

**Jonas Lundblad**

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Composer**

**A Study of Intersections between Composition,  
Theorizing, and Performance in Olivier Messiaen**





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## Acknowledgements

Scholarship seeks to produce knowledge and interpretations that carry a general validity, and it is essentially a public matter. At the same time, the impetuses and inspiration that sustain scholars in their pursuit of knowledge often remain deeply personal. Olivier Messiaen's music has played a central role in my life for some 15 years, since I began to learn and to perform his organ works. For me, Messiaen is a prism that mirrors my own need to move between musical performance, theoretical concerns, literature and art. He engaged a broad range of subjects and artistic expressions with a curiosity that inspired creativity and freedom, rather than to remain stifled by conventions. Messiaen's work and legacy form a universe that allows me, as a scholar and musician, to learn from investigations of very different types of sources, disciplines and artistic traditions.

Even the often-solitary work of scholarship in the humanities is thoroughly dependent on others. Johannes Brusila has been an instrumental figure in the process of transforming previous research ideas into the present dissertation. As the main supervisor, Johannes has guided the project through all the necessary stages with efficiency, pragmatism, experienced reading skills and a noticeable dose of dry humour. Camilla Hambro came on board as a further supervisor and provided valuable comments, especially in the final stages. Seminars and discussions among fellow doctoral students and other scholars in the community of musicologists at Åbo Akademi have been interesting. They have given me insights into a number of areas on which I previously had been strikingly ignorant.

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Friends, relatives and colleagues among scholars and musicians provide me with the companionship and exchange of ideas needed to grow as a human being and in my professional roles. My mother Anna constantly seeks to provide all the assistance she can offer, in times when support is needed.

Finally, my thoughts go to Anna-Lisa Wärme (1917–2017), one of the most extraordinary human beings I have encountered, and one of my very best friends. Her powerful intuition and openness of spirit allowed for a direct apprehension of Messiaen's music, far beyond what I have encountered in many professional musicians and scholars. When I performed organ works and previously had explained their narrative intentions, Anna-Lisa lived through their content with an intensity that never failed to amaze me. In these moments,

Messiaen's music truly opened a window to a richer and more beautiful alternative reality. She is dearly missed, for many reasons.

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*Jonas Lundblad*

# Abstract

Different professional roles within music change over time. The evolution of modernism in twentieth century art music elevated the composer to the pinnacle of musical creativity. Accomplished modernist composers came to be regarded as intellectuals, and were expected to hold rational conceptions of their individual styles. An increased focus on intentionality in composition, and on notated scores as representations of fixed works, went hand in hand with a tendency to neglect performance in common discourses on art music.

This dissertation investigates such intersections between professional roles in the influential French composer Olivier Messiaen (1908–1992). The study builds upon a noticeable revival of modernist studies in musicology in the twenty-first century. Scholars working on twentieth century music have typically moved away from a previous reliance on composers' own conceptualizations of their music, in the act bringing methods and concerns from postmodern musicology into their methodologies.

Messiaen has frequently been treated as self-standing figure among twentieth century composers. As a contrast, his self-understanding as a composer is here historicized and investigated as part of typical intellectual predispositions among leading modernists. The study draws on recent musicological advances on composers' writings and their recorded performances. It establishes a theoretical framework for critical approaches to both kinds of sources, as valuable complements to notated scores in investigations of what here is called composite work ontologies.

In methodological terms, the dissertation builds a novel connection between analyses in specialized Messiaen scholarship and methods in textual interpretation that originated in German Romantic philosophy. Messiaen's writings have recurrently been found wanting in systematicity and in discursive expositions of pivotal concepts and methods in composition. His manner of writing provides an example of a phenomenon that within musicology have prompted calls for a *gapology*, i.e., studies of discontinuities and omissions in composers' prose and conceptualization of their own music. A fundamental premise in the dissertation is that both human self-consciousness and communal discourses are to be expected to contain such blind spots. Consequently, scholars often need to reconstruct fundamental thought patterns that operate below the surface level in writings.

This understanding and concomitant methods are put to work in two discrete articles, investigating the pivotal impact of plainchant in Messiaen's aesthetics and the intellectual reception of his music by the philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Messiaen's interpretations of his own organ music are investigated in a third article, in which performance analysis is informed by deepened attention to the composer's ideals of successful interpretations.

The methods and theoretical framework formulated in the cover essay are also integral parts of the dissertation's findings. They propose that a current broader revisiting of musical modernism provides a fertile framework for further work on Messiaen, performance and intellectual ideas operative in his

compositions. The hermeneutical stance developed here is intended to serve similar carefully contextualized investigations of the composer's writings and activities.

The first article shows that Messiaen's musical thought and some of his methods in composition were more thoroughly ingrained in a late Romantic paradigm of expressivity than many scholars have noted. It also reveals how he adopted vital theoretical premises from previous authors, turned them into musical ideas, and continued to adapt his use of them to developments within his own musical style.

The second article opens new vistas for more thorough analyses of Messiaen as a composer-performer on the organ. In a novel manner, it suggests the need of considering Messiaen's distinct ideas concerning the aims of musical interpretation, and their impact on his style of playing. This approach stresses the centrality of communicating the musical ideas and narrative content in individual pieces, to which notated scores are a means. The analysis shows that Messiaen at times perceived such ideas in a piece quite differently in his roles as a composer and as a performer.

The third article corroborates previous observations concerning how Messiaen's verbalization of his own music shaped its reception. At the same time, it highlights the impact of his student Pierre Boulez's historiography of musical modernism, including the particular historical role it ascribed to Messiaen. The study also reveals how Deleuze and Guattari grasped pivotal aspects of Messiaen's compositional methods on purely theoretical grounds, in the act facilitating philosophical employments of key musical techniques well beyond the composer's stated understanding of them.



## Sammanfattning

Professionella roller inom musiken förändras över tid. Inom 1900-talets modernism kom tonsättarens ställning att höjas över andra roller inom musiklivet. Framstående tonsättare kom att betraktas som del av kategorin intellektuella i samhället och förväntades presentera välmotiverade ställningstaganden bakom sina kompositioner. En förhöjd värdering av sådana rationella aspekter gick hand i hand med en syn på noterade partiturer som representationer av fixerade verk. Samtidigt framhövdes tolkarnas betydelse typiskt sett inte i diskussioner och analyser av konstmusik.

Denna avhandling undersöker skärningspunkter mellan olika musikaliska yrkesroller hos den inflytelserike franske tonsättaren Olivier Messiaen (1908–1992). Dess angreppssätt bygger på en ny våg av musikvetenskapliga studier av modernism som epok och begrepp. Studier kring 1900-talets konstmusik har rört sig bort från tonsättarens egna sätt att teoretisera kring sin egen musik, i många fall inspirerade av metoder och frågeställningar i postmodern musikvetenskap.

Messiaen har ofta behandlats som en fristående gestalt inom 1900-talets musik. Som en kontrast historiseras och undersöks här hans egna uppfattningar om rollen som tonsättare, inklusive dess växelspel med teoretiska idéer om musik samt med interpretation, som en del av mer generella tankemönster bland ledande modernistiska tonsättare. Avhandlingen tar intryck från nya musikvetenskapliga tolkningar av tonsättarens skrifter och deras inspelade framföranden. Den etablerar ett teoretiskt ramverk för kritiska förhållningssätt till båda typerna av källor, som här betraktas som värdefulla komplement till partiturer i undersökningar av vad som här kallas komplexa verkkontologier.

I metodologiskt avseende etablerar avhandlingen ett nytt samband mellan analyser inom den specialiserade Messiaenforskningen och texttolkningsmetoder med ursprung i tysk romantisk filosofi. Messiaens skrifter har återkommande funnits brista i systematik och diskursiva förklaringar av centrala begrepp och kompositionsmetoder. Hans skrivsätt utgör därmed ett exempel på ett fenomen som fått musikvetare att påtala behovet att studera diskontinuiteter och innehållsliga luckor i tonsättarens prosa och teoretiserande av sin egen musik. En grundläggande utgångspunkt i avhandlingen är att både mänskligt självmedvetande och gemensamma diskurser kan förväntas innehålla sådana blinda fläckar. Följaktligen behöver forskare ofta rekonstruera grundläggande tankemönster som präglar skrifter, men utan att explicit exponeras i deras ytskikt.

Denna syn, och metoder som växer ur den, präglar två av avhandlingens artiklar. Dessa undersöker den påtagliga betydelsen av gregoriansk sång i Messiaens estetik, samt receptionen av hans musik i filosoferna Gilles Deleuzes och Félix Guattaris skrifter. Messiaens tolkningar av sin egen orgelmusik undersöks i en tredje artikel, där tolkningsanalys tillåts präglas av ett fördjupat intresse för tonsättarens egna ideal kring lyckade uttolkningar.

De metoder och teoretiska ramar som formuleras i kappan utgör delar av avhandlingens resultat. De indikerar att en vidare förnyad forskning kring

musikalisk modernism utgör ett fruktbart ramverk för framtida studier av Messiaen och teoretiska idéer som präglar hans kompositioner. Den hermeneutiska hållning som utvecklas här är avsedd att tjäna som underlag även för liknande noggrant kontextualiserade studier av tonsättarens skrifter och aktiviteter.

Den första artikeln visar att Messiaens musikaliska tänkande och flera av hans kompositionsmetoder var mer grundligt förankrade i ett senromantiskt expressivt paradigmen än vad många forskare har noterat. Den visar också hur han anammade centrala teoretiska utgångspunkter från tidigare författare, omvandlade dem till musikaliska idéer, och fortsatte att anpassa sitt bruk av dem i takt med förändringar inom hans egen stil.

Den andra artikeln presenterar ingångar för djupare analyser av Messiaen som interpret av sina egna orgelverk. Studien visar, på ett nytt sätt, på ett behov att överväga Messiaens specifika idéer om syften med musikalisk interpretation, och betydelsen av dessa idéer för hans eget sätt att spela. Denna ansats framhäver ett fokus på att kommunicera de musikaliska idéerna och det narrativa innehållet i enskilda verk, ett ändamål för vilket partitur är ett medel. Analysen visar att Messiaen i vissa fall förstod sådana idéer i ett stycke påtagligt annorlunda i sina roller som tonsättare och som interpret.

Den tredje artikeln bekräftar tidigare iakttagelser om hur Messiaens egen teoretiska uttolkning av sin egen musik format dess reception. Samtidigt understryker den betydelsen av hans student Pierre Boulez historiografi kring musikalisk modernism, inklusive den specifika roll som denna tillskriver Messiaen. Studien avslöjar också hur Deleuze och Guattari lyckades analysera väsentliga aspekter av Messiaens kompositionsmetoder på rent teoretiska grunder, och därmed möjliggöra deras filosofiska användning av centrala musikaliska tekniker bortom tonsättarens egen förståelse av dem.

## List of original publications

1. "Universal neumes: Chant theory in Messiaen's aesthetics", *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 147/2 (2022), 1–45. doi:10.1017/rma.2022.16.
2. "Sentiment beyond chronometry: A performance history of Olivier Messiaen's *Livre d'orgue*", *Musikki* 53/1 (2023), 80–107. doi:10.51816/musiikki.128191
3. "Deleuze reads Messiaen: Durations and birdsong becoming philosophy", *Svensk tidskrift för musikforskning / Swedish Journal of Music Research* 104 (2022), 77–107. doi:10.58698/stm-sjm.v104i.8896



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# 1. Introduction

Olivier Messiaen (1908–1992) was a prominent French composer of art music. At the same time, he did much more than compose music. The range of his professional activities was conspicuously multifaceted, bringing several discrete roles within music in contact with ventures into the theoretical realms of theology, philosophy, analysis and music history. The dissertation spotlights this trait by alluding to a remark by his student Pierre Boulez, who once commented on a conspicuous heterogeneity within Messiaen's musical style. In this study, Boulez's observation rather inspires a basic approach to Messiaen's manner of being a composer:

Were it not for the fear of being taken for a bad punster I would add that composer is exactly the right word for Messiaen, in that it suggests the word "composite".<sup>1</sup>

Before reaching the Parnassus of well-established composers, Messiaen was a journalist and a performer, an impresario and a producer of concerts in which his own music was played. He was to some degree a poet, providing the lyrics for his major vocal works. Messiaen was originally a pianist and added organ playing to his palette during studies at the Paris Conservatoire. As a longstanding organist at the church Sainte-Trinité in the same city, he was a distinguished improviser and interpreter not least of his own works for the instrument. Messiaen took up teaching at an early stage and would eventually become one of the century's most influential pedagogues in musical analysis and composition. Public lectures, occasional writing and authorship of treatises fulfilled both pedagogical aspirations and dissemination of his works, as well as explaining motifs and convictions behind them to the public.

The basic question behind this dissertation is how these many capacities intersect with each other and more specifically how the role as composer relate to other roles. Is Messiaen better regarded as a composer who also happened to have a number of auxiliary professional roles? How important were such other roles and to what extent did they influence his activity as a composer?

Evaluations of such questions prompt contextual considerations. Teaching has played a significant role for renowned musicians and composers throughout history. Service as a church organist has been natural in many historical cultures, but is rare among leading twentieth century composers. Writing treatises and promulgating distinct conceptions of music are recurrent traits among creators of music, but the acknowledged theoretical authority of such texts have shifted.

The central purpose of the dissertation is to study the apparent versatility in Messiaen's professional life as an instance of certain modernist conceptions. His multi-faceted activity is striking, but was not unique: several contemporary colleagues took on a similar breadth of tasks on the musical scene. Some of these roles were linked to prominent and commonly shared aspects of what it amounted to be a leading composer. To hold a rational explanation of one's own

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<sup>1</sup> Boulez 1986, 420.

artistic outlook and musical style was a pivotal ideal in a century that increasingly came to regard composers as public intellectuals. Many modernist composers also kept alive a longstanding reciprocity between performance and the production of new works. As a contrast to the widely acknowledged importance of theoretical principles, personal connections to musical interpretation have played a scant part in public debate and scholarship on modernist composers.

The constellation of several recent developments provides a beneficial historical junction for new investigations of the interplay between Messiaen's different professional roles, within a modernist paradigm. Firstly, the availability of new sources, during the last decades and into the future, enables studies of previously unknown material.<sup>2</sup> Secondly, some three decades after the composer's demise, scholars can feel free to traverse beyond his own stated views on such matters. Thirdly, new paradigms in studies of musical modernism enable a critical rethinking of twentieth century outlooks and, as a result, bring previously overlooked dimensions of composers' self-perception and activities into the limelight.

The chosen focus in the dissertation is to study how Messiaen's activities as a performer and as a writer, teacher and intellectual intersect with his role as a composer. There is a notable surge in studies of both these areas, more broadly, whose methods and insights can be used to set up a framework for comparisons and evaluations of Messiaen. Topics like composers' writings or performance, however, easily remain compartmentalized islands in scholarship. The main point here is to interpret the significance of these activities in Messiaen's role as a composer, including his creative processes, meaning in his works and reception of his ideas and music.

On a personal level, the dissertation arises from a longstanding interest in the interplay between theoretical ideas, works and performance in music from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. My own profile as a musicologist is shaped by an original training in historical philosophy, in my case on art and religion in the intellectual context of German Romanticism and Idealism. This focus is one of several reasons that lead me, as a musician, to learn and perform Messiaen's integral works for the organ. The three case studies within the dissertation exhibit manifest traces of my own professional roles, here conjoined with tools drawn from historical musicology. Hermeneutical theory from German Romanticism shape the first article, as well as basic premises on language and subjectivity throughout the dissertation. Methods for systematic reconstructions of ideas operative in larger corpora of writings shape both that article and the third investigation. The second included study rests upon a critical apparatus for evaluations of organ performance largely derived from personal experiences of musical interpretation. As such, the dissertation to

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<sup>2</sup> Most important is the inventorying, documenting and release of various kinds of sources to Messiaen's life and music in the Fonds Olivier Messiaen, VM FONDS 30 MES, held at the Bibliothèque nationale de France, <https://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc1121814/cN71572> [accessed 2022-11-21]. On this archive, see Soret 2016, Benitez 2018, 6-55.



some extent constitutes a meeting shaped by professional versatility both in the object of study and in the way it is studied.

## 1.1 Writings and performance in revived studies of musical modernism

The dissertation evolves out of debates and topics within the specialized Messiaen literature. A main feature of the study is, however, to treat both the composer and indeed the history of previous research within a broader modernist framework. The choice to approach Messiaen as a modernist is in fact far from self-evident. The first two sections in this chapter describe motives behind this decision, after which it will be possible to articulate the aims that shape the investigation. The present section provides a synopsis of some distinct traits in an ongoing transformation of perspectives in studies of twentieth century music, as they influence the present dissertation.

