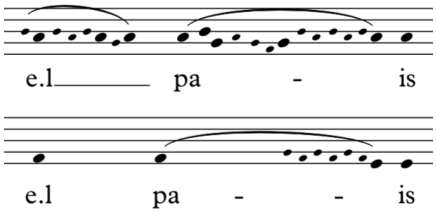

Fig. 60. Idrîsî Ensemble.

In the bass part, the shift from F# to E is an important opportunity for ornamentation. In previous recordings this change is consistently timed towards the beginning of the word "Tagliu" (figure 59). Our version places that shift towards the end of "pais" (figure 60), hence delaying resolution and leaning on the F#-G dissonance. At this point in our version, the ornaments in the bass most resemble those of the *secunda*. Indeed, our group developed a taste for simultaneous *rivuccate*, in contrast to the more conventional tiled aesthetic of this *versu*. The *terza* (top part) behaves in similar fashion, timing ornaments with the *secunda* on the words "on" and "vostre" (figure 62).

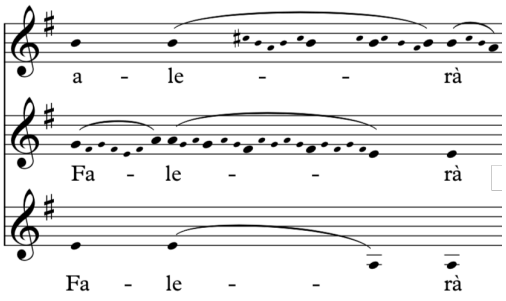

Fig. 61. Niculaiu Giustiniani.

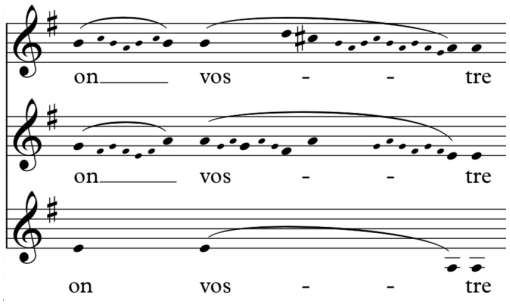

Fig. 62. Idrîsî Ensemble.

This superposition of ornaments appeals to my spectral sensibility: as the boundary between discreet entities blurs, the three-part texture becomes akin to a single organism and mysteriously transforms the sonic space. Corsican singers also conflate spectralism and spectrality in their approach to natural resonance, and in their search for a sonic phenomenon called the *quintina*.[295] The *quintina,* sometimes called the voice of the ancestors, or the voice of the angel, designates any fusion of harmonics resulting from just intonation. This "sonico-poetic" term therefore merges consonance and transcendence as one synergistic composite. In the *paghjella*, striving for harmony also means striving for communication with diverse sonic and spiritual ghosts.

Instead of repeating the melostrophe, my own verses conclude in two kinds of cadences (A and E), creating structures across two couplets. As shown in previous examples, the cadence in E is traditional, but the moment preceding resolution is modally ambiguous: just before the Picardie third,

[295] For spectrality, see sections 1.3 and 1.4 of this dissertation.

the *terza* (top part) usually unfolds above A, and listeners might expect a cadence in A (figure 63). In my own composition, the initial cadence in A fulfills this expectation (figure 64), and makes a later E major ending all the more rewarding.

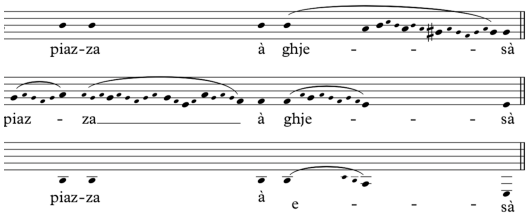

Fig. 63. Niculaiu Giustiniani.

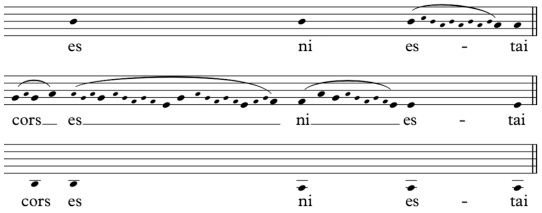

Fig. 64. Idrîsî Ensemble.

This prompts another variation at the beginning of the second verse. Variations traditionally occur at the beginning of reiterating melostrophes,[296] mine is but an extreme development of this idea. The hybrid modal implications of this *versu* are now furthered with the inclusion of an F quarter-sharp (13th harmonic of A) over an E drone.

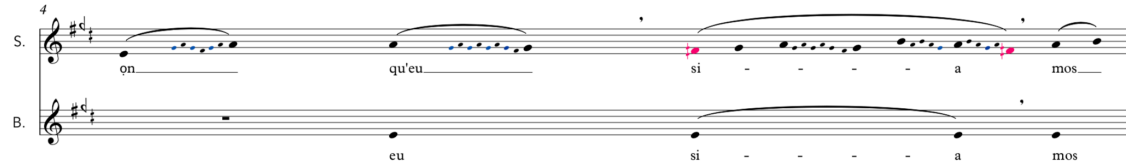

Fig. 65. Thomas Fournil, "Dieus sal la terra": red indicates the 13th harmonic of A.

The word "mos" marks the end of the variation, and the composition unfurls without any surprises. Naturally there are subtle differences in ornamentation throughout: for instance, the words "es lai" at the beginning of bar 5 present a cluster of consonants, which results in a florid "liquefying" of B into G (figure 66).

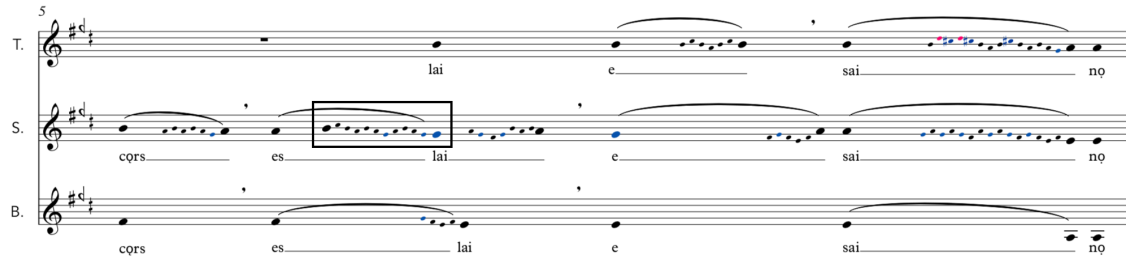

Fig. 66. Thomas Fournil, "Dieus sal la terra": liquescence on the word "es".

[296] *A Cirnea*, Félix Quilici. "Paghjella". *Evocation de la Corse: chants traditionnels et polyphoniques,* Consul, 1993.

Since spectral music is often based on structures derived from the harmonic series, it might appear to limit the use of minor harmonies. Performing this *paghjella* with the harmonic series of E would have been difficult indeed, but tuning in A provides both G quarter-flat (-31) and G sharp (-12). The singers originally learned this piece with a strict tuning in A, but Julian Anderson eventually encouraged me to soften that tuning. As this composition shows an ambivalence between E and A, I suggested a hybridisation of the tuning with F#+6 and G#-12, respectively 9th and 10th harmonic of E+2. The full tuning used for my organ is as such (numbers indicate cents deviations from equal temperament):

A0, B+4, C-2, D+51, C#-4, D#-6, E+2, F+41, F#+6, G-31, G#-12

5.5 Making the organ

After several years of research, I eventually found the perfect organ factor: Gregor Bergman showed incredible passion, patience and expertise in this collaboration. The process of working on the instrument together was akin to digital sound design, but a slow, medievalist version where many other parameters would come into play. Each note, each pipe had to be carefully curated: attack, sustain, timbre, volume, and dynamic range had to be individually adjusted, and to work synergistically across a number of tunings and temperatures. I insisted on building this instrument to accommodate for microtones found in Romano-Frankish sources, Byzantine chant, Corsican chant, and of course for this particular piece.

Most customers prefer loud and stable instruments with clean, precise attacks. I asked for the opposite: a soft sound that would easily melt within voices (or an instrumental ensemble), together with diverse timbres that would confuse and enrich the sonic space. Sharp attacks are not suited to highly ornate music: it results in heightened energy and interrupted, abrasive textures. Slower, richer attacks create more of a shimmer and a less focused tone at speed, making ornaments less intrusive. Gregor also made sure that pallets and keys were connected, guaranteeing that I never lose contact during fast passages. His unique and ingenious drone mechanism allows me to shift between notes easily, hence making a Byzantine ison or a Corsican polyphony possible. Finally, we have used leather to soften volume, which in turn resulted in more flexible tuning, greater dynamic range, and voice-like expressivity.

It was important for me to use Mediterranean woods that I am familiar with and have an emotional connection to. We were lucky to find cork oak wood, a rare and sustainable choice as one can only harvest dead trees. The keyboard was made of myrtle, another beloved plant throughout the Mediterranean, with extraordinary symbolic power. In terms of visual design, I took inspiration from Sicilian Norman-Arab-Byzantine architecture, one of the most inspiring examples of medieval multiculturality. I decided to borrow the octagonal star from the Palatine Chapel of Palermo (figure

67), of which the ancient and diverse history exceeds the scope of this commentary. Gregor cleverly deconstructed the design across the instrument (figure 68):

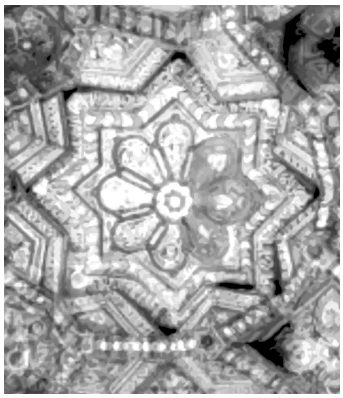

Fig. 67. Palatine Chapel.

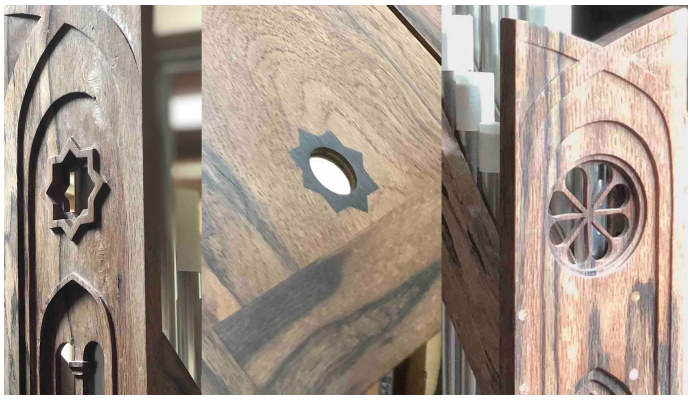

Fig. 68. Gregor Bergman carvings and inlay.

Here-below is a collaborative drawing showing Gregor Bergman's historically informed model, with my own additions: windows, arches, and top section (in the middle) lifted from Cefalu, Palermo and Monreale cathedrals.

Fig. 69. Initial sketch for the organ.

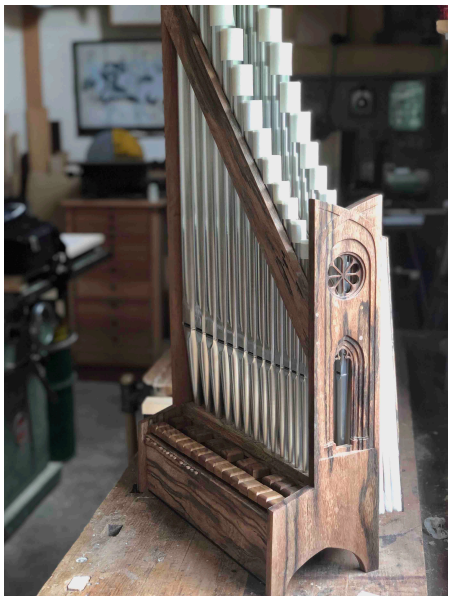

Fig. 70. Completed organ.

It was a mystery whether the organ would actually blend with traditional voices. In church acoustics, we have found that the organ sounds loud from within the ensemble (hence facilitating tuning) yet blends from afar (sometimes even to the point of disappearing, when a single drone is used). This merging of timbres is absolutely magical, and I am looking forward to performing more polyphonic textures with the instrument.

Portative organ technique may seem straightforward at first, but there is in fact a lot of room for

growth. Managing breath with the bellows requires careful planning, but it also provides many opportunities for subtle changes in texture and tuning. For instance, adjusting breath intensity between two notes may provide a portato, a legato or an expressive quality that we are not accustomed to hearing with an organ. The hand must get accustomed to a different position, a different keyboard design, as well as different musical demands (holding a drone while performing melodic lines, locking drone mechanisms in between sentences, coordinating finger action with bellow movement). Instead of pressure, here the speed at which keys are pressed or lifted can impact on the quality of the sound. Different parts of the register require different amounts of air to be in tune, demanding not only flexible bellow management between registers, but careful preparation when combining registers. For instance, a piece featuring a low fifth drone together with a melody would ideally require a slightly different tuning than a monodic piece. Parchment pipe extensions provide a lot of flexibility regarding tuning, and this particular model opens even more possibilities.
It was an absolute pleasure and privilege to work with Gregor Bergman, and to now hold this extraordinary instrument. This commission was entirely self-funded, and I must communicate my gratitude to my family who showed so much support in this endeavor. I have played a diverse range of ancient repertoires with it, it has enabled me to support grieving during a funeral, celebration during a wedding, but also to contribute to Noémie Ducimetière's band Noum, and to play with Elsa Hackett Esteban's synthesizer. I am looking forward to many other recordings and collaborations in the future.

