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What late medieval chant manuscripts do to a present-day performer of plainchant

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CHAPTER TWO

Research

Brussels, Wednesday 27 July, noon. I have just boarded flight SN3811 to Porto. I am on my way to Portugal's second largest city, at the mouth of the river Douro, where in the next couple of days I will be rehearsing with six female singers from the Coro Casa da Música. In one month's time, these six singers will travel to Antwerp and its Laus Polyphoniae festival, where together with six female members of Psallentes they will participate in *Genesis Genesis Genesis*, also known under the working title The Alcobaça Project. (I will return to that project throughout this chapter. The full score of *Genesis Genesis Genesis* is given in Appendix Five.)

With the prospect of spending most of the time on my own (if not rehearsing), I have decided to pack a few things I want to work on and some literature I want to study. There are scattered notes on my experiences as a plainchant-listener that need arrangement. There is the book *In Defense of Music* by the American born Israeli professor Don Harrán, on Jean Le Munerat's treatises, of which I would like to reread the epilogue.^{cix}

cix In Chapter One, I promised to return to a discussion of Munerat's treatise *De moderatione et concordia grammaticae et musicae*. Don Harrán has edited two treatises by Munerat in Harrán (1989).

And there is Aslaug Nyrnes' article *Lighting from the Side*^{cx} — one of the essays on the concept of artistic research that I have always considered most inspiring for my own work and (views on) research strategy.

Words are important because they are not the most important

With the airplane taking off smoothly, I decide to plunge into a reread of Nyrnes' article. As I will soon find out, my mind wanders off towards thoughts about connections between artistic research and creativity in general. Since 2004, I have participated in numerous — not to say endless — debates and discussions on the what, why and how (occasionally the 'so what?') of artistic research. I have participated in the docARTES doctoral training programme, both as a student and as a coordinator; I have attended many lectures, seminars and conferences on artistic research across Europe; and I have taught on the methodology of artistic research at conservatories in Belgium, The Netherlands and Norway.^{cxii} Everywhere and always, the views on artistic research tend to be highly divergent. Although this divergence can and should be considered as a sign of the discipline's youth and vitality as well as its methodological potential — to some it is not even clear whether artistic research^{cxii} can actually grow into a bona fide discipline at all^{cxiii} — the need for the explo-

cx (Nyrnes, 2006)

cxii (Vanden Abeele, 2006)

cxiii On the level of terminology, a whole range of interchangeable labels has been used, with different people assigning different meanings to each of them. Instead of trying to summarize or feed this debate on terminology here — it has been done elsewhere, notably by Borgdorff (2012) — it may suffice to think for a moment of what lies behind the names given to those fields of research that use musical practice itself as a starting point, as a research tool or/and as a constituent part of the research outcome. Whether this research 'in and through artistic practice' is called artistic research, practice-as-research, practice-led research, practice-based research or anything at all may be less important in the long run when viewed in the context of the down-to-earth situation: these denominators all have in common that they want to stress the important status of the artistic practice in the process as well as in the product of an artistic research endeavour.

cxiii Pültau (2012), for example, describes artistic research as "...merely a hairbrained scheme" ["... een louter papieren bedenksel..."] in a reaction to Henk Borgdorff's book *The Conflict of the Faculties* (2012). (Consulted via www.dewitteraaf.be, last accessed September 2014)

ration of a common ontological, epistemological and methodical ground feels urgent. This is neither the place nor the time to explore these grounds in depth, but some considerations on the subject may be useful for a good understanding of the set-up, the strategies and the presentation of the current project.

One of the recurring issues in the world of artistic research is the status of the so-called tacit knowledge that artistic practice holds, and the ensuing question if and how this tacit knowledge can be revealed. Central to this discussion is the complex relation between, on the one hand, the artistic praxis itself (artistic research and development, creative processes, eventual outcomes) and on the other hand, the language employed to delineate what happens throughout the different stages of that artistic praxis.

An illustration of this difficulty can easily be found in interviews with artists. These can be anything from dull to engaging, although in both cases and in any case in between, they tend to be elucidating, or interesting to say the least. Examples of the former are quite easy to come by, examples of the latter are more difficult to find. Let us take a look at an example from the world of popular music.

At the iTunes online music store, a series of ‘contextualized’ albums are available (iTunes originals). This is what Alison Goldfrapp and Will Gregory (from the UK-based band Goldfrapp) have to say as an introduction to the song ‘Forever’ (my transcription, unedited):

“[Voice of Alison Goldfrapp:] I really like it, and again, I think it is one of those songs, that may have been... it’s, you know, it does not get really talked about very much, you know, it’s a sort of... it’s a pretty... it’s very... it’s quite downbeat, slow, you know, people don’t necessarily take that much notice of those kind of tracks on albums. But uhm, it has got a certain quality to it that I think I really like. And uhm... Ah yeah, I don’t know what else to say about it really, it’s just, you know... [Voice of Will Gregory:] Yeah, I was thinking, all the chords sound good — it’s like it just comes in and does its thing just you kind of want it to, and, that does not always happen either. [Voice of Alison Goldfrapp:] Yeah, broken love — all that stuff — mixed with a bit of a sci-fi

kind of, you know, 'take me off to another planet for a bit', seems to be a kind of a running theme in quite a lot of our songs [Laughs].^{cxiv}

Alison Goldfrapp has great difficulty expressing any significant point (with commonplace remarks such as “a certain quality”, “all that stuff”, “a kind of a” ...), although in the end her little reflection turns out to include a ‘take-me-off-to-another-planet’ metaphor that actually is a striking verbalization of the outworld feel that one senses in the majority of Goldfrapp’s work. As a thankful receptor of Goldfrapp’s songs, I feel a certain disappointment in what appears to be a lack of awareness of the possible reasons for one’s own distinction and importance, or at least the incapacity to verbalise those reasons. But then, at the same time, this of course proves that so many qualities in music — and in the process of music making — are very difficult to articulate with only words.

Confronted with the task of writing about the complex world of an artistic research project, it is challenging to try and overcome the restrictions of verbal language. One method of doing so has been proposed by Norwegian art didactics professor Aslaug Nyernes in the article that I am about to reread. As it turns out, Nyernes does more than suggest ways to overcome verbal restrictions. Her idea of a topological triangle becomes a possible method for artistic research.

Nyernes proposes exploring a model for the discussion of artistic research from a rhetorical point of view, functioning as it were as a side-light (a metaphor she borrowed from Michel Foucault), at the same time extinguishing the toplight of ‘scientific knowledge’. We know rhetoric to be a theory of language, with classical rhetoric (how oral language is used in creating speeches) and new rhetoric (in which verbal language is a complicated world “that often turns out as a controller of the situation”^{cxv}) as the main classifiers. Between these two extremes, Nyernes says, we should look for a position from which a non-linear style of communica-

cxiv Goldfrapp on iTunes originals in 2008. In the iTunes originals series, artists are invited to introduce tracks on some of their most succesful albums, by way of a short interview. Other artists include PJ Harvey, Sting, Fiona Apple, Bonnie Raitt and Björk.

cxv Nyernes (2006, p. 8)

tion emerges, based on a language that is embedded in the entire research process.

Nyrnes describes five premises on which this communication should be based. (1) Form in language is the foundation for everything that creates meaning. (2) Different forms of expression each have their own register, history, grammar and topology. (3) Verbal language is not inherently poetical or logical: how it is used is the deciding factor. (4) Verbal language surrounds — and is embedded in — the creation and reception of art and the research process, constituting a guide for artistic research. (5) And finally — referring to Arild Utaker — “words are important because they are not the most important”.^{cxvi}

A communication that reflects a topological research approach

Nyrnes suggests talking about artistic research in spatial or topological terms. Three topoi of artistic research are presented. First, there's the 'own language' topos, in which storytelling and the use of metaphors help to make language more precise in a sensuous way. In this topos, artistic research concerns consciousness about how we develop our personal language (in the artistic practice itself, and in the talking/writing about it). Second comes the topos in which 'theory' is accepted as a systematic, general language, where theories, concepts and artistic practices become the context to relate to. And third is the topos of the 'artistic material' itself, which probably forms the energy centre of the artistic research: the material itself is in command, has its own laws, makes us think, and makes us do things.