The concept of modernism has made a remarkable comeback during the early decades of the twenty-first century, after having been driven into a corner during the final years of the previous century. Musicology was comparably late to adopt aspirations and rhetorical strategies associated with postmodernism, but this elusive paradigm had come to shape a notable anti-modernism in the theoretical preoccupations of vital strands of the discipline at the turn of the millennium. Especially in Anglo-American contexts, scholars desired alternatives to a previous focus on formalism, techniques and musical autonomy, with a concomitant and unilateral attention on comprehension and structure in the appreciation of music. A primacy of authorial intention in evaluations of meaning was connected to a one-sided regard for rationality and individual composer geniuses. Such traits were interpreted as part of an assumed universality and teleology that delimited musical progress to Western high culture and the ascendancy of a male canon. Scholars differed in their use of modernism as a designation primarily of a set of values, or the repertoire of Western art music composed after the Second World War. Regardless of such differences in focus, modernism was often perceived as a paradigm that needed to be surpassed, in order to provide space for novel beneficial ways of creating and appreciating music.<sup>3</sup>

Challenges from such postmodernist approaches were forceful enough to prompt reconsiderations even among musicologists still dedicated to study twentieth century high modernism. As a result, it is possible to note a distinct revival of modernist studies in the twenty-first century. This field had previously often been focused on individual composer titans, such as Boulez, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Elliott Carter and Milton Babbitt. Furthermore, perspectives and methods in line with the composers' own self-perception of

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<sup>3</sup> For vital contributions to postmodern musicology, see among others, Kerman 1985, McClary 1991, Leppert 1993, Kramer 1995, McClary 2002, Lochhead & Auner (eds.) 2002, Dell'Antonio (ed.) 2004, Lochhead 2009, Gloag 2012.

their artistic projects had often dominated criticism and scholarship. A few years into the twenty-first century, any unchallenged ascendancy of musical modernism had itself become history. Critics and scholars increasingly began to treat modernism as an epoch whose “legacy” called for, and was open to, new manners of analysis.<sup>4</sup>

One way of inducing such a shift was to introduce postmodern concerns into the study of twentieth century music, among them a questioning of the primacy of authorial intention in meaning and appreciation.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, a restricted Western gaze has increasingly been complemented with studies of modernism in other cultures, as well as in popular music.<sup>6</sup> Scholars have recently set out to interpret the “unconscious” in European modernism, gendering the concept and showing its relevance in disability studies.<sup>7</sup> Musicologists have also used the notion modernism to reconstruct a distinct approach to history and novelty in music, which purportedly prefigures the twentieth century.<sup>8</sup> In short, modernism is having a vogue and is used both in mapping of previously unrecognized material and in new approaches to previously canonized repertoires. Indeed, the multiplicity of approaches undertaken under this umbrella term possibly makes the concept itself increasingly nebulous.<sup>9</sup>

Of primary importance in the present investigation are conceptual and methodological gains in recent scholarship on modernist composers’ writings and the significance of performance in their compositions. Composers’ preoccupation with writing is certainly not an exclusive phenomenon in modernism, but they gained a new significance for their professional role. A novel systematic attention to such texts in recent scholarship can be visible on two interrelated layers. On a material level, musicologists have brought out critical editions of writings by a string of twentieth century composers, not least from France.<sup>10</sup> Such philological work goes hand in hand with the ongoing construction of an online dictionary and digital repository of composers’ texts.<sup>11</sup>

On a level of interpretation, strategies at work in composer’s manner of writing and in different textual genres are studied critically. Of seminal

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Heile (ed.) 2009.

<sup>5</sup> For such a conscious strategy, see notably Ashby (ed.) 2004.

<sup>6</sup> Bohlman 2008, Bohlman (ed.) 2008, Schleifer 2011, Janz & Yang (eds.) 2019.

<sup>7</sup> See, respectively, Brodsky 2017, Hisama 2006, Straus 2018.

<sup>8</sup> Berger & Newcombe (eds.) 2005, Downes 2010, Janz 2014, Gulbrandsen & Johnson (eds.) 2015, Johnson 2015.

<sup>9</sup> Heile 2011. The field is modernist studies has grown expansive enough to be surveyed in a research companion like Heile & Wilson (eds.) 2019.

<sup>10</sup> In addition to previous collections centred on Darius Milhaud, Maurice Ravel, Erik Satie and Francis Poulenc, recent editions include writings by Charles Koechlin, Igor Stravinsky, Paul Dukas, Nadia Boulanger and Vincent d’Indy. See respectively, Duchesneau (ed.) 2006-2009, Dufour (ed.) 2013, Perret (ed.) 2018-2022, Francis (ed.) 2018, Brooks & Francis (eds.) 2020, Saint Arroman (ed.) 2019-21.

<sup>11</sup> The *Dictionnaire des Écrits de Compositeurs* is available at <https://dicteco.huma-num.fr/en/> [accessed 2022-11-12].

influence in this dissertation are investigations of how the publication of writings contributed to shape new conceptions of composers and their status as intellectuals, not least in the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>12</sup> A conscious historicizing is crucial in such enterprises. The aim is generally to study writings in order to gain a deeper understanding of a composer, an artistic nexus or a time in musical history. Such an approach contrasts with the kind of urgency present in Susan McClary's earlier objections to Babbitt's self-presentation in his writings, as expressed at a time when these texts still exerted a notable influence.<sup>13</sup> The theoretical significance of a new paradigm in the study of composers' writings is discussed further in the second chapter of this dissertation.

Performance studies is a field whose relevance in musical modernism, and with the role of composers, may seem questionable at first. The quest for historically informed performance practices (HIP) during the twentieth century rediscovered a freedom for creativity in musical interpretation by liberating itself from modernist conceptions of the notated score as a stable representation of a work, and as a prescription of its authentic performance. Igor Stravinsky and Arnold Schoenberg are well-known proponents of a modernist view that musicians should restrict themselves to conveying the composer's intentions, as notated in the score. The latter famously stated that the performer was "totally unnecessary except as his interpretations make the music understandable to an audience unfortunate enough not to be able to read it in print".<sup>14</sup> Studies of performance history, and more specifically of recordings, have played a significant part in musicology since the 1990s, originally prompted not least by the so-called new musicology and the interdisciplinary field of performance studies.<sup>15</sup> Attempts to venture beyond conceptions of its lacking significance in modernist music, especially from after the Second World War, is a much more recent development.

The outcome of recent studies indicates how the kind of negative discourse first articulated by Stravinsky and Schoenberg for long prevented attention to how they and others actually performed music. A view of performers as objective reproducers of minutely detailed scores has been associated with a certain post-Darmstadt aesthetics of interpretation. The hegemony of such an attitude as representative of high modernism has been challenged through studies of lingering Romantic gestures in performance practices before and after the Second World War, embodied not least in interpretations from a seminal musician such as the violinist Rudolf Kolisch and writings by Theodor Adorno.<sup>16</sup> A significant investigation of Stravinsky's recordings of *The Rite of Spring* by Nicholas Cook discusses how the composer's renderings confuse

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<sup>12</sup> See foremost, as discussed further in chapter 2.1., Duchesneau, Dufour & Beonit-Otis (eds.) 2013.

<sup>13</sup> McClary 1989.

<sup>14</sup> Citation after Newlin 1980, 164. For a more multi-faceted view, see texts on performance and notation in Schoenberg 1975, 319–362.

<sup>15</sup> For a succinct portrayal of this change in North America, see Cusick 2004.

<sup>16</sup> Grassl & Kapp (eds.) 2002, Mattes 2015, Cook 2017.

rather than clarify intentions in the score.<sup>17</sup> Cook suggests that Stravinsky's performance style influenced both quests for objectivity within the early HIP movement and a common evenness in mainstream orchestral performances. This claim rests on an argument, significant in the present dissertation, that a combination of the roles as a composer and as a conductor wasn't enough to exert such an influence. Stravinsky's further role as author of his famous *Poetics of Music* purportedly made the difference.<sup>18</sup>

A number of studies have highlighted how idiomatic qualities in different instruments came to constitute a creative dialectic with musical structures and orchestration in compositions by Stravinsky, Brian Ferneyhough and Klaus K. Kübler.<sup>19</sup> The importance of previously overlooked elements, such as experiences from conducting, have been used to qualify images of a primacy of rationality in Boulez's artistic development.<sup>20</sup> The pianist Charles Rosen has documented aspects of interpretative freedom in piano literature from Schoenberg to Carter, reflecting not least on the distinct expressive strategies needed for different modernist composers.<sup>21</sup>

The collective testimony from the burgeoning field of work on interpretation practices and conceptions of performance in modernist music further accentuates the need for critical scrutiny of how different roles were estimated. A significant number of composition processes were clearly shaped by experiences from performances on different instruments. Many of the most seminal composers during the century dedicated a great deal of time and energy to conducting, among them Stravinsky and Boulez. Nevertheless, particular ways of talking, or rather the absence of talk, about their roles as performers have continued to steer attention away from how these activities influenced them as composers, and how their interpretations and recordings contributed to shape broader conceptions of music. There is still a need for further developed conceptual frameworks and methods to investigate extant sources to the composite role of the composer-performer in modernist music.

This overview of recent advancements in studies of musical modernism establishes four major points that shape the dissertation. Firstly, it highlights the potential in moving beyond authorial intention and modernist composers' own stated views on themselves and their music. From this follows, secondly, that they are better studied at a conscious historical distance, and as responding to certain contextual expectations on what it means to be a qualified composer. Thirdly, writings can fruitfully be studied as vital means in the establishing of such modernist conceptions of the composer. Finally, performance is an area of greater importance for modern composition than the common neglect of this aspect in composers' own writings and self-appreciation.

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<sup>17</sup> Cook 2003, a study that itself relies heavily on discussions in Hill 2000.

<sup>18</sup> On Stravinsky as author, see Dufour (ed.) 2013, Dufour 2021, Dahl 2021.

<sup>19</sup> Griffiths 2013, Førisdal 2015, Orning 2015.

<sup>20</sup> Gulbrandsen 2015.

<sup>21</sup> Rosen 1998.

## 1.2 Messiaen as modernist?

The view that a revival in modernist studies is beneficial to studies of Olivier Messiaen is hardly far-fetched, but it induces tensions to the composer's self-perception and strands in the secondary literature. A vital argument in this dissertation is that these two kinds of discourses have been interdependent, and that both the composer and studies of him have followed broader modernist conceptions. This section presents a concrete example of how such an interdependency on the topic of originality have influenced scholarly approaches to Messiaen standing in relation to modernism. It also gives examples of how the composer portrayed his own stance on the role of theoretical principles and on performance. Readers can thereby gain a preliminary sense for such first-person statements, which throughout the composer's own life frequently were reiterated rather than investigated. The main bulk of the dissertation is devoted to interpretation and critical evaluation of such and other sources within in a wider modernist framework.

Messiaen was the first musician to receive the Erasmus Prize (in 1971), a recognition of extraordinary contributions to culture and society. The speech he gave on receiving the prize is illuminating from several perspectives, and is recurrently used as a source in this section. Towards the conclusion, the speech thematises a constitutive tension between technical strictures and freedom in his compositions, and defines Messiaen's creative originality as a necessary freedom:

In the "Sept Haikai" – as also in my "Chronochromie", and in most of my works – there's a kind of conflict between rigorous strictness and freedom. Like all of my contemporaries, I've devoted attention to research, and was even the first to employ a super-series of time-lengths, degrees of loudness, pitches, kinds of touch used and tempi. But I've remained independent, and do not belong to any school. And I believe that that the birds' example has helped me not to lose this freedom. Freedom is a necessity for artists. By choosing its future, freedom creates a new past, and it's that which builds us up. It's that, too, which determines the style of the artist, his characteristics, his signature.<sup>22</sup>

Critics and musicologists have repeatedly suggested that the composer's style essentially represents a unique synthesis of history and progress in music. In much-read interviews with the journalist Claude Samuel, Messiaen responded to a seemingly uncontroversial observation on the matter with an urgent desire to uphold an idea of absolute freedom and originality along the lines just witnessed from the Erasmus prize speech. The comment concerns one of his most momentous works:

It was claimed that the *Transfiguration [de Notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ]* was a synthesis of classical and modern languages. That's absurd. My musical language is totally free.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Messiaen 1971, 45.

<sup>23</sup> Messiaen 1994a, 147.

The idea that Messiaen was a thoroughly independent artist still exerts a notable impact. For example, Paul Griffiths's entry on the composer for the influential *Grove* dictionary begins by stating that "He was a musician apart".<sup>24</sup> A few years into the twenty-first century, Stephen Broad criticized this trope and showed how it originated in Messiaen's own grip on public knowledge of his biography.<sup>25</sup> Ironically enough, the self-image of standing apart is arguably one of the most unexceptional of Messiaen's standpoints. This kind of rhetoric rather situates him firmly within a broader modernist paradigm, as discussed in the ensuing theoretical chapter.

In line with this stress on independence, Messiaen has rarely been studied as *one of several modernist composers*. Authors have instead typically discussed his *relation to modernism*. An underlying premise has been that he consciously merged his own Catholicism with a radical musical modernism that carried an unmistakable secular tendency.<sup>26</sup> Specialized studies that contextualize the composer have continued to give priority to intellectual and artistic cultures in French Catholicism, thereby shedding valuable light on aspects that makes Messiaen stand apart from topics and sources in mainstream modernist studies.<sup>27</sup> However, an increasing recognition of the lasting centrality of religion in several of the most prominent composers of the period gradually makes even this trait less conspicuous.<sup>28</sup>

Among the exceptions to the rule suggested here, Claude Samuel has tried to summarize modernist traits in Messiaen. His point that the composer was a "man of treatises", which is deemed characteristic of modernism, is pertinent to raise here.<sup>29</sup> In line with a statement by the composer, Samuel argues that the compilation of the treatises *Technique de mon langage musical* and *Traité de rythme, de couleur, et d'ornithologie* functioned as a personal diary, with the purpose of providing auto-explication. The motive is posited to have been a quest on Messiaen's behalf to see himself more clearly.<sup>30</sup> This is clearly a simplistic reiteration and fails to reflect on the manifold purposes of writing. Nevertheless, Samuel captures the idea that Messiaen was a typical modernist in his theorizing ambitions, even when this activity manifestly also served other ends than mere introspection.

The previous citation from the Erasmus prize speech showed Messiaen in the act of theorizing freedom in relation to research and innovation in musical techniques. He thereby touches upon the dissertation's central question on the interplay between theoretical knowledge and music. A common view is that research denotes the pursuit of generally or possibly even universally valid

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<sup>24</sup> Griffiths 2001.

<sup>25</sup> Broad 2005: I, 7-22.

<sup>26</sup> Scholl 2003, Scholl 2010, Bannister 2010, Hutcheon 2014.

<sup>27</sup> See notably Schloesser 2014, Burton 2018.

<sup>28</sup> On Schoenberg and Stravinsky, see Cross & Berman (eds.) 2000, Gay 2009, 244–263, Whittall 2016, Moody 2021, Sills 2022.

<sup>29</sup> "Messiaen était l'homme des traités", Samuel 2006, 343.

<sup>30</sup> "Quand on lui a posé la question, pourquoi avoir écrit ces traités, dans le fond, il a répondu: "Pour voir plus claim moi-même".", Samuel 2006, 343.

knowledge, in contrast to a subjective and non-discursive ground in artistic creativity. Messiaen's description in the same text of how he in 1948 began teaching his analysis class at the Paris conservatoire indicates a different standpoint. As he puts it, his "first concern was to develop a philosophy of time-lengths for my pupils".<sup>31</sup>

His stance contains a noteworthy utilitarianism in which a *philosophy* serves as a vital tool for students' creativity. The speech posits that theoretical insights are most useful, in order to understand how different cosmological, physiological and psychological time-scales shape experiences of time through music. At the same time, musicians are ascribed a "mysterious power" of exploring and changing the course of time through different rhythmic techniques.<sup>32</sup> In other words, the composer draws upon a philosophy of time, but also contributes, through music, to an interdisciplinary exploration of time. The creation of the composite role as a composer-philosopher is a key premise for many modernist composers and Messiaen's teaching may be one of its principal roots.<sup>33</sup>

A lengthier statement of the calling of the learned musician was articulated in 1978. In the present context, it reveals how the undoubted value of theoretical knowledge is posited in an asymmetrical relation to the reality of divine truth. Furthermore, the excerpt indicates how Messiaen's prose typically rests upon pithy but enigmatic claims on fundamental questions, without explanations of their epistemic basis. When he provides a reference to an author, it is unclear and ascribes an understanding to him that in reality arises from Messiaen's constellation of a borrowed concept with his own personal vision of music:

Scientific research, mathematical proof, amassed biological experiments have not saved us from uncertainty. Quite the contrary, they have increased our ignorance by constantly revealing new realities within what was believed to be reality. In fact, the one sole reality is of a different order: it is to be found in the realm of Faith. Only by encountering another Being can we understand it.

But to do that, we have to pass through death and resurrection, and that implies the leap out of temporal things. Strangely enough, music can prepare us for it, as a picture, as a reflection, as a symbol. In fact, music is a perpetual dialogue between space and time, between sound and colour, a dialogue which leads into a unification: Time is space, sound is a colour, space is a complex of superimposed times, sound-complexes exist at the same time as complexes of colours. The musician who thinks, sees, hears, speaks, is able, by means of these fundamental ideas, to come closer to the next world to a certain extent. And, as St. Thomas says: music brings us to God through "default of truth", until the day when He Himself will dazzle us with an "an

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<sup>31</sup> Messiaen 1971, 40.

<sup>32</sup> Messiaen 1971, 41.

<sup>33</sup> For an explicit thematization of this twin notion in John Cage, see Landy 1991.

excess of truth". That is perhaps the significant meaning – and also the directional meaning – of music...<sup>34</sup>

This statement is pregnant with cryptic implications and particular approaches to reality and knowledge. Its many claims cry out for exegesis and interpretation, which however is not the task in the present context. At this point, the excerpt indicates how Messiaen typically explicates his fundamental beliefs in a kind of poetic prose. Some preliminary points of significance in the dissertation can nevertheless be established.

As selected citations in this section indicate, Messiaen was adamant in his stress on an unrestricted artistic freedom at work in his music. He posited the need for what he called a *philosophy* as a seminal background in students' explorations of time, but was also unwavering in his conviction that music contributes to a particular experience of temporality. Finally, claims to have undertaken what he estimates to be *research* implied no manifest submission to academic or scientific standards of evaluation. Religious beliefs were used to underpin a vision of theoretical knowledge as beneficial, albeit never final.<sup>35</sup>

In contrast to a recurrent desire to speak of theoretical and technical ideas at work in his compositions, Messiaen seldomly commented on issues pertaining to performance. Recent questions whether interpreters add dimensions to works beyond their notation are not developed in written sources from him. Quests for any comments on tensions between representation in scores and sonic experiences of music likewise provide scant results. It is thus possible to note a general lack of explicit reflection on theoretical problems around performance in Messiaen's statements. This stance tallies well with perceptions of musical modernism as preoccupied with authorial intention and scores as the normative designation of a work. The Samuel interviews contain a rare comment on this matter, urging performers to provide faithful realizations of his notation.