5.6 Making the recording

It required three years for the singers to learn "Dieus sal la terra", to start feeling comfortable with the vocal techniques and with the tuning system. During that time, we also learned to read and sing Old Roman chant manuscripts, troubadour melodies and trouvère polyphonies. At the beginning of our journey, early music specialists Catherine Zimmer and Yves Grollemund (then director of the Ajaccio conservatory) invited the ensemble for a residency in Corsica. They were amongst the first to support our project. In collaboration with singer Lea Antona, we developed a program of female Corsican and troubadour songs. Our learning process was indeed a rich, wholistic, but complicated journey: the singers showed incredible perseverance, strength, vision and passion, without which Idrîsî Ensemble would not be today.

It must be emphasised that adapting traditions that had been male dominated until now, our work in Old Roman chant and Corsican polyphony was terra incognita: there were few models to follow, and each step forward required trial and error. Our first attempt at recording "Dieus sal la terra" was in the Guildhall School studio, which only yielded a very harsh recording: impossible to recreate the alchemy between parts that makes this music special. Fortunately, another opportunity arose during our residency in Greece: Noémie Ducimetière and Vahakn Matossian, who drove all the

way from the UK, happened to bring recording equipment with them. I am so grateful to Vahakn Matossian for selflessly documenting our work throughout, and for singing with us on many occasions. I shall not attempt to communicate the magic of our experience there; but recording a *paghjella* in a Greek medieval monastery was very meaningful indeed.

Our recording originally lacked dimension, and Alexandra (who was singing the bottom part) overpowered the other singers. Vahakn suggested to break from the conventional *paghjella* position (standing next to each other) and to spread singers across the space. Seating at the back, Alexandra's voice gained in depth and colour, while Elsa enjoyed a more distinct placement in the final stereo image (figure 71).

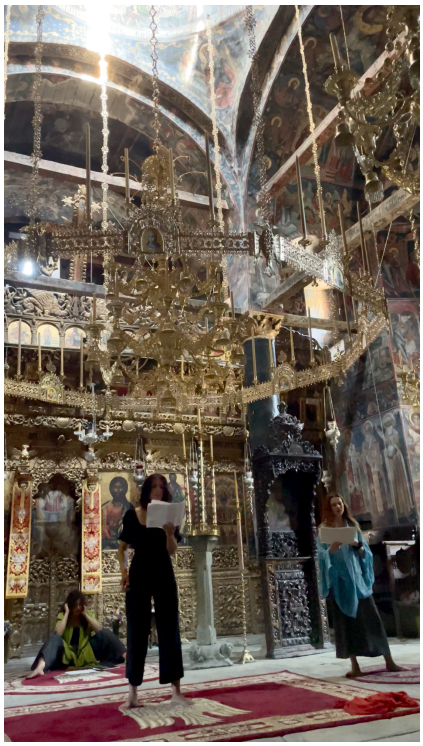

Fig. 71. Alexandra Achillea, Noémie Ducimetière and Elsa Hackett Esteban.

Singing in this formation was not without challenges, and everything was recorded a cappella as I did not travel with the organ. Alexandra developed the skill of singing with a tuner on the floor, ensuring stability for the group and enabling me to record the organ part later on.

In the end, the singers operated an impressive synthesis between the strict theoretical tuning we had been working on, and a more intuitive, contextual approach which helped bring the piece to life. Figure 72 shows how Noémie negotiated the performance of G-31 cents in musical ways, placing her tuning higher or lower (arrow up or down) depending on context (but always reaching for that unusual "blue" colour). In the context of an ornament around A (first arrow), slightly higher tuning improves physical relaxation and better accomplishes the purpose of this gesture. For "pais", Noémie initially leans on the dissonance with F# (down arrow), but then transitions up as the melody pulls

towards A (up arrow), and that dissonance is resolved. This management of microtones is absolutely audible, it is not a modernist approach to microtonality, but an embodied, meaningful development of modal sensibility.

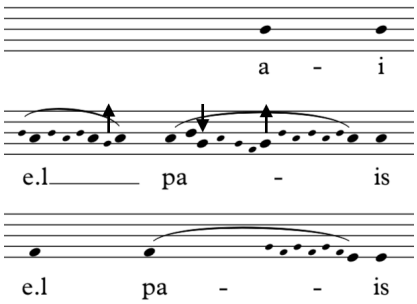

Fig. 72. Noémie Ducimetière's tuning inflections.

By contrast, the end of the first verse features an extremely stable low G, as the melody is centered around that note (figure 73). On the other hand, F# and E are slightly sharp, which is consistent with our Pythagorean sensibility.

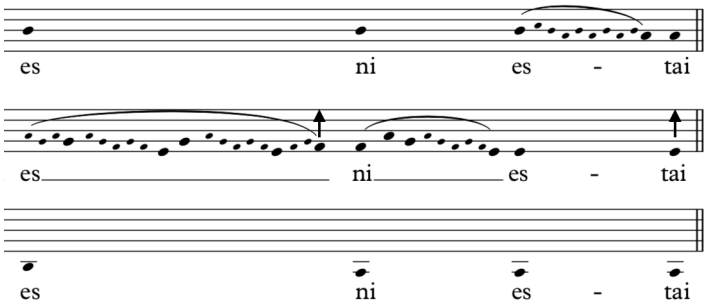

Fig. 73. Noémie Ducimetière's tuning inflections.

Recording an instrument alongside these voices was a delicate exercise, as the *paghjella* is rarely performed with an accompaniment: some have experimented with associating Corsican polyphonies with electronics[297] or percussion.[298] In 2010, Conductus Ensemble and A Filetta performed a *paghjella* alternating between voice and string quintet.[299] I believe this composition fails to enable a meaningful, reflective dialogue between different cultural spheres, and brings about an important question. Is it possible to compose for string quintet without relaying attitudes and power structures

[297] Les Nouvelles Polyphonies Corses. *Les Nouvelles Polyphonies Corses,* Philips, 1991.

[298] A Cumpagnia. *E voce di e pelle,* Casa, 2004.

[299] "A Filetta & Conductus – Paghjella". *YouTube*, uploaded by Conductus Ensemble, 17 Dec. 2010, https://youtu.be/6V5iRlIBYWM.

from the 18th and 19th century, without promoting the values, biases, and systems of order attached to periods of colonial expansion? Cameron Fae Bushnell suggests that true political change requires a radical re-imagining of the classical tradition:

> Western music redefines the way that we read the politics of empire, strongly suggesting that imperialism can be cast off only with the radical revision, or even abandonment, of the very forms that contemporary societies cherish as exemplary forms of culture.[300]

I have tried to invent a way of singing the *paghjella* with the organ, one that promotes aesthetics and modes of being specific to this tradition. My instrumental voice belongs somewhere between *bassu* and *secunda*, respectfully supporting and enriching vocal textures, embodying the friendship that connects our group. If notation was initially necessary to teach and remember this music, my performance did not require any: it is a pure product of orality.

5.7 Extended liminalities

Singing in *paghjella* means inhabiting multiple centuries at once. Hailing from medieval times, its timbres, heterophonic textures, rich ornamentation, bold intervals, and parallel harmonies speak of a heritage that stretches far beyond the Ligurian horizon. These characteristics perdured into subsequent eras, and accrued other harmonic structures, false bass motion, and Picardie cadences. *Paghjella* singers, like spectral composers, refined rhythm as a form of organic energy with structural and harmonic implications. Like Tristan Murail, they are not satisfied with sound "as a stable and self-identical entity",[301] their notes can shimmer, explode, and change the course of compositions. Such living organisms require specific musical and social ecosystems. The *paghjella* is not just a time capsule, or a metissage of influences, it inspires quasi-erotic beatitude, it is like being "wrapped in cotton" and "transported".[302] Hervé Muglioni describes this experience in rather metaphysical terms:

> Something happens inside the circle… I arrive at a point where I take off and I am somewhere else; that is to say, I have the impression when I go off like that in my calls (*chjame*) or in my melismas (*rivuccate*) that I've created a vacuum and I have the impression of being twenty or thirty centimetres above the ground… disconnected from the material world that is the stage and the auditorium, and I find alone with myself, I hear only these harmonies… It's a way of

[300] Bushnell, *Postcolonial Readings of Music in World Literature*, p. 21.

[301] Murail, Tristan. "The Revolution of Complex Sounds". Translated by Joshua Cody, *Contemporary Music Review*, vol. 24, 2005, pp. 121–136, p. 122.

[302] Bithell, *Transported by Song,* pp. 72–73.

> liberating myself from stress, of liberating myself from everything that is going on around me. I go somewhere else. It's something that can't be measured, but you experience it inside the circle and it's something extraordinary because you are there but you are no longer there.[303]

The psychosocial and transcendental dimensions of the *paghjella* ensured its unwavering relevance throughout the ages. Marcel Pérès describes oral polyphonies as "factors of regulation", providing "continuity in a changing society".[304] This siblinghood, this "brotherhood of song"[305] finds in the *paghjella* the expression of an identity removed from French, modern music, and Western music in general,[306] yet connected to a rich heritage spanning several continents. Its elusive genealogies and characteristics resemble the liquid spaces, the fragmented lands and "impeded archipelago[s]"[307] that Corsica belongs to. In "Dieus sal la terra", the *paghjella* is populated with ever more diverse ghosts, histories and identities opening spaces of freedom and interrogation. Maritime currents lead us to other voices: exiled in the mountains of Corsica, the trobairitz sing a Mediterranean "blues". Their orientation within a male dominated art, their trauma and spiritual sensibilities merge to reflect upon the northern gaze, and the power struggles of other geographical, cultural and sexual identities.

In his introduction to *The Voice of the Trobairitz*,[308] William Paden delineates the gradual diminishment of female rights, education, wealth and agency as societies stepped into modernity. He questions the applicability of historical periodisation as "undoubtedly based upon male experience" and the doctrine that Renaissance women enjoyed greater individual freedom, which only perpetuates "the self-esteem of the Renaissance thinkers who invented the Middle Ages".[309] Here we understand the liminal position of the trobairitz: deceptively embedded as a keystone of French culture, it challenges narratives of European and modern exceptionalism from within. Their voices demonstrate the possibility of mediating spaces of privilege and subalternity, of reconciling my own southern cultures, white, male attributes and queer identities. Working through these complexities is not a choice for me: making sense of difficulties and privileges, acknowledging, sublimating pain (mine and that of others) has become an absolute imperative for my well-being. Similarly, Dronke describes

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[303] Bithell, *Transported by Song,* p. 73.

[304] Huglo, Michel, Marcel Pérés, and Christian Meyer. *Polyphonies De Tradition Orale: Histoire Et Traditions Vivantes: Actes Du Colloque De Royaumont 1990*. Créaphis, 1993, p. 7.

[305] Bithell, *Transported by Song,* p. 75.

[306] Bithell, *Transported by Song,* p. 78.

[307] Farinelli, Marcel A. "The Impeded Archipelago of Corsica and Sardinia". *Island Studies Journal*, 2021, p. 325.

[308] Paden, William D. *The Voice of the Trobairitz: Perspectives on the Women Troubadours*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989.

[309] Bithell, *Transported by Song,* p. 2

medieval female writings as primarily springing from a place of necessity:

> The women's motivation for writing at all, for instance, seems rarely to be predominantly literary: it is often more urgently serious than is common among men writers; it is a response springing from inner needs, more than from an artistic, or didactic inclination. There is, more often than in men's writing, a lack of apriorism, of predetermined postures: again and again we encounter attempts to cope with human problems in their singularity – not imposing rules or categories from without, but seeking solutions that are apt and truthful existentially. Hence the women whose texts are treated here show excellingly a quality (literary, but also "metaliterary") of immediacy: they look at themselves more concretely and more searchingly than many of the highly accomplished men writers who were their contemporaries.[310]

The female troubadours' pervasive, erotic tone, their "willingness to deviate from accepted social behaviour"[311] must be informed, at least in part, by a sense of displacement, oppression and vulnerability. In my own setting of "Dieus sal la terra", the trobairitz is exiled and awaiting her final execution: simultaneously Occitan and Corsican, she reveals these regions as twin sisters in the French colonial continuum.

5.8 Southern resistance

In his 1957 article "Décoloniser la France",[312] Olivier Chevrillon (under the pen name Charles Brindillac) established a parallel between the administration of French colonies and that of metropolitan regions. He may have been the first to coin the term "internal colonialism" within French debate, questioning the "direct administration" enforced in the provinces, but he carefully excluded racial concerns from his discourse. Race, gender, ecology, and early conquest must be recognised within this history of the metropolis and its borders. Robert Lafont denounced the "cold official statistics" that too often obscure "profound [governmental] responsibility" in regional underdevelopment.[313] According to him, this misery can only be understood in the light of historical conquest, destructive processes linked to the state and anarchic capitalist development:

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[310] Dronke, Peter. *Women Writers of the Middle Ages: A Critical Study of Texts from Perpetua (d. 203) to Marguerite Porete (d. 1310)*. Cambridge University Press, 1984, p. x.

