



Silent Singing: A Musical Path Through the Voice for Contemplation

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Contemplation – a century-old and multicultural constant stance – has had a resurgence in the recent decades. In this paper we focus on some of its pillars: specifically, those that can be approached from music and particularly from singing. The latter relates to silence and deep listening, and this triad leads to a special embodied self-awareness. The explanation is based on the origins of the singing voice and on the philosophical foundation that connects the human being with the whole, understood as a form energy and vibration. The repertoire that would be used to apply these affirmations is close to Gregorian chant present in the Western tradition, but updated from a new practical and experientially contemplative approach that seeks spiritual growth as its final objective.

Keywords

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1 Introduction: From the Spanish Golden Age to Musical Practices

*The tranquil night
At the time of the rising dawn,
Silent music,
Sounding solitude,
The supper that refreshes and deepens love.* [1]

This poem by Juan de la Cruz (1542–1591), the famous Spanish mystic, contains some paradoxes that originate the very question of this paper. Firstly, the “silent music” concept poses the question about the relationship between silence and music. Beyond that, “the murmuring solitude” forces us to question not only music in general, but more specifically the music performed by the voice, i.e., singing, which is at the same time the most primitive and the primigenius way of music making. For that same reason we have used in our title the paradoxical expression “silent singing”.

The quest for spirituality, evidently present in recent decades, stems from several factors, among which we can highlight two: on the one hand, the obsolescence of the forms of the great religions that seem not to impact the new generations, or at least not in a deep and significant way; on the other hand, the scandalous, consumerist vortex of globalized neo-liberalism, which from its onset stifles any perspective of transcendence throughout our entire lives. Many voices and strong schools of thought have arisen against that: ecologism, peace and conflict theory, decolonization theories, gender equality movements, among others. In this context we can cite the quest for spirituality and a lifestyle that can overcome the consumerist trend.

In the West – and now almost around the world because of globalization – life seems to make sense only by filling it with activity (academic life being no exception), so that with considerable overstimulation we hardly really perceive the passage of time, as we are only able to string events together, with hardly any discernment of before and after. Life appears as a race that seems to be running away from itself and has led many people far beyond the mental clarity that comes through calm and intentional living, with the aim of having a spiritual and fuller lifestyle. Traditional wisdom casts light on the present-day reality: “*the ultimate meaning of the active life is to make possible the happiness of contemplation*” (Pieper 1958, 93).

Within this framework and considering our context and background that we will explain shortly, the main objective of our research is to find out what kind of singing can serve

as a tool for contemplation, under what conditions, and if it could prove attractive to new constituencies.

The specific objectives are the following:

- a) Identify the kind of contemplation that we are dealing with here, and outline its definition, relationships with other similar concepts (mindfulness, mysticism), as well as the broader conception of spirituality and religions.
- b) Carry out an exploratory study of other practices connected with musical experience through the contemplative prism, specifically silence and deep listening.
- c) Establish the theoretical philosophical and musico-logical foundation of the kind of singing can promote contemplation.
- d) Propose a project or model of contemplative musical practice, as an open suggestion rather than an experimental investigation, through a different use of Gregorian chant.

In general terms, the methodology used is descriptive and analytical as corresponds to research in the humanities, particularly when dealing with an interdisciplinary study through philosophy and musicology.

This is consistent with the planned objectives: forming theory, developing understanding, and proposing social/particular practices.

The methods or, rather, the best strategies for investigating the problems set out, on the one hand, will be the extrinsic or contextualistic approach and, more specifically, the history of ideas. On the other hand, we will also use the intrinsic approach when studying the specific characteristics of Gregorian chant.

The background of the authors also justifies this methodological design, having studied both music and philosophy, with musicology being the disciplines of academic specialization. Both the contemplative orientation and the practice of singing are also shared.

Placing ourselves into the cultural framework of Western Christianity (and more particularly Catholicism) has logically influenced the prior understanding of the phenomenon to be dealt with, although extensive bibliographical research has allowed us to contrast these previous conceptions scientifically, either to corroborate them or to dismiss them.

2 Approaching the Meaning of Contemplation: Steering Away from McMindfulness

We have undoubtedly borne witness, recently, to a contemplative turn, a challenge that is beginning to influence many aspects of our lives. Therefore, we will try to clarify what we understand by contemplation as an essential aspect of human nature. Typical practice emphasizes that contemplation should be cultivated in everyday life. Besides, it plays a significant role in various religious and philosophical traditions. We differentiate contemplation as an end from contemplative practices as a tool and warn of the danger of separating these practices from the original unified form.

2.1 Contemplation in Centuries-Old Traditions

Before continuing and being fully aware of the complexity of defining terms, it is useful to clarify what we are referring to with each of them. We understand contemplation as one of the most genuine and cross-cutting ways of life, and since we started this paper with a quote from a mystic poet, mysticism as the path of those who delve deeper into spiritual contemplation, radically in the end reaching true illumination [2].

Nonetheless, defining contemplation would be the object of not another study but several, given the complexity of the term and the many approximations that have been made, both across various disciplines and from diverse cultural approaches. Throughout our study, we will outline what we understand here by contemplation in its relationship with music and singing. As stated above, we will use the methodology of the history of ideas. But it is worthwhile, even in an approximate way, to establish first what we mean by contemplation in general.

It seems clear that contemplation is part of spirituality (or spiritualities); that is, it is present in all traditions as a specific part of spirituality. Considering its Latin etymology, it refers to that gazing at “the real” that is composed of amazement and admiration and, at the same time, simultaneity and contemporaneity, association, and union with the divinity (see Lat. *cum* and *templum*, understood as the “transcendent” and “sacred”). It is a form of apprehension of the real, characterized by the simplicity of the act, an intuition that rests on the known object (Borriello 2002, 458).

From the great religious traditions, especially the so-called religions of the book, successful and sublime contemplation is identified with mysticism – although there are considerable nuances that would be too lengthy to detail here. Since our approach starts from the religious tradition of Christianity, we will treat it consequently, that is, sometimes we will use mysticism as a synonym for contemplation.

On the other hand, we also find vast and centuries-old contemplative trends with oriental roots, such as Buddhism, Zen, yoga. It seems that they have attained a convergence with the West in recent times; but they have coincided from their origins; it could hardly be otherwise, given the unity of their projection. Nor can we forget that, although Christianity is particularly identified with the West, its roots are in the Middle East.

Ergas and Todd (2015, 164) pose an interesting question, which could shed light on the convergences between East and West:

A fair question would be whether there is need to ‘import’ practices from East Asia, rather than turn to a rich contemplative tradition found in the Greek, Roman, Hellenistic, and Christian schools of thought.