I'm a very meticulous man, and I note with great care on my manuscripts the tempos I desire, the dynamics, the bowing when it involves strings, articulation for the woodwinds, fingerings for the keyboards. I demand simply that my indications be respected; but I'm always appreciative of the artists who play my music.<sup>36</sup>

Messiaen immediately continues to elaborate on his appreciation of musicians and displays a manifest generosity towards interpreters who had dedicated themselves to his works. Technical proficiency is a quality that receives emphasis, but there is also a noteworthy gratitude towards interpreters who immersed themselves in the ideas behind his works. Messiaen singles out his wife Yvonne Loriod as ideally suited to play his piano music, but also credits

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<sup>34</sup> Excerpt for Messiaen's introduction to the programme booklet for the 1978 festival given in his honour in Paris, cited in translation from Rößler 1986, 10.

<sup>35</sup> The stance previously cited tallies with how Messiaen once withdrew from having to take a firm stance on the possibility of representing divine truth in art by saying "I'm not a theorist—only a believer, a believer dazzled by the infinity of God!", Messiaen 1994a, 28.

<sup>36</sup> Messiaen 1994a, 201–202.



Pierre-Laurent Aimard for having studied the relevant birds and landscapes in the vast *Catalogue d'oiseaux*.<sup>37</sup>

His generosity towards various interpreters goes hand in hand with a conviction that other organists are better suited to perform his works. This stance gainsays the conception of composer-performers, as developed by Stravinsky, resting on the idea that composers best can provide faithful interpretations. To be precise, Messiaen does not make the difference one of principle, but says that his preoccupation with other tasks has prevented the concentration necessary to maintain ideal standards of playing.<sup>38</sup> All in all, his scant remarks on interpretation provides no ground for conclusive judgments. It can, however, be established that performance played no vital role in his way of analysing and talking about music.

However preliminary, this brief overview has pointed out several circumstances of lasting value throughout the dissertation. It has given a first acquaintance with Messiaen's customary ways of stating his convictions. Brief excerpts from primary sources have been used to present some characteristic standpoints on theoretical knowledge in composition, as well as on performance. A considerable asymmetry between these two subject matters has also been established: Messiaen was keen to speak on abstract and theoretical principles, but rarely commented on the role of interpretation.

Claims for originality have been mentioned as a theme that has influenced the course of secondary scholarship, although it has been suggested that they rather reflect a customary kind of self-presentation among modernist composers. Enquiries along such lines have possibly shaped specialized investigations that have related Messiaen to modernism, but rarely have provided more sustained studies of Messiaen as one of many modernist composers. The idea that the composer's statements and ensuing research on him are intimately linked have been mentioned.

This observation and the plenitude of secondary literature that potentially could be found relevant for investigations of the intersection between theoretical knowledge and composition together motivate a decision not to undertake a formal review of previous research at the beginning of the dissertation. The choice of literature in such a survey is, no less than the perspectives put to use in such a reading, a matter that calls for a previous selection of theoretical standpoints. The aspired situation of Messiaen scholarship within a modernist framework requires this outlook to be established prior to an engagement with ongoing debates within the specialized literature. After these preliminary steps, it is now possible to set up the investigation undertaken throughout the dissertation, first by articulating its aim and the questions that guide the integral study.

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<sup>37</sup> Messiaen 1994a, 202.

<sup>38</sup> "I've been a good organist, but my activities haven't allowed me to work on my instrument as much as I would have liked, and today I no longer play as I did at age twenty", Messiaen 1994a, 203.

### 1.3 Aims and questions

At a time when new approaches to musical modernism enhance critical awareness and bring previously neglected dimensions into the limelight, this dissertation engages with the interplay between the role of composers and other professional activities. A crucial premise is that common assumptions of hierarchies between composition, abstract rationality and performance prevalent during the twentieth century may obstruct a deeper understanding of actual intersections between these dimensions. In other words, modernist composers' stated self-perception on these issues can be as much of an impediment to a contemporary understanding of their work as they provide unique autobiographical testimonies. As such an approach indicates, the dissertation consciously induces a historical and critical distance to investigated sources.

The term *critical* can entail a harder or milder stance in this context. It can be necessary in many kinds of investigations to examine information imparted by Messiaen, to question his analyses of music or ideas, or to launch criticism of personal agendas and conscious self-fashioning. However, rather than a programmatic questioning of conscious motives on Messiaen's part, the following study generally works with a milder sense of critique. The primary aim behind this stance is to avoid delimitations induced by too fixed critical parameters, rather seeking to facilitate new insights and increasing knowledge from both well-known and novel sources. In order to move beyond an uncritical acceptance of the composer's own views, a framework for comparison with tendencies in statements by other modern composers is established. This move serves to enable evaluations of when Messiaen's self-perception is conditioned by a prevalent way of talking about hierarchies between different roles. It also facilitates the assembling of theoretical perspectives on modernist composers' statements, in dialogue with previous scholarship. Finally, it stresses that the composer's own views now definitely are objects for historical scrutiny, including assumptions and tenets that shaped his thought and artistic sensibility.

A distinct premise shapes the aspired distance from uncritical readings of Messiaen's own statements: attention to dimensions that possibly remained outside the scope of Messiaen's and other composers' self-reflection. Although language offers a privileged route to self-reflection, participation in any communal usage of language also entails certain limitations. It contains streaks of meaning that orientate its users, while at the same time impeding their sight for alternative viewpoints. Likewise, human self-consciousness is neither fully self-illuminating nor immediately present to itself in its use of concepts. An essential aspect of this study is to search for central concepts and outlooks at work in Messiaen's creativity, of which he, however, need not have been consciously aware, at least not at all times. Interpretations by scholars in a later generation certainly lack the unique perspective of the first person, as well as direct personal experiences of Messiaen's character, oral reasoning and performances. A growing historical distance nevertheless entails the contrary

advantage of methodological advancements in the understanding of different kinds of sources, as well as an ever-evolving grasp of Messiaen's intellectual, social and artistic context.

The sketched outlook has ramifications for how intersections between different professional roles are considered. An approach which recognizes that vital aspects of human subjectivity fall outside of a distinct self-consciousness enables questioning of tacit assumptions that an artist engaging in various artistic enterprises naturally would have a single and fixed outlook operative independent of these activities. This study works on the contrary hypothesis that an individual's views are conditioned not only by conceptions at work in communal uses of language, but also to some extent by a distinct logic in activities such as composition, the development of theoretical ideals and performance.

Rather than to view discontinuities in Messiaen's alternation between different roles as shortcomings, it is regarded as natural that tensions should arise. It cannot be taken for granted that Messiaen as composer is always in concord with Messiaen as analyst, self-proclaimed philosopher or performer. Rather than to treat tensions between them as signs of inconsistency, they are treated as gateways to investigate intersections within multi-faceted artistic processes. Central questions concerning coherence and eclecticism in Messiaen can partly be posed anew on the basis of recognition of such a heterogeneity in unity.

Messiaen's conspicuous versatility entails that investigations of the entire range of his activities would be an insurmountable endeavour. A possible solution to this circumstance could have been to focus on a single intersection between the role as composer and a further role. The dissertation is nevertheless not primarily driven by an aspiration of surveying a particular material or a discrete topic. It is rather intended more as a methodological exploration, in which the pursuit of new theoretical standpoints, research possibilities and questions has a validity beyond the included case studies. Nevertheless, the intention is also to produce new insights through research on discrete sources.

For this end, a basic delimitation is to concentrate on crossroads between composition, theoretical principles and performance. There is, however, no ambition of scrutinizing even these distinct areas in a comprehensive manner. The dissertation rather undertakes discrete case studies of topics that exemplify different ways of investigating intersections between these three activities. Beside the results attained on particular themes, the case studies contribute to a broader aim of setting up a framework for future similar investigations on similar intersections, in Messiaen and other modernist composers.

The area called theoretical principles above contains manifest conceptual difficulties. Messiaen communicated his philosophical and aesthetic claims on the nature of music and other topics through speeches, interviews and writings. His activity as an author therefore calls for examination, but this role

is in fact too narrow to encompass what is at stake. Indeed, a single-minded attention to the activity of writing potentially fails to recognize the role of academic teaching and the recognized status of composers as intellectuals in France as inherent dimensions in Messiaen's communication of his conceptions.

In order to distinguish between the role as an author and the particular kind of epistemic authority on which Messiaen's writings rely, these two dimensions are posited as distinct layers within the activity of *theorizing*. This term is used methodologically to denote the nexus of Messiaen as holder and proponent of general principles on music and related theoretical problems, as well as the purported authority behind the activity of formulating and communicating them. The concept guides investigations of how Messiaen's principles were assembled, used and disseminated, rather than to entail claims that they in fact warrant recognition as having theoretical validity.

To study the composer as a performer is a straightforward business, in comparison. To be more precise, this activity is easier to delimit. The term performer is here used as a kind of shorthand for Messiaen as interpreter of his own works. The rich documentation of Messiaen's longstanding practice of organ improvisation is a key source that calls for future investigations, not least because it stands clear that key organ works such as *Messe de la Pentecôte* and *Méditations sur le Mystère de la Sainte Trinité* have their origins in previous improvisations. The choice to focus on interpretations of extant works is connected to an aspect of studies of the composer as a performer that the dissertation seeks to make less straightforward than before. Many pertinent questions in scholarly debates on musical performance relate to tensions between notated scores, often regarded as authentic manifestations of composers' intentionality, and the realization of works in actual interpretation.<sup>39</sup>

The ambition here is to highlight the significance of distinct artistic ideals of what musical interpretations should seek to attain. Performers may have reflected and verbally articulated conceptions on what they seek to accomplish, but a particular outlook may also operate implicitly. The noun *performance* is here understood to include concrete acts of music-making and ideals of both kinds, a stance that turns the activity as a performer into a composite, in its own right. Consequently, the dissertation analyses Messiaen as a performer, together with ideals that shaped his way of fulfilling this professional role.

The stated ambition of highlighting theorizing and performance are not self-standing endeavours, which primarily speak to different sub-fields within musicology, such as aesthetics or performance studies. These areas are rather given priority above other activities because of their purported potential for illuminating Messiaen's works and role as a composer from new angles.

A set of general research questions serve the process of realizing the aims just described. The overarching question is:

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<sup>39</sup> For influential approaches that have shaped debates in the early twenty-first century, see Krausz (ed.) 1993, Taruskin 1995, Davies 2001, Cook 2013, Assis, Brooks & Coessens (eds.) 2013.

- How did Messiaen's role as a composer intersect with his theorizing and activities in performance?

Two further questions capture key premises in the dissertation, which not only serve the pursuit of the first question, but also are important in their own right. They are thus at the same time subservient to the overarching query and orientate the investigation of how Messiaen came to hold his own views on the matter, as well as how contemporary studies can gain new knowledge beyond his statements:

- Which modernist conceptions shaped Messiaen's self-perception of intersections between composition, theorizing and performance?
- How can a historical and critical distance to Messiaen's own statements on the interplay between these roles enable new investigations of their connections?

Finally, there is a further dimension that calls for attention. The demise of uncritical acknowledgments of authorial intention as normative prompts investigations of how well a composer like Messiaen managed to shape public understanding of his person and music. Of central importance in this dissertation is how sources from his different activities have shaped the dissemination and ensuing reception of his person, music and ideas. In order to scrutinize the intersection of roles both within Messiaen's own professional life and in the wider appreciation of his work, the last question is:

- Which conceptions and sources have shaped the reception of Messiaen and his works?

## 1.4 Structure of the dissertation

The first chapter has introduced a versatility of discrete roles as a central feature in Messiaen's professional activity. The recent revival in studies of musical modernism suggests that the time is ripe to enrich studies of the composer with perspectives and methods developed as part of endeavours to investigate aspects of twentieth century music that have received scant attention, not least because of assumed hierarchies between different roles. Such outlooks are at work in Messiaen's own discourse and in previous scholarship, especially to the extent that the composer's statements have been reiterated rather than examined. The aim and overarching questions in this dissertation have delimited the following investigation to the interplay between theoretical ideals, performance and composition, in Messiaen's work, and in the intellectual reception of his output.

It is now time to give an overview over the integral dissertation. The following chapter serves to establish a historically relevant framework for

comparisons and theoretical parameters for explorations of intersections between the three roles. A majority of the highlighted perspectives represents theories emerging out of French musical modernism, or recent approaches to this cultural legacy. A first subsection provides perspectives on what here is called common intellectual predispositions among modernist composers on their professional role. Thereafter follows two sections on the significance of and authority behind their writings, as well as on performance as a constitutive dimension in multi-layered ontologies of works. A fourth and final section is devoted to intersections between theories and composition in individual composers, together with principles for their investigation. The perspectives and methodological advice discussed in this chapter serve as a basis for the case studies in the dissertation, but also focus the lens for appraisals of previous Messiaen research.

The following chapter undertakes a reading of existing Messiaen scholarship, as it has evolved in tandem with primary sources. The literature on the composer has become all too abundant to be examined in its entirety. As a first delimitation, analytic studies are generally not considered in detail, because of academic conventions that often disregard the potential influence on musical structures from the kind of intersections in focus here. The breadth of investigations that primarily trace influences from particular composers or authors also fall outside the scope of closer attention. The selection gives priority to previous literature that discusses Messiaen as an author and as performer. The first category includes perspectives on the status of his theoretical principles.

Having witnessed transformations in the research literature into its current state, it is possible to set up the three case studies, their methods and main sources. The overarching aim for all three is to further insights into tensions and previously underestimated links between different professional roles and their respective kind of sources.

The first study concerns the interplay between theoretical tenets and compositional techniques, here in the case of Messiaen's understanding of Gregorian chant and his use of theoretical ideas on the subject in composition. The methodological aim is to explore possibilities of reconstructing central aesthetic concepts that shaped such transfers but lacks discursive explanation in Messiaen's writings.

The second study investigates tensions between notation and performance. Previous criticism and scholarship have often stressed a remarkable *freedom* in Messiaen's performances of his own works. Such verdicts typically rest upon notions of fidelity to notated scores, albeit often without critical reflection on foundations for such approaches. The study heeds Messiaen's advice to performers on how to negotiate the ideas behind different pieces, authenticity in relation to scores, and performers' own individuality. An analysis based on separation between these dimensions allows a multi-layered ontology of works to emerge, which calls for artistic choices between different aspirations in performance. The article takes advantage of a novel possibility to compare

different recordings by the composer of his organ cycle *Livre d'orgue* and includes reflections on reception within an ensuing tradition of interpretation.

The third study entails a shift of focus from Messiaen's own activities to the reception of his person and music. The article investigates the use Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari make of Messiaen in their writings, and includes a critical discrimination of their actual sources to the composer. The study clarifies how Boulez's particular historiography of musical modernism shaped their understanding of Messiaen's importance, in vital if not all aspects. A close reading of this philosophical reception indicates that Messiaen's verbal discourse eclipsed sonic experiences of his music.

Up to this point, the dissertation has moved from the overarching aims, through extant theories and research to the concrete level of the case studies. The conclusion traverses in a contrary direction and discusses the contribution of the three case studies to the overall purpose. Results and insights from the dissertation are assessed in this broader light.





## 2. Theoretical framework

A central ambition in this study is to situate Messiaen's conception of the professional roles of a composer within a larger community of modernist colleagues, in order to facilitate relevant comparisons. To undertake new readings of writings by sufficiently many composers to attain well-grounded results is an enterprise that would extend the full range of a dissertation. It therefore proves necessary to build on previous studies with such a focus.

At the same time, theoretical perspectives are needed to clarify and to delineate the claims raised in the first chapter on a partial lack of perspicuity in both common uses of language and in self-reflection. Two distinct but interrelated standpoints call for theoretical warrants. The first point is that Messiaen's views on his role as a composer and its intersection with other tasks to some extent can be assumed to have been conditioned by common ways of conceptualizing such matters in his intellectual milieu. The second point is that human self-consciousness provides no perfect and total perception of the self, rather many aspects of its thought patterns and experiences remain external to explicit self-reflection in language. There is a vital reciprocity between the communal and individual to heed here. On both levels, it is assumed that certain themes are given sustained attention, while other topics and aspects fall outside of the scope of attention, or are barely mentioned. In this dissertation, both common and individual conceptualizations of theorizing and performance are of primary concern, as they intersect with perceptions of the role as composer.

Messiaen's understanding on these matters is of course the principal object of study in the dissertation, but are not studied in this chapter. Its function is rather to assemble theoretical perspectives that guide the integral study and its case studies. At the same time, it is necessary to attain an overview of relevant outlooks on composers' theorizing and performance in Messiaen's modernist context. To these ends, perspectives from musicological and philosophical studies have been identified that investigate either musical modernism or articulate theoretical approaches to music that are immediately relevant for the twentieth century. Studies of French modernism have generally been deemed more relevant, because of their proximity to Messiaen or for the purpose of setting up a framework of comparison. The broad sweep of scholarship used in this endeavour brings thematically interrelated perspectives together in a new fashion, in the act facilitating further studies of similar kinds.

The chapter is divided into four discrete sections. The first part concerns the communal level of conceptions of the role as composer at work among leading modernists. This section involves reflection on predispositions that shaped modernist composers' self-perception and on the intellectual authority gained through academic teaching. The second part assembles recent perspectives on such composers' writings and their role in shaping professional identities and composition. The third part qualifies one-sided articulations of a general ignorance of performance in musical modernism, collecting extant outlooks on performances as sonic realizations and integral dimensions in the ontology of works. The fourth part sets out hermeneutical principles for investigations of

modernist composers' theoretical views and their relevance in composition. At the same time, the principles formulated here are relevant for the interpretation of these composers' statements in general, thus cutting across the different subtopics investigated in the dissertation.