The order in which these three main topoi (the own language, the theory and the artistic material) are presented is of no importance. For essential to this topological approach is that the starting point is not fixed, one can start anywhere, and one can move around freely between the topoi. There is also no fixed progression from one topos to another. The moving around between the three topoi actually forms the method, build-

cxvi Utaker (1992, p. 37) quoted in Nyrnes (2006, p. 12).

ing new relations between the topoi again and again. Thus, in using a topological approach, the research presents itself as the dynamic and creative process it is, in which analytical work is “embedded in fantasy and emotion”.^{cxvii} Here Nyrnes warns about two possible pitfalls, which can arise when there is not enough balance between the different topoi visited: in the end the writing can become too general (“lukewarm”), or the discussion of theory is cut short (from the standpoint that “too much theory damages art”), and things become blurred.

Considering this approach within the present subject of the development of a creative and present-day performance practice of late medieval plainchant, the three basic topoi become palpable.

We have seen how the chant group Psallentes was founded in 2000, initially with the intention of developing a plainchant context for fifteenth- and sixteenth-century polyphony. A thorough study of manuscripts and other sources was set in motion, not (only) as a theoretical study, but (rather) as a practical matter, aimed at addressing the many performance challenges that emerge when confronting late medieval plainchant. To put it in topological terms: there is a topos where the ensemble’s own language is developed, where the group’s signature style emerges (the kind of programming employed, the layering of plainchant elements, the singing style); there is a topos where this language and style is confronted with other people’s practices, with historical as well as present-day theories and concepts (e.g. the ‘what can we learn’ challenges of Chapter One); and there is a topos in which the artistic material itself (manuscripts, notes, the music, the singing) models and is modelled.

Guiding the creative process

With this topological approach, in which “creativity is a matter of being aware of the topoi in order to choose new paths”^{cxviii}, Nyrnes presents a useful and exciting tool to guide the creative process itself as well as the

cxvii (Nyrnes, 2006, p. 16)

cxviii (Nyrnes, 2006, p. 13)

writing about it. Part of this is echoed in creativity prophet Ken Robinson's acclaimed book *Out of Our Minds* (2001). While coining the term *successive approximations* along the way, Robinson talks about the dialogue between concept and material, and he stresses the non-linear trajectory of that dialogue.

We begin with an initial idea of some sort ... The idea takes shape in the process of working on it — through a series of successive approximations. ... Creativity is often a dialogue between concept and material. The process of artistic creation in particular is not just a question of thinking of an idea and then finding a way to express it. Often it's only in developing the dance, image or music that the idea emerges at all.^{cxix}

In the act of creation, means and ends, concept and material, ideas and verbal expressions of ideas are often intermingled in a very pragmatic way. It is by handling the material that an idea emerges. The idea materializes through and in the material. What I shape, shapes me. How I talk about it, shapes it. Seen that way, creativity is about exploring concepts, material and language, but not in an austere or rigorously factual way. It is about searching for new horizons and using imagination, it is about using metaphors and telling stories, about investigating and traversing boundaries, about developing ideas, about (dis)connecting things that do or do not seem to belong together, about making and doing.

The *Gemeentemuseum* in The Hague houses the biggest Mondriaan collection in the world. The work of Piet Mondriaan, to my mind, is a brilliant testimony to two of the most vital aspects of creativity: the dialogue with the material and the development of a personal language through the unrelenting focus on one particular idea — taking that idea as far as possible. *De rode boom* [The Red Tree, 1908] shows a tree that is still very recognizable as a tree. After 1908, a series of successive approximations demonstrate Mondriaan's evolution towards a radical cubism. In *De bloeiende appelboom* [The Blossoming Apple Tree, 1912] Mondriaan had reached a

cxix (Robinson, 2001, pp. 134-135)

typical cubist's abstraction, but with figurative elements still present. He was not satisfied with this, and went on to take the abstraction to extremes — resulting in what Mondriaan is now most famous for: compositions with rectangles in red, yellow and blue^{cxx} — an example of the kind of creativity that is born out of a constant reconsideration of a single idea.

Contrasting with this concept of creativity as a process in which one particular idea is worked out to the nth degree, the work of another Dutch artist, jazz pianist Michiel Borstlap, is a good example of quite the opposite. His album *Eldorado* (2008) is swarming with ideas on all levels, from the overall concept (fusion of jazz, rock, electronics in a lounge-jacket, a touch of classical music) down to the tiniest details (sophisticated audio producing by Reinder van Zalk, with an enormous amount of additional sounds, tunes, effects etc.). Viewed with the topological triangle of Nyrrnes in mind, this seems to be the result of a restless, relentless, hyperactive back and forth between many different topoi. The outcome is an album that (enjoyable though it is) to me feels top-heavy with ideas, almost over-creative (if that is possible), up to the point that you wish that Borstlap would have taken inspiration in the very focused, stylized, restrained successive approximations of his compatriot Mondriaan. But then, the title of this album would probably not have been *Eldorado* — a place of great abundance.

cxx (Warncke, 1990, pp. 112-114)

Musicians' creativity

I seem to have dozed off, and I am now brutally awakened as, through the intercom loudspeaker, the flight purser announces that we will soon be arriving at Porto's Francisco Sá Carneiro airport. The Nyrnes article is still on my lap, I did not finish reading it. Looking out from the airplane window at the beautiful Portuguese landscape with dramatic scenery of a meandering Douro, I think about how creativity has become the buzzword of our time, maybe even more so beyond the boundaries of the traditional artworlds. In politics, in business, in society at large, 'creativity' is today linked primarily with 'innovation' to form two horses harnessed side by side and galloping towards the so-called innovation-driven economy of the twenty-first century, of which creativity is presented as means and motor.^{cxxi} In the arts however, including music, creativity is not just means and motor, but also the motive of all activity. Artists employ their mental agility and make use of concepts, constructs or devices because they feel the need and urge to (re)produce, to (re/de)construct, to (re)create.

Turning to creativity in the world of plainchant, the composer and singer — historically often one and the same person, more suitably to be described as a *developer* or a *replicator* working with different levels of musical *memes* (to use the term coined by English ethologist Richard Dawkins in 1976, as applied to music by musicologist Steven Jan in 2007^{cxxii}) — began with a particularly pragmatic approach to a liturgical text. The developer of plainchant first of all had an excellent knowledge of the form and content of the text to be set, and acquired an expert use of musical language in close relation to that text. The recitation of a liturgical text in its simplest musical form was nothing but a more or less *recto tono* rendering of the text, transforming it, in its richest form, into an often very complex and ornate melismatic format. Decisions on simple

cxxi This very economy-related use of the word 'creativity' is illustrated in Richard Florida's bestseller *The Rise of the Creative Class*. To Florida, creativity is first and foremost "an economic force that increases the resources with which we may do good in the world". (Florida, 2002, p. 325)

cxxii (Jan, 2007)

versus complex delivery of texts were made according to the practical circumstances of the liturgy, the ritual and communal roles, a specific textual character, and the expressive potential. A present-day performer will retrace these memes within the repertoire, and she will explore the practicalities behind a multitude of decisions, leading, in the best of circumstances, to a re-productional performance of plainchant.^{cxiii}

The Alcobaça Project — First Rehearsal

I have been picked up at the airport by car and I am now on my way to the Casa de Música, straight to the first rehearsal. It is only a short drive, but I have some time to reflect on the task ahead. The Alcobaça project was initiated by Laus Polyphoniae director Bart Demuyt, within the context of this year's festival theme *Sons Portugueses* [*Portuguese Sounds*]. Through his Portuguese contacts, Bart has come across a private collector in Brazil who owns an amazing sixteenth-century chant manuscript. It is exceptional mainly because of its enormous size. It is the biggest chant manuscript that I have ever heard of. When opened, it measures 180 cm wide by 120 cm high. Such big choir books are not uncommon on the Iberian Peninsula, they are known as *cantoriales*, and many have survived. Dimensions of 160 cm by 100 cm, or 120 cm by 90 cm are more common.

Presumably the manuscript is part of a set of choir books together constituting the whole of the antiphony needed for the liturgy of the hours. The Alcobaça manuscript (named after the Portuguese Santa Maria de Alcobaça monastery, one hour's drive north of Lisbon, where it is supposed to have been made and used^{cxiv}) starts with the first responsory for the Matins of Septuagesima Sunday, seventy days before Easter. That

^{cxiii} See also Treitler (2003), and especially Chapter 10 'Oral, Written, and Literate Process in the Music of the Middle Ages' (pp. 230-251).