It is true that one would have to go back to the ancient origins of Western philosophy, to the pre-modern conception of a philosophy as a way of life; but it is also true that ancient vision of life has not completely disappeared, rather that traces of it have remained in the Western tradition over the centuries. As Steel (2012, 46) nicely summarizes:

*The ancient sense of ‘contemplation’ refers to a direct or non-linear form of knowing; that is to say, it involves not the separation but rather the union of knower with what is known in the act of ‘seeing’ [note: *theoria*]. Not through the discursiveness of the ratio, but in the immediate apprehension of the intellectus does the loving gaze of contemplation unify seer with what is seen.*

This is the closest approximation to the concept of contemplation that we are handling here: a holistic convergence between East and West, both theoretical and practical, from the Christian tradition but without forgetting its aspiration of totality and worldview, which therefore cannot be circumscribed to a single geographical area or specific tradition.

2.2 Mindfulness: The Secular Way and the Danger of Separating the Practices from the Whole

We must also consider the non-religious perspective, which is usually defined under the broad umbrella of *mindfulness* and which, as we will see, also shares the difficulty of definition and the implicit contradictions of the religious approach. We cannot fail to highlight this practice – mindfulness – because we can speak of a real boom thereof in society.

Shinzen Young, in his clarifying chapter *What is Mindfulness? A Contemplative Perspective* also talks about the difficulty of defining mindfulness and the importance of differentiating isolated practices from the understanding of this term as a contemplative totality (Young 2016, 38).

Listing the more-or-less contrasting studies on the practice and benefits of mindfulness would be an endless task. Mindfulness can nowadays be found in education, psychology, medicine, and, of course, in personal productivity and business organization. For this reason, it is no less true that it has become a neoliberal substitute for the great spiritual traditions that, on the other hand, do provide a radically holistic vision (Purser 2021, 253). Thus, we are urged to practice mindfulness to concentrate more on our tasks, to control our affections or to relate to other people in a better way; in short, to be more productive, to oil the economic machinery and make it work better. This is what has wisely been called “McMindfulness”, i.e., a time of meditation, silence, or practice, superficially similar to what could be called contemplation, but rather as a kind of hamburger squeezed into our day between other activities, without any influence on our life as *Weltanschauung*.

In the foundations and origins of mindfulness, it is possible to observe the East–West pairing, where, roughly speaking, the East would represent wisdom, and the West would represent rationality. It is true that the mindfulness practices to which we have just alluded come originally from the East and particularly from Buddhism; but it is fair to say that as isolated practices, they have been stripped of their sapiential roots.

But the most important thing is to point out that contemplation is a task and for a lifetime, which requires totality and unity. To achieve it, we work with various tools, paths, and contemplative exercises: in our specific case, we will study singing as a road to reach this contemplation. But these activities cannot be dissociated from the vital purpose, the essential one of having a contemplative life.

We can find this dissociation from some disciplines, which have introduced “contemplative practices” in their development, but that may have lost sight of the unitary and holistic end to which they were originally intended, thus remaining as broken branches of a tree.

For instance, this happens, paradoxically, from the psychological view, where contemplation would be “*a set of practices that may foster particular forms of awareness in students, forms conducive to the conscious motivation and regulation of learning, and also to freedom and transcendence in life more generally*” (Roeser and Peck 2009, 119).

What may be perplexing, perhaps, is precisely to refer to contemplation as a set of practices, when the goal pursued is precisely a holistic conception of the human being, stripped off from the distraction and pressure of productivity in order to be able to focus instead on its own being and on the unity of the self. This contradiction could be illustrated by the behavior of people rushing, already stressed, to their mindfulness class.

In the pedagogical arena, it is common to refer to a series of teaching and learning strategies (Braud 1998, 37) that “*seeks to learn how people can become more whole through integrating the somatic, emotional, intellectual, spiritual, creative-expressive, and relationship and community aspects of their lives.*”

However, there is an integrating intuition that is both present and innovative (though by no means new): it is precisely the distraction of post-modernity that has led us to perceive this almost radical need for a return to the unity of the original to the original in its unity.

This occurs in the aforementioned disciplines, but something similar can be found in religions. Religions are cultural concretizations of spirituality [3], escaping neither, nor the fact that some practices may be detached from the contemplative goal. For instance, if we were to draw a parallel between the modes of prayer found in religions and what we understand here as contemplation [4], we would say that in the first phase, perhaps the most common one, we find vocal prayer, i.e., repetition of phrases belonging to each tradition and of diverse origins. This is followed by mental prayer: reflective introspection, whether or not based on the aforementioned prayers and texts. Very often, this mental prayer is followed by affective prayer: the movement of feelings and emotions towards the spiritual object. We draw attention to this type of prayer because in many traditions, particularly in the Western world, music has been at the service either of vocal prayer – using it for better memorization, learning and appreciation of

the texts prayed – or of affective prayer, to move the feelings more towards a certain object than towards contemplation. And in too many occasions, the role of religions ends here: in a set of practices, rules, and dogmas that are far from contemplation.

The original contribution to knowledge intended here is precisely that of introducing the sung voice – and not just any kind of music, nor just any type of singing – as a vehicle for contemplative prayer, understood as the stillness of mind, inner silence, personal and holistic perception, and direct, non-discursive knowledge. In the world of contemplative mindfulness (the comprehensive version), it may be referred to as *meditation*. Since we intend to reach a broad audience from various traditions, we will use these words (meditation and contemplative prayer) almost synonymously.

The methodology for addressing our question is to explore the music-related practices that can lead to and establish singing as a tool for contemplation, that is, *silence* and *deep listening*. We underline how they can lead to embodied self-awareness, i.e., to a conception of our lives that focuses on the personal awareness of being in the here and now and, through these tools, acquires its relational dimension with the absolute, hence constituting the most complete vision possible. This is the subject of Section 3.

Next, we discover that there are philosophical and historical-paleontological roots that can underpin the practice of contemplative singing. By delving deeper into the traditions of these areas, we find the foundations that relate the voice to the spiritual path. This is presented in Section 4, which is subdivided into each of the fields in which we have traced our findings.

We also find that, in the Western tradition, the Gregorian chant is an interesting source with truly spiritual roots, but that its practice within the framework of the Catholic church may not always lead to true spiritual growth, but rather to the reinforcement of a specific religiosity, sometimes identitarily closed or, at best, conducive to moving the emotions rather than the stillness of the soul. For this reason, and based on this study, we also propose as a result some concrete practices in how the voice could be used for contemplative education: an experimental proposal which we have called, in Section 5, *deconstructed Gregorian chant*, that can serve as a workshop-laboratory for its development at practically all formative levels.

To round off this point, we can add that perhaps the place for setting the foundations of contemplation is precisely this

music-philosophical vision, in which the various traditions certainly converge and, equally, are underpinned by some kind of spirituality. There are conceptual and ritual differences, when spirituality is concretized in religions, but it is not the rationality of these explanations that is of interest, but the common experience of a unified vision: a *“trans-traditional engagement”* (Sarath 2015, 314) that can be approached from music as understood within this tradition of thought – Western, in our case – and from specific practices, since it is also true that music constitutes a privileged place for this spiritual encounter (Boyce-Tillman 2007, 1410).