## 2.1 Intellectual predispositions among modernist composers

Messiaen's turn in the 1950s towards inspiration from nature and birdsong set him on a deviant artistic course from the preoccupations of more typical modernist composers. His distinct path has continued to set him apart from mainline studies of musical modernism. Not only has specialized scholarship on the composer often been reluctant to pursue investigations of Messiaen *as* a modernist, rather preferring to discuss Messiaen *and* modernism.

Within studies of post-war modernism, the composer is commonly seen as a father figure and as the originator of certain techniques that prompted the advent of a new wave of serialism from the late 1940s. As one of the most influential pedagogues in composition during the entire twentieth century, Messiaen taught and was at least partially cherished by some of the most prominent composers during the heyday of the post-war avant-garde. More rarely is his ensuing creativity taken into account. Although this feature is worth noting, attention to his teaching at the Paris conservatoire is sufficient to establish the necessary links to other composers for a relevant comparison of their views. The twenty-first century has in fact witnessed a surge in attention to Messiaen's teaching.<sup>40</sup> As noted in the first chapter, he set out to assemble what he called a philosophy of time as one of the first priorities after having been granted a class in musical analysis.<sup>41</sup> This aspiration constituted a striking attempt to transform the role of writing music, by means of conjoining this task with the authority of a researcher or a philosopher.

Aaron Hayes has undertaken studies of writings by Messiaen and some of his most prominent students from this period: Boulez, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Karel Goeyvaerts, and Jean Barraqué.<sup>42</sup> Except for Barraqué, they all participated in the international summer courses for new music at Darmstadt and contributed to shape the artistic ideals and preoccupations of the avant-garde. Hayes's choice of composers has the advantage of comparing Messiaen's views with those of these students. In the act, he provides evaluations of writings by several of the most influential individuals in the construction of post-war conceptions of modernist composers. To the extent that Messiaen's understanding of what it means to be a composer influenced his stellar group of students, the teacher played a seminal role in establishing a new professional identity among a new generation of composers. These connections also form a bridge between

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<sup>40</sup> See foremost documentation in Bongrian (ed.) 2008. Further studies are referenced in chapter 3.1.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Messiaen 1971, 40.

<sup>42</sup> Hayes 2016, Hayes 2021.

Messiaen's manifestly French cultural profile and the cosmopolitan modernism that his students contributed to shape.

In the present context, Hayes's work has the distinct value of articulating a theoretical view of how his selected group of writers came to hold a common outlook on the nature of their profession. He notes how some key intellectual attitudes shaped their reflection and launches a claim that these premises became constitutive of a common understanding "of what modernism means with respect to the European avant-garde".<sup>43</sup> Hayes speaks of such basic convictions as "the structures of the horizons; the limitations of sight; the inability for a discourse, however self-reflexive, to fully step out of itself."<sup>44</sup> His term for these ways of regarding professional identity is "biases", a notion which easily can be understood in a more negative vein than Hayes's primarily descriptive stance.<sup>45</sup> I prefer to speak of *intellectual predispositions*, a concept here intended as a synonym for the cited description of how certain common attitudes shape an outlook, without forming part of explicit reflection.

The first predisposition is a stress on *independence*. Hayes discusses Messiaen's teaching on Bergson and temporality as a potentially formative background for the attending students, which however is conspicuously absent in their writings. This and similar examples provide a basis for his summary of a common tendency among the students to present themselves as independent of tuition and other intellectual influences:

Within their lectures and published essays, composers presented themselves as relatively isolated artists, obscuring the community of individuals who collaborated and shared ideas.<sup>46</sup>

The second point is a related emphasis on *innovation and originality*, or a self-perception of being an "independent scholar with original ideas".<sup>47</sup> The studied composers tended to avoid acknowledging their use of common ideas by means of references to other authors. This circumstance raises the problem of interpreting to what extent such references were intentionally left out or whether some ideas were simply "in the air" and therefore did not call for particular acknowledgment. It also raises the question how composers regarded the idea of being influenced or borrowing from a philosopher or theorist, who they in some cases in fact might have referenced: How broad and deep was their reading of the thinker? To what extent were concepts and ideas critically examined before they were employed to inspire musical creativity? Hayes also calls attention to the issue that references to theorists can have served strategic purposes:

With the notable exception of Messiaen's posthumous notes for his *Traité*, much of the writings and lectures by composers in the 1950s and 1960s

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<sup>43</sup> Hayes 2016, 13.

<sup>44</sup> Hayes 2016, 13.

<sup>45</sup> Hayes 2016, 13–32. The valuable theoretical framework created by these principles is unfortunately not included in the book version of the original dissertation, Hayes 2021.

<sup>46</sup> Hayes 2016, 13.

<sup>47</sup> Hayes 2016, 15.

represent a genre of writing that did not go out of its way to acknowledge influence. References that did emerge, like those in Boulez's Darmstadt lectures, served more as rhetorical devices whose main significance seems more to do with the intellectual capital of their obscurity than their central importance to the topic at hand.<sup>48</sup>

This verdict on Boulez cannot be evaluated in the present context, but indicates that citation can serve many purposes, including self-fashioning. Beside composers' use of theoretical ideas, Hayes also probes their views of *interactions between music and science*. He speaks of a common

tendency for the discourse on composition to employ a scientific sounding technical language. Composers often laid claim to a modernism of scientific progress, but this community shared an intellectual culture that was defined by a passionate and extremely trans-historical eclecticism that distanced their work from the specialized focus of the scientific and academic worlds, on whose periphery they were constantly located.<sup>49</sup>

As this analysis indicates, the rise of a more technical conceptuality in music analysis was inspired by a widespread optimism in scientific advancements. It does not follow, however, that this development included a wholesale acceptance of a scientific kind of authority or methodologies in the creation of music. Composers such as Boulez and Stockhausen certainly incorporated scientific concepts and methods into their constructions of material or statistical elements in music. In spite of transfers between disciplines, these musicians neither intended to solve scientific problems nor submitted their creativity to evaluations according to scientific norms. They retained a liberty of moving in other directions and of relying solely on artistic or poetic ideas in some of their works. Hayes indicates an intellectual realm that runs parallel to science, but remains distinct. He suggests that composers could negotiate an *utilitarian approach to conceptions from science* within this wider public space:

However much these composers engaged with science and technology, they remained in an intellectual paradigm that would not admit to the exclusivity of scientific truth. The distinction between the scientific and intellectual worlds is not mutually exclusive or essentially combative, but rests on different sets of values.<sup>50</sup>

At this point, Hayes's assembled predispositions can be complemented by Peter Gay's stress on "*a commitment to a principled self-scrutiny*" as a common trait among modernists throughout the arts.<sup>51</sup> This aspect spotlights ethical dimensions in a kind of reflection that is grounded in human subjectivity, but intends to use self-scrutiny according to certain principles as part of a calling to rise above solipsism, public appreciation and commercial success. Gay notes that artists with such divergent artistic standpoints as Schoenberg and Stravinsky both strived for a purified subjectivity and an elimination of individualism, in the

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<sup>48</sup> Hayes 2016, 15.

<sup>49</sup> Hayes 2016, 27.

<sup>50</sup> Hayes 2016, 27.

<sup>51</sup> Gay 2009, 3–4. The use of italics is mine.

service of humanity and religion or metaphysical values.<sup>52</sup> Such a view tallies with Messiaen's description, in the Erasmus Prize speech, on self-control as the ground for a freedom that opens paths to search for divine truth.<sup>53</sup> This predisposition contains a notable dialectic between freedom from a logic in science and a self-imposed regulation that aspires to use the freedom of a modernist artist for a higher good.

A vital further qualification of the intellectual realm is how the academic world related to science and intellectual culture. Of primary interest in this context is the status of composers and musical education within *academic institutions*. Schoenberg and Paul Hindemith are two prime examples of modernists who assumed roles as academic teachers in composition and who wrote prolifically in the context of their tuition. Messiaen was arguably the most significant composer-teacher on the European academic scene after the Second World War.<sup>54</sup> The authority gained by his professional role as a professor was exerted in a characteristic fashion. As Hayes notes, the breadth of sources and materials incorporated in Messiaen's tuition represents an "eclecticism of a different spirit than the usual pedagogical approach of a professor-academic".<sup>55</sup> Messiaen's eclecticism certainly sets him apart from a university-based composer like Babbitt. The American both articulated and consistently realized an ideal of "the composer as specialist", a notion that was his proposed heading for the article famously published under the provocative title "Who cares if you listen?".<sup>56</sup> Babbitt explored interactions between mathematics and music and had a history of research and affiliation in the department of mathematics at Princeton. Messiaen's wide-ranging use of theoretical and literary sources rested upon no such auxiliary professional competence.

At the same time, his eclecticism was not unique in intellectual discourses on music in Paris at the time. Hayes points out the similarity in this regard with the pianist and musicologist Gisèle Brelet.<sup>57</sup> In contrast to Messiaen, she was professionally trained to undertake philosophical investigations, gaining a doctorate at the Sorbonne in 1949. Her three substantial books on music from the late 1940s and early 1950s draw on different authors within musicology and psychology, but are more conspicuous for the constellation of ideas assembled from a wide span of philosophers throughout history and different traditions.<sup>58</sup> Brelet faced criticism because of her concoction of metaphysical aesthetic postulates and a modern scientific style of argumentation. This trait might,

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<sup>52</sup> Gay 2009, 244–263.

<sup>53</sup> "The freedom about which I am speaking has nothing to do with fantasy, disorder, revolt or indifference. It is a constructive freedom, which is arrived at through self-control, respect for others, a sense of wonder of that which is created, mediation on the mystery and the search for Truth. This wonderful freedom is like a foretaste of the freedom of Heaven", Messiaen 1971, 46.

<sup>54</sup> Darius Milhaud, his colleague at the Paris conservatoire, was also highly influential, but had a more untypical career as a post-war teacher both in Europe and in the US.

<sup>55</sup> Hayes 2016, 29.

<sup>56</sup> Babbitt 1958, reprinted in Babbitt 2003, 48–54.

<sup>57</sup> Hayes 2016, 30.

<sup>58</sup> Brelet 1947, 1949, 1951.

however, have been a primary reason behind Messiaen's invitation to give a guest lecture on musical time in his class.<sup>59</sup>

The intellectual predispositions outlined by Hayes have the advantage of growing out of sources of immediate relevance to Messiaen, and even including him as part of the investigation.<sup>60</sup> A brief comparison with the excerpt of statements presented in section 1.3 reveals a number of vital similarities. Messiaen's desire to stress his freedom, originality and inventions of novel technical means tallies with a common modernist predisposition towards individuality and innovation. His outlook that philosophical and scientific knowledge are useful, rather than being a goal in itself, would be retained, although in a modified sense, in a broader modernist tendency of making use of science and technology, but without submitting to any primacy of scientific truth. The idea that a transhistorical eclecticism sets modernist composers apart from scientific and academic worlds possibly grows out of Messiaen's style, personality and teaching, to some extent.

This overview of predispositions in composers' self-reflection has presented a particular way of regarding basic principles that underlie thinking, but frequently remain implicit. It has situated Messiaen in a modernist framework and explained his relation to the evolution of common conceptions after the Second World War. This connection prompts further interpretations of how he not only was influenced by common modernist outlooks on composers' professional identity, but also contributed to shape them. The concluding remarks on Messiaen's stance, in comparison with those of others, provide a preliminary answer to the general question which particular modernist conceptions influenced his reflection on the matter.

## 2.2 Writings in the transformation of composers into intellectuals

The renewed attention to composers' writing in revived studies of musical modernism provides critical perspectives on how such texts contributed to change the public recognition of composers. The ensuing collection of vital principles on the matter continues the discussion of the purported epistemic authority at work in these writings and in their claims.

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<sup>59</sup> Boivin 1995, 135–437, Keym 2002, 242–245.

<sup>60</sup> Hayes's outlook echoes four central aspects of the influential musicologist Célestin Deliège's portrayal of what he calls a conceptual consciousness at the heart of musical modernism: 1) Modernity is rational: The creative artist considers himself to be a researcher and imitates a scientific behaviour. 2) Modernity prefers innovation. 3) Modernity prefers ideologies of progress. 4) Musical modernity in the twentieth century rejects any incompatibility of languages. This presentation of four criteria follows the reading of Deliège 2007, 327–345, in Decroupet 2015, 135. The final aspect echoes Hayes's stress on syntheses or eclecticism of styles. As Decroupet points out, Deliège's historiography and defence of modernism largely provides a summary of ideas proposed by post-war composers.

Michel Duchesneau, Valérie Dufour and Marie-Hélène Benoit-Otis count among a wider group of scholars who have given sustained attention to composers' writings from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. They have authored a significant introduction to this topic, beneficially spotlighting three main issues at work in the reciprocal transformation of composers' status and their writings after 1900.<sup>61</sup> As a preliminary observation, they note how a growing expectation of originality in music developed into a radical individualization and a multiplicity of highly personal styles. This tendency meant that neither musical structures nor artistic principles behind them could be readily appraised through listening alone. Composers became increasingly expected to provide verbal explanations of their use of musical material, techniques and their personal language. The first issue to note is the elevated *authority* of the composer, resting on a general acceptance of their own conceptualization as the normative interpretation of their musical styles. The second issue is how verbal programmes became part of the ontology of the musical works. Explications by composers' of a work's structure and meaning guided the public in its encounter with the music. Such texts came to function as manuals that complemented and in a sense realized the works, when the public appreciated them as they were conceived by the composer. These writings became a common idiom par excellence in the *mediation* of musical works.

Duchesneau, Dufour and Benoit-Otis could very well have highlighted Messiaen as an exemplary case of this tendency. He consistently provided individual works with written commentaries and did so within certain French conventions, most notably the genre of "explication de texte", as inspired by formalist analyses in literature.<sup>62</sup> Religious poetry in his programme notes, as conjoined with his idiosyncratic musical style, provoked "Le cas Messiaen", a fierce debate in the French musical press right after the Second World War.<sup>63</sup> This tempestuous experience notwithstanding, Messiaen remained steadfast in his commitment to ideas and supplementary texts as integral elements in his compositions.

The third issue is how composers came to be regarded as *intellectuals*, or conveyors of the particular quality of *intellectuality* (*l'intellectualité*). The coeval rise of musicology as an independent discipline often facilitated the recognition of composers as authorities on their own music. Furthermore, musicologists contributed to establish links between themes in individual composers' writings and topical concerns in music more broadly. Duchesneau, Dufour and Benoit-Otis also stress the increasing significance of teaching in composition. Academic status and a commonly recognized primacy of authorial intention behind composers' musical syntax and style together induced a change in which composers rapidly were ascribed the authority of intellectuals. This role entailed

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<sup>61</sup> Duchesneau, Dufour & Benoit-Otis (eds.) 2013.

<sup>62</sup> Nattiez 1990, 191.

<sup>63</sup> See foremost Boswell-Kurs 2018.

an ability to raise their voice on art and beauty, but also on questions pertaining to society as a whole, beyond the subject matter of music.<sup>64</sup>

Duchesneau, Dufour and Benoit-Otis implicitly highlights a bifurcation in which the written word propelled music's significance and modernist claims for its autonomy. The composer's role was reconfigured into a more rational character, expected to articulate personal but also theoretically valid ideas about music. An increasing complexity in music is commonly associated with an aesthetics of formalism, but the need for written explanations indicates a tension in which verbal programmes became ever more indispensable in the appreciation of music with an autonomous status. The role of the intellectual calls for further consideration and contextualization, not least in order to reflect on its merger with the role of the composer.

Jane Fulcher has investigated the rise of such an outlook in France during the interwar period, building on Jacques Julliard's and Michel Winock's conception of the artist as a "potentially" intellectual profession.<sup>65</sup> In this outlook, composers are regarded as intellectuals to the extent that their work predisposes them to treat ideas and philosophies concerning society at large, or qualifies them to point out moral standards and a "direction to society".<sup>66</sup> This historically relevant framework delineates the intellectual realm discussed by Hayes as a basis for composers to speak on broad philosophical and theoretical issues, without submitting to scientific standards. Put in negative terms, if society acknowledges the import of such a voice, an artist's enhanced insight and ability to express personal experiences and emotions to others are allowed to circumvent a professional logic based on conceptual reason, empirical data or solid references.

Significant in the present context is Fulcher's analysis that composers' verbal statements in some cases clashed with symbolic messages in their musical style.<sup>67</sup> Incongruities between composers' texts and musical styles are regarded as tensions between their rational intellect and creative personality, of which the latter is called "autonomous".<sup>68</sup> She suggests that composers' creative work carry a logic at odds with schematizing tendencies in the ideology they intend to express. This view is summarized in a key passage:

For art seeks concrete experience, emotions and passions as opposed to abstraction; it strives for immediacy and closeness, whereas ideology is by

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<sup>64</sup> Duchesneau, Dufour & Benoit-Otis (eds.) 2013, 10–11. The composer Charles Koechlin's writings have been investigated as an instance of a composer acting as an intellectual, see Cathe, Douche, Duchesneau & Benoit-Otis (eds.) 2010, Duchesneau 2013.

<sup>65</sup> Fulcher 2005, Julliard & Winock (eds.) 1996, see also Winock 1997, Kritzman 2006. On the origin of this conception in the aftermath of the Dreyfus affair, see Charle 1990, Datta 1999.

<sup>66</sup> Fulcher 2005, 4–5.

<sup>67</sup> Fulcher has interpreted Messiaen's early career within Bourdieu-inspired investigations of musical styles as part of semiotic strategies, responding to current events and political quests for power in France, see Fulcher 2002, Fulcher 2005, 296–302, Fulcher 2018, 289–341. Messiaen's public profile during the convoluted period of the 1930s and the Second World War clearly lends itself to such investigations more easily than later works. In this dissertation, it is Fulcher's framework for investigating composers as intellectuals that is significant, rather than her own interpretations of Messiaen.