^{cxiv} Unfortunately, I have not been able to see the manuscript except via digital images, nor have I been able to obtain additional information as to the relation with the Alcobaça monastery, the owners' history etc.

Sunday marks the beginning of pre-Lent, the run-up to Ash Wednesday,^{cxxv} which in its turn is the start of the proper Lent period of forty days before Easter. The book contains a total of 105 chants (of which 54 antiphons and 43 responsories) for the pre-Lent and early Lent liturgy. It ends abruptly, in the middle of the antiphon *Assumpsit Jesus*, used here as the first antiphon for the first vespers of the second Sunday of Lent.

Figure 13 shows the opening folio of the manuscript. Lavishly illustrated pen-flourished borders with plants, fruit and what appears to be a young monk; an immense decorated initial I (of the responsory *In principio*) with pen and ink drawings and gold leaf decoration; five staves each made up of five red lines; and self-confident black square notes almost as big as post-its. Studying the contents of the manuscript some time ago, I soon decided to work with the first fifteen folios of the manuscript, thus restricting myself to no more than nine responsories for Septuagesima Sunday and nothing else (except for the lessons, see below), together forming a coherent repertoire for a project that should take approximately one hour of concert-time. Since from the very start of this project the idea was that maybe the manuscript would be available at the concert, and that we then could have sung from the manuscript itself, I thought it best to start the programme right from the opening folio of the book, the only illuminated and visually most attractive page of the manuscript. I was told recently, however, that the *cantore* will after all not come to Antwerp, but the idea of showing the book to the audience is not lost: I will work with projected images — but more on that later on.

These are the incipits of the nine responsories for Septuagesima taken from the Alcobça manuscript:

^{cxxv} The intermediate season of pre-Lent was taken out in the 1969 reform of the Roman Rite, with the weeks between the end of the Christmas season (Baptism of Our Lord) and the start of Lent (Ash Wednesday) becoming part of the *Tempus per annum* (the Ordinary Time).

fol.1 ^r	<i>In principio fecit Deus</i> [In the beginning God made]	(1:1,26-27; 2:7)
fol.2 ^r	<i>In principio Deus creavit</i> [In the beginning God created]	(1:1-2,31; 2:1)
fol.3 ^v	<i>Formavit igitur Dominus hominem</i> [Then God formed Man]	(2:7; 1:1,27)
fol.5 ^r	<i>Tulit ergo Dominus hominem</i> [Then the Lord took the Man]	(2:14; 2:18)
fol.6 ^v	<i>Dixit Dominus Deus</i> [The Lord God said]	(2:18; 2:20)
fol.7 ^v	<i>Immisit Dominus soporem in Adam</i> [The Lord cast Adam into a deep sleep]	(2:21,22,19,23,21)
fol.9 ^v	<i>Plantaverat autem Dominus</i> [And the Lord planted]	(2:8; 2:9)
fol.11 ^r	<i>Ecce Adam quasi unus ex nobis</i> [Indeed! Adam has become like one of Us]	(3:22,21)
fol.13 ^r	<i>Ubi est Abel frater tuus</i> [Where is your brother Abel?]	(4:9-10; 3:17; 4:11)

Typical for the responsories of Septuagesima is their provenance from the book of Genesis (chapters and verses shown between brackets). A first essential part of the ultimate project title was born here: Genesis. As seen from the verse numbers given, each of the responsories is a patchwork of verses, with the majority of the texts taken from the second chapter of Genesis, where after having created heaven and earth, God creates man and woman and they enter paradise. But soon (in the third and fourth chapter, and reflected in the texts of the two final responsories listed above) Adam and Eve will know the difference between good and evil, and the first officially registered murder in human history takes place (Cain killing his brother Abel).

It is a great story — Hollywood material if you ask me, including all the violence and the sex(ism) — and very well known to the audience, we may assume, and recognizable too. Excellent for what I want to do: build a programme for the Alcobaça project using Nyrrnes' topological triangle

as a lead, exploring and developing the project into an exciting 70-minute construction, constantly moving around between the three main topoi that Nyrnes has defined. This is the point where I always think of Woody Allen talking about how the movie he has in his head is brilliant and perfect, and how subsequently, when the movie is made and released, not more than thirty per cent of that brilliance and perfection seems to have remained.^{cxxvi}

Meanwhile, we have arrived in Porto's second city centre, the Boavista area — mainly a shopping and business district. Porto became the European Capital of Culture in 2001 (together with Rotterdam), and in the years leading up to 2001, a new cultural icon and architectural landmark was planned, the Casa da Música, here at the Rotunda Boavista. Staff member Cristina and director Alexandre have been waiting for me and show me around the impressive building. The Casa was designed by Dutch architect (and Rotterdam-born) Rem Koolhaas, and it has been highly acclaimed worldwide. But as a high point of the Porto 2001 events, it failed. Cristina tells me about the huge delays in the construction, with the opening concert finally taking place as late as April 2005, and the project's budget having risen quickly to a staggering one hundred million euros. Some 2001 concerts were held at the site under construction.

After the quick tour of the Casa, I am now in one of the windowless rehearsal studios somewhere deep in the middle of the huge building. The room is more than air-conditioned, it feels refrigerated, quite a contrast to the heat outside. I meet the six female singers of the Coro chosen for this job and after a brief introduction the rehearsals for the Alcobça Project can start. I have the opening responsory projected, and we start singing. This is an important moment that will shape the future of this project. I need to set the tone in order to obtain what I want but what I want will be shaped by these actors in my play. In front of me are six

^{cxxvi} I have been unable to retrace the exact words of Woody Allen on this subject. I heard him talking about this phenomenon in an interview, but that must have been more than twenty-five years ago. Incidentally, Allen appears to have the habit of reshooting tons of material for his movies. That habit was taken to extremes when he rethought, rewrote and recast his 1987 movie *September* after the first version was completed and ready for release. (Lax, 2009)

singers, certainly well motivated but also hesitant and searching—we will need some time to reach common ground. However their hesitation and their searching is not so much on the vocal level. These are well trained professional singers, and I have no reason to complain at all. Their hesitation and their searching is all about this manuscript they are looking at. Some of these singers have some experience with singing plainchant from square notation, others have not. I'm not worrying, as I have turned to an approved method which must be the oldest didactic trick in the business: the cantor sings, the pupils repeat.

I sing the first note, the singers repeat. I sing the first and second note, the singers repeat (see Figure 14). We continue with this strategy note by note, word by word, and stave by stave, meanwhile learning the melody by heart. It is an intense and intensive exercise, but very effective. It connects ears and eyes, and develops the notion of the intertwinement of oral and written transmission: it is the *dictum scriptumque* that appears in the already mentioned manual for singers, the *Summa musicae*.^{cxxvii}

The two authors of this thirteenth-century treatise—identified by Christopher Page as Perseus and Petrus, with at least one of them possibly working at Würzburg cathedral—are practical musicians who know how to teach chant. They are not merely plainchant theorists, but they take pride in their musical learning and even acknowledge that chant's purpose is not only spiritual but can be delightful too, with aspects of the repertoire “chiefly invented for the sake of pleasure” [“que propter delectationem precipue fuit inventa”].

The reading of the *Summa musicae* has encouraged me to use classic classroom techniques. In my short introduction to this first rehearsal, I have referred to some of the practical suggestions that Perseus and Petrus have listed, starting with the most basic solfège issues (1), continuing with attention to be paid to words (2) and semitones (3, i.e. the “soft” b flat and the “hard” b), and ending with the didactics of singing note by note (4), studying with someone who is knowledgeable (5) and learning the chant by heart (5):

cxxvii (Page, 1992, p. 16)

(1) *Signis musicalibus visis et intellectis, qui cantum ignorat et modum cantandi et eum scire in brevi desiderat, consideret primo clave et utrum prima nota in linea vel spacio teneatur, et quot note uni vocali debentur ...*

[Anyone who has understood musical notation, and who wishes a quick remedy for his ignorance of chant, should consider the clefs first of all, then whether the first note is located on a line or in a space, and then how many notes should be assigned to one vowel ...]

(2) *Item cantor clausulam sive congeriem notularum per se canat distincte, et anhelitum recipiendo pausans nequaquam syllabam incipiat post pausam nisi forte prima fuerit dictionis ...*

[Next, the singer should perform the phrase or group of neumes distinctly by itself, and when he pauses to take a breath he should not begin a syllable after a pause unless it is the first of a word ...]