3 Connecting the Voice with Other Musical Practices: Silence and Deep Listening

The holistic nature of singing calls for an intricate balance between the mental and physical processes involved. The voice is decisively linked to our own identity; we use it to communicate thoughts, emotions, and needs, it is directly involved in corporeality, and establishes connections with others and with the outside world. Consequently, the learning and practice of singing should incorporate means that integrate the emotional, the bodily, and the mental, and indeed reach well beyond this very integration towards contemplation as we understand it here, for the sake of a personal growth.

Among these means are those tools that consciously help to practice contemplation from the point of view of philosophy (perceiving, observing, reflecting for greater self-awareness) and based on cultural strategies with religious roots (e.g., Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity) or secular ones (e.g., mindfulness), as described above. These contemplative practices have been introduced in recent decades and have been the subject of specific research in the field of voice (Blackhurst 2021, 24–28). They are tools that seek to create the conditions for exploration, deepening and the development of the inner life of the individual.

The multiple facets of these contemplative practices were organized according to categories and activities in the representation of a tree conceptually designed by Maia Duerr (2004) for The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society two decades ago. The success of this image is evidenced by the numerous references to the tree within the specialist literature (Barbezat and Bush 2013, 141; Owen-Smith 2018, 77). Of the more than seven categories and thirty types of activities into which these practices are classified graphically, only the branches related to stillness (silence), creative (music and singing), relational (deep listening), and ritual/cyclical (ceremonies and rituals based in spiritual or cultural traditions) are of interest for our proposal.

We refer to these categories freely, since chanting in its phenomenological dimension (action to be performed) is a repetitive, generative, and non-linear process, and can therefore be accompanied and prepared by any of the resources historically, religiously, and culturally linked to meditation or contemplative prayer. These inputs include: the power of concentration (focus, attention), sensory clarity (discrimi-

nation, capacity for diagnosis, penetration), and equanimity (balance, letting flow, non-judgment).

Thus, the practical concretization that is proposed in Section 5 explores the exercise of contemplative prayer through song within the context of the rituals or liturgy of the Christian tradition (ritual/cyclical). When the individual seeks a simple, spontaneous, and direct contact with “the principle” (spirit), he or she is unequivocally confronted with practices that include silence (stillness) and deep listening (relational). The inclusion of vocal music in this context is not a means of self-expression to assert one’s individuality, but a resource that is proposed to enter into silence and fulfills a function similar to that of Christian mantras or ejaculatory prayers: to lead us away from the reflective path and enter onto the contemplative one [5].

Assuming that “the principle” [6] is constituted by sound and silence, we must admit that the binomial is interdependent and that its (unintentional) symbiosis is privileged over (intentional) music. The reason is that music does not precede human existence and cannot be defined in absolute terms of thought and, consequently, is subject to the constrictions and meanings assigned to it. This special construction that music achieves based on the sound-silence binomial is in fact our original way of relating to the Other, to the world, and to our fellow human beings (relation). Sound and silence are defined by their potentiality for music which, as an external entity or musical product, becomes a social construct: a sign limited by a shared cultural experience whose meaning is only possible within that frame of reference (Cavia-Naya 2004, 64–66). Therefore, it is not this type of music that is of interest to our purposes as an objective, although it can serve as a means, as we shall see in Section 5.

In the realm of meditation or contemplative prayer, the most important aspect of any practice is the process: letting things be without the bonds of the self. This interest points to a view of sound and silence as predecessors of our being and with an eternal potentiality that has been expressed in Western philosophy through the well-known music of the spheres, a concept we will discuss later in Section 4.2.

In Eastern thought we find connections to Zen practices or the writings of Taoist philosophers such as Lao Tzu, who embrace mystery and the unknown as a fundamental part of real life with insights into nothingness and associated notions of absence and negation: presence through the complementarity of opposites (Yin–Yang) and nothingness, action/non-action, sound/non-sound, passion/non-passion (neither sorrow nor joy).

From our point of view, the Christian tradition also shares these same references, since developing contemplative capacities involve embracing opposites. Life is paradoxical only for a strictly rational vision. If we make space for intuition, for example, the paradox dissolves: the contemplative vision is integrative in its nature and, as such, which is contradictory from the rational point of view is part of a greater whole, wherein each part has its place, free of struggle against anything apparently contrary to it. Here, the need to exclude disappears because the contemplative way of being in the world consists in the harmonious dance of the different.

In Western music, the Taoist philosophy of nothingness has illuminated the ideas and works of musicians such as John Cage (Cavia-Naya 1998, 546). In the score of *4'33"* (1952) the indication "tacet" provocatively suggests that all sounds are music, and at the same time the absence of any musical writing raises questions such as the boundaries between art and life or the very nature of non-action/non-sound in music. From there, a strand of contemporary music has sought to blur the boundaries between sound and music by focusing on the properties of sound, compositional and interpretative indeterminacy, and the purpose of purposelessness. The latter, clearly, is a properly contemplative attitude of Christian spirituality: letting go of expectations allows you to embrace what life brings you without judgment, without rejection. Just as Cage does with music, it is about living life as it presents itself: flowing with it.

It should be noted however, that there is a fundamental difference between Cage's *4'33"* and Lao Tzu's complex notion of silence which he calls *The Great Note is Rarified Sound*, a term that refers to the near-sound or very soft sound related to non-action (Lu and Tan 2021, 92). While the physical phenomenon remains similar to Cage and Lao Tzu, the term Taoist emphasizes a tradition of deep inner reflection, which may (as we have noted) partly overlap with the presuppositions of Christian spirituality, but which is very alien to most Western audiences.

It is from this profoundly reflective attitude of the individual, underpinned by their spiritual dimension, that most of the Western audience can be linked to the Western, Christian contemplative practice, which also presupposes work with the body (relaxation), with the mind (concentration), and with the spirit (contemplation). This stillness refers to the search for the silence of the body. If the body is not silenced, it is difficult to silence the mind, let alone the spirit. The Christian monastic tradition and other proposals of present-day Christianity show that the spirit can be glimpsed in this way [7]. The focus of attention is no longer on words, feelings, or

thoughts, but on silence (on the Other). Attention is no longer focused on the self but on the unknown. When one remains still one discovers that one is restless, and in this situation the action that is called for to maintain the presence of absence is that of transiting or non-action (letting go, not paying attention, flowing).

Assuming that the dual phenomenon sound/silence is a continuum and that listening has both spatial and temporal dimensions, we can understand that the way to the Other (the absolute, spirit) opens up through perception rather than through discursive thought. In the beginning there is always perception through the senses: hearing, touching, tasting, seeing, and smelling. Then, attentive, leisurely listening leads to spiritual perception, which consists in awareness, understanding, and discovery: we become aware of something in reality. The concept of *deep listening* can be partially adapted to this kind of perception. It is a term that originates with the artist Paulina Oliveros and has been used in the field of contemporary music as a resource for compositional practice. The term refers to the perception that results from paying conscious attention to internally generated sounds and their transmission through external means in the form of musical creation (Oliveros 2005, 10–12).