[311] Perkal-Balinsky, Deborah. *The Minor Trobairitz: An Edition with Translation and Commentary*. Facs. reprint ed., UMI, 1999, p. 46.

[312] Brindillac, Charles. "Décoloniser La France". *Esprit (1940-)*, vol. 256, 1957, pp. 799-812.

[313] Lafont, Robert. *La Révolution Régionaliste*. Gallimard, 1967, p. 94.

> Internal colonialism obeys the territorial logic, and renews, centuries later, military conquest. We have seen Parisian capitalism and its relays in the North, East, or Lyonnais transform Brittany and the South-West into forgotten areas, and fight a severe battle to seize the economy between Durance and Garonne. It is simply because Occitan consciousness was modified by the myths of centralisation that we have not seen, in the South, that the Capetian conquest was being renewed in modern terms.[314]

In *Nationalizing Empires*, Stefan Berger explained that of all the French regions, Corsica was arguably "where colonialism held the greatest sway"; it was, "in many ways, France's colonial island".[315] From a customs point of view, the island was indeed treated as a foreign colony until 1912. Sampiero Sanguinetti noted that French legislation rendered trade impossible, extinguishing their precarious (but somewhat self-sufficient) lifestyle.[316] In the 18th century, cultivated lands represented 30-35% of the territory, by 1967 this number had dropped to 5.3%. Around the same period, Balearic Islands, Sardinia and Sicily respectively cultivated 26.8%, 23.1% and 57.5% of their territories.[317] Similarly, Corsica suffered an impressive depletion of cattle and fishing boats, and the highest mortality rate of all Mediterranean islands, with an unusual decline in population:

	Corse	Baléares	Sardaigne	Sicile	Malte
1870					
1890	32,2	59,8	29,8	124,4	474,6
1950	19,5	80,7	51		981,1
1990	28,7	145,5	67,6	194	1139,2

Fig. 74. Number of inhabitants per km^2.[318]

Metropolitan France and urban life increasingly became synonymous with survival and economic advancement; traditional culture, agriculture and craftsmanship with a life of struggle that many decided to forget.

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[314] "Le colonialisme intérieur obéit à la logique territoriale, et renouvelle, à des siècles de distance, la conquête militaire. Nous avons bien vu le capitalisme parisien et ses relais du Nord, de l'Est, ou Lyonnais transformer la Bretagne, le Sud-Ouest en zones oubliées, et livrer une bataille sévère pour s'emparer de l'économie entre Durance et Garonne. C'est simplement parce que les consciences occitanes étaient modifiées par les mythes de la centralisation que l'on a pas vu, au Midi, que se renouvelait, en des termes modernes, la conquête capétienne". Lafont, Robert. *La Révolution Régionaliste*. Gallimard, 1967, p. 18.

[315] Berger, Stefan, and A. I. Miller. *Nationalizing Empires*. 2015, p. 189.

[316] Sanguinetti, Sampiero. *Corse, Le Syndrome De Pénélope*. Albiana, 2008.

[317] Sanguinetti, *Le Syndrome De Pénélope*, pp. 42-43.

[318] Sanguinetti, *Le Syndrome De Pénélope*, p. 42.

Through colonial expansion, Corsican villages – featured in books to illustrate the archaism present on the margins of the metropolis – were replaced by the exhibition of the peoples of Africa.[319] Corsican people gradually lost their exotic character, which in turn provided opportunities for other processes of identification and alterisation; a chance to escape misery and the "grotesque" of Corsican life, a chance to be included within the French narrative:

> In the 1930s, when Corsica accounted for only 0.75 percent of the total French population, Corsicans made up 22 percent of the colonial administration and a similar proportion of the European soldiers in the colonial military.[320]

This extraordinarily strong commitment overseas can only be understood from a subaltern perspective of desperation and necessity. Following their othering and subjugation, the Corsican population successfully demonstrated "that they were productive citizens and eternally loyal Frenchmen, their commitment to the nation evidenced by the work and the sacrifices made in the empire".[321] From this sentence alone, it would seem that Corsica had "passed", to use a queer term, and secured their place into modern society. However colonial literature perpetuated anti-Mediterranean preconceptions about the Corsican, often portrayed as "vindictive, show-off, schemer, obtuse, sinister, furious and almost exclusively assigned to the roles of tenant, pimp or hoodlum".[322] Following Franco Piperno and Edward Said, the prejudice of southernism (the reduction of the south to a "premodern relic of the past") could be read as a form of orientalism, where primitiveness inheres in a place, *is* the place.[323] This problem is immediately addressed in Franco Cassano's introduction to *Southern Thought and Other Essays on the Mediterranean*:

> To rethink the South some preliminary observations are in order. The most important is that we must stop thinking of its pathologies simply as the consequences of a lack of modernity.[324]

As we perform and narrate history, we must also show that modernity is "not extraneous to the

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[319] Peretti-Ndiaye, Marie. "Passé Colonial Et Phénomènes Contemporains D'identification Et D'altérisation. Le Prisme Corse". *L'homme Et La Société*, vol. 175, no. 1, 2010, p. 83.

[320] Aldrich, Robert. "France's Colonial Island: Corsica and the Empire". *French History and Civilization: Papers from the George Rude Seminar*, H-France, 2005, p. 112, https://h-france.net/rude/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/AldrichVol3.pdf.

[321] Berger and Miller, *Nationalizing Empires*, p. 190.

[322] De Negroni, François. *Corse Colonies*. Albiana/Musée De La Corse, 2002, p. 177.

[323] Dainotto, Roberto M. *Europe (in Theory)*. Duke University Press, 2007, p. 173.

[324] Cassano, Franco, et al. *Southern Thought and Other Essays on the Mediterranean*. Fordham University Press, 2011, p. i.

pathologies that, even today, some think it should cure". [325] Corsica and Occitania remain, according to recently published numbers, amongst the poorest regions of France, only rivalled by colonies overseas.[326] In the private sector, Corsican income is 25% lower than in the continent, with a higher cost of living.[327] These are however the two most attractive regions of metropolitan France, which inflates property beyond indigenous means. In the context of culture preservation, these numbers matter; while composers often address threats to the biosphere, our medium is uniquely suited to fight against an equally urgent crisis, that of the ethnosphere. Language is perhaps the most resilient, the last element of a culture to disappear, yet according to The Language Conservancy, one language disappears every 40 days.[328] The following is my transcription of a talk by journalist and anthropologist Wade Davis, "Cultures at the far edge of the world":

> The ethnosphere is humanity's great legacy. It is the symbol of all that we are and all that we can be as an astonishingly inquisitive species. And just as the biosphere has been severely eroded, so too is the ethnosphere – and, if anything, at a far greater rate. No biologists, for example, would dare suggest that 50 percent of all species or more have been or are on the brink of extinction because it simply is not true, and yet that – the most apocalyptic scenario in the realm of biological diversity – scarcely approaches what we know to be the most optimistic scenario in the realm of cultural diversity. And the great indicator of that, of course, is language loss. A language is a flash of the human spirit. It's a vehicle through which the soul of each particular culture comes into the material world. Every language is an old-growth forest of the mind, a watershed, a thought, an ecosystem of spiritual possibilities.[329]

The Corsican language was categorized as "definitely endangered" by UNESCO. In Corsica, of the 143 *communes* that constitute the Parc Naturel Régional, 116 are also "on the brink of being abandoned".[330] The *paghjella* is a rare surviving species from this once luxuriant ecosystem.

In his "Study of Economics As If People Mattered",[331] Ernst Friedrich Schumacher warned us of the dehumanising processes at the heart of globalisation, and of an impending mental health crisis.

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[325] Cassano, *Southern Thought and Other Essays on the Mediterranean*, p. I.

[326] "Revenus et patrimoine des ménages". *Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques*, 27 May 2021, https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/5371235?sommaire=5371304.

[327] Sanguinetti, Sampiero. *Corse, Le Syndrome De Pénélope*. Albiana, 2008, p. 56.

[328] "The Loss of Our Languages". *The Language Conservancy*, https://languageconservancy.org/language-loss/.

[329] "Wade Davis: Cultures at the Far Edge of the World". *YouTube*, uploaded by TED, 12 Jan. 2017, https://youtu.be/bL7vK0pOvKI.

[330] Bithell, *Transported by Song,* p. 4.

[331] Schumacher, Ernst Friedrich. *Small Is Beautiful: Economics As If People Mattered*. Harper & Row, 1973.

The *paghjella* helps me remember the possibility of being satiated within a sustainable musical culture, one encompassing dimensions of community, physicality, ecology and spirituality. Such time-tested, wholistic approaches to music making are still in resonance with contemporary societal challenges; they question the need for superficial reinvention, for growth in modernist terms, for the technological, intellectual and sensory bidding wars driving our music industry.

The preservation of endangered cultures not only ensures the survival of distinctive customs but also protects valuable knowledge and potential solutions for humanity's future. Wade Davis warns that as we move towards a more homogenised worldview, we risk waking up one day having forgotten the existence of other possibilities. He draws attention to a common portrayal of indigenous people as quaint and colourful, but relegated to the periphery of history, as the real world moves on. However, the integrity of the ethnosphere is not threatened by change or the advancements of technology:

> It is power, the crude face of domination. Wherever you look around the world, you discover that these are not cultures destined to fade away; these are dynamic living peoples being driven out of existence by identifiable forces that are beyond their capacity to adapt to.[332]

The colonial question is often overlooked, and in many education systems, including the French one, important chapters of violence and their ongoing relevance are not adequately discussed. In February 2005, the French National Assembly and Senate adopted a law obliging history textbooks to present the "positive role of the French presence overseas, particularly in North Africa", with no mention of the term "colonisation".[333] Following myriad internal and international pressures, the law was theatrically denounced by the president, yet never entirely repealed: in 2006, the Human Rights League of France noted a legal contortion allowing it to be "implemented by [the] ministry for more than two years" (at the time of publication), which resulted in overwhelmingly biased accounts of history in textbooks.[334] Benjamin Stora's 2021 report to Emmanuel Macron indicates there is still much room for improvement. Amongst numerous recommendations, he emphasised the importance of artistic expression in the various methods of writing and depicting history:

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[332] "Wade Davis: Cultures at the Far Edge of the World". *YouTube*, uploaded by TED, 12 Jan. 2017, https://youtu.be/bL7vK0pOvKI.

[333] "La Loi du 23 Février 2005: Texte et Réactions". *Cahiers d'histoire. Revue d'histoire critique*, 1 July 2009, http://journals.openedition.org/chrhc/1077.

[334] "Colonialisme: Application de l'Article 4 de la Loi du 23 Février 2005". *Ligue des Droits de l'Homme*, 6 Feb. 2006, https://www.ldh-france.org/6-fevrier-2006-Colonialisme/.

> But history cannot be written solely from state archives, as the archives are not without silences, without gaps, which we must also know how to question and interpret. Other archives must be searched, scrutinized, explored, those that send us back images, sounds, words of intimacy.[335]

In my mind, this speaks of the necessity to approach history – in particular the complex interwoven threads of Mediterranean heritage – with a spectral sensibility. In "Spectral spectralism" (see page 12) we have seen that creative applications of medievalism constitute a spectral form of historiography. Instead of stabilising the past, medievalist composers must find other tools to dialogue with history – here southern voices bring about even greater complexity, variegation and porosity. In their efforts to overcome Western metaphysics, Iain Chambers and Marta Cariello similarly call for a particular kind of maritime psychology, for "thinking *with* the Mediterranean"[336]:

> Unable to reduce the spatiotemporal heterogeneity of this stretch of water to a unique narrative, our language inevitably splutters on the edge of the unsaid and the indecipherable. The sea, with its fluid and tempestuous custody of the ebb and flow of histories we seek to know, frustrates our rationality. This maritime challenge suggests, beyond the more obvious appeal to the necessity of interdisciplinary and trans-national analyses, the registration of limits. Such borders are never simply barriers. They are also productive in their invitation to consider what exceeds our conception and control. [...] Europe has imposed a unity on what elsewhere carried multiple names. This distinction and fracture draws attention to a more open archive: one whose subaltern language is not merely of European provenance. At the same time, this is not to propose a separate alternative. Rather, these complexities take us to the underside and unconscious dimensions of a Mediterranean which, when laid out flat as the map, betrays all the limits of its modern European inscription.[337]

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[335] "Mais l'histoire ne peut s'écrire uniquement à partir des archives étatiques. Car les archives ne vont pas sans silences, sans lacunes, qu'il faut savoir aussi interroger et interpréter. D'autres archives doivent être fouillées, scrutées, explorées, celles qui nous renvoient des images, des sons, des mots de l'intimité". Stora, Benjamin. *Rapport sur les Questions Mémorielles Portant sur la Colonisation et la Guerre d'Algérie*. Jan. 2021, https://www.vie-publique.fr/sites/default/files/rapport/pdf/278186.pdf.

[336] Cariello, M., and I. M. Chambers. "Mediterranean Blues: Archives, Repertoires and the Black Holes of Modernity". *California Italian Studies*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2020, p. 2, http://dx.doi.org/10.5070/C3102048843.

[337] Cariello and Chambers, "Mediterranean Blues", p. 2.