<sup>68</sup> Fulcher, 2005, 8.



nature general and inclusive. Ideas, in sum, undergo transformation in the aesthetic process, in the ineluctable movement from theories to experiences, or to the emotional coherence of a creative application.<sup>69</sup>

This outlook suggests that art, and thereby music, instils a kind of meaning that transforms the logic of abstraction, even when the composer may not have intended a conscious transfiguration or change. Such a standpoint entails that theoretical reason and music should not be assumed to stand in perfect coherence, which also is a vital claim in this dissertation. It beneficially qualifies conceptions of authorial intention that simplistically regard works of music as realizations of a preceding rational idea or order. However, a notable limitation is the simplification that stems from Fulcher's hypostatization of reason and music as contrasting symbolic modes. A counterweight to her stark contrast can be found in Boulez's self-reflection on composers' writings.

An early article from 1954 in fact resembled Fulcher's problematic tendency to elevate the activity of composition to a more essential or autonomous level than writing. Boulez then presented composers' writings as mere commentary or testimonies from the creative process:

A creative artist may never express his essential self in these critical essays, analyses and general theoretical writings, but these may turn out to be a critical commentary, or a kind of incantation murmured over a new work as it comes to birth.<sup>70</sup>

As a contrast to this questionable bifurcation, Boulez later broadened the notion of composers' writings. He came to use the term *writing* to denote an organisation of musical parameters, including rational premeditation, regardless whether the outcome are verbal or musical texts. Writing is then regarded as static and prescriptive transcriptions of a musical dynamics that essentially involves a fluid and constant interplay between concepts and perception. The kind of rationality operative in writing is subservient to perception and assessments of the final work. Writing has analytical and structuring qualities, but it establishes no stable code or techniques that carries a meaning quite separate from musical experiences. Boulez finally arrives at a conception that counts on transitions between intuitive creativity and intellectual reflection, rather than to posit them as separate realms:

The reciprocal relationship between the organisation of the creative imagination and the organisation of writing is such that one cannot ask which is antecedent and which, consequent, hierarchically speaking. The step from the *spontaneous* to the *intellectual* does not involve an alteration of essence, but rather a very unstable see-saw. Intellectual reflection can be stimulated by acting on impulse just as much as compositional acts can be revitalized by calculation!<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Fulcher 2005, 9.

<sup>70</sup> Boulez 1986, 106.

<sup>71</sup> Boulez 2004, 214. On this nexus of thought, which includes reflection on memory, creativity, ideas and learning processes within reason and the imagination, see Boulez 2018, especially 485–525 and 560–591.

The reciprocity expounded here has the advantage of avoiding simplistic boundaries between composition and theorizing. However, Boulez's standpoint is that of a composer who describes a parallelism in the writing of verbal texts on music and in writing as an umbrella term for the activities of composition and notation. As such, his outline contains no critical attention to the role of writings in shaping composers' status or to the possibility that verbal texts might elicit a kind of reflection that is distinct from the kind of organisation at work in musical notation.

Limitations in Fulcher's and Boulez's approaches indicate a need to maintain an open mind on how composition and theorizing can influence each other. To this end, the final aspect to consider is how recent scholars have investigated such intersections from different angles. Critical attention to the independence of composers' writings and stated ideas from their musical works have resulted in three main lines of enquiry:

1) Closer attention to writings and ideas can enhance understanding and analyses of compositions, furthering awareness of a reciprocal but yet largely harmonious unity between the different kinds of sources.<sup>72</sup>

2) It becomes natural to investigate discrepancies between theoretical ideas and musical notation as inevitable consequences of inherent differences in the modes of communication operative in writings and scores.<sup>73</sup>

3) Ideas expounded in composers' writings become valuable objects of study in their own right.<sup>74</sup>

In this section, results from ongoing investigations of the function of modernist composers' writings have shown how they contributed to transform the professional recognition of their authors. In this process, music and writing reciprocally shaped ideals of autonomy and rationality in composition. These new configurations were instrumental in propelling composers to a status as public intellectuals. The influence on these developments on intersections between music and writing is, however, anything but clear. Fulcher's idea that music transforms the general level of writing and ideology was contrasted with Boulez's understanding of writing as a parallel process in composition and authorship. Beyond his lacking attention to incongruities between writings and musical notation, it was finally suggested that recognition of writings' independence from music can elicit investigations that focus on different movements between the two media.

## 2.3 Performance in composite work ontologies

The first chapter contained brief glances on some of Messiaen's few preserved comments on performance. His emphasis on scores as a privileged source to compositions was seen to stand side by side with a marked generosity towards different kind of interpretations. The conspicuous scarcity of comments on the

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<sup>72</sup> See e.g. Campbell 2010 and Goldman 2011 on Boulez, Jezic 1981 on Ernst Toch.

<sup>73</sup> As in Dahl 2022, on Stravinsky.

<sup>74</sup> See Jarzębska 2020 on Stravinsky, and Hayes 2021.

matter can be linked to a general forgetfulness concerning performance in modernist discourses on art music. However, a certain degree of caution is called for, lest recent attempts to advance the importance of performance in fact reinstates cliché-ridden portrayals of a complete ignorance throughout the modernist period. This section brings together theoretical articulations of more complex ontologies of works, in which performance is credited with an irreducible role. Taken together, they amount to the beginning of an alternative historiography of interpretation in musical modernism. The perspectives assembled provide a background against which Messiaen's stance eventually can receive clearer contours. They also serve as a conceptual basis for the ensuing evaluation of extant studies on Messiaen, not least pertaining to the composite roles of composer-performers and their recordings.

As noted in the previous section, Gisèle Brelet's work on musical time was well known by Messiaen. She worked with Bergsonian concepts and sought to merge a psychological conception of experiencing a living and a real duration (*durée*) through music with the objectivity in a formalist aesthetics. Having articulated her philosophy of time and music in a dissertation, Brelet applied several of her main principles in a substantial book on performance as a creative act. It combined post-Bergsonian concepts with invocations of Hegel's aesthetics of music.<sup>75</sup> A vital metaphysical inference from the German thinker is that works and performances belong to different ontological levels. Notated scores constitute abstractions and symbolizations of works, whereas the creative act of performance gives concrete existence to the ideal unity of a work. Musicians thus allow works to enter into the dynamic reality of lived time and create conditions for a merger of objectivity and subjectivity that lies at the heart of aesthetic contemplation.

Brelet's broad philosophical gateway to the problem of performance helps to establish a notable categorical differentiation between score and sonic renderings. Her understanding that the work represents an ideal unity entails that any distinct realization by a performer necessarily transforms the basic unity into a novel configuration.<sup>76</sup> This ontological difference forms a bulwark against attempts to elevate any single version as an original or perfect interpretation. The work attains reality in a performer's interpretation, but the fullness of the work's idea can never be embodied in a single rendering or recording. Although Brelet's philosophy of music was closely aligned with Stravinsky's music, she rejects his idea that composers should move beyond the task of notating music, seeking to produce definitive versions on disc. In her view, composers are seldomly the best performers and works that originate in a composer's distinct style of playing often has a limited scope of musical potential. Brelet notes that some composers require performers only to play what is written, but she argues that an artist must provide a free interpretation of the musical idea on which the work rests. Notation of rhythms, sounds and dynamics are only abstract symbols and attempts to play nothing more than what is

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<sup>75</sup> Brelet, 1951, 12. On her philosophy of musical time, see Keym 2004, 242–244.

<sup>76</sup> Brelet 1951, 27.

written will result in an abstract playing, devoid of life. Her conspicuously idealistic conception of works implicitly delimits the potential of notated scores to signify the full reality of any music. Good works are rather held to carry a fecundity of potential meaning that surpasses composers' intention of how the music is to be played. Any interpretation is necessarily a creative act and entails the challenge to conjoin the novel individual understanding of the player with the essence of the work.<sup>77</sup> In this view, respect for the text is commendable, but it is merely a means. Brelet argues that the misguided centrality of this ideal steams from misconceptions that the written score, in itself, can be a final testimony to the living reality of the work.<sup>78</sup>

Brelet's outlook is of particular interest because of her proximity to Messiaen. In the present context, her approach can also be used as a basis for a further discussion of subsequent thinkers' similar conceptions. This move entails no claims for influences between them, merely an observation of similitude in their ideas.

Roman Ingarden's ontology of art has no immediate connection to Messiaen's intellectual context, but the philosopher's dissertation on Bergson prepared him for his long-lasting aspiration of creating a phenomenological alternative to positivistic epistemologies and conceptions of time. In contrast to his teacher Husserl, and to Brelet's idealism, Ingarden theorized art works as exemplary instances of intentional objects that simultaneously rest in material objects. In other words, his primary philosophical interest in the category of musical works rests upon their conjunction of ideality and reality.<sup>79</sup> The work is regarded as an intentional object, stemming from the composer's creative acts, typically notated in the physical and enduring object of the score. The score is itself primarily a collection of "imperative signs", communicating the composer's vision of the work, thereby designating it and serving as instructions on how to realize a faithful performance.<sup>80</sup> As such, scores are regarded as schematic objectifications of works. Their notation is regarded to leave wide "gaps or areas of indeterminateness which can be removed only in performance".<sup>81</sup>

In contrast to the score, the work is taken to rest upon the reality of sounds, ordered in distinct sound-constructs. In order to be perceived as music, these sounds demand aesthetic perception from listeners, who attend to these structures. The appreciation of sounds as works of music is a complex matter, taking place in a particular sonic and spatial setting, incorporating emotions and assumed aesthetic values. The latter category forms part of a wider discourse on the significance and merit of different works, thereby shaping listeners' attitudes and experiences of musical works. Ingarden speaks of such composite and intersubjective acts as *concretizations*.

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<sup>77</sup> Brelet 1951, 6, 33, 39–40, 53–57.

<sup>78</sup> Brelet 1951, 83–93.

<sup>79</sup> On the intellectual context, including Ingarden's break with Husserl, see Rieser 1971.

<sup>80</sup> Ingarden 1986, 37–40.

<sup>81</sup> Ingarden 1986, 116–117.

He also evaluates the role of recordings, granting that recordings remove some of the gaps left undecided in scores. At the same time, Ingarden disregards the idea that they could realize the fullness of a work. The necessity of aesthetic perception and the many contextual qualities that shape experiences of music form a boundary that prevents any recording from providing a perfect realization of the work. Ingarden mentions a host of objections against attempts to make a recording by a composer into a privileged original object. Taking Chopin as an example, he raises the point that there is no basis to assume that extant recordings by the composer-pianist would constitute perfect renderings, technically or musically. Chopin's work has come to assume different aesthetic values throughout history and changing styles of performance, which entails a possibility that novel aspects bring out features beyond the composer's own understanding. Even if the music is posited to grow out of Chopin's creative personality, it would be hazardous to claim that any single recording could represent every dimension of his interpretation of a piece.<sup>82</sup> Ingarden's final stance is that composers' primary contribution is to notate works in scores, rather than to concretize them in performances:

We may reach the conclusion that the profile of the work realized by its composers is neither unique nor perfect and that in fact there are several permissible variations in the performance of the work. The composer's artistic achievement is not so much the realization of a unique model performance but rather the creation of the work as a schema subject to musical notation that, as I have already argued, displays a variety of potential profiles. Modern techniques of preserving performances do not so much allow us to return to the work itself as an "original," but to one of its possible profiles realized by the composers. The fact that this realization happened to be the effort of the composer rather than of a performer may be of great historical significance, but it is of little consequence for a philosophical theory concerned with musical works.<sup>83</sup>

This stance upholds a clear boundary between the roles of composers and performers. The score continues to be regarded as the primary contribution by a composer, but the intimate link between score and work in many modernist conceptions is severed. The situation of performances and recordings on a different ontological level than scores provides space for a manifest plurality of interpretation. Ingarden assembles several notable objections against attempts to ascribe authorial intention to composers' recordings, and thereby serves as an alternative to uncritical conceptions of authenticity in composers' own interpretations. At the same time, the tendency of his argument provides little impetus to investigate how composers' recordings may provide insights into the work beyond what the merely schematic notation in scores provides.

A distinct criticism of the division between the roles of composers and performers in modernism stems from Peter Hill. Writing as a musicologist and a pianist, he points out the multiplicity of interpretative choices left open even in

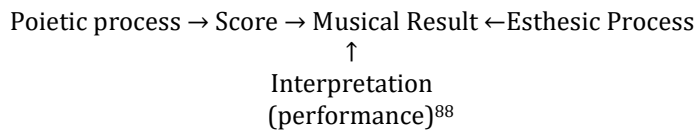
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<sup>82</sup> Ingarden 1986, 142–150.

<sup>83</sup> Ingarden 1986, 157.

precisely notated modernist scores. He suggests that calls for authenticity in performance ultimately reflects a division of labour between composers and performers, in which the latter category has lost the self-esteem needed to play on the basis of personal conviction rather than searching for “rules” and “evidence”.<sup>84</sup>

With an explicit basis in Ingarden’s outlook, Jean-Jacques Nattiez has developed what he calls a “relativist attitude” on the question of fidelity or authenticity in performance.<sup>85</sup> The basis for this stance is a schema, in which notation functions as a link between an intentional or *poietic* dimension and what he calls the *esthesis* sphere of appreciation, analysis and discursive narratives.<sup>86</sup> A critical point is that the work is located within a necessary interaction between these poles. All levels together constitute the composite unity of what Nattiez, after Jean Molino, calls the “musical fact”.<sup>87</sup> The interplay is represented graphically in this manner:



In the present context, this figure primarily raises the question whether performances are to be seen as the final realization of the composer’s intentions, or whether they belong within the sphere of reception and dissemination. Nattiez leans towards the latter option, saying that the performer gives the work sonorous existence, rather than to participate in its creation.<sup>89</sup> A point at stake in posing this question is whether performances primarily should relate to scores, or whether they rather correspond to aesthetic values and ideas that are independent of authorial intentions. A notable merit in Nattiez’s outlook is an emphasis that verdicts on the fidelity of a performance rest upon two kinds of interpretations: The sonic rendering by a performer and the critic’s intellectual judgment, often implicit, about the work’s truth or essence. In the following step, the performance is judged according to the reflected or merely assumed understanding of this particular work, and how it should be played. These two stems constitute what Nattiez calls different symbolic forms, which calls for a methodology on how to form accurate judgments across the divide between sound and ideas.<sup>90</sup>

Unfortunately, he does not cogitate further on the status of performances or recordings in such evaluations. The result is a stance which highlights the role of particular ideas in the evaluation of performances, but in which performers

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<sup>84</sup> Hill 1986, 7.

<sup>85</sup> Nattiez 1990, 74.

<sup>86</sup> Nattiez 1990, 70. The concepts are taken from Valéry 1944.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. Molino 1990.

<sup>88</sup> Nattiez 1990, 73.

<sup>89</sup> Nattiez 1990, 72.

<sup>90</sup> Nattiez 1990, 77.

primarily are held to realize what the score designates.<sup>91</sup> Nattiez's vision of a multi-dimensional musical fact has an intrinsic but never realized theoretical potential for alternatives to a score-based norm. It could have elevated esthetic processes as more central than intentions in the poietic processes. It could also have considered a kind of symbolist aesthetics in which performers are called to concretize certain ideas or mental states through sounds, under the guidance of scores. Many of Messiaen's works programmatically conjoin the notated sound-structures with descriptive titles, captions, poems, subheadings and prefaces. This feature calls for further hermeneutical consideration of how meaning is constituted through a mixture of discursive and sonic elements, but also raises questions how performances are to negotiate between the poles of ideas and the score.<sup>92</sup>

Daphne Leong and Alejandro Cremaschi have explored Messiaen's *Visions de l'Amen* within the former scholar's wider project of examining cross-fertilizations between analysis and performance in modernist music. Leong stresses that perceptions of musical structures are constructed within certain emotional and discursive parameters. Her interest lies in how performance not only induces a "knowledge-how" of how to shape musical gestures. She stresses that it also fosters a "knowledge-that", i.e., distinct insights into musical structures that carry analytical value, although they remain an embodied kind of apprehension.<sup>93</sup> Their close reading of *Visions* constructs an argument that the two pianos essentially play out a ritual, which stand in the service of overarching dramatic purposes. In this way, the input from performer-analysts is said to constitute a distinct way of engaging with the work, thereby contributing performance-based knowledge of its meaning and construction.<sup>94</sup> Leong finally proposes that both performance and listening rest heavily on implicit knowledge, which is a matter of using previously attained abilities that remain below the level of articulated explicit knowledge.<sup>95</sup>

To conclude, this section has discussed the output of several theoretical approaches to interrelations between scores and performances. Brelet and Ingarden articulate different philosophical conceptions of works, which induce awareness on performances as concretizations of a work whose integral unity is situated on another ontological level. Their outlooks prevent an uncritical acceptance of scores as designations of works in their entirety, rather opening for a view of scores and performances as parallel and complementary realizations of the work. Nattiez builds on Ingarden and prompts attention to the often unrecognized fact that evaluations of authenticity in performance are conditioned by a particular idea of how the work ought to be played. In spite of possible openings in his multi-layered vision of musical acts, this theory remains

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<sup>91</sup> On the status of notation, including considerations of open works and improvisation, see Nattiez 1990, 78–90.

<sup>92</sup> On such repertoires, including Messiaen, and resting on Lawrence Kramer's musical hermeneutics, see Bruhn 1997, xvi–xxi.

<sup>93</sup> Leong 2019, 8–11, 14–17.

<sup>94</sup> Leong 2019, 201–262, see specifically 201–204, 262.

<sup>95</sup> Leong 2019, 381–385.

restricted by a strict focus on scores, rather than the work, as the norm in performance. Leong and Cremaschi have used music by Messiaen in their effort to show that performers attain a particular kind of knowledge, based on their specific role. It remains to be discussed which kind of knowledge a composer-performer as Messiaen can be said to have held. The different approaches assembled here will illuminate both the ensuing survey of previous Messiaen research and discussions of the second case study, including its outcome.