(3) *Item cantor huiusmodi puerillis circa semitonium caute procedat ne vel ipsum ponendum postponat vel proferat negligenter ...*

[Next, a junior singer of this kind should proceed very carefully so that he does not delay the placing of the semitone or place it negligently ...]

(4) *Item hoc precipue novus cantor attendat ut notam unam tam diu teneat donec perfecte consideret ubi et qualiter alia sequens debeat incohari ...*

[The novice singer should chiefly attend to this rule: that he hold one note as long as is necessary to consider fully where, and how, the next note should begin ...]

(5) *Item rudis cantor cum alio frequenter cantare studeat et mutationes et intervalla consideret diligenter, et ut melius per se cantare valeat cantum corde addiscat ...*

[The inexperienced singer should frequently study by singing with someone else, and must diligently consider the mutations and intervals. He should learn the chant by heart so that he may sing in a more accomplished fashion when he is alone.]^{cxxviii}

cxxviii All this from chapter 13 of the *Summa musicae*: “Concerning the stratagems with which a new and untrained singer learns chant” [“De cautelis quibus novus cantor et rudis cantum addiscit”], as edited and translated by Page (1992, pp. 89-90).

These Portuguese singers prove very responsive to the *Summa musicae* suggestions that I try to employ here. Certainly the tactic of waiting as long as is necessary on one note and not proceeding into the next one as long as the current one is not well established (4) seems to appeal to them, at least in the manner in which I have been using that idea (see above, and Figure 14). Consequently my incessant repetitions of small fragments will be decisive for the learning aspect, but also and more importantly for the artistic development of the Alcobça project. As a residue from the didactics employed and inspired by these instructions, the repetition of notes, or rather the accumulation of notes will become one of the project's most remarkable characteristics (as seen at rehearsal mark 2 and similar passages in Appendix Five).

I conclude our first rehearsal with a lecture/workshop on more general aspects of plainchant and the challenges of plainchant performance practice (see Chapter One). I am very satisfied with these singers' agility and responsiveness, and I think they (as well as I) have absorbed and communicated various ideas, exploring different performance possibilities. I am to some extent less convinced as to the issues of blend, balance and intonation. I think some vowels have a surprisingly dark colour, far from the bright, clean vowel sounds that I usually aim for. But these are matters to try and tackle in the next couple of days.

That night, after an unexpected free dinner,^{cxix} I sit myself down in my hotel room with Don Harrán's book on the Jean Le Munerat treatises. Le Munerat's work is an interesting testimony to what has happened during the fifteenth and sixteenth century. I guess plainchant performance practice must have lost quite a bit of flexibility and sensitivity, since only one note on a stressed syllable and many notes on a unstressed syllable felt unnatural enough for certain humanistic forces to want to change exactly that. But Le Munerat felt that speech did and should be subject to melody, an argument with which he defended the repertoire as it had come down to him through the ages.

cxix As I was having dinner on my own in a local restaurant on the Avenida da Boavista, I fell through a chair and was offered my meal for free. I accepted.

De moderatione et concordia grammaticae et musicae

To the humanists the words in music were primordial. All text needed to be audible and understandable, and should not be blurred by organ music or polyphony — or too many melismas for that matter. Music could not obstruct the sacred texts and should be subordinated to them. But of course, this was not in the interest of music itself or in the interest of musicians performing music — and moreover, it may not have been to the advantage of the performance of the liturgy itself. In the context of this clash between the humanist's and the musician's opinion, Don Harrán's study of the case of Jean Le Munerat, singer and scholar at University of Paris' College of Navarre, is of particular interest.

Le Munerat took a firm stand against the humanists, and to find testimony of this in his 1490 and 1493 treatises is quite an exceptional thing in an era so dominated by the humanists' view on the relation between text and music. Where humanism tended to force music to adapt itself to the structure and content of speech, Le Munerat came to defense of the authority of music over speech (hence Harrán's title *In Defense of Music*), thereby also defending a tradition of text-related musicality which, through its then current performance practice of plainchant, may have lost some of its original features.

In his treatises, Le Munerat contemplates the accentuation of words in plainchant, in the broader context of the relation between music and grammar. Jean Le Munerat's first treatise on the performance of plainchant bears the title "De moderatione et concordia grammaticae et musicae" ["On the regulation and concordance of grammar and music"] and was written in 1490. The second, not more than two pages of text, was written in 1493 and bears as its title the first words of that text: "Qui precedenti tractatu" (referring to the "previous treatise"). It is a reflection of a debate on the subject, held at the College of Navarre on August 25 (feast of Saint Louis) 1493, with Le Munerat as an advocate of music against reformists advocating speech (the College of Navarre apparently was one of the birthplaces of French humanism).

Right from the start, Le Munerat positions himself as a man of prin-

ciple, but with the best of intentions: he wants to “settle the dispute over the observance of the measure or quantity of syllables”.

Volunt enim quidam quod quecumque sillaba longa vel brevis est secundum precepta grammaticae prosodie vel prosodiace: tam in simplici littera quam in littera notis seu notulis modulata: longa vel brevis suo modo pronuncietur: quod qui vellet observare oporteret omnia gradalia et antiphonaria destruere: et nova seu novos condere: cum in ipsis passim super syllabas breves multe note: super longas vero unica tantum adiciatur.

[Some believe that whatever syllable is long or short according to the rules of grammatical accentuation or of prosody, both in plain speech and in speech sung to notes or neumes, ought to be pronounced after its measurement as long or short. Yet for anyone to observe this, all graduals and antiphonaries would have to be destroyed and new ones compiled, for here and there in the former several notes are assigned to short syllables but only one note to long ones.]^{cxxx}

The crux of the matter is that texts tend to be pronounced after the measurements (long or short), and that some people want to apply exactly the same principle to the music (i.e. plainchant). To Le Munerat, this would mean that graduals and antiphonaries would have to be destroyed and rewritten, because music and speech have different regulators: the regulators of melody (notes, used in antiphons, responsories etc.) and the regulators of accent (plain speech, used in lessons, epistles, gospels etc.). Although both do serve the purpose of the Divine Office, Le Munerat supports the idea that “melody occurs without accent” — an essential feature of the ‘original’ plainchant, in which it is perfectly possible to have lots of notes on unstressed syllables without losing the direct connection with the meaning and metre of the text.

The combat between these two regulators produces “great confusion” (“magnam confusionem”). To clarify matters from the beginning, Le Munerat turns to some basic examples. The word *Gaudia* for instance,

cxxx (Harrán, 1989, p. 81)

from the hymn *Sanctorum meritis*, normally has $\underline{1}/2/1$ notes per syllable (I have underlined the stressed syllable), which to the mind of many ‘grammarians’ should be altered to $\underline{2}/1/1$ notes per syllable. Le Munerat adds that this is only a very easy and simple example, but that even on this basic level the confusion is already huge.

We can trace this problem and the handling of this problem on almost every page of any chant book. Looking at Figure 13, the opening page of the Alcobaça manuscript, we immediately encounter the word *principio* (second and third stave), which has $1/\underline{2}/2/1$ notes per syllable — the grammarians would have preferred $2/1/1/2$. Compared with other versions of the same responsory, we notice an invariable $1/\underline{1}/2/1$ notes per syllable layout of the word *principio*. And the next word *fecit*, which has $\underline{2}/1$ notes per syllable in the Alcobaça source, is equally invariably written as $\underline{1}/1$ in the other sources. Obviously, the word *creavit* (bottom stave of Figure 13) with its $1/3/1$ notes per syllable would have been excellent in the eyes of the grammarians.^{cxvxi} Le Munerat, however, would have defended the $1/2/2/1$ because of the musical tradition, implicitly defending a performance practice by which attention to the stressed syllable of a word is of greater importance than the attention to the quantity of syllables within that word, which is an altogether totally different situation.