In the field of contemplative meditation, we take the term *deep listening* a little further than the importance given to it as a compositional resource, the role acquired by sound in the experimental avant-garde, the implicit fascination with the sound environment that surrounds us (*enviroment*, *soundscape*) or the successes obtained from the application of sound through media such as electronics and new technologies. The *deep listening* proposed here begins with sensory perceptions and extends to more spiritual insights, emphasizing the importance of learning how to dwell in them – leaving behind the past and the yet-to-come future. Perception, consciousness, existence, and abiding in the present are practically synonymous. Remaining in perception means remaining in the present because being constantly attentive to the present will lead us to the presence of the Other (relational). This is how the Christian-rooted, contemplative tradition has historically seen it and, therefore, the goal of the spiritual journey in Benedictine spirituality is "to walk in the presence of God" (Jalics 2003, 24).

The use of song as a means of transcending the ordinary and penetrating the transcendent (the Other) goes well beyond the history of Christianity or the philosophies and religions of antiquity. Its practice goes back to the very origin of the human species, as the latest research, reviewed below, shows.

4 Why Singing? Origins, History, and Metaphysics of Voice

4.1 From the Ancestors: Was There Singing in the Beginning?

Musicality, like language, is a universal human trait that leads us to recognize and attempt to explain the value of music in our evolution and development. The extraordinary diversity of human activities that form part of music is evidence that musical practices have accompanied our species since its beginnings. As far back as our historical records go, the various cultures we know of have used aural modalities as part of their life experience (Flaubert 2017, 74). Although there is no clear consensus today on how or why humans developed the ability to create and understand music, the discovery of the importance of sound in prehistoric and ancient cultures has benefited from recent research within neuroscience, cognitive studies, and evolutionary psychology. These studies have also served as a reference for new disciplines such as musical archaeology and archaeoacoustics (Pasalodos *et al.* 2021, 17).

Scientific theories on the origin of music date back to the 18th century with Rousseau and continued during the 19th century with evolutionary anthropologists such as Herbert Spencer or Charles Darwin himself. The former two point to the common origin – and this is the most relevant for our purposes – of music and speech: through the natural capacity of the human voice, a proto-language is created that is closely connected to emotions, which are an extension of natural psychological phenomena. For Darwin, on the other hand, music predates language itself; he understands it as sounds involved in the mating courtship of certain animal species and forms part of the process of sexual selection in which individuals with greater vocal ability have greater reproductive success.

Currently, there are two basic currents in theories about the origin of music: structural models and functional models. The controversy arises from two different approaches: those who consider that music is a secondary product of other mental faculties developed by the brain and, on the contrary, those who defend that its existence responds to evolutionary reasons (Pasalodos 2020, 5). In any case, it is recognized that musicality has an undoubted adaptive advantage, and many researchers argue for a common origin of music and speech as a mixed form of communication, taking into account that

the areas of the brain activated by music overlap with those dedicated to language. Therefore, it is suggested that both functions either developed in parallel, or that there was a precursor form of both that Steve Brown called *musilanguage* and that many other authors have followed suit (Rubia Vila 2018, 36). According to Brown, the differentiation of both phenomena would occur due to progressive and reciprocal specialization: language would emphasize the transmission of information and music would privilege emotional expression (Brown 1999, 274).

Although the latter possibility has been contested by other scholars, a consensus is reached when the majority affirm that music has accompanied our species from its beginnings, and that the musical traditions of early prehistoric times already presented many of the cultural behaviors that also exist in historical and contemporary practices studied by ethnomusicology, anthropology, and sociology. These fields of knowledge emphasize the context in which sound is produced and understand it as *“an activity of human beings involving sound, the purpose of which is to facilitate and enhance our connections to our environment. ‘Environment’ here is intended to be inclusive of both natural/physical and social realms”* (Golden 2017, 32).

Music thus becomes a means of transcending the ordinary in the way we express ourselves, and convincingly suggests that sound can powerfully influence not only oneself or others, but the *environment*, as understood in its broadest sense, reaching the spiritual and transcendent.

Ethnomusicology has investigated these aspects widely and has highlighted the important role that music would have played in proto-rituals or rituals, in which it would be used to interact with and summon supernatural entities (Merriam 1964; Blacking 1973; Seeger 1987; Nettl 2005). In many cultures, conceptions of music – which, as we have said, would be mainly singing – are to some extent inseparable from conceptions of ritual and religion as understood in a broad sense (from its Latin etymology, *religare*, “connection” with the transcendent). Music is conceived as a means for transforming the boundaries between the sacred and the profane, between the natural and the supernatural; it favors trance and increases the experience of the sacred [8]. Along those boundaries that border on the trans-spiritual or transcendence, how music is interpreted and perceived can serve as a perfect medium for conveying symbolic associations, because combining them does not involve a fixed meaning, yet it has the potential to stimulate emotional reactions. This power of the non-denoting meaning of the human voice is confirmed if we consider that initially all music is born as

a vocal phenomenon produced by certain muscles that move when emotions are experienced. These emotions alter the pitches, timbres, and tones of the spoken word, which generates musical sounds.

Referring to these sound interpretations or listening and their degree of meaningful indeterminacy, Morley (2009, 160) has coined the terms “floating intentionality” when referentiality is non-existent, and “bounded ambiguity” when this absence of meaning is contextualized in a basic way in a particular cultural and belief system. This combination of features allows the experience of these music’s embedded in a particular Weltanschauung, to be at once both powerfully personal and deeply unified, in the belief that they are shared by those with similar interpretations and personal experiences. From these premises, it is easy to infer that the key to the development of music in general, and singing in particular, finds its essence for the human being in the close link that the individual establishes between himself/herself and the desire to search for the transcendent.

Consequently, we can come to understand that ancient practices and beliefs related to the sung voice can become coherent with modern knowledge and technology. This in turn benefits the pursuit of the collective and individual well-being that we propose since our conception of integral music, and that affects our spiritual practices beyond the power it has over our emotions, social interactions, behavior, brain functions or cultural development. This trans-spiritual path that opens up can be beneficial both within current models of education and personal development, in that it can more effectively help to model personalized meditative practices based on song, and within projects that foster the spiritual character, both individually and collectively – in short, the relationship with the Other that we explored earlier.

4.2 Some Philosophical Foundations: From Pythagoras to Mysticism and Science

If, so far, we have discovered that there is an evolutionary and ethnographic foundation that frames the purpose that we accord to the singing voice, we now perform a search from the philosophical point of view, although in these pages we can only trace the general lines that support contemplative spirituality and its relationship with music. Nevertheless, there is indeed a century-old persistence of certain concepts that, even with their logical interpretive evolution, have survived into our times.

Thus, it is no coincidence that Pythagoras and his school, founders of musical theory based on number and proportion, have also always been considered a mystical school (Cornford 1922,139). His heritage was received by Plato, who, although on the one hand seems to understand music as something hedonistic that exalts the senses, on the other hand also considers it as the highest philosophy (Plato 1997, *Fedón* 60e–61a):

Visiting me many times in my past life, the same dream, which showed itself sometimes in one appearance and sometimes in another, said the same advice with these words: Socrates, make Music and apply yourself to it. And I, in my past life, believed that the dream exhorted me and encouraged me to do precisely what I was doing, like those who encourage runners, and the dream also encouraged me to do what I practiced, to make Music, in the conviction that philosophy was the highest music and that I practiced it.