## 2.4 Gapology: Hermeneutical principles for reconstructions of what composers fail to write

In this final section, it is time to return to the dialectics of how uses of language at the same time manifest and conceal aspects of self-reflection. Having previously discussed the level of intellectual predispositions common to a relevant circle of influential modernists, this section first discusses how theoretical principles and creativity intersects in an individual composer. Even though the presentation moves back towards a common level, the section continues to delineate aspects of a unified theoretical and methodological approach. Indeed, the consistent claims that central dimensions of composers' experiences remain absent in their use of language hinges upon a theoretical understanding that from the outset predisposes the dissertation towards particular hermeneutic principles. These are here set out as an imperative to develop a *gapology*, a systematic endeavour of investigating how theoretical conceptions shape composers without being available for scrutiny on the surface level of their statements.

Investigations of writings by modernist composers have intensified in recent decades, but is not an entirely novel field of enquiry. Schoenberg's writings are a kind of material that previously had prompted reflection on the interplay between artistic principles and composition. In a significant article from 1976, Carl Dahlhaus posited that Schoenberg no less than Stravinsky had a "musical poetics", and outlined methodological principles for investigations.<sup>96</sup> The concept here denotes a conception of composition that is based on an artistic reflection that itself include distinct theoretical claims. Such a poetics is posited to be at work in both compositional techniques and theoretical statements by a composer. At the same time, a poetics is never a given starting point for an investigation. It rather requires reconstruction based on extant sources. Dahlhaus's stance entails that composers' writings have no final authority. They are rather key sources in the task of reconstructing an artistic outlook that is manifested throughout works and writings, but also remains a separate third layer beyond.<sup>97</sup>

Dahlhaus obviously induces a critical distance towards primary sources in the choice of searching for such a poetics. It is noteworthy that his stance evolves

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<sup>96</sup> Dahlhaus 1976. The title of the article is "Schönbergs musikalische Poetik".

<sup>97</sup> Dahlhaus 1976, 82.



from an apparent incongruity between Schoenberg's and Dahlhaus's own fundamental epistemological convictions. The composer belonged within a paradigm in which nature was regarded as a fundamental source and norm for music, and in which history was a site for a gradual evolution of music. The intuitive capability of a composer to realize an expressive potential in nature, as well as passing judgment on musical form, amounted to a privileged authority, which to some degree could be reconstructed in terms of general theoretical principles.<sup>98</sup> Dahlhaus belonged to another paradigm, in which such a teleology, and a concomitant understanding of the composer within history, was reconfigured as the embodiment of particular and changing historical categories of thought. His concept of a poetics denotes this shift from Schoenberg's belief in the general epistemic validity of his own principles to a critical and historical delimitation of their scope to a personal level. Central concepts and categories are no longer interesting as carriers of universal claims; the musicologist rather studies how they shape a composer's creative work.

Dahlhaus has been described as an exponent of Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutics, partly because of his insistence on taking the historicity of both interpreter and objects of study into serious consideration.<sup>99</sup> However, as John Covach has pointed out, the aspiration to reconstruct Schoenberg's poetics in fact manifests greater similarity with the earlier hermeneutic methods of Friedrich Schleiermacher or Wilhelm Dilthey.<sup>100</sup> Dahlhaus's aspiration of understanding a historical author's way of reasoning on the basis of a wider grasp of the relevant historical discourse echoes central traits in their approach. At the same time, a critical awareness that the interpreter engages in a dialogue with the author, and thus creates a layer of understanding that never completely reproduces an extant outlook, forms a critical dimension in the hermeneutic dictum "to understand an author better than he understood himself". As Schleiermacher formulates this task, a later interpreter should seek understanding of what is written, but also needs to attain a conscious grasp of aspects that remained external to the author's own self-reflexivity.<sup>101</sup> The challenge is to conjoin an informed and truthful apperception of texts with a systematically developed knowledge of a historical period that was self-evident to the author. Within a musical setting, the conductor Nikolaus Harnoncourt has in a similar vein stressed the seemingly self-evident and therefore unspoken dimension in historical treatises:

We must always bear in mind [...] that the author could assume the existence of important reserves of knowledge, self-evident knowledge that no one

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<sup>98</sup> Dahlhaus 1976, 81.

<sup>99</sup> Hepokoski 1991.

<sup>100</sup> Covach 2000, 338 n. 13.

<sup>101</sup> "The task is also to be expressed as follows, to understand the utterance at first just as well and then better than its author. For because we have no immediate knowledge of what is in him, we must seek to bring much to consciousness that can remain unconscious to him.", Schleiermacher 1998, 23. See further Breithaupt, Brousse, Deligne & Desbordes 1985.

needed to speak of [...] the unwritten, the assumed, would undoubtedly be far more important than what is written.<sup>102</sup>

Harnoncourt's intention behind this statement is not to call for contextual reconstructions of ideas in treatises. He rather stresses the impossibility of recreating historical performance practices in their totality. Such a stance serves as a healthy reminder that it would be futile to seek a perfect or consummate understanding of historical circumstances. However, the situation is in principle no different in regard to knowledge of contemporary life and culture. What Dahlhaus's use of the term poetics potentially opens for are investigations of an indistinct field, central in Schleiermacher's method, in which the generality in language and the individuality in human subjectivity mutually influences each other.<sup>103</sup> In other words, knowledge of the cultural context at a given moment facilitates a more qualified understanding of individual authors, who in their turn contributed to the general use of central concepts and discourses. The hermeneutical vision briefly set out here calls for an informed imagination, able to perceive aspects and traits that may not be spelled out in writings or scores, but which nevertheless shaped a composer's reasoning and artistic choices.

Nattiez worked closely with Boulez on the composer's writings and has probed the status of this category of texts. This attention follows from his premise that verbal discourse, such as commentaries, criticism and analyses, is an intrinsic element in the already discussed notion of a total musical fact. Nattiez articulates some commonalities that resembles Hayes's kind of intellectual predispositions, but also develops a methodology for studies of composers' written analyses of their own music. He notes a recurrent tendency towards eclecticism in composers' analyses of historical music, and witnesses how they deviate from musicological methods because of a focus on finding techniques that may be relevant in the creation of new music. In a striking choice of words, composers are said to show "how music can be subject to a marvellous and erratic alchemy within the confines of the atelier, an alchemy that bears upon the origin of contemporary works".<sup>104</sup>

Citing one of his own conversations with Boulez, Nattiez emphasize composers' primary interest in the imaginative force in any analysis, in contrast to quests for historical accuracy. He suggests that composers' commentary "deliberately strikes a *delinquent* stance".<sup>105</sup> This is not intended as derogatory, but rather suggests that musicologists should treat such writings as valuable testimonies to perceptions of music that provide extreme cases in historicity: a contemporary interest on the analyst's part takes precedence over attempts to establish historical objectivity. In contrast to Dahlhaus, Nattiez here conjoins the need for distance with a call for musicological self-criticism.

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<sup>102</sup> Harnoncourt 1984, 40, cited in translation from Nattiez 1990, 78.

<sup>103</sup> As a contrast, Schleiermacher could not have used the term poetics, which for him denoted a rule-based creativity at odds with the role of subjectivity in modern art, Scholtz 1995, 97.

<sup>104</sup> Nattiez 1990, 185.

<sup>105</sup> Nattiez 1990, 185.

A basic premise in the methodology he sets up is that verbal commentary has a significant degree of independence, which calls for evaluations of how closely it adheres to the music. Nattiez invokes attitudes from ethnographic investigations, in order to stress a degree of respect for the cultural otherness of composers' statements.<sup>106</sup> Implications in several of the four basic principles he sets up have already been taken into account in the dissertation.

Nattiez stresses that the *general attitude toward language* in a specific cultural setting needs to be considered, and that *attitudes towards discourses about music* within a culture construct social norms for composers' writings. Furthermore, *circumstances of a discourse* must be considered, among them the significance ascribed to different styles of argument, and the different formats offered by teaching sessions, interviews or program notes. Beside these cultural aspects, there has to be a recognition of *the speaker's personality*. This dimension includes the possibility that writings take a stance that is anything but representative of their cultural setting.<sup>107</sup>

The main contribution from Nattiez's project to this dissertation is his following reflections on how the nature of composers' writing demands a certain kind of interpretation. He emphasizes that no sources, including composers' analysis of their own works, cover all characteristic features of music. Composers might typically merely report on some elements in the process of creating music, such as the mechanism and techniques through which a work came into being. In other words, such discourse entails a *focalization*, regardless whether it stems from intuitive or reflected choices of parameters. This circumstance calls scholars to develop a "gapology", a notion denoting methods for investigations of discontinuities and blind spots in the discourse.<sup>108</sup>

Nattiez prompts reflection on the circumstance that the perceived usefulness of composers' discourse on their own music largely depends on the scholar's own theoretical framework. In drawing parallels to the study of music in other cultures, the ethnography called for by Nattiez should elicit a certain cultural sensitivity in studies of composers' writings. Their word provides merely one approach and their "view from inside" is per se neither true nor a privileged gateway to the music.<sup>109</sup> Composers speak and write on their work within certain genres and cultural norms. Scholarly discourse on the same subject has its own conventions, and is not necessarily more objective than the particular voice of the composer. What researchers can do is to enter into a dialogue with testimonies given by composers, in a fashion inspired by anthropological

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<sup>106</sup> Nattiez relies upon analogies with the work undertaken in the late 1970s and 1980s on so-called "ethnotheories" of music at work in indigenous cultures. His basic approach to writings by composers in Western art music can be beneficial without adhering to the potentially dominant exoticism in such approaches to other cultures.

<sup>107</sup> Nattiez 1990, 190–192.

<sup>108</sup> The term gapology stems from Lawrence Gushee's work on the jazz saxophonist Lester Young, see Nattiez 1990, 193, cf. Gushee 1981.

<sup>109</sup> Nattiez 1990, 195.

aspirations to gain access into the conceptual world and outlooks at work in other cultures.<sup>110</sup>

From Hayes's study of intellectual predispositions to Dahlhaus's and Nattiez's investigations of poetics and composers' self-analyses, this chapter has assembled perspectives on how modernist composers' reflection on their profession and their works contain implicit streaks beyond what they convey in a clear manner. What is assumed is posited to be at least as important as that what is spelled out. This chapter has begun the process of comparing Messiaen to other modernists and has pointed out, albeit preliminarily, some streaks in the predispositions that orientated his stance on composers' theorizing. It has also begun to build a contextual sensitivity and a conceptual framework for ensuing estimations of how theorizing and composition intersect.

It has been posited that performance can fruitfully be investigated in a framework of composite or multi-layered ontologies of works. The hermeneutical principles discussed entail imperatives of building a more comprehensive understanding of historical contexts, and of actively seeking out discontinuities between composers' verbal commentary and music. Such a stance responds to a both critical and sympathetic awareness of intrinsic limitations in their texts and the particular focus they may have. Taken together, Dahlhaus's and Nattiez's methods call for interpretation of claims in composers' writings as expressions of personal principles and experiences of music.

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<sup>110</sup> Nattiez 192–197.

### 3. Messiaen scholarship within transformations of musical modernism

Surveys of extant scholarship is commonly regarded a preliminary step in investigations, after which the purpose, invoked theories and used methods can be defined. Such a procedure can be perfectly adequate, but has limitations in the present study. Nattiez's insistence upon a dialogical approach to composers' analyses provides one of several impetuses to develop a self-reflected stance even before articulating observations on previous scholarship. The history of musicology, including scholarship on Messiaen, has formed an integral part in constructing and rethinking of the modernist intellectual predispositions that also shaped the composer's perception of himself as a composer. Such a reciprocity between scholarship and the status of modernist composers as intellectuals has already been observed in the section on composers' writings. Rather than treating primary sources and secondary commentary as distinct entities, the following reading approaches them as mutually formative within a common and ongoing conceptualization of subject matters such as the theoretical status of composers' treatises.

Albeit in brief, this chapter highlights how criticism and scholarship have grappled with this particular problem in direct continuity with Messiaen's own ambivalence on the theoretical validity of his writing. At the same time, it will stand clear that scholars and performers have contributed to create additional sources to Messiaen's principles on musical interpretation through documentations of his teaching. The chapter itself adds new knowledge on how certain intellectual predispositions and his own teaching shaped central aspects of Messiaen's self-perception.

The scope of the chapter has been delimited to music criticism and scholarship that have discussed aspects of Messiaen's theorizing and his stance on performance in notable ways. The selection of highlighted perspectives is informed by discussions in the previous chapter. Against this backdrop, it becomes possible to witness with greater clarity than before how approaches to Messiaen have wavered between divergent standpoints, especially on his standing as an author and intellectual. A significant portion of commentary has either criticized or defended the composer on conceptual grounds that have been assumed, rather than being discursively explicated. The framework developed in the previous chapter enables an enhanced awareness of the particularity of these standpoints.

The present chapter is divided into two discrete sections. The first concerns the multi-layered nexus of theorizing, whereas the second surveys texts on performance. The structure of the presentation within each section follows the historical evolution of scholarship as it has developed throughout and after Messiaen's life.

### 3.1 Studies of Messiaen as author and intellectual

Messiaen's standing as a musical thinker was for long intimately connected with his *Technique de mon langage musical* (*The Technique of my musical language*). Originally published in 1944, it was translated into English and German after a little more than a decade and shaped the reception of the composer's works throughout the twentieth century.<sup>111</sup> Indeed, the *Technique* served as the obvious "go-to source" for countless expositions of Messiaen's music throughout his life. It provided musicians and scholars with an overview of characteristic technical novelties in his musical language, pertaining to rhythm, melody and harmony.

Messiaen was ambiguous concerning his epistemic claims and purpose of writing the *Technique*. The text was also read and debated on the grounds of deviating, but frequently merely implicit, preconceptions on systematicity and rationality in contemporary composers' music. Two years before the actual publication, Messiaen had written an article on what he called his coming "treatise on composition", which pointedly stated that it in fact is no treatise: "Ce traité de composition n'en est pas un".<sup>112</sup> He rather wanted the text to be read as an introduction to his personal language and its expressive properties, hence the stress on *mon* (*my*) in its title. The equivocacy is conspicuous and Messiaen's own diaries from the time reveal that he wavered between the more objective term treatise (*Traité*) and the more personal and poetic final title.<sup>113</sup> The printed preface is dated 1941 and explains that "this little "theory"" was intended to develop and explain vital ideas and techniques in Messiaen's language. It also says that the undertaking was prompted by misunderstandings from critics and admirers alike.<sup>114</sup>

The *Technique* represented a major step towards a distinct artistic self-confidence, in comparison with a couple of earlier pedagogical works.<sup>115</sup> Early reviews of it discussed expectations and the potential of a systematic theory of composition, offering contrasting approaches to Messiaen's enigmatic proclamation that the *Technique* is a theory that is neither comprehensive nor carry general validity. The organist and critic Bernard Gavoty was merely one of several authors who highlighted the conspicuous presence in the *Technique* of ideas and techniques drawn from other composers and traditional repertoires. Gavoty concluded that the text represents an a posteriori attempt to articulate the coherence of a language, which in reality consists of eclectic transformations of musical fragments drawn from predecessors.<sup>116</sup> In contrast to the underlying assumption that a composer should develop original and clear artistic principles, as well as a coherent musical language, other critics lamented the treatise's

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<sup>111</sup> Messiaen 1944, Messiaen 1947–56. On its impact on later developments, see e.g. the historiography in Deliège 2003, especially pp. 27–31.

<sup>112</sup> Messiaen 1942b, 1, see also Messiaen 1942a.

<sup>113</sup> Hill & Simeone 2005, 119–120, Simeone 2007, 24.

<sup>114</sup> Messiaen 1944, 3, Messiaen 2002b, 7.

<sup>115</sup> Messiaen 1934, Messiaen 1951 [1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1939], on the latter see Balmer & Murray 2018b.

<sup>116</sup> "Le vrai, sans doute, est qu'à l'origine Messiaen a dû éprouver la nécessité inconsciente d'un tel langage musical. Plus tard, il a essayé, pour lui-même, pour ses disciples et contre ses détracteurs, de recoudre en un mannequin cohérent les matières premières de l'instinct", Gavoty 1945.

degree of systematicity and its formulaic approach to music. Such an approach would potentially impede creative spontaneity and inspiration, if adopted by others.<sup>117</sup>

The *Technique* is historically significant as a rare example of an analytical work from the early twentieth century to have been evaluated in the influential journal *Revue de musicology*.<sup>118</sup> The reviewer Armand Machabey had previously penned a portrait that deemed Messiaen still devoid of a distinct theory behind his style. In the earlier text, Machabey expressed his belief that the composer would be able to write a treatise on composition, which showed how musical forms emerge from the development of an original thematic cell, according to ineluctable laws of logic.<sup>119</sup> As Yves Balmer notes in a retrospective analysis of the review, the latter ideal indicates a clear influence from Machabey's own teacher, the composer Vincent d'Indy.<sup>120</sup>

Machabey's review of the *Technique* endorsed Messiaen's freedom to make artistic choices according to his taste, inner necessity and personal doctrine. Nevertheless, it appears that Machabey would have wished such arbitrary preferences to be systematized into a distinct aesthetic, possibly including rational explanations. Ardent calls for objectivity in his text serve the purpose of opposing Messiaen's professed and highly personal Catholicism, a trait which reveals how evaluations of the composer's status was conditioned by controversies surrounding religious programmes in key works from the 1940s.<sup>121</sup> Throughout this decade, Messiaen was criticized both for being too systematic and for not having attained the theoretical and musical coherence, which would be a hallmark of an autonomous and original composer. His own indecisiveness on the epistemic status of the *Technique* thus reflects contrary expectations in contemporary discourse.

The ideal of having an original and coherent style informed comments on Messiaen's dependency on Debussy written in the 1960s. André Hodeir and Roger Smalley noted how the *Technique* lists quotations drawn from other composers, and described Messiaen's composition processes as transformations of existing material.<sup>122</sup> As a contrast, early musicological monographs on Messiaen commonly used the *Technique* as the basis for explications of the composer's personal style. Robert Sherlaw Johnson called it a "theoretical treatise" and Serge Gut deemed it a "fundamental key" to early works and significant for the understanding of later compositions.<sup>123</sup> Messiaen's student Harry Halbreich provided a comprehensive summary of the early language,

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<sup>117</sup> Boswell-Kurs 2001, 246–312.