It is a recurring phenomenon in many sources: the shifting of notes towards the stressed syllable to make it longer, or the shifting of notes from an unstressed syllable towards the stressed syllable. Let us return briefly to the responsory *Tenebrae*, as seen in the double transcription of Figure 7. At (18) in the word *inclinato*, we see a $1/1/\underline{1}/2$ distribution of notes in Fribourg (thirteenth century), and a $1/1/\underline{2}/2$ in the Ghent case (fifteenth century). A more drastic intervention is seen at (19) in the word *emisit*,

^{cxvxi} I checked the available images at cantusdatabase.org for the responsory *In principio*. All of the thirteen sources with images that have the responsory show a $1/\underline{1}/2/1$ distribution on *principio*, and all of them have $\underline{1}/1$ on *fecit*. These are the sources: A-Gu 29 (Sankt-Lambrecht, 1400s), A-KN 1010 (Klosterneuburg, 1100s), A-KN 1011 (1300s), A-KN 1013 (1100s), CDN-Hsmu M2149.L4 (1554-55, the Salzinnes antiphony), CH-E 611 (Einsiedeln, 1400s), CH-Fco 2 (1260+, the Fribourg antiphony), CH-SGs 388 (Sankt-Gallen), D-Mbs Clm 4303 (Augsburg, 1459), F-Pn lat. 1090 (1190+, Marseille), F-Pn lat. 12044 (ca. 1300, Paris). Last visited May 2014.

where a striking 1/1/10 is altered into a slightly more suitable 1/3/11 notes per syllable.^{cxixii}

Le Munerat, complaining that too many singers lack musical skills, quotes Quintillian quoting Archytas and Aristoxenos declaring that “grammar is subject to music”.^{cxixiii} So he goes on to say that music does not need to follow (or even that for music it is not possible to follow) the measure or quantity of speech syllables. Whereupon he takes his time to give some examples from polyphony, stressing his point. Being an accomplished diplomat, Le Munerat does not hesitate to state: “In truth, I do not know how to explain the logic behind my observations, nor do I believe that it can be explained.”

Le Munerat’s writings are no doubt significant in the process of learning to understand the late fifteenth-century situation of plainsong performance practice. Le Munerat’s views are, although defending the musical predominance over the more grammatical matters, not very different from the views of his contemporaries, all of them being educated in the tradition of careful attention to an appropriate alliance of speech and song. Le Munerat acknowledges that there is a problem with stressed syllables which only have a few notes while unstressed syllables can have many notes. He acknowledges the problem, but he decides to defend the music. To my mind, this shows that the view on the alliance of speech and song had deviated from what could be considered the more ‘original’ way of singing plainchant: taking care of stressed syllables regardless of the quantity of notes on any syllable.

Moreover, the humanists’ vision on the position of music in relation to text, with music being expected to (amongst other things) subordinate itself to grammatical quantity, was nothing but a logical continuation of the already existent, well-known and universally taught views from antiquity. And yet, somehow, Le Munerat, obviously with the guts of a musician, felt that something in the adherence to that principle (of music

cxixii These are cursory explorations of the phenomenon, anecdotal evidence. It would certainly merit a more thoroughly conducted study.

cxixiii The full passage is “Architas atque Aristoxenus etiam subjectam grammaticen musicae putaverunt”. Quintillian, *Institutio Oratoria*, 1.10.17.

being subordinate to the grammatical quantity of the Latin text) went against the music, against its long tradition preserved in chant books. For him, music (i.e. chant) had a logic of its own, and could therefore to a certain extent ignore the verbal logic. It was with the same clash of logics in mind that matters of text-underlay or text setting (the latter being a more general term including the former) were subject to heated debate in the late Middle Ages and Renaissance, when considering the performance of polyphony.^{cxxxiv} Very specific rules were set out, although sometimes contradicting each other, with these rules having their implications on the performance of plainchant itself. Thus the 1563 Council of Trent's decree on the importance of textual intelligibility^{cxxxv} was a formalization of a long-standing prescription, as was Monteverdi's creed of music being 'servant of the words' as expressed in his 'seconda prattica'.^{cxxxvi}

But let us turn back to the fifteenth century, where an educated musician felt the need to stand up against what he considered to be an anti-musical stress on rules of grammatical accentuation and prosody. In defending the value of music over the threatening dominance of adhering to the quantity of words as in speech, Le Munerat turns to usage and habit as an argument in favour of the music. After having given some examples to show how sometimes even long syllables carry only one note, while other syllables many notes, Le Munerat calls on the authority of the distinguished 'doctors of the Roman Church'. Saint Jerome, and more in particular Saint Gregory as 'establisher' of the melodies, lend their weight to the persuasiveness of his argument. Le Munerat again stresses his understanding of the viewpoint of the grammarians, when looking at psalmody, lessons etc., where the words "ought to be measured in their due quantity according to the laws of grammar".^{cxxxvii}

Most probably, Le Munerat was an outsider (with his views), and had difficulty in making a convincing argument. A few years after the first

cxxxiv (Harrán, 1986)

cxxxv On the situation of church music in the context of the Council of Trent, see Fellerer and Hadas (1953) and Monson (2002).

cxxxvi See for example Ossi (2003).

cxxxvii (Harrán, 1989, p. 102)

treatise, he felt the urge to add some afterthoughts, thinking that he had found “a logical explanation for the statement that grammar is subject to music”. It is a small but quite clever idea: music has indivisible parts (the notes, probably equal), and is therefore measured (“totus est moderatus vel mensuratus”), whereas words are not measured. (The central argument of *Le Munerat* being that something measured or regulated always dominates the unmeasured or the irregular.) So where “grammar is totally unregulated and unproportioned” it follows that music should be the ruler, the leader, the driver directing “the chariot of syllables and words, subjecting them to its own discourse”. At the end of his short text, *Le Munerat* testifies once more to the the great confusion: “In several churches I witnessed a controversy between certain persons who say that the chants should be sung or chanted in one way and others say otherwise”.^{cxxxviii}

Le Munerat was a courageous man, but he obviously lost the battle, when we look at what happens in the years after the publication of his treatises. An anonymous *Compendium musices* often found as an introduction to chant books,^{cxxxix} clearly states that the performance of chant should be governed by the word, as an expression of faith (whereby gravity, humility, devotion, accuracy, smoothness and uniformity are prescript). And this same text disapproves of performances in which musical qualities are considered more important than the meaning of the text. On the level of plainchant, the sixteenth century brought more and more of this, with of course the Council of Trent’s decree on the importance of textual intelligibility as one of the highlights of this evolution, with subsequently the well-known altering of chants and chant books.

In a final example, and a most clear one, we may see what happened to plainchant over the centuries after the long-syllable-equals-more-notes-principle became dominant. The gradual *Laetatus sum* in the Sankt Gallen version of ca. 900 (Figure 15a) is to be compared to the same in a (randomly chosen) 1759 graduale from Toulouse (Figure 15b). The very first

cxxxviii (Harrán, 1989, pp. 105-106)

cxxxix (Crawford, 1982)

word in Sankt Gallen has 2/1/7 notes per syllable, which to the grammarians must have been a horror, whereas the *Laetatus* in the Toulouse source has seen an amazing shift towards 1/8/1. Many similar shifts are noticeable throughout the piece - and throughout chant history in general, at least if we compare pre-Trent repertoire with later versions of the same.

The Alcobça Project becomes Genesis Genesis Genesis

Porto, day two. In my opening rehearsal with the six members of the Coro Casa da Música yesterday, I focused on two things: on learning notes, first those of the manuscript and subsequently notes in transcription, but always trying to engage memory; and on theories and concepts that have given substance to my performance strategies when dealing with the Alcobça manuscript. Today, apart from the fact that thoughts about Le Munerat and the grammarians are still in the back of my head, I will also be trying to work towards a sound and a style.

Inevitably, I compare the sound of these Coro-members with the sound of my Psallentes singers. I have the feeling that I am at a crossroad. I have to decide whether to try and make this Coro sound similar to Psallentes, or to leave each of the ensembles to their own strengths. I soon realize that in attempting to bring the Coro closer to my personal view on chant aesthetics as formed by my work with Psallentes, I would not only be taking them out of their comfort zone, but I would also be ignoring and diminishing the things that make them unique. I should explore and exploit their characteristics, and help the ensemble develop its own language, which will at some level contrast with my own ensemble, Psallentes. Moreover, unlearning certain habits takes time, it is not done overnight. And for new practices to be engrained, it will take even longer. Since I am only here for about three days, I should not tempt fate.

My decision on leaving each ensemble in their own right and characteristics has important implications for the project. It feels as though a new Psallentes is born, a different one, one that is constructed with southern voices, albeit their schooling feels northerly enough so as not to be estranged too strongly from the Psallentes aesthetic. I had founded a

men's ensemble in 2000; seven years later I witnessed the Genesis of the female version of the ensemble, and now a third Genesis happens, here in Porto.