Despite the common interpretation of Platonic thought as dualistic (the world of ideas vs the real world), deeper investigations underline the unity that is reflected in his thought. In particular, the notion of harmony as something that can unify the diverse, both in the human soul and in the cosmos (cf. Plato 1997; *Laws* 659e; *Laws* 664e–665a), where he affirms that, through multiplicity, an absolute unity is achieved, both moderate and harmonious. This concept of harmony can be understood as both musical and spiritual, above all when, at the end of the Platonic dialogues, we find what he calls the supreme good or the One as an object of knowledge that is accessed in a non-rational but direct, intuitive, or contemplative way (Reale 1989, 621).

In a Medieval church portico, it is Augustine of Hippo who follows this tradition (Ramírez-Hurtado 1992, 219). Although the book *De Musica* (which begins as a treatise on musical theory) is not among his most studied, the metaphysical affirmations of its last chapters are present throughout his work: the numerical structure of music, which in turn expresses and makes sensitive, has a correlate both in the psychosomatic structure of man (microcosm) and in the systematic order of the universe (macrocosm). This conception that we inherited from the realm of Platonism in Greek philosophy, remained in full force in the culture of the Roman world and that is why it remained in full force well into the Middle Ages.

On the other hand, the metaphysical conception of music as the harmony of humankind and, in general, of the universe was not only suggested to Christians (i.e., by Augustine of

Hippo) by the Greco-Roman tradition, but also by the Jewish one: the harmony of the universe in this religion undoubtedly influenced the development of Boethius (Gersh 2011). A paradigmatic case is that of Philo of Alexandria, who speaks of the Chaldean people as those who have learned how to harmonize or assemble the things that are on Earth with those that are above with heavenly things and have shown how, since the proportions of music, the most melodious of consonances is realized in the universe. This idea may have come to Philo because of his Judaism and by his incardination in Greek culture; in any case, his vital experience was that of a contemplative mystic, as he describes in his own work, *De vita contemplativa*.

So far, we find the cross-cutting persistence of the concepts of harmony and unity, both in music and spirituality. But this entire tradition has been taken up in our days and has thus expanded with the most recent paradigms of the philosophy of science, which include energy (vibration), as well as inefability, and the senses as proxies for the direct knowledge provided by spiritual contemplation.

This is expressed very clearly by Normand Laurendeau (1944–2012), who was Professor Emeritus of Combustion – that is, his point of departure was science – and whose series of three articles on *Christian Mysticism and Science* was published in the journal *Theology and Science* in 2012 and 2013. In them he analyzes the convergence of mysticism with science in a broad sense, including philosophy and the human sciences, and develops it through an epistemological (Laurendeau 2012a), phenomenological (2012b), and psychological (2013) analysis.

We now proceed to highlight from this broad analysis only those areas that connect with music from the century-old philosophical tradition with which we began this epigraph.

It seems clear that there is a parallel between the physical senses and the spiritual senses; this assimilation is already present in Origen of Alexandria (c. 185–253), continues also with Augustine of Hippo, (contributing another concept to those cited above), and persists in Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), etc., “[a]s for all models, whether in science or religion, the spiritual senses clearly express only partial understanding. For this reason, they provide a viable link between the known and unknown.” (Laurendeau 2012a, 232).

And although, among the senses, sight seems to be more linked to the mystical experience, it is no less true that hearing – the sense *par excellence* for music – is also related to such experiences. We think of those who listen with clarity

to sounds or words that are imposed on them, or those who transcribe such experiences as if writing by dictation, hardly adding anything of their own, but with a direct knowledge of what they receive, which they hear with total clarity and receive without any kind of doubt as a gift, and with total *auditory* clarity (D’Amato 2009, 49).

On the other hand, the energy that God is shown as, is as an ontological metaphor that expresses both the immanence and transcendence of God (Laurendeau 2012a, 235):

This metaphorical concept has received its most thorough explication through the work of Gregory Palamas (1296–1359), mostly in his Triads for the Defense of the Holy Hesychast. According to Palamas, God is unknowable in his essence, but knowable by humans through his manifestations or energies. God’s energies, of course, proceed from his essence, which is the source of his creation.

Even more concretely and contemporarily, some theological currents (overcoming the Aristotelian dualism that has traditionally equated interpretation in terms of form), consider the very sacraments of the Christian liturgy as forms of energy, especially Baptism and the Eucharist (Roll 2013, 266). Thus, although these are elements of a particular religion, it is clear that in the paradigm it represents, they constitute the most obvious links to spirituality.

In our judgment, the vibration that is necessary to produce any kind of music is also a source of energy, so it can equally be considered as one of the *energetic* manifestations of God Himself, and of our access to transcendence that stems from our own nature as well as from the natural world, connected literally by both physical and metaphorically ontological vibrations.

Laurendeau’s phenomenological and psychological analyses relate more directly to music, and even to singing as a concrete practice. For this reason, we will analyze them, together with other concepts and authors, in a separate section.

4.3 Spirituality of Music and Metaphysics of Singing

So far, we have unveiled connections between music in general, singing, and spirituality on a philosophical level. These connections have been concretized in the concepts of harmony, unity in multiplicity, energy, and vibration, as well as in the capacity of the senses, especially hearing, to capture this energetic vibration. In the same way, their capacity to appre-

hend the immanence and transcendence accorded to them in what they perceive, especially under this prism of the vibrating dynamic totality, or with other concepts and authors under a specific heading, has also been made clear.

In this sense, June Boyce-Tillman (2007, 1409) includes a large part of these studies in some of her writings, but we have selected the only one that connects with contemplative spirituality:

This is the area where many claims for a spirituality associated with order have been made by traditional writers on aesthetics and spirituality linked with an unseen order.

She also understands the musical potential for spirituality in a sense consistent with the one we propose here: “*the ability to transport the experienter to a different time/space dimension*” (Boyce-Tillman 2007, 1409). Moreover, this unseen order relates to the philosophical findings outlined in the previous section, according to which music and singing, through the perception of energy and vibration, can access the transcendent and invisible in an embodied form. And they do this in a particularly intimate and personal way because the voice is like a fingerprint, unique to each person, which is part of their identity in a specific and radical way.

In the articles by Laurendeau that study the parallels between science and Christian mysticism, we can find some paths that can very well be applied to our object of study [9]. Moreover, in the new trends in the methods of learning to sing, there are also similarities with the path towards spirituality.

One of the shared axes is that, on the intellectual plane, access to transcendence can only be attained by suspending, precisely, our reasoning, to let reality itself penetrate us. Laurendeau thus underlines this aspect of modern phenomenology and describes this process by following the experiences of Teresa of Jesus [10]; the union with the absolute is not explained or constructed, but requires the suspension of intellect, detachment, and surrender.