Maritime, ornamental and spectral psychologies align as decolonial strategies in the "composition" of history, seeping through the seemingly invisible cracks of West-European representations. The concept of cosmopolitanism is not often examined from an ethnomusicological perspective, but it is relevant here; Thomas Turino defined it as such:

> Cosmopolitanism is a specific *type* of cultural formation and constitution of habitus that is translocal in purview. Because cosmopolitanism involves practices, material technologies and conceptual frameworks… it has to be realised in specific locations and in the lives of actual people. It is thus always localised and will be shaped by and somewhat distinct in each locale. Cosmopolitan cultural formations are therefore always simultaneously local and translocal.[338]

I present myself as a queer Corsican-Occitan composer working in London; despite all appearances, my histories and cultures are deeply rooted in this "foreign" landscape. It is my role to amplify these resonances, and in doing so, to improve people's ability to belong. My journeys through the Mediterranean are efforts of simultaneous rooting and worlding, towards Appiah's dream of "rooted cosmopolitanism".[339] These ancient repertoires are opportunities for me to expand my allegiances, to reclaim, protect and reinvent heritage. This *paghjella* transcends stylistic, temporal, geographical and institutional boundaries, it is a symbol of freedom.

5.9 Conclusion

Dipesh Chakrabarty calls for journeys beyond historicism, beyond the transition narratives of modernity, towards a present that is irreducibly not-one:

> Historicism is what made modernity or capitalism look not simply global, but rather as something that became global *over time*, by originating in one place (Europe) and then spreading outside it. This "first in Europe, then elsewhere" structure of global historical time was historicist; [...] It was historicism that allowed Marx to say that the "country that is more developed industrially only shows, to the less developed, the image of its own future". It is also what leads prominent historians such as Phyllis Deane to describe the coming of industries in England as the first industrial revolution. Historicism thus posited historical time as a measure of the cultural distance [...] that was assumed to exist between the West and the non-West. In the colonies, it legitimated the idea of civilization. In Europe itself, it made

[338] Turino, Thomas. *Nationalists, Cosmopolitans, and Popular Music in Zimbabwe*. University of Chicago Press, 2000, p. 7.

[339] Appiah, Anthony. *The Ethics of Identity*. Princeton University Press, 2005.

> possible completely internalist histories of Europe in which Europe was described as the site of the first occurrence of capitalism, modernity, or Enlightenment.[340]

The "anachronistic voice" of Grant Olwage is not dissimilar to the "peasant"[341] described by Dipesh Chakrabarty; figures of lack, relegated to the waiting room of modernity. This relationship clarifies the subordination processes at the heart of historicisation, necessary casualty in the fabrication of this mythical, hyperreal Europe. John Dagenais described the middle-ages as a "vastness of time ripe for colonial exploitation",[342] but I would like to suggest it is not an entirely passive or vulnerable entity. The voices of unwritten polyphonies, hailing from "subaltern" pasts, relentlessly reroute, expand our archives. In the institutional site of the conservatoire, whose knowledge protocols, like the university, "will always take us back to the terrain where all contours follow that of my hyperreal Europe",[343] these voices resist historicisation. When in classical music settings, performance practice of polyphonic works can represent a historicist agenda, oral tradition polyphonies constitute an intractable force of resistance and interrogation. From their timeless plane of existence, they shout "plenitude" and "creativity", when moderns read "lack" and "inadequacy".[344] Conservatoires can benefit from listening to the spectral timbres of Mediterranean voices, for they spell the decolonial power of West-European classical music. Far from solid ground, the traveler may then observe the shores and acquire richer coordinates for the mapping of home, for existing in the present:

> To attempt to provincialise this "Europe" is to see the modern as inevitably contested, to write over the given and privileged narratives of citizenship other narratives of human connections that draw sustenance from dreamed-up pasts and futures where collectivities are defined neither by the rituals of citizenship nor by the nightmare of "tradition" that "modernity" creates. There are of course no (infra)structural sites where such dreams could lodge themselves.[345]

It is the role of the composer to create such spaces, for these dreams find arid ground in Chakrabarty's

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[340] Chakrabarty, Dipesh. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton University Press, 2012, p. 7.

[341] Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, p. 11.

[342] Dagenais, John. "Decolonizing the Middle Ages: Introduction". *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, p. 431.

[343] Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, p. 45.

[344] Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, p. 35.

[345] Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, p. 48.

hyperreal Europe, they are “what the modern supresses in order to exist”.[346]

[346] Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, p. 48.

6 - Sound Installation

In July 2022, Guildhall New Music Society organised an event entitled “installations 2022”. Diverse sound works and experimental performances were featured simultaneously in the space of St Giles Cripplegate. In this reverberant gallery of sonic and theatrical experiences, people could stroll or sit down near a performer. My contribution to this event was a piece for medieval portative organ, saxophone (performed by Simeon May) and electronics inspired by the acoustics of St Giles Cripplegate.

Fig. 75. Simeon May and myself, “installations 2022”.[347]

Acoustic analysis can be conducted using an impulse response test, but my first objective was to *generate* materials derived from the sonic properties of the church. In his 1969 composition “I Am Sitting in a Room”, Alvin Lucier offered a strategy for achieving this objective. The piece begins with Lucier recording a spoken statement in which he describes the process he will undertake:

> I am sitting in a room different from the one you are in now. I am recording the sound of my speaking voice and I am going to play it back into the room again and again until the resonant

[347] Harrison, Harry. *St Giles Cripplegate*. 5 July 2022.

> frequencies of the room reinforce themselves so that any semblance of my speech, with perhaps the exception of rhythm, is destroyed. What you will hear, then, are the natural resonant frequencies of the room articulated by speech. I regard this activity not so much as a demonstration of a physical fact, but more as a way to smooth out any irregularities my speech might have.[348]

Following this, Lucier plays back the recording into the same room and records it again. This process is repeated multiple times, causing the room's natural resonant frequencies to gradually become more prominent. As the piece progresses, the original spoken statement becomes increasingly distorted and unintelligible, while the room's resonant frequencies begin to dominate the sound.

Lucier's technique offers a method for materialising the acoustic properties of a space. I adapted his process to generate sound materials for my composition. Instead of using speech, I broadcast a sine sweep through large speakers, recording and replaying it in cycles. This approach produced recordings with a broader spectrum and more unexpected sonic shapes than those based on speech or impulses. This process was carried out at night, in St Giles Cripplegate: the ascending sine sweep gradually morphed into a series of un-tempered pitches – a wave of sound that eventually came to rest on the highest portions of the spectrum. After several iterations, these final sections grew longer, developing textural depth and a sense of circular motion. My electronics were entirely derived from these fascinating materials, undergoing only minimal transformation. Each iteration was referred to as a "pass". Passes 9, 15, and 28 were among the most compelling, leading to the following spectral analyses:

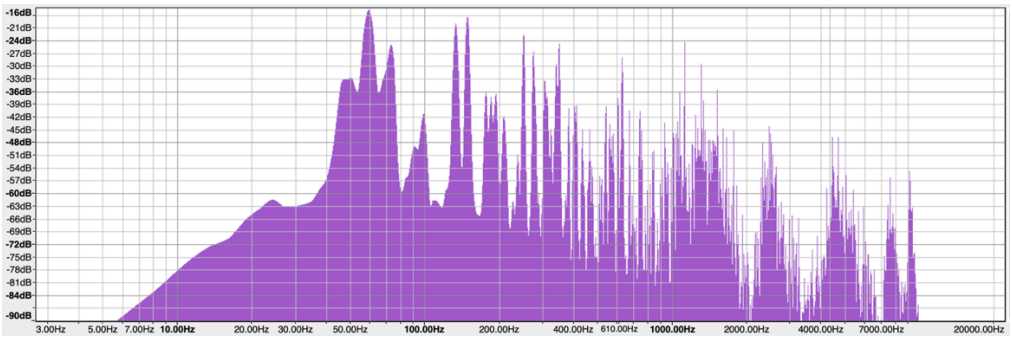

Fig. 76. Sine sweep in St Giles Cripplegate, Pass 9.

[348] Lucier, Alvin. *I Am Sitting in a Room*. Lovely Music, 1981.

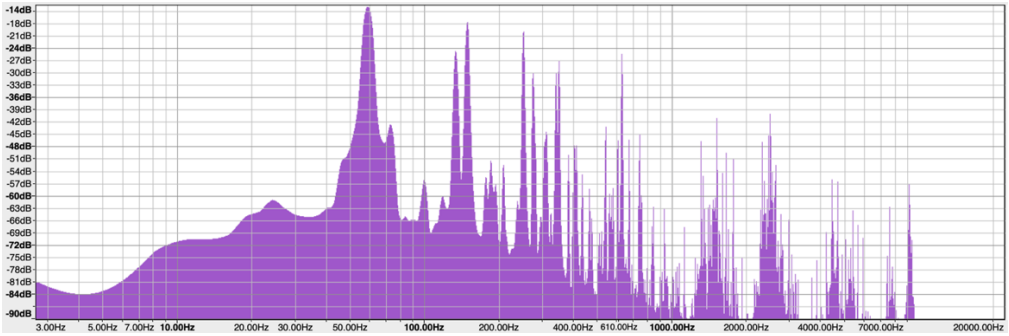

Fig. 77. Sine sweep in St Giles Cripplegate, Pass 15.

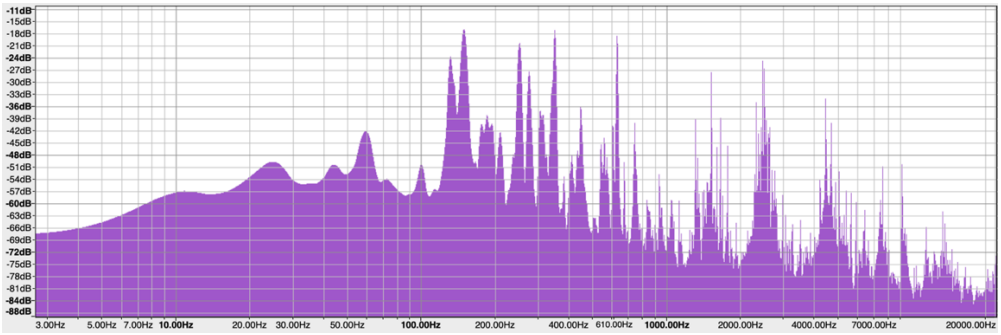

Fig. 78. Sine sweep in St Giles Cripplegate, Pass 28.

Jazz saxophonist Simeon May joined Idrîsî Ensemble in 2021, and as male voices, much of our practice centred around droning. This particular way of inhabiting time, space and togetherness naturally transpired into our piece. Saxophone and portative organ were surprisingly similar in their behaviour, sharing comparable timbres, pitch fluctuations, and note durations. Drawing on prominent pitches from the spectral analyses above, we explored the materiality of our combined timbres, and negotiated our breathing towards a trance-inducing, ever-shifting balance. Through experimentation, we identified our favourite pitches and established that the saxophone should play slightly below the organ (fluctuating between 0 and -13 cents) to create beatings that enlivened the sound. On the organ, tuning varies according to register and air pressure, it was therefore possible to instinctively interact with these subtle changes. This exercise proved immensely satisfying, both sonically and physically, allowing us to sustain a single note for extended periods without fatigue. It provided us with a rare sense of peace and communion in London. In light of these acoustic interplays, we resolved to perform in unison as much as possible, while also giving the illusion of a continuous sound. In order to conceal my instrumental breaths within the sound of the saxophone, I took advantage of the moiré effect resulting from our acoustic beats. Using these irregularities together with a careful handling of dynamics and tuning, taking a breath could be heard as a resolution of frequencies between both instruments. The organ's softer tone proved advantageous in this regard; it also facilitated the gradual introduction of richer harmonies. When Simeon breathes, it presents an opportunity to augment the

drone with additional notes, crafting a stylised form of resonance that appears to linger between breaths. This alternation between single notes and their "resonant" counterparts prefigured the poetic and musical structures of the piece.

In the recording, the relationship between the instrumental sections and electronics is readily discernible. Droning on a single note acts as a magical gate gradually revealing the resonances of the space. Like an incantation, its incessant repetition eventually penetrates and energises the architecture, prompting it to reverberate in response. Various waves of sound (passes 9, 15, 28 and 30) supersede the instruments, disclosing the broader geometric and ecological systems to which they belong.

There is no formal score for this piece; instead, an Ableton project served as the foundation for the performance. My hand-drawn guide resembled the structure outlined below: electronic waves of sound are indicated at the top, while drone pitches (and harmony pitches in smaller font) are displayed underneath. Additionally, tuning is annotated as cent deviations from equal temperament.