On the spur of the moment, I decide to devote some time to reflections on ensemble sounds, how these sounds are in my head through my very own listening history, and how I am happy to find that my personal history of listening is an inescapable part of myself functioning as a musician.

Listening (to) history

Regardless of the obvious influence of new semiological insights and developments, the distinct qualities of the Solesmes approach to plainchant singing appear and reappear in almost all recordings available from almost all ensembles anywhere. It dominates our notion of plainchant performance. The dominance of the Solesmes aesthetic is astonishing—and here already I am fully aware of the inescapability of what is in my ear, even when only looking at plainchant.

Minor shifts in style do occur, also in the Solesmes style. It is quite well known, for instance, that from 1971 onwards, under the direction of choir master Dom Jean Claire (who succeeded Dom Gajard in that year), there was a shift towards a more spectacular, less sober style. I distinctly remember, on my first visit to the Abbey of Solesmes (as a teenager, in the early eighties) a monk, actually breaking the famous *silence de nuit* (the obligation, as decreed by Benedictus himself, of not speaking after Compline) and obviously quite nostalgic for the old days under Dom Gajard, complaining about the fact that “nowadays the chant is sung more brilliantly, less praying”.^{cx1}

We may observe that the characteristic style of Solesmes is already well established in the earliest recordings, dating from about 1930. For a few decades leading up to the seventies, it was choirmaster Dom Joseph Gajard who was to be the central figure in an aesthetic that consequently

cx1 In French, this involves a little wordplay: “plus brillant, moins priant”. This little conversation must have taken place around Easter 1983.

(and up until the present day) is the most recognised and recognizable sound in the performance of chant. Ask anyone to describe how chant sounds, or should sound, and the majority will probably describe the typical Solesmes-style: a polished and expressive legato, an unmistakable solemn and ‘spiritual’ rendering of the music, the careful handling of high notes in a melodic line, taking care of a slender vowel [ʊ] etc.

Comparing two versions of our responsory *Tenebrae factae sunt* as recorded by the monks of the Abbey of Solesmes, one from 1930 and the other from 1991, only minor shifts seem to occur. As is to be expected, the 1930 performance is in a more pompous style than the 1991 version, which is 20 seconds faster (the total length being 191 seconds versus 211 seconds for the older version). Yet except for the differing speeds, the younger recording rather sounds as if it was intended to be a remake of the older: a mild *martellato* on the words *dum crucifixissent*, a more forceful *et circa horam nonam*, a romantic lingering on the first few notes of *Jesus*, a genuinely *forte* rendering of the *Deus meus* with however a *diminuendo* towards the highest note, stresses on the first note of each *pes*, a longer pause before the *et inclinatio capite*, and so on.

But stating that the Solesmes style only showed ‘minor shifts’ throughout the decades is probably somewhat disrespectful towards the many (and often audible) efforts that were put into making audible the scholarly research undertaken in the *Paléographie Musicale* of the famous abbey.^{cxli} For instance the theory on the *coupures neumatiques* (rhythmical implications for certain notes on the basis of separation in a melodic group), of which Dom Eugène Cardine was the prime advocate from the late fifties onwards, has probably had one of the most concrete influences on the performance practice of chant. Indeed, the habit of lengthening every note before a quilisma, clearly audible in the 1930 version of the *Tenebrae*, is more difficult to trace in the version of sixty years later. The same has happened with the so-called *repercussion* (the reiteration of a

cxli *Paléographie Musicale* is a series of publications, issued by the Abbaye of Solesmes since 1889. The full title is *Paléographie musicale, les principaux manuscrits de chant grégorien, ambrosien, mozarabe, gallican, publiés en fac-similés phototypiques par les bénédictins de Solesmes*.

unison note on a syllable). Meanwhile, the *Méthode de Solesmes*^{cxlii} influenced chant ensembles everywhere, more often than not with all the negative aspects of imitation. Epigones abound.

The 1970s were crucial years for the development and dissemination of plainchant performance practice. Inevitably, the liturgical changes ordered by the Second Vatican Council in the sixties resulted in new editions of the chant books, with the edition of the new *Graduale Romanum* in 1974 as an important high-water mark. This *Graduale* would immediately become the prime score for most ensembles of plainchant, and this status was confirmed and augmented with the edition of the *Graduale Triplex* in 1979. This *Triplex* adds neumatic notation (mainly from Swiss and French sources^{cxliii}) to the square chant notation, turning the original *Graduale* three-fold into an indispensable source for research and performance of plainchant. To this statement should be added that Dom Cardine's *Sémiologie Grégorienne* (1970) and *Graduel Neumé* (1972) had prepared the grounds for the success of the new chant books.

In fact, it had become fashionable to refer to the use of the *Graduale Triplex* as a source for performance (it had become a quality assurance label), just as it had become fashionable to allude to Cardine's work in the seventies. British chant researcher Mary Berry, when referring to the first recording of the Swiss Schola of Maria Einsiedeln (from 1972), reports a "curiously misleading statement on the sleeve of this record, [which] claims that the rhythmic interpretation is according to Dom Cardine's discoveries". She labels the statement 'misleading' because of the fact that Cardine 'vehemently disclaimed' it.^{cxliv}

Anyway, chant recordings today are to be categorized in two main groups: the continuation of the Solesmes-line on the one hand, and an alternative to these that came from the world of Early Music (which of course traces back to the sixties). In the first category, the Archiv recordings of monastic choirs around Europe have been particularly noteworthy.

cxlii (Gajard, 1951)

cxliii The *Graduale Triplex* presents the neumes from Laon, Sankt-Gallen, Einsiedeln and Bamberg manuscripts from the tenth and eleventh century.

cxliv (Berry, 1979, p. 208)

They express a devotion to the Solesmes school on the one hand^{cxlv}, or the slight—and gradually more evident—deviation from the Solesmes school on the other hand.^{cxlvi} In the second category of chant recordings, the alienation from the more or less classical performance practices first became evident in the work of Alfred Deller. The Deller Consort made a series of six records, in which we hear the transition from a subtle ‘rhythmic’ performance to a less subtle, more direct and forceful interpretation. Looking at this early period of chant recordings, mention should also be made of Konrad Ruhland and his Capella Antiqua (with hymns and sequences in a patent metrical performance) and of John Blackley (focusing on the theories of so-called equalists such as Jan Vollaerts^{cxlvii}).

And then, finally, from the eighties onwards, the interpretations of Marcel Pérès have gained ground.^{cxlviii} For some purists in the world of plainchant, the shift from the pure and angelic sound à la Solesmes to the earthy, masculine and more adventurous sound of Ensemble Organum was hard to cope with. But the shift was/is there, and it is a very important one. Not only did Pérès explore other chant traditions (Old Roman, Beneventan, Mozarabic...), he also explored many singing styles, often turning to non-Western or less-Western chant practices (e.g. Byzantine). Organum’s singing style is radically different from the Romantic one employed by the majority of chant ensembles, with a vocal power, a certain roughness, and an extensive use of vocal drones as main characteristics.

I tend to think that in my own work with chant, I am somewhere in the middle of that debate. I have in my ears, for instance, the perform-

cxlv Certainly in the recordings of the ‘Choeur des Moines de l’Abbaye Notre-Dame de Fontgombault’ and the ‘Coro de Monjes de la Abadía de Santo Domingo de Silos’.

cxlvi E.g. in the recordings of the aforementioned choir of Einsiedeln, or the ‘Choralschola der Abtei Münsterschwarzach’ with Godehard Joppich.

cxlvii (Vollaerts, 1960)

cxlviii I have been fortunate to have met Marcel Pérès for the first time in the summer of 1982, when I was sixteen years old. I was staying at the Abbey of Sénanque for a week, on what must have been my second ever concert tour. During one of the concerts that we sang at Sénanque, Pérès performed improvised *interludia* on a medieval organ. It was there at the Abbey of Sénanque and in that summer that Marcel Pérès founded his Ensemble Organum. Pérès has expressed his chant performance creed in the book *Les Voix du Plain-Chant*. (Cheyronnaud & Pérès, 2001)

ances of chant and polyphony by the women's group Anonymous IV. Neat and pure, heavenly. I have always liked that, and listening to recordings of my own female Psallentes, I recognize things that remind me of the Anonymous IV aesthetic. But there are differences too. With Psallentes, in general, I aim at a slender, subtle and supple result, but forceful as well without becoming hard, and with clean bright vowels and light consonants produced quite far forward in the mouth. That means that in my own chant world, 'feet on the ground and head in the clouds' is probably the first step towards a performance aesthetic that is both corporal and spiritual, temporal and celestial.