Singing itself, as considered here (without referring to its possible support in the form of words or feelings) is perception and self-awareness of oneself – body, mind, and spirit – and of the environment as a whole. Indeed, learning to use the voice efficiently, humanely, and holistically involves such abandonment and surrender.

In this sense, Rosanna Baroncelli explains her process as a professional singer in an article in which, despite its some-

what ambiguous title [11], we find surprising coincidences with the spiritual path. First is the need to let go of the ego, as taught by so many currents of spirituality; the abandonment of the ego occurs when there is a previous process of meditation and concentration (Baroncelli 2015, 2). She follows the school of *Estill Voice Training* to reach what she calls the zone: an empty space of reasoning and abandonment of judgment, with clear parallels in the meditative practices of various traditions that seek to reach the center of the self. Although this author follows a specific school, this point is common to other systems of learning to sing [12] and coincides exactly with the paradox taught by the great masters of spirituality: namely, one must make an effort not to make more effort, as we have already pointed out in another of the previous sections (cf. Jalics 2003).

The metaphysics of singing thus speaks to us of a path beyond the physical (which implies a spiritual quest). And discipline and technique, which are obviously necessary and hard to learn, also have a parallel with the early stages of what in many spiritual traditions can be understood as asceticism in its various forms. This is practiced before meditation, contemplation and letting go, freeing the consciousness from judgment and focused effort to let go and enter into detachment and surrender, thus allowing the spirit in us to speak, unhindered and unimpeded.

If this approach is followed, the voice reflects the inner balance that involves all aspects of the whole of the human being; it is a vibration that happens in the world and places us in it with the naked truth about who we are [13].

For the purposes of our study we would not so much follow the path of the professional singer who studies the discipline for years, as assert that anyone can reach this contemplative moment through his/her singing voice. We would then approach it as contemplative meditation through singing, which, as a practical corollary, we set out in the following section.

5 From Theory to Practice: Some Suggestions for Deconstructed Gregorian Chant

The time has come to ask what concrete practices of contemplative singing might look like within the framework that we have drawn out here. But it could be applicable for people of any cultural tradition, with the only condition of being able to sing adequately in tune. On the other hand, the facilitator or guide for group practice should be sufficiently prepared both in singing and in contemplation.

Also, as pointed out above, it is relevant to underline what contemplative singing is not: singing that is concerned with the outcome, seeking applause from the audience, and focused on the ego; feeling pressured by the need to perform certain musical-vocal productions or conform to specific musical-vocal structures, regardless of the genre, with dates, deadlines, and technical conditioning factors in a framework that may even be clearly competitive. As we pointed out in the introduction, this path lends itself to misunderstandings and can lead in the opposite direction to that which is: seeking to give meaning to life by filling it with activity.

Contemplative chanting is, then, one that focuses only on the perception of vibration and breath, which can thus quieten the mind and connect with the absolute that is both within and outside of us, as energy, wholeness, and unity.

Although neurological research is beyond the scope of our paper, there has already been some work to scientifically substantiate the neural connection of mystical experiences with chanting, thus shedding new light on the subject. The interpretative models offered by those studies show how the capacities of chanting are concurrent with *“neurocognitive functions that are associated with mystical states. Attention and repetition promote disengagement from automatic thoughts, reduced mind wandering, and can diminish a sense of time through semantic satiation, when a phrase temporarily loses its meaning”* (Perry et al. 2021, 113).

Far Eastern traditions use the voice for these practices, based on how they are conceived anthropologically, such as the chanted mantras of Kundalinī yoga that relate to the opening of the chakras. And, as we shall see, certain kinds of music from the Western tradition can also be recovered to focus on perception and attention, to anchor ourselves in mindfulness of breathing, and to return to simplicity and self-knowledge. The reason is that we have a rich tradition of contemplative

chanting, one that has not, however, focused so much on attention, perception, stillness, and peacefulness of the mind as on emphasizing the word or moving the emotions.

Specifically, we are referring to Gregorian chant, whose role in Western spirituality has several aspects that we need to *deconstruct*. On the one hand, it features in monastic environments, where recollection, stillness, and contemplation are pursued, and where its practice alternates with long periods of silence. In this sense, it is in the spiritual DNA of the Western tradition and can be intuitively perceived by people of this and other traditions [14]. Currently Gregorian chant is framed within the liturgy, in concrete rituals (Eucharistic celebrations, canonical hours, sacramentals, etc.) and is used to underscore the word (vocal prayer) or to move the emotions; but it does not always contemplate the underlying unity of the spirit with nature, the corporeality of the spiritual in its totality. Therefore, we focus here on contemplative prayer, personal or communal, but not institutional or liturgical.

By maintaining the interest in introducing singing into contemplative activity within the Western tradition, our proposal re-reads aspects of Gregorian chant from a musicological approach that includes some references to the historical context, the analysis of musical parameters and vocal techniques relevant to our purpose and the proposal of contemplative practice.

The connection between chanting and the contemplative experience in the Christian tradition can be established historically from the onset of monasticism and continues today. It is worth considering the separation of chanting from the world, postulated in its origins by religious orders whose main purpose aims at the contemplative life itself and, at the same time, considers that chanting is one of the main obligations of monastic life – especially in the celebration of the Eucharist and the recitation of the liturgy of the hours.

However, to testify to the individual mystical experiences of those who participate in the composition or performance of Gregorian chant can only be roughly achieved and is beyond the scope of our research. Even so, we can affirm that conciseness, plainness, simplicity reflected technically in the monody, as well as the reduced melodic range and the primarily syllabic settings combined with sparser pneumatic sections, are stylistic characteristics of the plainchant which are perfectly suited to the interests of contemplative prayer. Consequently, we can trace this fit between Gregorian chant and contemplation back to the Middle Ages, when cultivated women who held government positions were concerned with the preservation and instruction of culture, and even devoted

themselves to the composition of plainchant melodies centuries after the first compilation made by Pope Gregory I.

The first of those women was Kassia, who lived in the Eastern Roman Empire in the ninth century. She was born between 805 and 810 in Constantinople and her compositions reveal her deep spirituality. Her works, in addition to fulfilling the liturgical function of her community that gathered to sing the Divine Office, are likely to form part of the pre-contemplative phase and preparation for individual contemplative prayer, due to their poetic richness and strong symbolism. They were written in classical Greek and in a compositional style that combines – in parallel or in contrast words and music, creating musical motifs that symbolize and reflect the text. Most of their music can be placed in the category of the *sticheron*, with melodic and metrical structures similar to those of the sequence known in the West. Others, such as the short prayer hymns or *troparia*, are still part of the liturgy of the Orthodox Church. This is the case of the *troparion* of Mary Magdalene which is sung in the morning office on Spy Wednesday (Touliatos-Miles 2004, 6).