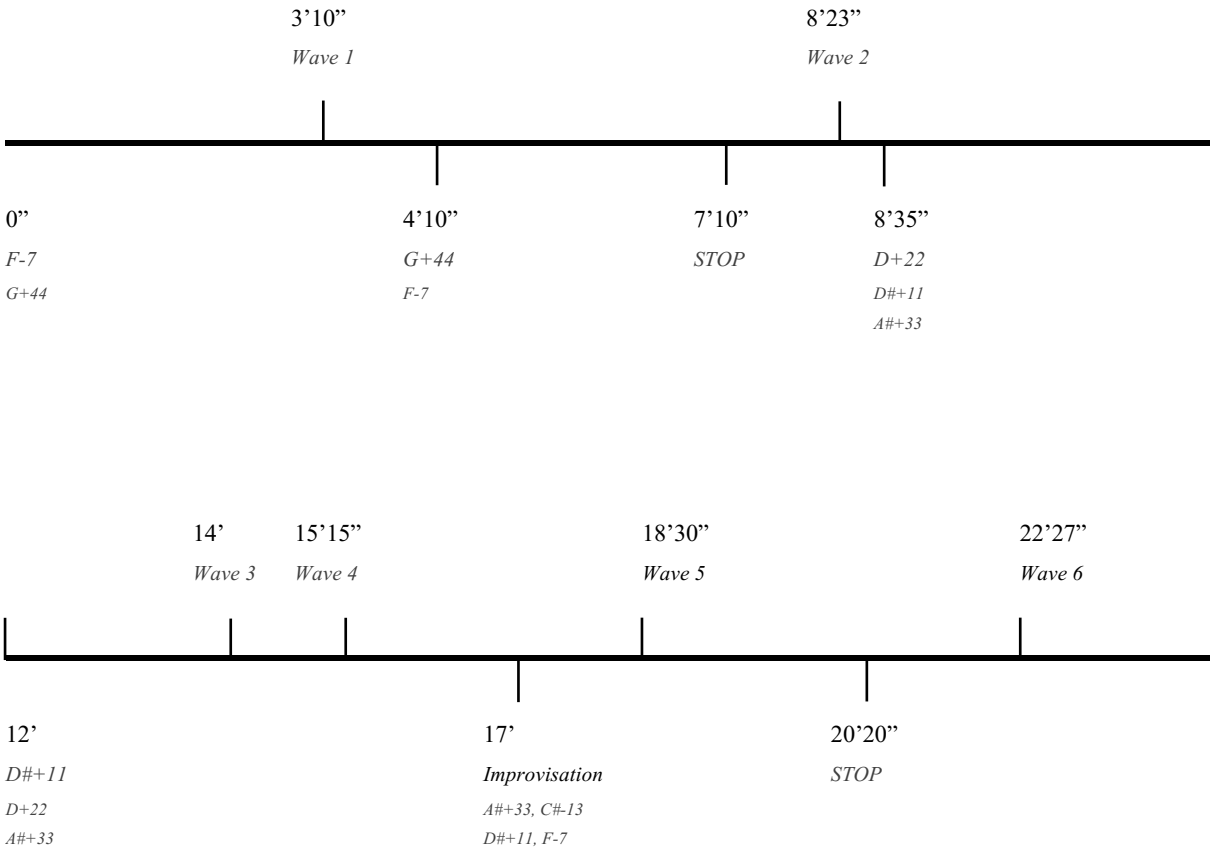

Fig. 79. Structure of "Sound Installation".

I have already explained the concept of extended liminality introduced by Steve Lehman,[349] which pertains to alternative leadership dynamics. Throughout this project, I have expanded upon this idea with a spectral-medievalist exploration of perception thresholds, alternative spiritualities, as well as aesthetical, historical and temporal ambiguities. In "Se vous n'estes", I chose to superimpose two nearly identical layers of sound (live and pre-recorded acoustic instruments), thereby blurring the boundary between electronic and live acoustic performance. I employed the same strategy for the sound installation: pre-recorded sections were introduced alongside live instruments, often supporting them, and sometimes taking over. This method allowed acoustic instruments to seamlessly blend into the electronic soundscape, facilitating acoustic transformations and dramatic transitions from delicate, intimate sounds to powerful, overwhelming electronics.

In this project however, a spectral transformation could not be deemed complete without also resonating with the spiritual voices of imagined pasts. It begins with bells and crickets: I previously discovered that slowing down and transposing the highest partials of a recording could produce a chiming texture evocative of bells. This time, true cattle bells and crickets were introduced without any transition, and with minimal electronic processing (reverb and resonators): it is a poetic leap, a variation in my ongoing dialogue between spectralism and spectrality. I was experiencing extreme exhaustion and my sole ambition was to create spaces where I could find rest and experience human connection. For me, this soundscape was also the physical manifestation of a trance state resulting from our repeated spells. This sense of peaceful disorientation must have been particularly palpable for Simeon, who relied on extended breaths to sustain our drones.

Finally, voices from a bygone era emerge, singing a forgotten tradition: the early morning harvests of June and July, when children could freely sing and roam. This field recording, a *tribbiera*, was collected by Felix Quilici in the 1960s.[350] In Corsica, the *tribbiera* is both an ancestral agricultural technique and a song associated with this practice. It involves husking wheat after the harvest on a threshing floor, known as the *aghja*, to separate the grains from the ears. During this process, men turn the straw in song while two oxen pull a heavy stone to promote separation. The *aghja* serves not only as a space for agricultural know-how, but also as a sacred site where various signs and omens are observed, offering insights into the community's future.[351] This intersection between agrarian techniques and circumambulation rites (or the act of moving around a sacred object) is once again representative of heterogenous spiritualities, existing in a continuum, bridging divides

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[349] Lehman, Stephen H. *Liminality As a Framework for Composition: Rhythmic Thresholds, Spectral Harmonies and Afrological Improvisation*. 2012, p. 41.

[350] Quilici, Félix, Ghjuvanteramu Rocchi, Petru Grimaldi, Jean-André Culioli, and Charles Rocchi. *Corsica: Chants de Tradition Orale : 73 Documents Sonores Inclus*. Éditions Alain Piazzola, 2018.

[351] Fogacci, Tony. "Actions de médiation autour du spectacle *Tribbiera*". *Isula.corsica*, 2021, www.isula.corsica/culture/agenda/Actions-de-mediation-autour-du-spectacle-Tribbiera-Scola-di-Musica-Populare-Ajaccio_ae700564.html.

between populations and their designated others. In the context of St Giles Cripplegate (an ancient Saxon site) these voices can also act as catalysts for the remembrance of our own landscapes and lifestyles.

This piece represents a synthesis of various approaches I have cultivated throughout this project. It incorporates aspects of authorship dissolution, circular temporality, and extended liminalities, as found in "Se vous n'estes". It also delves into the liminal spaces between positive and negative outlines, and the interplay between minute details and their broader sound ecologies, reminiscent of "Quintina". Furthermore, it echoes "subtiliorbeats" as a medievalist twist on a typically post-modern experience. Through spectral engagement with history, the composition aims to create sonic representations of memory, to express the existence of a rich and multifaceted "now".

Finally, the piece alludes to ancient speculative ideals and their spiritual cosmologies, as exemplified in the traditional polyphonies of my native island. By studying the principles of harmony, resonance, and proportion in music, medieval thinkers believed they could gain insight into the mysteries of the divine and the workings of the cosmos. Just like the Greek monochord, instruments such as the organistrum were used as tools of mathematical knowledge, providing bridges for ideas to descend from higher planes into the physical world. For instance, the organistrum's central place amidst the twenty-four elders of the Apocalypse of the Gate of Glory at the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela and the collegiate church of Toro may carry significant symbolism. According to Thomas Connoly, it symbolises spiritual and mathematical speculation, progress towards the divine essence, and tuning in to a new order.[352] Such awareness likely fostered a special focus on elemental processes in medieval music making, one comparable to that of spectral composers. In this sound installation, our instruments are similarly represented as catalysts opening doors to invisible knowledge.

Corsican songs, originating from the necessities of manual labor, often conveyed profound sorrow and were seldom performed for an audience. The drones in this composition may also serve as a private, mournful prayer, expressing a longing for ever-deeper connections with diverse places and memories, and reflecting on the divinatory nature of musical vibrations.

[352] Connolly, Thomas. "Entering the Lord's Joy: Musical Symbolism at Church Doorways". *Los instrumentos del Pórtico de la Gloria: Su reconstrucción y la música de su tiempo*, edited by J. López-Calo, Fundación Barrié, 2002, p. 74.

7. Conclusion

At the heart of this study is the mediation of disparate areas of research, freely combined and transformed through practice-based enquiries. Spectral medievalism is a triple hybrid, where medievalism, spectralism and spectrality act as catalysts for creative and critical engagement with tradition. We have seen that medievalism cannot be dissociated from political projects of modernity, identity, progress, or change. Positioning myself in this place of in-between has forced me to engage with the various ways in which my training, identities, and practices may perpetuate, enrich, or disrupt these projects.

Within this framework, compositional devices become interconnected hybrids with diverse musical and ethical implications. In my compositions, time does not solely reflect medieval-liminal states of expansion, contraction, repetition, and stasis, but becomes an ethical force probing stylistic, ideological, and academic inquiries. Melodic writing is hybridised through new logogenetic devices, proto-spectral structures, medieval musicology, oral tradition, and pastiche, but also embodies forms of *ornamentalism* as resistance and revendication. Spectral concerns of sound as a living entity merge with embodied musicological research, oral traditions, and the ecologies necessary for their survival; resulting in various degrees of authorial dissolution, multiple manuscript sources, and more fluid composer-performer hierarchies.

In her introduction to *Postcolonial Readings of Music in World Literature*, Cameron Fae Bushnell reads Western classical music as "representative of imperial cultural dominance", yet she also believes it simultaneously suggests "resistant structures, forms, and practices that challenge imperial hegemony".[353] In the course of this practise-based exploration, I have gradually awakened to the practical ways in which medievalist composers may indeed find resistance strategies from within. And most important of those modes of resistance in my practice are alternative approaches to plainchant, micro-intonation, ornamentation, troubadour song, vocal technique and oral tradition.

In *Culture and Imperialism* Edward Said retold that nations are narrations.[354] Stories are at the heart of our struggles for power and territory; obtaining and maintaining power has always been dependent on the ability to shape narratives. Medieval music and especially liturgical music carry extraordinary power in the collective imaginary. Through performance practice, I have demonstrated that diverse medievalisms may help reshape these narratives. Updating the curriculum in the realms of plainchant, troubadour music and polyphony would certainly lead to significant philosophical and

[353] Bushnell, Cameron F. A. E. *Postcolonial Readings of Music in World Literature*. Routledge, 2017, p. 4.

[354] Said, Edward W. *Culture and Imperialism*. Vintage, 1994, p. xiii.

technical breakthroughs: in this context, what would then constitute a "good" melody? What types of cultural heritage would constitute an advantage in the classroom? Could embodied knowledge, orality-focused practices, and community-building become essential components of a composer's education? Could conventional signifiers of otherness (specific vocal techniques, timbres, micro-intonation, ornamentation, heterophony, orality) be reclaimed as part of diverse European histories and identities? Would maritime, ornamental, spectral, endangered and nonmodern musical psychologies become powerful tools for critical and creative engagement with classical music cultures? If that is the case, medievalist composers may emerge as important disruptors in the perpetuation of colonial legacy.

In literary studies, this approach has been popularised by thinkers such as Sharon Kinoshita, who problematises over-simplistic conceptions of alterity and conflict (including in postcolonial discourse), and reads medieval artefacts as opportunities to rethink these dichotomisations and challenge modern categories of identity.[355] I contend that Old Roman chant is one such artefact. While some distinguished authors insist on describing "the monophonic music of the Latin West" as "solely indigenous",[356] engaging with medieval manuscripts and uncovering the cultural stratifications they contain can profoundly expand a composer's imagination. For instance, Neil Moran demonstrated the Palestinian origins of part of our repertory:

> The preservation of the ancient medial second mode Palestinian chant "Crucem tuam" in the Old Roman repertoire as well as the Old Roman versions in Aquitanian sources, at St Gall and in the Metz tonary run counter to any theory of a GALL to GREG to ROM flow.[357]

These publications not only challenge notions of foundational purity and conventional progress narratives, but may also provide composers with substantive frameworks for engaging with contemporary society. Similarly, Leo Lousberg's thesis linking microtones and rhetoric can offer powerful and never-explored creative pathways for composers.[358]

Nonmodern philosophy facilitates an examination of the sustainability of hegemonic conceptions of progress, and the underpinnings of modernity itself. Bruno Latour argues that nonmoderns embrace complexity and interconnectedness; they foresee a future where we establish

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[355] Kinoshita, Sharon. *Medieval Boundaries: Rethinking Difference in Old French Literature*. 2013.

[356] Nowacki, Edward. *Greek and Latin Music Theory: Principles and Challenges*. University of Rochester Press, 2020, p. 1.

[357] Moran, Neil K. "A Second Medial Mode Palestinian Chant in Old Roman, Beneventan and Frankish Sources". *Plainsong and Medieval Music*, vol. 19, 2010, pp. 1-19.

[358] Lousberg, L.A.G. *Microtones According to Augustine: Neumes, Semiotics and Rhetoric in Romano-Frankish Liturgical Chant*. Utrecht University, 2018, https://dspace.library.uu.nl/handle/1874/369247.

more robust relationships with diverse groups and "aliens", rather than promoting difference and detachment.[359] Medievalists follow a similar impulse; they work away from the glamour of Darwinian narratives and revolutions, from fully stable and constituted objects, they want to be more "fully attached".[360] In this way medievalists may naturally be aligned with the attitudes of decolonisation activists. We want to embrace various aliens, hybrids, spectres, and other medusas as already belonging to the conservatoire mythology.[361] Nonmodern creators can enrich their institutions by leveraging the classical music concept of an intellectual tradition (however fabricated) tracing back to the Ancient Greeks, and help them redefine classical values in postcolonial terms.