Estruntos

On this third day of my stay in Porto, I have made a long early morning walk up to the waterfront, looking out over the river Douro, which to my left meanders gently out of a canyon and to the right into the Atlantic Ocean. Just in front of me, on the opposite side of the river, a few *Rabelos* (flat-bottom boats) remind tourists of the time when Port was taken down the river in barrels towards the Villa Nova de Gaia, where all the major Port labels have their houses. My time is short, I should get back to the Casa da Música, but I remain seated for a moment looking at the modest waves splashing against the river bank. They approach, they withdraw, they come again, always the same and always different, sometimes rather timid, sometimes with just that little bit of self-confidence. The movement of the water is unmeasured but regular, it has rhythm but without a beat. It reminds me of what we have been doing yesterday: plainchant notes that were sung and sung again, adding notes to form neumes, and neumes into syllables and words, forming melodies, exercising them through endless repetition.

The image of the gently splashing waves stays in my head and gets mingled with another image, that of the elaborate blue and red pen and ink drawings that accompany the huge initial I in the Alcobaça manuscript. The plan has lingered in my head, but now, climbing up the Rua Dom Pedro V from the waterfront towards the Casa da Música, I am sure

that I want to dig deeper into the idea of repetition, of repeats, of reiteration, of endlessness, of sameness and uniformity, of otherness and difference.

And to that idea I want to add the exploration of ornaments, of embellishment. Figure 16a has a detail of the very first note of the Alcobaça manuscript. It is a bent note with two tails pointing upwards, a U-shaped single note doubling back on itself, which reminds us of a *plica*. Maybe it is exactly that: a liquescent neume employed here to attract the singer's attention towards the consonant 'n', which could then be semi-vocalized. Strangely enough, there is not a single similar note to be found in the whole of the manuscript. The only other neumes in the manuscript suggesting a *plica* are eight notes (Figure 16b-i) which have the inverted U-shape, a bent note with two tails pointing down. Four of these are on an 'et' (c, e, f, g), one on an 'est' (h) and one on a 'per' (d), all of which could to some extent confirm the use of this neume as being liquescent, a classic *plica*. However, as seen in Figure 16i, the liquescent idea loses its power when used on 'te' (no consonant, except for the 't' but that would not make any sense). Finally, the special neume ceases to present itself as a *plica* when we look at Figure 16b, where the note appears on nothing but the vowel 'a'.

As these bent notes are now unlikely to represent a liquescent neume, another solution presents itself, when looking at other *cantorales*. The Kyriale of San Pedro Mártir (Toledo, ca. 1490-1510)^{cxlix} has exactly the same *plica*-like neumes (in far greater numbers). These may be referred to as *estruntos*, a name used in an anonymous sixteenth-century treatise *Arte de melodía sobre canto lano y canto d'organo* [*The Art of Melody Concerning Plainchant and Polyphony*]. This treatise contains descriptions of ornamental figures, claiming that these figures date back to Mozarabic times. The two types of neumes that we encounter in the Alcobaça-manuscript could be catalogued as a *tocus* (Figure 16a) and an *uncus* (Figure 16b-i). According to the treatise, the *tocus* "is a figure like a breve with two *plicas* pointing upward and it was invented to signal that the voice should be propelled

cxlix [US-NHub Ms. 710]

upward and then return to the same point in the melody”. The *uncus* is described likewise.^{cl}

We keep wondering though why such ornamental neumes would only occur on so few occasions: nine instances in the whole of the Alcobaça manuscript. Nine such *estruntos* compared to a total of an estimated nine thousand notes in the manuscript, which is less than 0,1 per cent of the music. Is this only a conscious but random reminder of the possibility of using ornaments? Or a slip of the pen on the part of the scribe? Anyway, I have made up my mind. This rehearsal will be about *ornamented reiterations* of fragmented responsories. Figure 17 demonstrates how these ornamented reiterations have been built: 17b has the original melody, while 17a shows how embellishments and repeats were added. Notes, cadences, leaps in the melody, they have all been ornamented one way or another.

Added to this, all responds have received a *mensural* treatment, slightly forcing them into a perfect measure (nine responds, starting at rehearsal marks ca. 8, 47, 76, 107, 135, 149, 185, 246 and 260). Some of the more ‘juicy’ elements in the original Alcobaça score have attracted my special attention and treatment: the word *virago* [*woman*]^{cli}, on which a whole scale of f occurs (rehearsal mark 182); the phrase *in paradiso voluptatis* [*in the garden of Eden*], turned into sober building blocks with which to create an ethereal soundcloud (rehearsal mark 109, 115 and 121); and the almost hysterical *nescio* [*I do not know*], with Cain becoming a frightened stutterer. The verses of the responsories, sung to the typical elaborate tones, have largely been left untouched, leaving these the only elements in *Genesis Genesis Genesis* that could be described as being performed ‘straight from the source’.

Flash-forward to a different scene. One month has passed since my stay in Porto, where I had three full days of rehearsals with the six singers of the Coro Casa da Música. Today is Sunday 21 August, and in a few hours time, the *Genesis Genesis Genesis* will be premiered here at the Laus Polyphoniae

cl (Candelaria, 2008, pp. 101-102)

cli ‘Virago’ is also translated as ‘manlike woman’, and ‘heroine’.

festival in Antwerp. Rehearsals and concert take place at the fifteenth-century *Elzenveld* chapel. The Portuguese singers have arrived a few days ago, and together with six members of Psallentes, we have been working hard to make this production work. Since last month, the project has seen the addition of three important new features: *lectiones* from secular texts, faux-bourdon scoring of those readings, and projected images from the manuscript, with added fragments from a comic book.

Grayling

As we have seen, the *Genesis Genesis Genesis* programme was built around the nine great responsories of the Night Office of Septuagesima Sunday that I had chosen, being the responsories featuring on the first fifteen folios of the Alcobaça manuscript. We have also seen that these responsories use texts from the book Genesis exclusively. Responsories have their name for a reason: they are musical responses to lessons, musical postludes to the readings with which they are linked. The traditional liturgical readings connected with the responsories of Septuagesima Sunday are also taken from the book Genesis.^{ciii}

Just a few weeks before the start of my work on the Alcobaça Project, I saw *The Good Book* in my local book store. It is ‘A Secular Bible’, made by British philosopher A. C. Grayling.^{ciiii} I thought that the idea of an alternative, non-religious Bible was interesting and attractive, and the flap text did its job in encouraging me to buy the book:

ciii As is to be expected, responsory texts are generally selected with respect to the preceding lessons. These lessons are usually chosen from specific parts of the Bible, related to the liturgical season. Thus for example during the summer months mainly texts from the historical books of the Bible are being used (Tobias, Judith, Esther etc.), in Advent texts from the Prophets (Isaiah, Daniel etc.), in pre-Lent and Lent texts from the Heptateuch (Genesis, Exodus etc.).

ciiii “Made by” are Grayling’s words, indicating a special authorship status, as the book was not merely written, but “conceived, selected, redacted, arranged, worked and in part written” by Grayling, based on material he took “from over a thousand texts by several hundred authors and from collections and anonymous traditions”. (Grayling, 2011, p. 599)

The Good Book is a book of insight, inspiration, wisdom, solace and commentary on the human condition drawn from the great humanist traditions of thought and literature of the world. ... The Good Book ... has been made in just the same way as the Judaeo-Christian Bible was made: by redaction, editing, paraphrasing, interpolation, arrangement and rewriting of texts from the last three thousand years of the great secular traditions.^{cliv}

Grayling presents his book as a collection of fourteen books, similar to the ‘real’ Bible: Wisdom, Parables, Lamentations, Songs, Histories, Proverbs, Epistles and so on. The title of the opening book is, appropriately: Genesis. In Grayling’s Genesis, there is a garden and a tree, and that garden bears fruit, and that fruit is knowledge. Because from that tree an apple fell, and “when Newton sat in his garden, and saw what no one had seen before: that an apple draws the earth to itself, and the earth the apple”, it was the new inspiration for inquiry into the nature of things.^{clv}