When trying to establish connections between Gregorian chant and contemplation in the Middle Ages, the most prominent figure is Hildegard von Bingen (1098–1179), abbess and counselor to popes and monarchs. She is well known for her writings on natural history and medicine, but above all for the book recounting her mystical visions. Her musical compositions are written in a very personal style, following late medieval plainchant norms, and are the result of moments of rapturous divine inspiration. She herself commented that her words were dictated directly by heaven, a common claim in those who undergo mystical experiences. This context of direct communication with the transcendent on a creative level becomes a spiritual participation through the community that performs it, the audience that actively listens to it, or even the music critic who comments on it. An example would be what happens in the sequence *Columba Aspexit*, where according to Kerman and Tomlinson (2008, 64) “the mystical words of the poem join the free rhythm of the melody and produce a feeling of deep and intense spirituality”.

Without claiming to exhaust all the possible functions that Gregorian chant fulfills in the contemplative realm in Western spirituality, it is necessary to highlight some of the apparent paradoxes that have arisen throughout its history. This is the case in terms of how it is practiced by the Discalced Carmelites, founded by one of the great mystics, Teresa of Jesus (1515–1582). Specifically, according to the foundress of this order, a simple form of recitative monody or Gregorian chant was preferred in the liturgy of the Hours to the elabo-

rate and prestigious polyphonic works that at the time were provided by the best music chapels and the great composers of the Spanish Golden Age. We base our argument on the fact that, in the *Constitutions* (1567) of her order, Teresa wrote that “singing should never be done in a point-by-point melody, but in tone, the voices equal” [15]. Therefore, we can deduce that the great mystic and doctor of the Church was more interested in the direct communication provided by Gregorian chant, as a prayer proper to contemplative meditation, than in the technical procedures, aesthetic results, or purely emotional effects of the polyphony of her time. Consequently, we can also point out that, in that era, and especially from the mystical point of view, Gregorian chant was emphasized as a means of accessing the divinity from bareness, simplicity, and silence, above other contemporary music that was more dramatic or spectacular.

However, in addition to the reasons of historical tradition, the relevance of Gregorian chant is based on the fact that it is a simple chant (plainchant) that is practiced with a very particular attention to the breath, perceiving one’s own body and the being of the spirit within us. The fact that it is music performed *a cappella* also connects with the bareness necessary for abandonment, detachment, surrender.

On the other hand, rhythm, which is such a perceptual and bodily aspect, is incorporated in this song only through the voice and breathing. This is not the case with music that has instrumental accompaniment, for here the question of rhythm is largely delegated to the accompanying instruments, especially percussion, which then constitute a further mediation. In Gregorian chant, this unity occurs especially in a primitive and, precisely for this reason, freer phrasing: before mensural music dissociate the embodied unity of vocal musicality from vocal musicality itself.

Another question to bear in mind is that Gregorian chant is modal music, composed of eight modes or scales, configured according to a specific sequence of intervals that distinguish each one of those modes. Using these scales, structural melodic patterns are formed, the centrality of which is much more watered down than the system of common-practice tonality imposed in Western culture from the 17th century onwards. The lesser centrality of the tonic and the reduced capacity of Gregorian-mode degrees of intervals to bring compositions to a conclusion, mean that the melody is perceived in a less directional and progressive fashion than is the case with tonal music. The latter is characterized by a continual forward movement due to the harmonic directionality and the predominant technical means that furnish a constant sense of tension and resolution, which causes the

flow of music to advance. The modal system, on the other hand, offers a sense of spatial circularity, introspective capacity and of suspension or acceptance of the present that are very pertinent to contemplative practice. The profound listening and silence referred to above are also articulated in this very context, where the homogeneity of the modes, a free rhythm and a monadic texture predominate. At the same time, drawing on such elements of a modal system as Gregorian chant – historically and culturally distant in time from the tonal system that is much more common in both classical and popular contemporary music – reinforces the relevance of this type of chant to contemplative practice: individuals place themselves on a new, existential plane, to which the absence of normal sound references contributes.

Moreover, soon after Gregorian chant emergence, melismas appear, which we call *vocalizes*: the free performance of many notes on a single vowel. This also meant an opening towards liberation from the constraint of regimentation, and emancipation from the servitude of the text for the sake of a greater expressiveness in the praise. As Alcalde says, quoting St. Augustine, “*he who rejoices does not utter words: it is the voice of the heart*” (Alcalde 2007, 147). This statement supports our proposal to deconstruct Gregorian chant, as it is not oriented to the exclusive literalness of the fixed text. And on the other hand, it connects with one of the contemplative traditions that speaks of contemplation as “*prayer of the heart*” [16].

Moving now towards a practical proposal, contemplation that filtered through singing could begin with vocal sessions interspersed with long moments of silence, during which the deep listening that we have already mentioned, would be practiced. This listening, which projects attention on to different planes of sound in function of the subject, permits a particular self-perception that prepares the ground for using the voice differently.

It can also be accompanied by a guided meditation that allows the attention to slowly move towards the elements of the phonatory apparatus: the nose, from the flaps to the top; the paranasal sinuses; the pharynx, the larynx, the trachea; and the whole respiratory movement in a resting phase, with the inter-costal expansion and the movement of the diaphragm visible.

The first sounds could be articulated using Latin words typical of the ritual Christian tradition in which we are moving. As we have pointed out, it is logical and culturally significant that the chosen words possess a resonance that promotes stillness because of their link to the sacred text. Moreover, their segmentation or syllabic deconstruction would be

carried out with a slow and attentive pronunciation that, in terms of technique, favors vocal resonators and vocal projection. Among these words would be some of those that enjoy the greatest universality due to the extent of the shared cultural codes in which they have been used: *Amen, Alleluia, Kyrie, or Kyrie Eleison* [17]. They could simply be pronounced in spoken form at first, and then intoned on two or three notes, which could be repeated in imitation. Another option, also viable, would be to use them with the freedom of the early medieval vocalizes or melismas.

In principle, this is a communal practice, so one participant would improvise on these terms with just a few notes, and the others would respond in a question-answer cadence-mode. If the level of performing group allows it, the improvisations can be longer, or the answers might be carried out in retroversion. The latter involves attentive and concentrated listening, relevant only if the musical level of the meditator allows it. Consequently, is only advisable as a practice if it is formulated in a perceptive way, letting oneself be carried along rather than as a strenuous exercise.

Another possibility would be to emit a single phrase from a psalm or any other Gregorian chant form as responsories, sequences, antiphony, etc., which would also be repeated in response to a question, interspersed anew with moments of silence, in which deep listening is exercised.

In the second stage, replicating communally the historical evolution of the birth of the polyphonic organum from Gregorian chant, we might proceed to create a vocal and auditory space on two levels: voice against voice. That is to say: half of the group holds a drone or pedal note while a participant improvises on it, to return to deep listening and even to a new moment of attentive breathing with the phonatory apparatus, which is now perceived in a new way, with a renewed self-awareness of how the contemplative voice is exercised.

A more detailed scheme for applying this practical methodology as an activity of contemplative chanting, and for providing an adequate guide to carry out sessions according to the objectives of our research, could be as follows, in a session lasting approximately one hour and a quarter to one hour and a half. This scheme is intended for group practice, but it can also be carried out individually, adapting the parts in which an imitation or a basic polyphony is proposed:

These are, in any case open-ended proposals, which would always have to be adapted to the particular community and individuals in order to be truly effective as a chant used as a formative path to reach a state of contemplation.