Indeed, medievalism encourages us to incorporate regional intangible heritage into our practices, uncovering alternative legitimacies, timelines, histories, and structures of knowledge production. As a Corsican with a family speaking Occitan and French, I may reclaim my oral traditions without a modernist update, and defend them as valid, original forms of knowledge production within the institution. For instance, in our recording of "Ar em al freg temps vengut" (cf. Appendix 2) one can hear singer Noémie Ducimetière embody principles of *mouvance*, Old Roman chant and Corsican ornamentation in troubadour performance. Noémie, a consummate musician, singer, songwriter, film composer, and sound artist, initially lacked familiarity with classical music notation. However, she has since achieved fluency in Old Roman chant notation. As a medievalist composer, this development inspires my practice to evolve, and become increasingly academically rigorous *as it becomes* more inclusive.

Medievalists and spectralists may help steer our collective imaginary towards a renegotiation of modern "classical" ideals in nonmodern and postcolonial terms. The ancient Mediterranean, intrinsically woven into this narrative, always already complicates postcolonial discourses of alterity and conflict. As a realm of porous borders, fluid identities, and ceaseless negotiations and contradictions, the medieval Mediterranean disrupts conventional musicology, historiography, and identity constructs. By returning European history to the sea (alongside plainchant and troubadour song) we can observe and renegotiate their contours and constitution. I argue that meaningful psychological change may come about if we adapt our understanding, teaching, and performance of these key building blocks of our identities. In doing so, diverse creators may also gain the tools to reclaim other facets of their heritage, establishing legitimate spaces for traditions, knowledge, and

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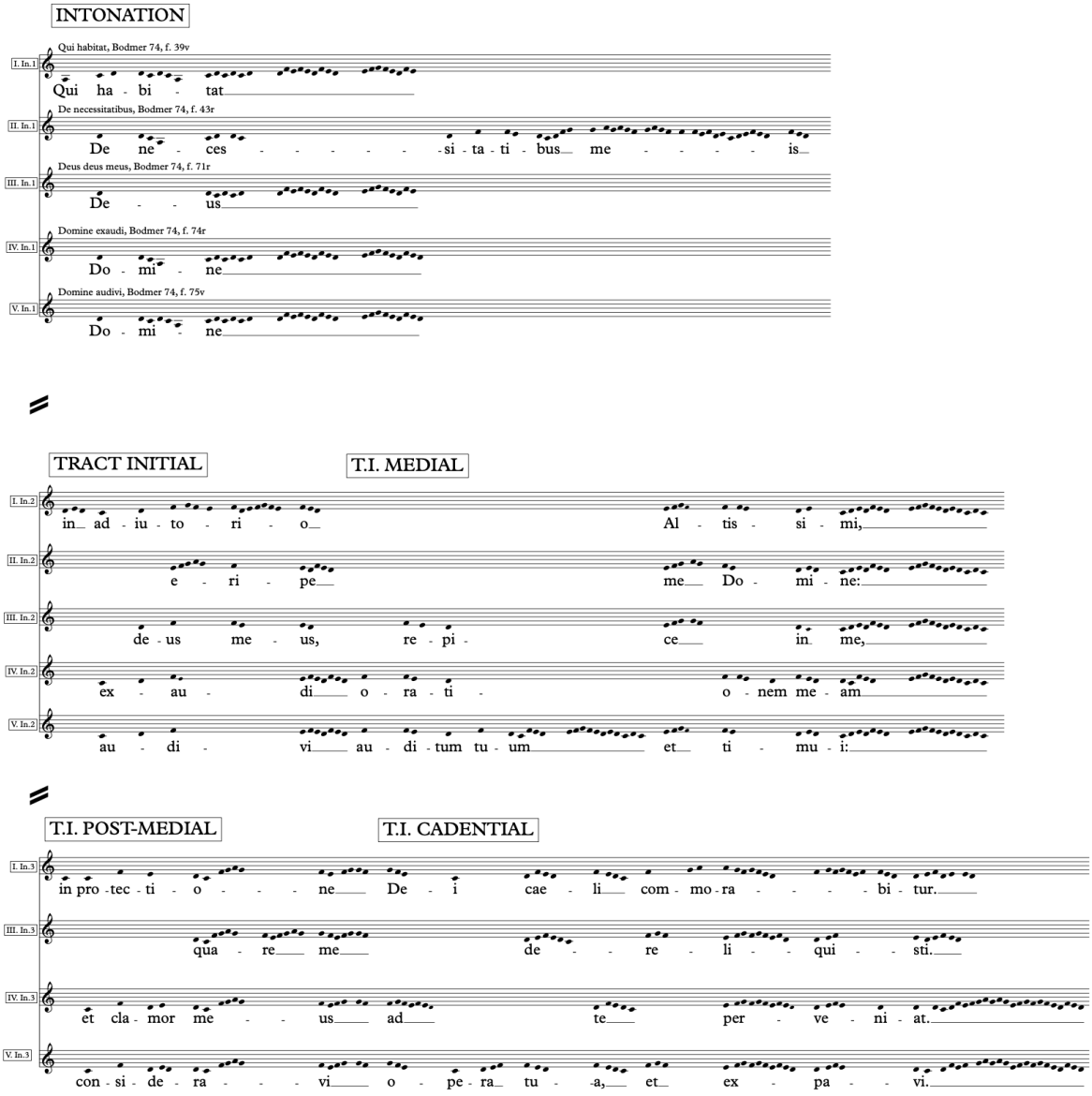
[359] Latour, Bruno. *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy*. Translated by Catherine Porter, Harvard University Press, 2009, p. 191.

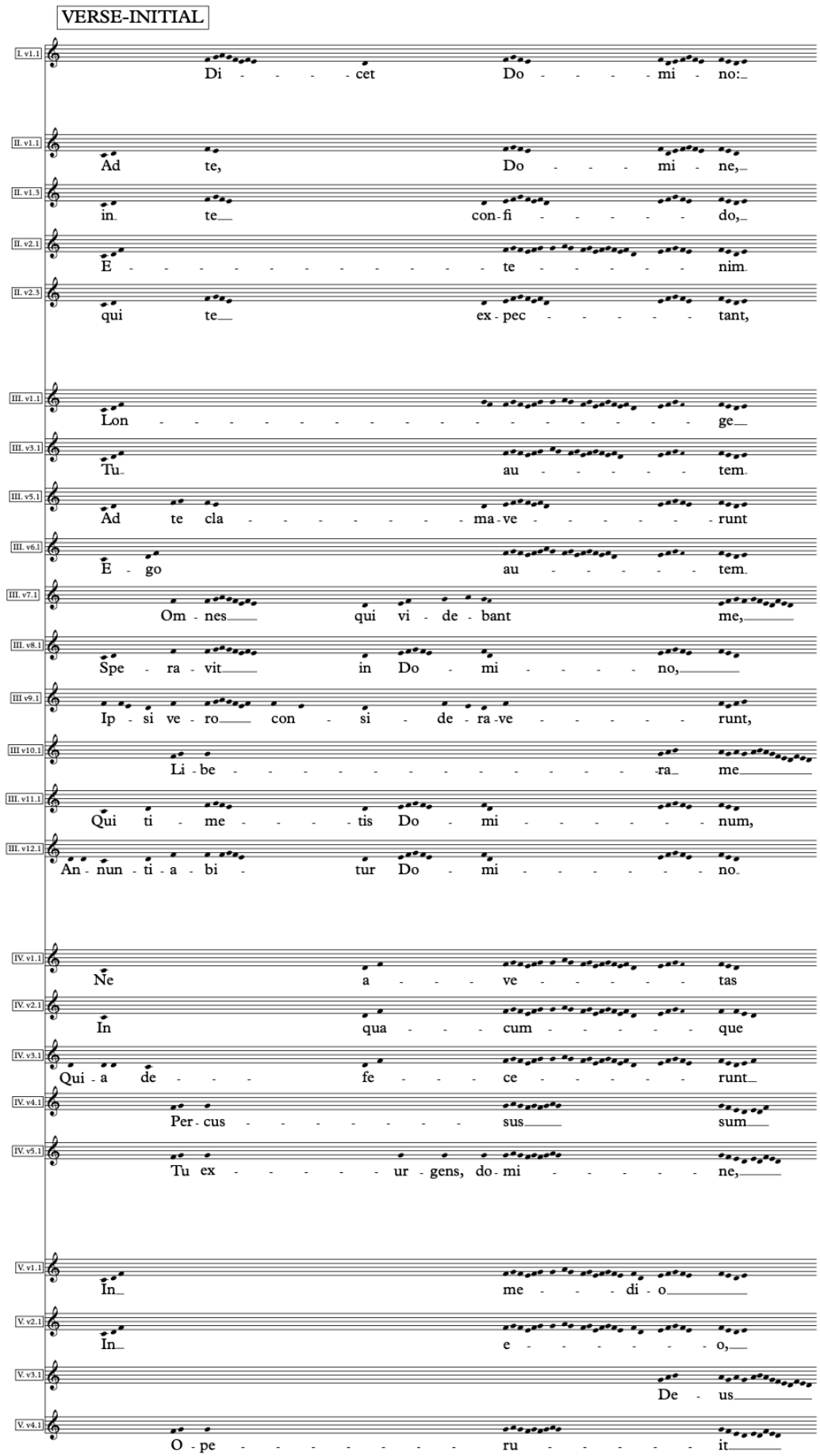
[360] Latour, *Politics of Nature*, p. 191.

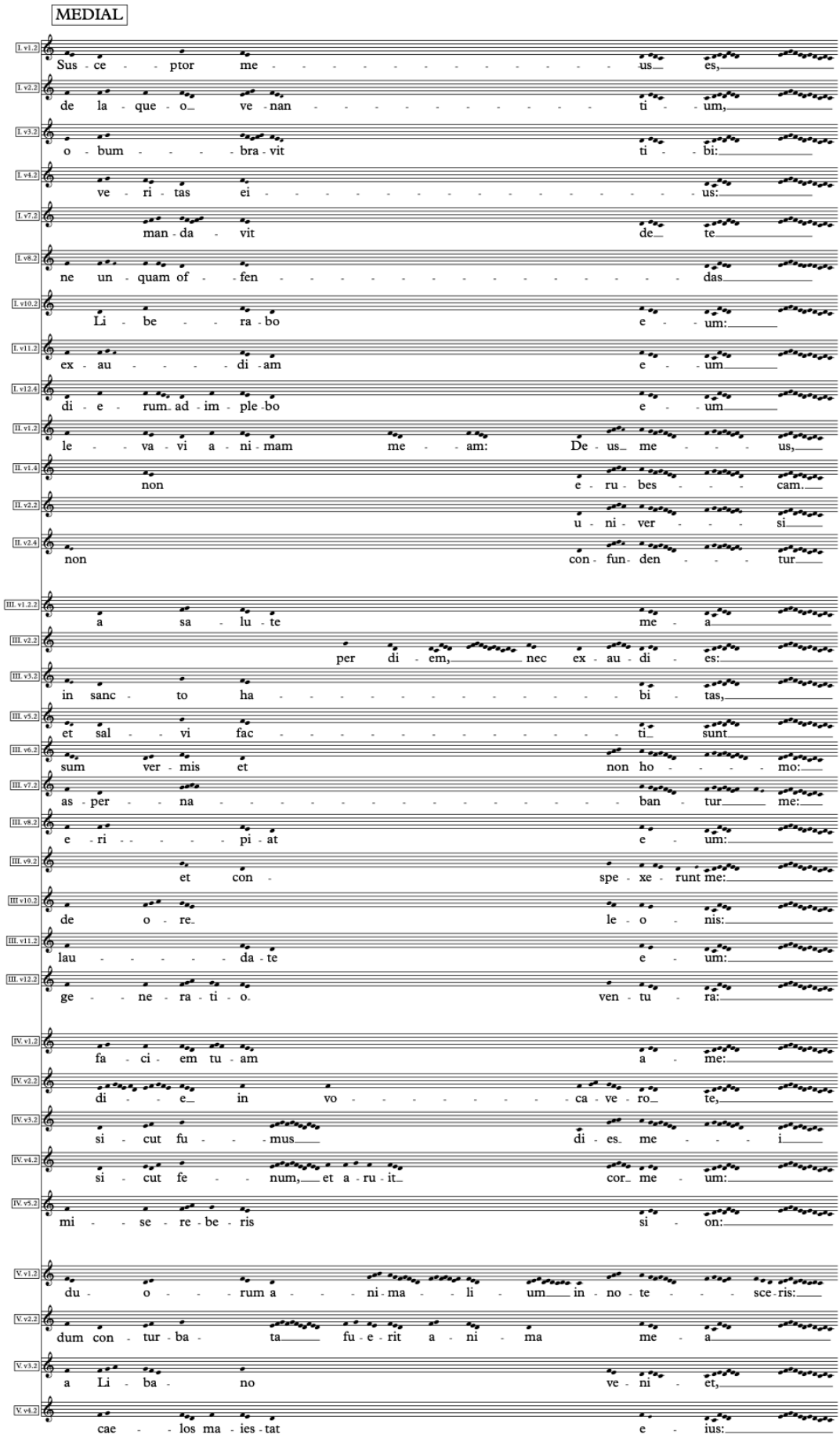
[361] One could argue that modernist composers indeed embraced the art of complex ambiguities, but they adhered more firmly than ever to a progressivist, linear narrative of music history. This approach created "winners" and "losers" within a neo-conservative framework of intellectual "excellence" in Eurocentric terms.