<sup>118</sup> Machabey 1946.

<sup>119</sup> Machabey 1942.

<sup>120</sup> Balmer 2018, 540.

<sup>121</sup> Machabey 1946, Balmer 2018.

<sup>122</sup> Balmer, Lacôte & Murray 2017, 20–21.

<sup>123</sup> Johnson 2008 [1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1975], 13, Gut 1977, 80: "Cet ouvrage est une clé fondamentale pour l'analyse des oeuvres composées de 1928 à 1948 et contribue également pour une part non négligeable à la compréhension des compositions ultérieures."

which clearly was based on the *Technique*.<sup>124</sup> Halbreich also noted the personal nature of Messiaen's 1939 manual on harmony, which treats several themes later reused in the *Technique*.<sup>125</sup>

Paul Griffiths launched a more reflective stance on the text, its authorial validity and its use by others until the 1980s. A succinct passage highlights several key points and is worth reading in full:

It is of the nature of *Technique de mon langage musical* that it is very much more concerned with how the music is put together than with how it sounds and is heard. Right at the outset Messiaen insists that his work is "not a treatise on composition", but neither is it an analysis, nor could it be when the creator is his own commentator. It is, rather, an attempt to establish general rules from particular instances of creative process, and as such it carries no special authority: it cannot tell us how Messiaen's music works, but only how in the early 1940s he thought it had been composed. Yet sometimes this has not been understood. Messiaen's music has been investigated as if his *Technique de mon langage musical* provided the only avenues of approach; whereas its explanations are often only partial and occasionally downright questionable.<sup>126</sup>

This verdict implicitly suggests that Messiaen's writing responds to a modernist expectation of giving an account of materials and basic techniques used in his compositions. Griffiths's opinion that a composer in principle would be unable of providing analysis of his own music is itself doubtful. Readers may also question both the interpretation that Messiaen sought to lay down general rules and the assumption that a text based on arbitrary artistic processes must be deemed devoid of a broader authority.

Griffiths was also one of the first authors to spotlight the fragmentary nature of Messiaen's writing, a stance that went hand in hand with a call for different analytical approaches to it. Furthermore, he analysed Messiaen's music as a "penetration of mechanical process into musical intention".<sup>127</sup> Taking the "Liturgie de cristal" from the *Quatuor pour la fin du temps* as a prime example, Griffiths made Messiaen emblematic of a rupture in twentieth century music. Instead of an organic wholeness in which the elements of music themselves establish both the means and the substance of composition, composers' personal ideas and means of organisation induce a divide that accentuate how music represents an inherent "dialogue between a composer's taste and his system".<sup>128</sup> Griffiths's reflections prompted a novel critical probing of stakes and limitations in the *Technique*. At the same time, the tension between taste and system recalls the polarity that Messiaen spoke of as a reciprocity between strictures and freedom in his music (see section 1.3).

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<sup>124</sup> Halbreich 1980, 110–194. The actual presentation adopted a historical approach and thereby consciously departed from the *Technique's* structure.

<sup>125</sup> Halbreich 1980, 488–489.

<sup>126</sup> Griffiths 1985, 93.

<sup>127</sup> Griffiths 1985, 94.

<sup>128</sup> Griffiths 1985, 94.



Subsequent scholars differ in their verdicts on which perspectives Messiaen managed to communicate and which areas remain implicit. Christopher Dingle notes the absence of discursive explanations of how different techniques listed in the *Technique* relate to each other. In his view, “Messiaen is very good at saying *what* the elements are of his music, but tells us precious little about *how* he uses them”.<sup>129</sup> Contrastingly, Yves Balmer, Thomas Lacôte and Christopher Brent Murray regard the text both as “a treatise in the generation of material” and “a treatise in transformation”.<sup>130</sup> Their reading highlights its practical nature as an introduction for students on how to use and develop Messiaen’s techniques, in line with an aim stated in the composer’s preface.<sup>131</sup>

Another debate concerns whether the *Technique* formed part of Messiaen’s multifarious ways of presenting himself as a voice quite distinct from other modernist composers. Robert Sholl has interpreted its publication as part of a conscious strategy of subverting prevalent artistic ideals, and opening the realms of religious music and modernism to each other. Such aspirations would purportedly explain why connections to some composers are missing in the *Technique*, and why Messiaen was unwilling to spell out how complex and ambiguous some of his techniques really are. According to Sholl, such motives underlie a conspicuous incongruity between writing and composition:

Messiaen’s writings generally attempt to place him in a discourse outside and even at odds with modernity and modernism, whilst the complexity, multivalency and the degree to which Messiaen acts as a synthesiser of the past places him squarely in this discourse. By using the former to subvert the latter, Messiaen attempted to transfigure the aesthetics of modernity.<sup>132</sup>

This verdict rests upon a particular use of the term modernism and its tenor is far from self-evident. A couple of years later, Stephen Broad articulated an almost antithetical view within his study of Messiaen’s early self-contextualisation through writings. In Broad’s gaze, the *Technique*’s constant references to (some) other composers and acknowledgements of influences from (some of) Messiaen’s teachers serve to define his individuality through relations to others. Broad argues that Messiaen, throughout the text, “attempts to show, explicitly or implicitly, that his work does not stand apart from the rest of music, but is rather a result of the musical environment in which it developed”.<sup>133</sup>

A further vital point is the intertextuality between the title of Messiaen’s text and the *Histoire de la langue musicale* by his teacher Maurice Emmanuel.<sup>134</sup> One of several relevant similarities is the idea that music is built upon a set of discrete basic principles and that it amounts to a language that can be understood through enhanced insights into its syntax. Broad suggested that Messiaen, in line

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<sup>129</sup> Dingle 2005, 62.

<sup>130</sup> Balmer, Lacôte & Murray 2017, 18–19.

<sup>131</sup> Balmer, Lacôte & Murray 2017, 18–22.

<sup>132</sup> Sholl 2003, 152.

<sup>133</sup> Broad 2005: I, 84.

<sup>134</sup> Emmanuel 1911.

with such a view, set out to provide a verbal explanation of his musical language, in order to further public understanding of his works.<sup>135</sup>

In spite of their antithetical interpretations of motives, both Sholl's and Broad's readings prompt considerations of contextual aspects. Investigations of tensions and reciprocal influences between theoretical writings and composition are clearly not only a matter of different static qualities latent in the logic of discursive rationality and musical principles. Both these fields are rather continually renegotiated, being put to practice with a great variety of topical aspirations.

Although the *Technique* for long remained the principal text written by Messiaen, a considerable number of lectures and printed interviews provided greater accessibility to his biography, thoughts and compositions.<sup>136</sup> The most influential of these ostensibly oral sources are lengthy talks with Antoine Goléa and Claude Samuel, printed from the 1960s.<sup>137</sup> The Samuel set of interviews were expanded in several editions, covering an increasingly wide range of topics.<sup>138</sup> The 1986 version was translated as *Music and Color*, and still provides a natural gateway to Messiaen for many English-speaking scholars and musicians.<sup>139</sup> In contrast to the technical focus of the earlier treatise, such oral communication provided the composer with effective channels to establish a standard take on his own life, works and artistic standpoints. Some statements in the interviews are quite pointed and uncompromising, in the fashion of an artist's strongly felt intuitive judgments. Messiaen sometime adopts a self-conscious manner of speaking on the essence and nature of music, as well as uttering verdicts on contemporary life and culture. Nevertheless, the composer reveals no conspicuous desire to speak out on matters of common societal significance, on the assumed authority of an intellectual. The colloquial language rather enhances the strictly personal nature of the content.

In retrospect, Samuel remembered how the first edition of his interviews was "accepted as gospel by those who wanted to know and repeat, write or comment upon Olivier Messiaen's truths".<sup>140</sup> As a contrast, Vincent Benitez hoped that the English translation would contribute to more sophisticated analyses of the interplay between Messiaen's ideas and music beyond mere reiterations of the composer's own expositions.<sup>141</sup> In fact, neither the content nor problems associated with the text-genre of published interviews have yet been evaluated in a comprehensive and critical fashion. It is clear that Messiaen, like Stravinsky, was meticulously self-conscious of such transcripts.<sup>142</sup> His heavy editing indicates that the published text forms a hybrid genre between oral and written

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<sup>135</sup> Broad 2005: I, 84–85.

<sup>136</sup> For a detailed enumeration of such sources, see Benitez 2018, 105–118.

<sup>137</sup> Goléa 1960, Samuel 1967. A further significant publication based on interviews is Massin 1989.

<sup>138</sup> Messiaen 1986, Samuel 1999.

<sup>139</sup> Messiaen 1994a.

<sup>140</sup> Messiaen 1994a, 9. For Dingle, the book was "addictive reading", Dingle 1995, 30.

<sup>141</sup> Benitez 1996.

<sup>142</sup> For an example of how heavily Messiaen edited the proofs, see Schlee & Kämper (eds.) 1998, 146. On Stravinsky, see Dufour 2016.

communication. Further research is needed to reveal how Messiaen, like fellow composers and artists, used interviews strategically, in order to reach greater audiences, elevate his authority, create a fictionalized account of himself, and to stave off criticism. At the same time, the dialogical nature of conversations with qualified journalists may possibly have contributed to a deeper self-understanding. Recent research provides conceptual tools and methods for future comparisons with other contemporary composers.<sup>143</sup>

Another genre of writing that testifies to Messiaen's changing relation to language is the programme notes that accompany the vast majority of his compositions. The composer wrote such texts himself and was personally involved in the entire production chain for booklets and other prints for important performances, festivals and recordings of his works. Messiaen clearly recognized the potential in his written commentaries to enhance the diffusion of his compositions, and his ability to shape how they were perceived and understood. Balmer argues that Messiaen approaches the "tyranny of the author" theorised by Michel Foucault in his endeavour to use commentaries to prescribe the truth of works, or at least delimiting boundaries of interpretation that cannot be contradicted.<sup>144</sup> Balmer's analysis of programme notes reveals a conspicuous development in the case of commentaries that Messiaen edited and rewrote throughout his career. New versions relinquished the terminology and genre labels prevalent in the early twentieth century, and increasingly relied on notions coined by Messiaen himself. In contrast to youthful references to his individual sentiments and aspiration, the composer withdrew from the literal surface of his texts. The prose became increasingly analytical and precise, stayed on a technical level and, in line with a broad modernist tendency, thereby conveyed an impression of the musical syntax's objectivity and autonomy.<sup>145</sup>

The comments and statements Messiaen gave in interviews and lectures range across many subjects and often leave readers with a mosaic impression. Messiaen appears to have instigated the process of collecting notes with the intention of writing a more comprehensive treatise as early as 1948.<sup>146</sup> This arduous work was never brought to completion during his lifetime. It rather fell to the widow Lorigod and to Alain Louvier to transform the vast material into the published *Traité de rythme, de couleur, et d'ornithologie*, whose seven volumes amount to some 3300 pages.<sup>147</sup> These tomes have incited ongoing scholarship and prompted novel investigations. Scholars were suddenly confronted with more sustained expositions of many central aspects of Messiaen's thought and musical language. As the same time, the publication of the *Traité* has also provoked, or at least coincided with, further attention to the vital role of teaching

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<sup>143</sup> See Campos 2016, Duchesneau 2016 and other chapters in Brogniez & Dufour (eds.), 2016.

<sup>144</sup> Balmer 2013, 35.

<sup>145</sup> Balmer 2013, 34–35.

<sup>146</sup> Balmer, Lacôte & Murray 2017, 22.

<sup>147</sup> Messiaen 1994b, Messiaen 1995, Messiaen 1996, Messiaen 1997, Messiaen 1999, Messiaen 2000, Messiaen 2001, Messiaen 2002a.

in Messiaen's professional life. This background is crucial for an informed understanding of the printed text and thus of its author's status as an intellectual.

Messiaen was first appointed to the Paris conservatoire in 1941 as a teacher in harmony.<sup>148</sup> Two years later, he launched a private course in analysis and composition at the home of the musicologist Guy Bernard-Delapierre. This enterprise was taken into the curriculum of the conservatoire in 1947, when its director Claude Delvincourt gave Messiaen the possibility to set up a similar class in analysis within the institution. Over the following two decades, the class was consecutively called "Analysis and Aesthetics", "Philosophy of Music", and "Rhythmic and Musical Analysis", before Messiaen was appointed professor of musical composition in 1966.<sup>149</sup> Typically lecturing from the piano, Messiaen analysed works from the Western tradition, including pieces by himself and contemporary peers. In a succinct outline of characteristic traits in the method and authority of Messiaen's teaching, Benitez spotlights its subjective nature. He also situates the approach in a particular national context:

The French consider analysis as the result of an experience, and the most qualified people to teach analysis are composers. They offer subjective visions of a composition to students. To construct one's vision begins with what they learn from a composer-teacher.<sup>150</sup>

Beyond Benitez's general description and its stress on subjectivity, Jean Boivin adds a dimension of systematicity. His summary of testimonies from participants in the class show that Messiaen were regarded to hold a "coherent and extremely personal vision of music".<sup>151</sup> At this stage in his career, the composer was thus granted the kind of originality and coherence that some critics found wanting in his earlier *Technique*. A central aspect was the unusual topics that Messiaen deemed essential in the curriculum. Extensive teaching on Greek and Hindu rhythm in the early 1950s would find its way into the printed *Traité*. Students have testified to an almost verbatim similitude between their own lecture notes from the 1950s and parts of the published text. Several scholars have come to a joint conclusion that most of the final treatise stems from this decade.<sup>152</sup> It thereby grew out of Messiaen's epistemic authority as an academic teacher. A growing body of secondary literature on Messiaen in this role can now prepare the ground for analyses of his intellectual profile and as author of the ensuing *Traité*.<sup>153</sup>

Among such traits, Benitez mentions the kind of ahistorical syntheses that previously have been seen to reflect a typically modernist stance: "Messiaen mixed genres and time periods freely, jumping from one work to another while associating dissimilar composers and pieces."<sup>154</sup> The tuition provided music analyses undertaken from a composer's perspective, intended to illuminate and

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<sup>148</sup> On this class, viewed from the perspective of Boulez's studies, see Balmer & Murray, 2014.

<sup>149</sup> Messiaen 1994a, 176–180.

<sup>150</sup> Benitez 2000, 119.

<sup>151</sup> Boivin 1995, 182.

<sup>152</sup> Keym 2004, Boivin 2013.

<sup>153</sup> Boivin 1995, Delaere 2002, Bongrian (ed.) 2008, Balmer & Murray, 2018a.

<sup>154</sup> Benitez 2000, 119.

inspire younger composers in their future work. Boulez argues that analysed works no longer were objects of study, but rather became vehicles for students' exploration of their own potential of developing various techniques in new directions.<sup>155</sup> To sum up, Messiaen's teaching may have been presented as a philosophy of music or as a kind of meta-reflection on composition, but it rested on an *artistic* focalization rather than any scholarly authority.

The *Traité* played a role in scholarship even when it was still under construction. Griffiths surmised that a release of teaching material would "indicate a close correspondence between his ideas about music and his ideas in music".<sup>156</sup> Halbreich heralded the treatise as "the highest and most vast project in his creative life" and drew a parallel between its rich scope and Wagner's *Parsifal*.<sup>157</sup>

The two first chapters in the first volume certainly stand out as regards their wide scope. Drawing upon theology, philosophy and biology, Messiaen ventures far beyond music in his aspiration to convey his vision of time and rhythm, as a preamble to the sustained treatment of musical rhythm throughout the first three volumes of the *Traité*. A significant part of the material likely harks back to an attempt, begun in 1954, of providing a solid philosophical and physical basis for teaching on musical time.<sup>158</sup> Alain Louvier's preface casts Messiaen as a Renaissance artist, a contemporary Leonardo da Vinci who wanted to know an innumerable number of sciences, in order to establish correspondences with music.<sup>159</sup> The composer here clearly assumes the role of an intellectual, fearlessly establishing abstract principles on fundamental topics common to many disciplines, but traditionally investigated primarily by theologians and philosophers. Introductory explanations of methods or personal preferences are lacking. Readers face a text that in turn invokes its own author and other thinkers, or simply appears to rest on its own objective authority.

Reviews of the consequently issued volumes formed the first stage of reception. Problematically enough, this genre of writing seldom provides space for authors to discuss the assumptions they bring into their reading of the work under review. Many reviews commented on the epistemic status of the *Traité*, and thereby revealed different attitudes among scholars on what such a composer's treatise should amount to.

Dingle repeatedly came back to Messiaen's "somewhat naïve" approach to philosophy, and linked this trait to an idiosyncratic enthusiasm in the composer's eclectic constellation of ideas.<sup>160</sup> In his view, it is "Messiaen's very subjectivity

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<sup>155</sup> "Dans ses classes d'analyse, il posait sur les œuvres un regard d'"inventeur"; ce qui, dans la pédagogie habituelle, n'est souvent qu'activité de comptable, devenait ici incitation à découvrir. L'œuvre regardée devait moins se révéler à vous, que vous révéler à vous-même: moins un objet d'entomologie qu'un miroir magique de votre future.", Boulez 1994, V.

<sup>156</sup> Griffiths 1985, 152.

<sup>157</sup> Halbreich 1980, 505.

<sup>158</sup> Boivin 1995, 134–137.

<sup>159</sup> Messiaen 1994b, VIII.