I soon decided that in the Alcobaça Project I would confront the two creation narratives — the one with Adam and Eve from the Bible and the one with Newton’s apple by Grayling — “meandering between believing and knowing, between theology and science in unresolved tension”.^{clvi}

cliv So I bought the book and I read it and was very charmed by it. It would have been interesting to have the exact references to the sources used, a shortcoming not really compensated by the more than one hundred names of authors Grayling gives on the last page of the book, from Abulfazi and Aeschylus to Xenophon and Zhuxi (Grayling put his own name in the list, between Goethe and ‘Greek anthology’). It is not an easy read, I often lost track of what it really was about and I sometimes had the feeling that I was leafing through a collection of one-liners. But, again, I was attracted to the non-religiousness of the book, quite in contrast to a later book by Grayling, *The God Argument* (2013), in which the professor of philosophy presents himself not only as a humanist (which in itself is not necessarily non-religious), but also as a vehemently anti-religious activist. (Grayling, 2013)

clv Grayling’s Good Book makes use of the same numbered verses quotation system as seen in Bible-editions (it even has double columns), which is nice and convenient but also slightly awkward, because I think every imitation is a form of flattery, and flattery may not really be what Grayling is intending towards the real Bible. The quote in this paragraph is Genesis 1:7, introduced and concluded paraphrasing Genesis 1:1 and 1:6.

clvi (My) programme notes to *Genesis Genesis Genesis* in the programme book of Laus Polyphoniae Antwerp 2011.

Faux-bourdon

I chose nine short fragments from Grayling's Genesis, choosing themes that would correspond with the nine responsories, and had them translated into Portuguese (with sounds nicely compatible with Latin). These will function as introductory readings to each of the nine responsories with text from the Bible's Genesis.^{clvii} Consequently, I could have chosen to have these lessons sung by a soloist^{clviii} and make them comply with the typical recitation formulas with which lessons are usually sung. For the longer lessons in the Night Office, these formulas are quite straightforward, with certain inflections and cadences reflecting divisions within the text, such as pauses, semicolons and full stops. Occasionally and interestingly, however, some sources propose more elaborate recitation formulas to certain types of readings (often on solemn occasions), opening up a whole range of possibilities. Consider Figure 18 as one of the many possible illustrations of this. It is a special tone for the epistle of Epiphany, taken from a Girona cantoral ca. 1400^{clix}, quite far away from stereotype formulas, instead developing rather elaborate melodic lines into verses two by two (in this case red echoing blue), as often seen in sequences.

In *Genesis Genesis Genesis*, I have applied two extremes in lesson recitation. Some lessons are recited fully recto tono (Lesson 9, rehearsal mark 260), in other cases I turned to the more elaborate tones used for the chanting of Psalm 94, the *Venite exultemus Domino*, also known as the invitatory psalm. In Figure 19b, the elements of an elaborated tone for the Venitepsalm are shown, in the *tonus solemnus* which has a dubious modal character (it is fourth mode, but has features reminiscent of the first mode), together with my adaptation (Figure 19a) to the Portuguese version of Grayling's lesson (including hesitations, reiterations and embellishments

clvii Some texts in English and all translations into Portuguese occur in the full score (Appendix Five), at rehearsal marks 11, 50, 78, 113, 139, 187, 246 and 260.

clviii From the start of this project, I had decided that everything would be sung by either the Coro or Psallentes, or by the two ensembles as a tutti. No soloists in *Genesis Genesis Genesis* — nothing but collectiveness. An intuitive decision, one that I take often.

clix [E-Boc Ms. 911]

similar to the ones applied to the responsories). Figure 20b is another Venite-tone, this one is (also) in the fourth mode, and in the Portuguese version I have kept it in a more sober setting (Figure 20a), closer to the original formulas. (These represent the opening verses of Grayling's Genesis.)

But there is even more elaboration to come. Figure 25 (in Chapter Three — Morphology) makes us think about the use of the so-called fauxbourdon technique, of which the Gloria shown there bears witness. Fauxbourdon techniques were widely known and used, and for some composers of mainly the fifteenth century, it even was the basis of a considerable part of their compositorial output (Dunstaple, Binchois, Dufay). The technique has all sorts of variations, but the basic principle of a classic fauxbourdon would be, that top voices move in parallels and that the lowest voices would counter-balance this in contrary motion. In the case of the Gloria in Figure 25, only the original voice and the contrary motion of the lowest voice has been notated (with the notes of the lower voice in smaller notes, possibly added in later times). I have arranged the two Venite-tones that I have used for these Grayling-lessons to the basic principles of fauxbourdon, as can be seen in the score at rehearsal marks 29 and 188 (and similar passages).

Crumb

Finally, the creation of *Genesis Genesis Genesis* is imminent. It is a full house today, and the twelve singers and myself are on stage. Behind the two ensembles, a large projection screen has been erected, on which the relevant parts of the manuscript will be projected, here and there aided by Robert Crumb's comic book version of the book Genesis.^{clx} The American cartoonist (sometimes referred to as "controversial cartoonist", or "underground comic legend") has faithfully illustrated the Bible book, leaving nothing out, not even a word. This means that certain contradictions in the story stand, and that there is quite a lot of sex and violence shown rather explicitly (resulting in a warning on the cover, recommending adult supervision for minors). In his own words, Crumb "wanted to do a straight

clx (Crumb, 2009)

illustration job, because the stories themselves are so strange that it doesn't need satirizing, ... it just stands up on its own as a lurid, you know, comic book."^{clxi}

The first words *In principio* are sung, softly and repeatedly. When this ostinato *In principio* returns in just over an hour, we will have arrived at rehearsal mark 276. We will hopefully have given to the audience the experience of an exciting 70-minute construction of *Genesis Genesis Genesis*. Thinking of Woody Allen, I am equally hopeful that at least thirty per cent of the brilliance and perfection that I had in my head will come to the surface.

Tomorrow, in Belgium's premium newspaper *De Standaard*, the reviewer Stefan Grondelaers will give his testimony of the experience. He will write:

"From the confrontation between the dry creation narrative and Grayling's deep human but sobering vision on the birth of humankind, a kind of an ominous 'third' Genesis was generated. It sucked all hope from the biblical story of the creation and cast a dim shadow on the mad ecstasy of the Portuguese chant."

["Uit de botsing tussen het droge scheppingsrelaas en Graylings diepmenselijke maar ontnuchterende visie op het ontstaan van de mens, ontstond een onheilspellend soort 'derde' Genesis. Ze zoog alle hoop uit het bijbelse scheppingsverhaal en wierp een duistere schaduw over de gekke extase van het Portugese gregoriaans."]^{clxii}

Methodos

In this second chapter, simply but appropriately labelled 'Research', I have given a brief but comprehensive demonstration of how an artistic product, the Psallentes project *Genesis Genesis Genesis*, was developed through the

clxi From a radio interview with Robert Crumb on 17 June 2013, on NPR, accessed via www.npr.org March 2014.

clxii The reviewer adds, I am happy to say, that he thought it was "an overwhelming experience" ["een overonderende ervaring"]. (Grondelaers, 2011)

use of an artistic research method based on the topological triangle proposed by Aslaug Nyrnes: the expert development and use of a musical language, the self-aware cultivation of theory and context, the transformation of different constituting elements of the artistic material into something new, the traceability of this transformation in the works and the words of a musician. The project was also presented as a layered consideration of what could be called the *pragmatics*^{clxiii} of musicians' creativity, in successive approximations towards a final product. No plan or method is a guarantee for any kind of success, and what I had planned as 'ornamented reiterations' has become 'mad ecstasy' in someone else's head.

Chapter Four will exhibit (in lesser detail) a total of 17 Psallentes productions in which similar paths have been followed. In the many diverse projects on display there, the 'method' reveals itself in an etymological sense of the word — from the Greek *methodos* as a combination of *meta* (expressing development) and *hodos* (way)^{clxiv}. Before we enter that exhibition, however, we want to explore two *topoi* that are central to almost all of our ventures: the manuscripts and the notes they contain (in Chapter Three — Morphology).

clxiii I am fully aware of the possibly improper use of the word *pragmatics* here, as I am not referring to the branch of linguistics with that name, although there might be some characteristics of that discipline applicable to what I claim in this context.

clxiv Ethymological description taken from the Oxford Dictionary of English (2014). The complete reference is: "Method. Late Middle English (in the sense 'prescribed medical treatment for a disease'): via Latin from Greek *methodos* 'pursuit of knowledge', from *meta*- (expressing development) + *hodos* 'way'.