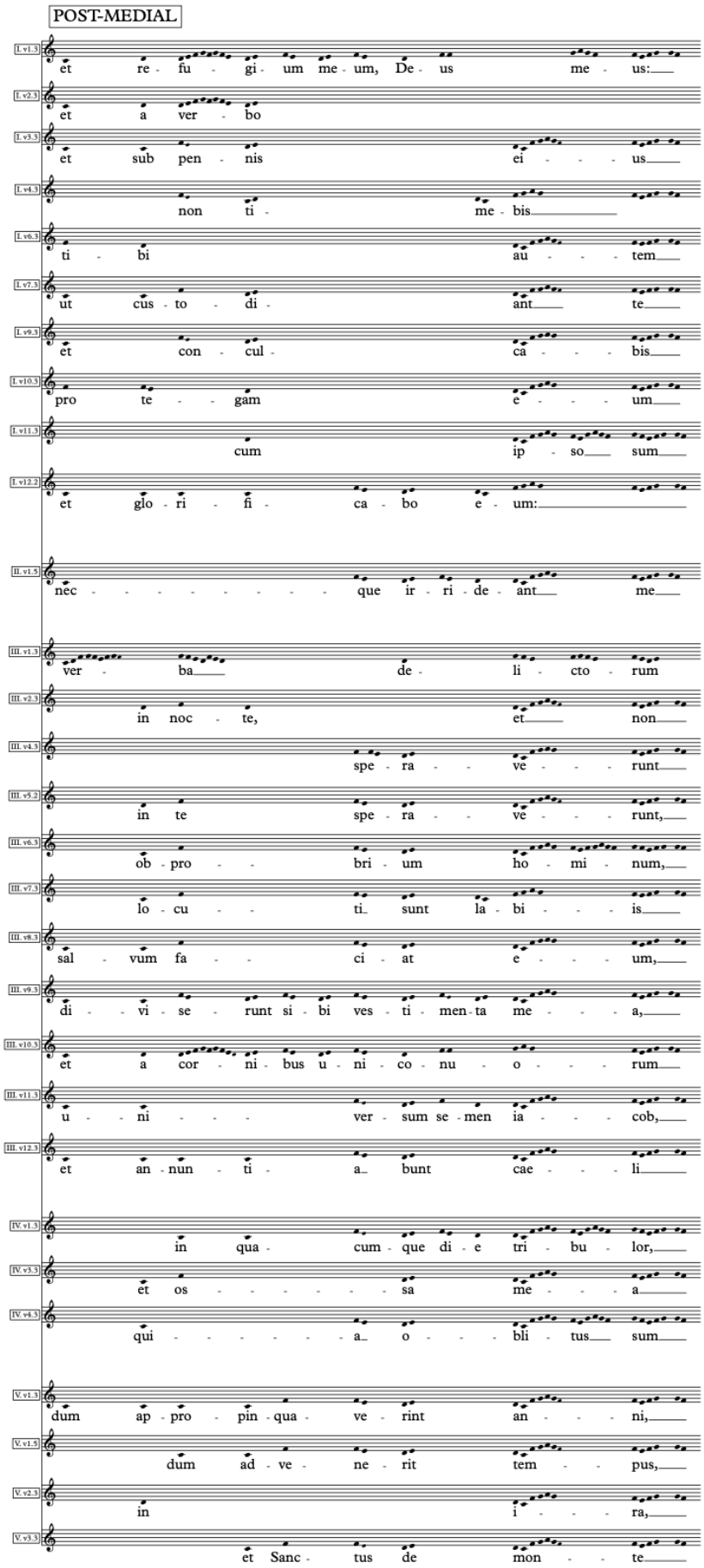
modes of being otherwise deemed inferior or beyond the scope of classical music. The demands and challenges of novel scholarship will propel us to forge new structures, seeking knowledge, skills, musicians, and students that do not exist yet in the conservatoire.

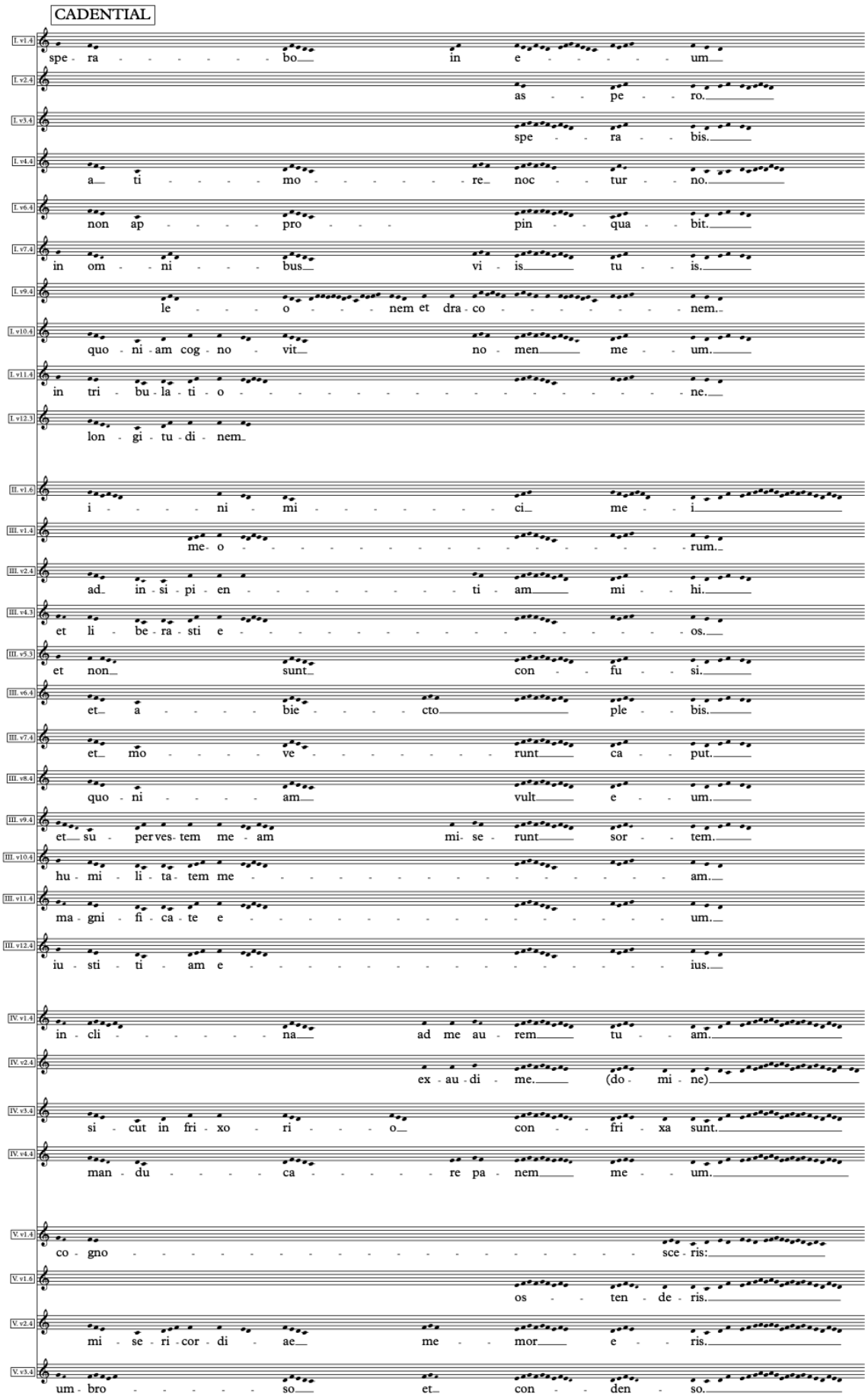
APPENDIX 1 – Comparative notations of Old Roman plagal D tracts