Activity	Duration (in minutes)	Explanation
1. Singing (a verse or a sentence taken from an antiphon, psalm, etc.)	10	This is done in an imitative fashion, where the guide sings a phrase, and the group repeats it, much like the way Psalms are recited or sung in the liturgy (call and response)
2. Guided meditation	10	Focused on breathing, as explained above
3. Silence	15	Now individuals pay attention to their breathing by themselves
4. Sung improvisation on vowels or short word with spiritual resonances: <i>Amen, Alleluia, Kyrie</i>	10	Depending on the musical training of the participants, it could be more elaborate, featuring long melismas, as explained above in the medieval style. This practice is carried out in open shifts, with the free participation of attendees
5. Silence	15	Focused now on deep listening
6. Final chant	10	A Gregorian composition widely recognized, or reminiscent of early polyphonic organum, where half of the group sustains a note while some singers in the other half engage in free improvisation upon it

Table 1. Proposal for Practical Session of Contemplative Singing

6 Conclusion

We can give an open answer to our main question as to whether the sung voice could be a vehicle for contemplation, the kind of singing involved, and under what conditions. By way of reply, we have designed what we have called *deconstructed Gregorian chant*. The steps therein have been drawn up alongside explanations of how it should be practiced, among other musical contemplative issues (silence and deep listening). Another important requirement is the need for unity in the concept and practice of contemplation as wholeness in life, as we stated in Section 2, and to avoid the frequent aim among musicians of achieving success in the performance or of being productive.

The result achieved with the deconstructed Gregorian concept is novel and perhaps even risky. But the fact that it even proposes a way of putting it into practice as a tool for spiritual contemplation through the sung voice is a sign of the viability of the results, albeit logically, in an open and adaptable way, according to the cultural and social characteristics of communities and individuals. Deconstruction implies that it has been removed from a specific religious practice; it is

not performed within any liturgy, so it could be appropriate for people of any cultural background.

To create this new model, it was deemed necessary to delve into the philosophical, anthropological, phenomenological, and musical roots of sung voice, and connect them with contemplation, while also using other paths that are inherent in contemplative singing. It has been unavoidable to travel a wide and at the same time deep path to build this foundation, so that each of these lines could certainly constitute an independent research theme itself. This methodological and conceptual framework may be both a strength and a limitation. Nevertheless, it leaves the way open for further work.

Therefore, the new lines of research that open up from this could deepen each of the foundational points, in order to expand the deconstructed Gregorian model (in theory or practice) or could even be extrapolated to other cultural (for example, Muslim or Jewish) traditions, to deconstruct their traditional chants.

Notes

- [1] John of the Cross, “Spiritual Canticle,” Stanza 14, in *John of the Cross: Selected Writings*.
- [2] Mysticism itself denotes communicable thoughts and/or actions of living human beings regarding holistic experiences of God. Such experiences involve a unique, sacred mode of perception, an ontological conformity between the mystic and God (Laurendeau 2012b, 344).
- [3] At times, these beliefs can become so concrete and culturally rooted, so intensely focused on identity and rationalization, that they ultimately depart from spirituality and evolve into doctrines.
- [4] Although there is a wide range of terminology to describe this itinerary, this one is taken from *Contemplative Retreat* by Franz J. Jalics.
- [5] It may seem to us that this type of resource is more common in Eastern traditions, for example *kōan* used in some Zen schools. However, it should be noted that similar tools exist in Christian contemplative schools, such as *mantra* or a short vocal prayer traditionally called the *ejaculatory*. *Mantra* has a similar function to *kōan*: to turn away from the reflective path and start upon another way. Its etymology reveals that it is an *instrument for cleansing the mind* (Sa. *man* – “mind”, *tra* – “instrument”). It is assumed by believers as a powerful, sacred, and unique word, the repetition of which helps to penetrate into silence (Cavia-Naya 2006, 96). To contextualize its meaning, we must consider that having a first glimpse of the transcendent throughout mystery history has occurred in three main ways: the way of nature (the image), the way of culture (the word) and the way of silence (without the mediation of image or word). For Christians, the way of the image is the way of God the Father, the way of culture is the way of God the Son, and the way of silence is the way of God the Holy Spirit. The first two would be pre-contemplative ways, and the third would be the contemplative way.
- [6] The term *principle* is understood here as “source”, “origin”, or “spirit”.
- [7] Contributions to the modern contemplative tradition include the Irishman, John Maine (1926–1982) whose *World Community for Christian Meditation* emerged under his leadership (wccm-colombia.org), and the Spaniard Pablo D’Ors (1963) with his open network of meditators *Friends of the Desert* (amigosdeldesierto.org).
- [8] The term “trance” is understood here as the *state in which a person’s conscious mental faculties are temporarily suspended*.
- [9] We found them particularly illuminating, for it is not for nothing that it is the poem by a Christian mystic that opens this study and inspires the main research question. However, Laurendeau’s articles also cite other traditions.
- [10] Together with John of the Cross (Juan de la Cruz), the greatest exponent of Spanish Golden Age mysticism.
- [11] The word *metaphysics* used in the title of his article *Metaphysics of Singing* would need disambiguation, for sometimes it refers to the truly spiritual, other times it speaks of something like *magic* (which we do not consider to be a spiritual phenomenon), and yet other times it may perhaps be understood in the traditional, philosophical sense. Here we will take the aspect where it really refers to a connection with spirituality.
- [12] Thus, the Alexander technique or *Fendelkrais* applied to music in general and singing in particular, follows a similar route.
- [13] See Rosana Baroncelli (vocevera.org).

- [14] In this sense, Ricardo S. Arce's study *Música de la palabra y gesto ritual: Un saber no científico* is interesting, in which he conducts ethnographic field research in several Benedictine and Zen monasteries, in which he observes and contrasts the ritual of Gregorian chanting by monks and the silent meditation of Buddhist novitiates. In both cases, one discovers, in silence and in chanting, ritual gestures and prayer that involve a kind of invisible, transcendent referent whose knowledge is based on deep spiritual experience. The article shows how the communal life of believers provides them with social and cultural foundations that legitimize the knowledge they gain in their spiritual experience, and how contemplating the Good results in more certain and reliable knowledge than any other. In a sense, this is the same claim that philosophy has made since Plato, as we discussed in Sections 4.2 and 4.3.
- [15] "*Jamás sea el canto por punto, sino en tono, las voces iguales.*" (Teresa of Ávila 2023).
- [16] This is the case of the well-known, anonymous work in the Russian tradition, *The Way of a Pilgrim*, or *The Pilgrim's Tale*.
- [17] The reference book for use in practical sessions is the *Graduale Triplex* (1979). The reason for choosing it, is that it is not an official liturgical book of the church, but instead an academic tool for specialists in Gregorian chant and liturgical music at the musicological, historical, liturgical, palaeographical, semiological, and interpretative levels.

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