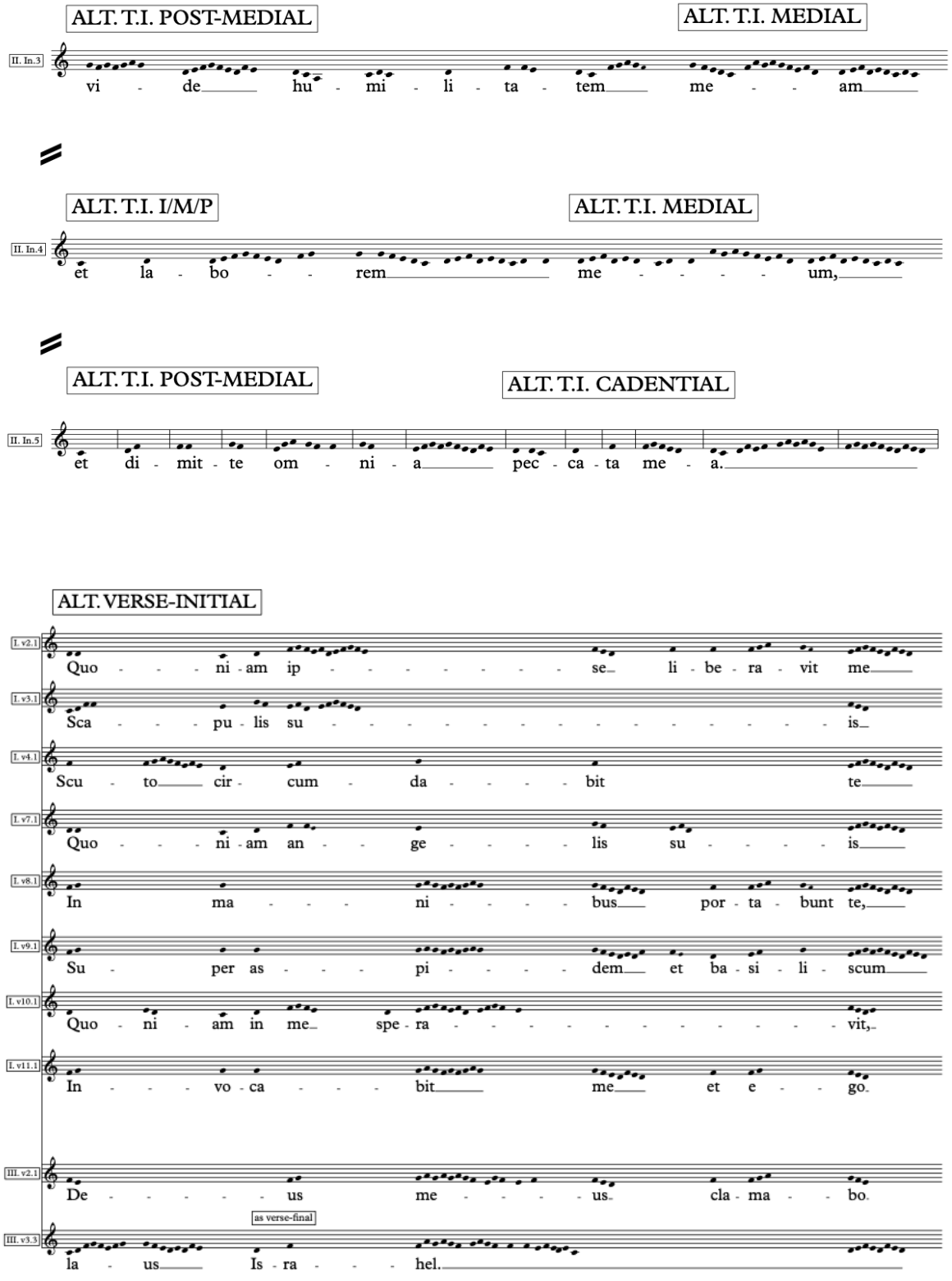


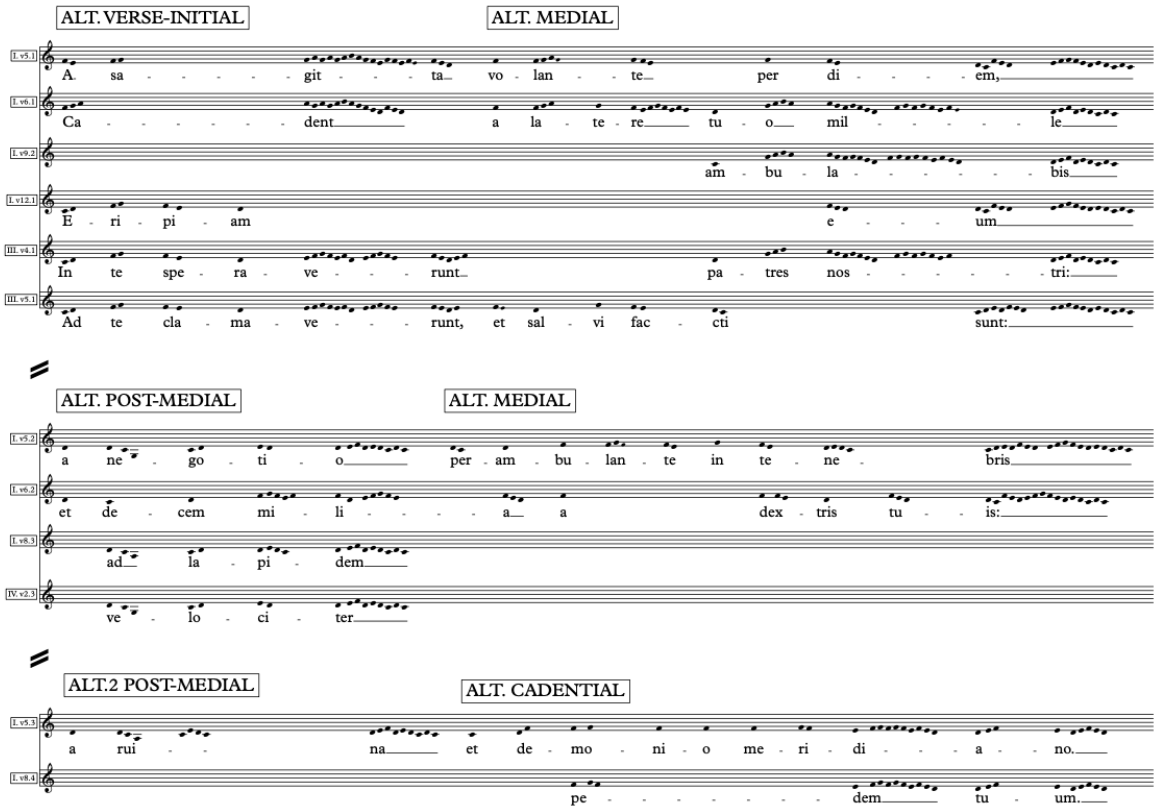

VERSE-INITIAL
I. v1.1
Di - - - - cet Do - - - - mi - no:
II. v1.1
Ad te, Do - - - mi - ne,
II. v1.3
in te con - fi - - - - - do,
II. v2.1
E - - - - - - - - - - - - te - - - - - nim
II. v2.3
qui te ex - pec - - - - - tant,
III. v1.1
Lon - ge
III. v3.1
Tu au - - - - - tem
III. v5.1
Ad te cla - - - - - - - ma - ve - - - - - - runt
III. v6.1
E - go au - - - - - tem
III. v7.1
Om - nes qui vi - de - bant me,
III. v8.1
Spe - ra - vit in Do - mi - - - - no,
III v9.1
Ip - si ve - ro con - si - de - ra - ve - - - - - runt,
III v10.1
Li - be - - - - - - - - - - - - - ra me
III. v11.1
Qui ti - me - - - - tis Do - mi - - - - - - num,
III. v12.1
An - nun - ti - a - bi - tur Do - mi - - - - - - no
IV. v1.1
Ne a - - - ve - - - - - tas
IV. v2.1
In qua - - - cum - - - - - que
IV. v3.1
Qui - a de - - - fe - - - ce - - - - - runt
IV. v4.1
Per - cus - - - - - - - - sus sum
IV. v5.1
Tu ex - - - - - - ur - gens, do - mi - - - - - - ne,
V. v1.1
In me - - - di - o
V. v2.1
In e - - - - - - o,
V. v3.1
De - us
V. v4.1
O - pe - - - - - - - - ru - - - - - - it

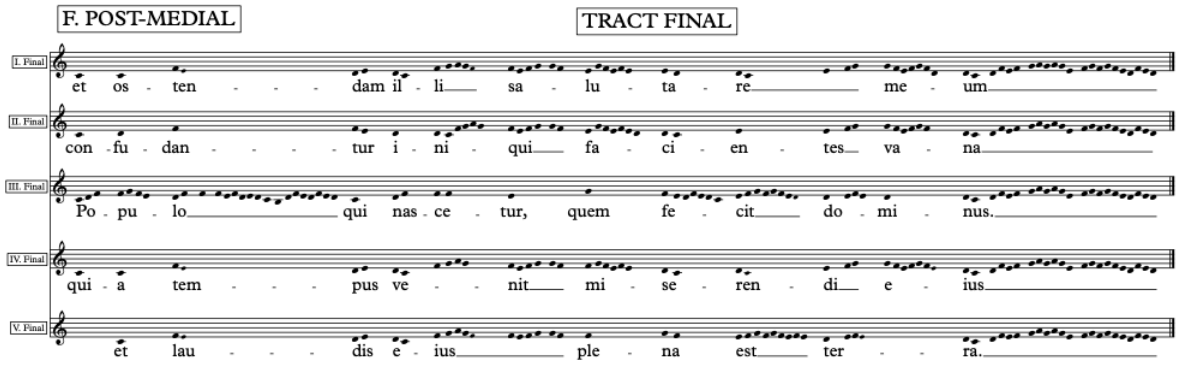

MEDIAL
I. v1.2 Sus - ce - - ptor me - - - - - - - - - - - - - - us es,
I. v2.2 de la - que - o ve - nan - - - - - - - - - - - - - ti - um,
I. v3.2 o - bum - - - - bra - vit ti - - bi:
I. v4.2 ve - ri - tas ei - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - us:
I. v7.2 man - da - vit de te
I. v8.2 ne un - quam of - - fen - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - das
I. v10.2 Li - be - - - ra - bo e - - um:
I. v11.2 ex - au - - - - - di - am e - - um
I. v12.4 di - e - rum ad - im - ple - bo e - - um
II. v1.2 le - - va - vi a - ni - mam me - am: De - us me - - - - us,
II. v1.4 non e - ru - bes - - - - cam.
II. v2.2 u - ni - ver - - - - si
II. v2.4 non con - fun - den - - - - tur
III. v1.2.2 a sa - lu - te me - a
III. v2.2 per di - em, nec ex - au - di - es:
III. v3.2 in sanc - to ha - - - - - - - - - - - - - bi - tas,
III. v5.2 et sal - - vi fac - - - - - - - - - - - - - ti sunt
III. v6.2 sum ver - mis et non ho - - - - - mo:
III. v7.2 as - per - - na - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - ban - tur me:
III. v8.2 e - ri - - - - - pi - at e - um:
III. v9.2 et con - spe - xe - runt me:
III v10.2 de o - re - le - o - nis:
III. v11.2 lau - - - - - da - te e - um:
III. v12.2 ge - - ne - ra - ti - o ven - tu - ra:
IV. v1.2 fa - ci - em tu - am a - me:
IV. v2.2 di - - e in vo - - - - - - - - - ca - ve - ro te,
IV. v3.2 si - cut fu - - - mus di - es me - - - - i
IV. v4.2 si - cut fe - - num, et a - ru - it cor me - um:
IV. v5.2 mi - - se - re - be - ris si - on:
V. v1.2 du - o - - - rum a - - - ni - ma - - li - um in - no - te - - - - sce - ris:
V. v2.2 dum con - tur - ba - ta fu - e - rit a - ni - ma me - a
V. v3.2 a Li - ba - no ve - ni - et,
V. v4.2 cae - - los ma - ies - tat e - ius:


POST-MEDIAL
I. v1.3 et re - fu - gi - um me - um, De - us me - us:
I. v2.3 et a ver - bo
I. v3.3 et sub pen - nis ei - - - us
I. v4.3 non ti - me - bis
I. v6.3 ti - bi au - - - tem
I. v7.3 ut cus - to - di - ant te
I. v9.3 et con - cul - ca - - - bis
I. v10.3 pro te - - gam e - - - um
I. v11.3 cum ip - so sum
I. v12.2 et glo - ri - fi - ca - bo e - um:
II. v1.5 nec - - - - - - - - que ir - ri - de - ant me
III. v1.3 ver - ba de - li - cto - rum
III. v2.3 in noc - te, et non
III. v4.3 spe - ra - - ve - - - runt
III. v5.2 in te spe - ra - - ve - - - runt,
III. v6.3 ob - pro - - bri - um ho - mi - num,
III. v7.3 lo - cu - - ti_ sunt la - bi - - - is
III. v8.3 sal - vum fa - - ci - at e - - - um,
III. v9.3 di - - vi - se - runt si - bi ves - ti - men - ta me - - - a,
III. v10.3 et a cor - ni - bus u - ni - co - nu - o - - - rum
III. v11.3 u - - ni - - - ver - sum se - men ia - - - cob,
III. v12.3 et an - nun - ti - a_ bunt cae - - - li
IV. v1.3 in qua - cum - que di - e tri - bu - lor,
IV. v3.3 et os - - - - - - sa me - - - a
IV. v4.3 qui - - - - - - - a_ o - - - bli - tus sum
V. v1.3 dum ap - pro - pin - qua - ve - rint an - - - ni,
V. v1.5 dum ad - ve - ne - rit tem - - pus,
V. v2.3 in i - - - ra,
V. v3.3 et Sanc - tus de mon - - te


CADENTIAL
I. v1.4 spe - ra - - - - - - bo in e - - - - - um
I. v2.4 as - pe - ro.
I. v3.4 spe - ra - bis.
I. v4.4 a ti - - - - mo - - - - - re noc - tur - no.
I. v6.4 non ap - - - - pro - - - pin - qua - bit.
I. v7.4 in om - ni - - - bus vi - is tu - is.
I. v9.4 le - - - o - - - nem et dra - co - - - - - - - nem.
I. v10.4 quo - ni - am cog - no - vit no - men me - um.
I. v11.4 in tri - bu - la - ti - o - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - ne.
I. v12.3 lon - gi - tu - di - nem
II. v1.6 i - - - - ni - mi - - - - - - - ci me - i
III. v1.4 me - o - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - rum.
III. v2.4 ad in - si - pi - en - - - - - - - - - ti - am mi - hi.
III. v4.3 et li - be - ra - sti e - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - os.
III. v5.3 et non sunt con - fu - si.
III. v6.4 et a - - - - bie - - - - cto ple - bis.
III. v7.4 et mo - - - - ve - - - - - - - runt ca - put.
III. v8.4 quo - ni - - - - am vult e - um.
III. v9.4 et su - per ves - tem me - am mi - se - runt sor - tem.
III. v10.4 hu - mi - li - ta - tem me - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - am.
III. v11.4 ma - gni - fi - ca - te e - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - um.
III. v12.4 iu - sti - ti - am e - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - ius.
IV. v1.4 in - cli - - - - - - na ad me au - rem tu - am.
IV. v2.4 ex - au - di - me. (do - mi - ne)
IV. v3.4 si - cut in fri - xo - ri - - - o con - fri - xa sunt.
IV. v4.4 man - du - - - - ca - - - - - re pa - nem me - um.
V. v1.4 co - gno - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - sce - ris:
V. v1.6 os - ten - de - ris.
V. v2.4 mi - se - ri - cor - di - ae me - mor e - ris.
V. v3.4 um - bro - - - - - so et con - den - so.


ALT. T.I. POST-MEDIAL
ALT. T.I. MEDIAL
II. In.3
vi - de hu - mi - li - ta - tem me - - am
ALT. T.I. I/M/P
ALT. T.I. MEDIAL
II. In.4
et la - bo - - rem me - - - - - um,
ALT. T.I. POST-MEDIAL
ALT. T.I. CADENTIAL
II. In.5
et di - mit - te om - ni - a pec - ca - ta me - a.
ALT. VERSE-INITIAL
I. v2.1
Quo - - - ni - am ip - - - - - - - - se li - be - ra - vit me
I. v3.1
Sca - - - pu - lis su - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - is
I. v4.1
Scu - to cir - cum - da - - - - bit te
I. v7.1
Quo - - - ni - am an - - ge - - - - lis su - - - - is
I. v8.1
In ma - - - ni - - - - bus por - ta - bunt te,
I. v9.1
Su - per as - - - pi - - - - dem et ba - si - li - scum
I. v10.1
Quo - ni - am in me spe - ra - - - - - - - - - - vit,
I. v11.1
In - - - - vo - ca - - - - bit me et e - - go.
III. v2.1
De - - - - - - us me - - - - - us cla - ma - - bo.
as verse-final
III. v3.3
la - us Is - ra - - - hel.


ALT. VERSE-INITIAL
ALT. MEDIAL
I. v5.1
A sa git ta vo lan te per di em,
I. v6.1
Ca dent a la te re tu o mil le
I. v9.2
am bu la bis
I. v12.1
E ri pi am e um
III. v4.1
In te spe ra ve runt pa tres nos tri:
III. v5.1
Ad te cla ma ve runt, et sal vi fac cti sunt:
ALT. POST-MEDIAL
ALT. MEDIAL
I. v5.2
a ne go ti o per am bu lan te in te ne bris
I. v6.2
et de cem mi li a a dex tris tu is:
I. v8.3
ad la pi dem
IV. v2.3
ve lo ci ter
ALT.2 POST-MEDIAL
ALT. CADENTIAL
I. v5.3
a rui na et de mo ni o me ri di a no.
I. v8.4
pe dem tu um.


F. POST-MEDIAL
TRACT FINAL
I. Final
et os ten dam il li sa lu ta re me um
II. Final
con fu dan tur i ni qui fa ci en tes va na
III. Final
Po pu lo qui nas ce tur, quem fe cit do mi nus.
IV. Final
qui a tem pus ve nit mi se ren di e ius
V. Final
et lau dis e ius ple na est ter ra.

APPENDIX 2 – Recording

Ar em al freg temps vengut (2018), performed by Noémie Ducimetière (voice), Oliver Dover (kaval), Thomas Fournil (medieval portative organ), Konstantinos Glynos (kanun) and Harry Buckoke (vielle).

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