<sup>160</sup> Dingle 1995, 29.

that acts as the catalyst for the most inspiring insights in the *Traité*.<sup>161</sup> This feature is also explicitly connected to the *Traité*'s genesis in teaching: "Messiaen's unashamedly subjective nod in the direction of objectivity lies at the heart of his allure as a pedagogue."<sup>162</sup> Dingle found the lengthy enumerations of things like transcriptions of birdsong valuable for their contribution to an understanding of the composer's own music, rather than the self-standing epistemological value the text appears to claim.<sup>163</sup> Roger Nichols took a more derogative stance on a similar basic analysis, lamenting what Messiaen tacitly left unsaid and the authors and composers he failed to credit. Nichols deemed the authoritative tone of the text "childish".<sup>164</sup> Even though this concept spotlights a particular capacity for wonder and awe, it also measures the author's scant historical training against a scholarly model and finds the composer wanting.

Boivin spoke of Messiaen's uncommon intellectual curiosity and, in a contrasting evaluation to Nichols, argued that he should not be reproached for methodological deficiencies – on the argument that he never postured as a scholar.<sup>165</sup> While granting that musicologists often would desire a more rigorous manner of writing, he accentuated that the *Traité* is the product of "a particularly cultured and lucid *composer*".<sup>166</sup> The larger question here is to what extent composer-authors should be judged by scholarly standards. Boivin clearly seeks another yardstick in evaluations of such texts:

The truth is, we ask a great deal from composers who are also theorists or writers, especially in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. We expect them to be at once rigorous and frank, to use solid reasoning but also to complement their *exposés* with carefully doled-out unpublished revelations.<sup>167</sup>

A further noteworthy observation is Boivin's stress that Messiaen and his writings definitely have become part of *history*. In other words, the *Traité* can be approached more independently of Messiaen's personal authority. This freedom is also necessary. As Boivin puts it: "Given the size and the complexity of this posthumous work, we are barely beginning to come to terms with its contents and its impact."<sup>168</sup> Such a historization have instigated a new turn of scholarship, which gradually turned away from early reviews' comparisons of Messiaen with the kind of literature read and authored by musicologists.

Balmer, Thomas Lacôte and Christopher Brent Murray have emphasized the incomplete nature of the *Traité*, giving it the label of "an unfinished work (*"c'est une œuvre inachevée"*)".<sup>169</sup> Their work with the text aims at investigating its

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<sup>161</sup> Dingle 1997, 26.

<sup>162</sup> Dingle 1997, 26.

<sup>163</sup> Dingle 2004.

<sup>164</sup> Nichols 1996, 17.

<sup>165</sup> "Tout au long du traité, Messiaen se révèle en fait un artiste intuitif pourvu d'une curiosité intellectuelle hors du commun, et, cette distinction une fois faite, on ne peut guère lui reprocher de n'être pas le chercheur rigoureux et méthodique qu'il n'a jamais prétendu être.", Boivin 2008, 20.

<sup>166</sup> Boivin 2013, 361.

<sup>167</sup> Boivin 2013, 361.

<sup>168</sup> Boivin 2013, 361.

<sup>169</sup> Balmer, Lacôte & Murray 2017, 23.

asperity and breaches, in order to establish its discontinuity of argument, and reconstructing an internal logic at work within the material. Other scholars concur in the need to reconstruct central tenets and principles, which shape Messiaen's thought and composition, but which remains absent on the surface level. Stefan Keym has accentuated the tension between the *Traité's* encyclopaedic wealth of material and its scant discursive explanations. His analyses stress the text's many leaps, and note that the different theories of rhythm and time in the first volume were assembled to excite future composers in their own reflection on the subject.<sup>170</sup> Writing on the same chapter in the *Traité*, Andrew Shenton captures challenges and prospects in a text that originally stems from teaching:

At first glance the chapter may seem like a *pot-pourri* of ideas, largely quoted out of context, with little underlying pattern or relevance and one wonders whether such a superficial use of these sources has any real academic merit. On closer inspection an order is revealed in which it is clear that Messiaen has some firm beliefs about time and rhythm, which to him are logical, rational and supported by scientific evidence.

[...] it should be noted that this is not a rigorous academic work, fully referenced and with footnotes, but rather a more conversational lecture that draws from a wide variety of sources[...] One can imagine Messiaen elaborating on these notes in his classes and drawing conclusions that are not expressed in this text. For those of us left with only the *Traité*, there is the task of analysis and interpretation.<sup>171</sup>

As Shenton notes, Messiaen's theories are not only there to inspire him and his students in their search for new musical techniques. A key feature in the composer-author's self-understanding is a firm belief that his theories form a coherence and that they are scientifically warranted. His suggestion that the text resembles mere lecture notes should be treated with some caution, but nevertheless stresses the need for interpreters to provide additional discursive elaboration of its contents.

Other authors have recently delivered such readings. Gareth Healey has used the often incomplete references to different authors throughout the *Traité* as a path to gather further insights into Messiaen's use of literature and theoretical writings. He shows how the text advances knowledge of the composer's musical analyses, as well as revealing heavy borrowing from other theorists.<sup>172</sup> A firmer grasp of Messiaen's analytical methods also reveals limitations in the descriptions of his techniques and interpretations of his own works. Healey

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<sup>170</sup> "Die zahlreichen in Messiaens *Traité* zusammengetragenen Zeittheorien sollen demnach primär dazu dienen, zukünftige Komponisten zur Reflexion über ihr Arbeitsmaterial anzuregen.", Keym 2002, 235. More generally, Keym succinctly speaks of "den oftmals enzyklopädischen, katalogartigen, im Detail sehr genauen, zugleich aber bisweilen erstaunlich unsystematischen, fragmentarischen und generell wenig diskursiven Ansatz [...] Wer in diesem Traktat umfassende Werkanalysen und eine erschöpfende Darlegung der einzelnen Aspekte von Messiaens musikalischer Sprache sucht, mag angesichts des sprunghaften, offenen Charakters vieler Kapitel enttäuscht sein", 2004, 273–4.

<sup>171</sup> Shenton 2007, 176.

<sup>172</sup> Healey 2007, 2013.

claims that enhanced knowledge of the *Traité* is crucial, but ought to result in a critical and independent stance, thus avoiding a common and stifling “over-reliance on Messiaen’s own comments on his music”.<sup>173</sup>

Wai-Ling Cheong has been able to show how Messiaen’s written analyses of birdsong exhibits how his own distinct *style oiseaux* was constructed on patterns from Greek metrics and neumes in plainchant.<sup>174</sup> Cheong and Peter Asimov have both contextualised Messiaen’s employment of Greek and Hindu rhythms in relation to broader intellectual trajectories in German and French philology, as well as the impact of these tendencies on French music.<sup>175</sup>

To summarize, scholarship on Messiaen as an author and an intellectual have progressed in tandem with developments in musical modernism and hermeneutical methods in the humanities. The *Technique* and early comments on the text stem from a period in which a discourse of modernist composers’ autonomy, originality and rational grasp of their language was being established. Contrasting verdicts on the fruitfulness of composers’ articulating a systematic theory of composition indicate a clash between different paradigms on this issue. Messiaen himself responded to such ideals in his delimitation of the content to his personal style, but hesitated on the epistemic status of the text. As the composer’s standing increased, published interviews became an important channel for the communication of a standard version of his own biography and artistic vision. Programme notes and other minor pieces of writing played a key role in establishing a reception of works that tallied with Messiaen’s authorial intention.

The posthumous publication of the *Traité de rythme, de couleur, et d’ornithologie* instigated a new phase in scholarship. The availability of much more comprehensive treatments of central aspects in Messiaen’s musical thought coincides with possibilities to launch more independent investigations of the composer’s legacy. Early commentary on a markedly subjective approach to musical history and philosophy has been complemented with a growing awareness of the text’s pre-history in Messiaen’s teaching. His academic authority provides a vital backdrop for an informed understanding of claims, purposes and the seemingly eclectic collection of material for the *Traité*. Recent studies have moved away from verdicts that necessarily seek historical accuracy and rational coherence, and that subjects the treatise to common musicological standards. The text is investigated as a vital source to Messiaen’s personal poetics and with methods that takes its manifest limitations into account. In lieu of earlier modernist expectations that a composer should hold an omniscient rational grasp of methods and principles, scholars are moving towards a hermeneutics that consciously focus on reconstructions of gaps and implicit principles at work below the surface level. References to other composers and authors throughout the *Traité* allow scholars to study aspects within Messiaen’s own outlook that had remained undetected, in the act furthering a more nuanced

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<sup>173</sup> Healey 2013, 163.

<sup>174</sup> Cheong 2008.

<sup>175</sup> Cheong 2019, Asimov 2020.



and fine-grained understanding of his dependency on and creative developments of both musical and intellectual trends in his context.

### 3.2 Studies on Messiaen and performance

Considerations of Messiaen as a performing artist, and more specifically as interpreter of his own works, emerged later than criticism and investigations of his writings and intellectual convictions. The number of musicologists ready to venture into this field has largely been delimited to individuals with a dual competence that involves personal experiences in performance. Discussions have also been instrument-specific, treating piano- and organ-related aspects separately. Early publications consisted more of assembled comments and reminiscences than systematic investigations. The following reading is the result of a search for sources to Messiaen's own playing and his views on performance, inspired by the preceding chapter's theoretical discussions of differences between notation and interpretation, and of authorial intention in recordings. It begins a process of categorizing the composer's scant statements in relation to such general problems and has a wider scope than previous treatments of the subject, not least due its combination of perspectives from different instruments.

The German organist Almut Rößler studied with Messiaen and published her recollections of his advice and suggestions. An important aspect of their collaboration is her documentation of the composer's readiness to adapt his choice of timbre to instruments of a completely different kind than the Cavaillé-Coll organ at Sainte-Trinité. In spite of a meticulous selection of registers in his scores, and a conspicuous stress on timbral qualities in music, Messiaen was willing to experiment with alternative solutions. The importance of acoustics was also highlighted as a key element in conversations on the performance of his organ works.<sup>176</sup> Rößler was very much an advocate for Messiaen and reacted to criticism from John Cage that his music represents a rigid stance on rhythm. In response, she penned a text on the need for agogic subtlety and imagination in renderings of the organ music.<sup>177</sup>

Several contributions to the 1994 *Messiaen Companion* contained further comments on the subject, and created new sources through recollections from Messiaen's teaching. Jane Manning deemed songs with piano to be "eminently practical", because of the composer's sagacious attention to vocal techniques and bodily perspectives, as well as the need for exact co-ordination between pianist and singer.<sup>178</sup> Although somewhat implicitly, the analysis suggests that Messiaen drew on his considerable experience as an accompanist when composing his song cycles. Peter Hill explicitly thematised prospects and challenges in the two idiosyncratic piano parts in *Visions de l'Amen*. Written for Messiaen's and the young Loriod's contrasting pianistic temperaments, the cycle is a showpiece for

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<sup>176</sup> Rößler 1978, Rößler 1986, especially 48–50, 133–134.

<sup>177</sup> Rößler 1986, 170–176.

<sup>178</sup> Manning 1994, especially 107–108.

the latter's brilliance and yet allows the composer's own part to be the main musical agent.<sup>179</sup>

John Milsom discusses the divergent sound worlds emerging from various kinds of organs and states that Messiaen's organ works thereby causes many, rather than a single "aural experience".<sup>180</sup> The composer's 1956 recordings of his extant output for the instrument are shown to make use of timbres beyond, or at odds with, prescriptions of registers in the printed scores. Milsom takes up the theme of agogics and imagination, describing a shock that ostensibly arises from comparisons of notated rhythms and their realization by the composer. His reactions on hearing "Les eaux de la grâce" from *Les Corps Glorieux* are pregnant and suggestive:

What appears from the page to be a steady stream of undifferentiated semiquavers played in a constant pulse is, in Messiaen's own mind, nothing of the sort. He speeds up; he slows down; he compresses; he lingers; there are agogic accents and tiny moments of suspended motion all over the place; it is music of far greater rhythmic variety and life than one could possibly have imagined from the notation. The word "rubato", so conspicuously missing from the most of Messiaen's scores, is clearly taken for granted by the composer.<sup>181</sup>

Milsom's experience highlights the different temporal modes of notation and actual performance, as discussed in the previous chapter. His surprise appears to stem from an assumed conception that scores and recordings would mirror each other to a much greater degree. At the same time, his comment captures an essential feature of Messiaen's style of playing, and tallies with Rößler's talk of the need for a lively imagination in the renderings of scores.

The companion also includes a striking, albeit enigmatic, verdict on Messiaen's 1956 recordings. Christopher Dingle summarizes a charismatic but seemingly idiosyncratic performance style, and touches upon the status of composers' recordings:

These are compelling performances which should be heard by any lover of organ works. Interpretations range from mildly enlightening to the outrageous, usually, though not always, conveying the music in renditions that most protagonists would not dare even to consider. These recordings should be avoided by anyone who believes in definitive performances!<sup>182</sup>

This verdict raises many questions. Although rejecting the idea that Messiaen's renderings would be definitive, Dingle thereby brings the possibility that recordings could serve as potentially conclusive sources to a work's realization into play. He also posits that the composer could grant himself greater liberty in performance, although without further discussion of the norm against which such freedom stands out.

A further text in the *Messiaen companion* contains recollections from Hill's study of Messiaen's piano works with the composer. It stresses the composer's

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<sup>179</sup> Hill 1994a, 79, 81.

<sup>180</sup> Milsom 1994, 58.

<sup>181</sup> Milsom 1994, 58–59.

<sup>182</sup> Dingle 1994, 552.

pride in his meticulously prepared scores, regarded as a final statement of the works. Hill credits Messiaen's beautiful touch on the piano and his keen sensitivity for colours and internal balances within sounding chords. In his teaching, Messiaen demanded clarity, also in pedalling, and is said to have been an advocate of a classical "purity of sound".<sup>183</sup> In terms of phrasing and rhythm, Hill was encouraged to explore a noteworthy latitude in tempi and a poetic flexibility in phrasing.

These memories also contain testimonies on issues on which there is scarce information, among them Messiaen's understanding of the role of interpretation within the ontology of works. Hill highlights a generosity in the face of individual styles of performance: "he never showed the slightest inclination to impose an alien style on my playing".<sup>184</sup> In a more theoretical vein, Hill recollects: "Certainly neither of us had in mind producing an "authentic" performance, if by that one means the performer copying with exact fidelity a composer's own perceptions of his music."<sup>185</sup> Finally, their conversations touched upon a conception of notation as a tool to realize a level of music that ostensibly lie beyond both scores and sounds themselves.

Above all he emphasized that, despite their meticulous clarity, his scores are not an end in themselves. For Messiaen the "music" was not in the scores, nor in the sounds they represent, but in the meaning which lies beyond and which through sound we hope to reveal.<sup>186</sup>

Although mediated by Hill, this remark suggests Messiaen to have held a complex vision of musical works, in which notation, performances and sounds are constitutive aspects of an ideal or intentional unity beyond all three dimensions. This outlook reinforces the centrality of language, poetry or intellectual conceptions as the ground and inspiration for individual works, together with an aspiration that the music in some way should symbolize or enact this original meaning.

An interview with Loriod reinforces the composer's own stress on fidelity to the scores as a paramount quality. Speaking with Hill, she provides valuable information on details like fingering and the (lacking) availability of pedals when Messiaen recorded on the piano. More complex is a stated desire to bring out editions that include the composer's choice of tempo, while at the same time acknowledging historical changes in this regard, due to the increasing technical proficiency of performers, and the inherently personal nature of performers' different tempi.<sup>187</sup>

In tandem with a growing recognition of performances and recordings as musicological objects of study, Messiaen's extant recordings as a pianist were studied as a distinct source type from the late 1990s. Alan Gerald Ngim captured many characteristic and consistent traits in the composer's style of playing,

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<sup>183</sup> Hill 1994b, 280.

<sup>184</sup> Hill 1994b, 281.

<sup>185</sup> Hill 1994b, 281.

<sup>186</sup> Hill 1994, 282.

<sup>187</sup> Hill 1994c.

based on documented renderings of *Visions de l'Amen*. These sources reveal a constant use of rubato, but in a manner that rests upon particular couplings with dynamics and the kind of attack at work (staccato, portato etc.). Ngim notes similarities with André Souris's multi-dimensional theory of sound and thus implicitly spotlights the need for a contextual approach to Messiaen's conception of rubato.<sup>188</sup> Performances of fermatas, breath marks, added values and pauses are analysed in detail and are seen to raise critical questions for subsequent interpreters.

In spite of Messiaen's precise notation, he treats similar marks differently in various contexts. Rather than attempting a ready-made instruction how to interpret the notation, Ngim explores the use of different parameters in varying musical structures. It becomes clear that Messiaen and Loriod frequently played with additional breaks and pauses, beyond indications in the score. Further analyses of ornamentation and conspicuous rhythmic groupings in performance indicate that the composer's interpretations contain keys to an enhanced understanding of both structural and expressive features in the music, traits not visible in the notation. Ngim elevates recordings to a pinnacle seat among different kinds of sources, suggesting that they reveal dimensions in the compositions that circumvented the composer's conscious reflection:

Messiaen's performances of his own works reveal canyons of missing information in the written score. Bridges may be built to span this gap by combining careful study of familiarity with the compositional techniques Messiaen devised and employed. But it will be the recordings which confirm or refute any theories built upon such study. The sound is what ultimately matters. Perhaps Messiaen played truths that for himself were subconscious and invisible.<sup>189</sup>

Later scholarship has taken a less contentious stance on the status of recordings, but has highlighted the importance of documented performances. Hill has analysed Messiaen's 1951 recording of his then brand new *Quatre Études de rythme*. He notes the importance of the recording, rather than the score, in healing the composer's earlier rift with Boulez, and in the immediate success of this work in Darmstadt circles. The style of playing is characterised by a keen sense of drama, a conspicuous rubato and a gestural approach to musical events. Like Ngim, Hill highlights how accents produce manifest groupings in lines of notes with equal note values, thus producing the sonic effect of shifting metrical units.<sup>190</sup>

In a survey of Messiaen's piano recordings, Dingle raises the issue that studies of performance would be irrelevant in the case of a composer-performer. Such an outlook is regarded as a musicological predisposition to assume that scores and musical interpretations would mirror each other: "We might rationally think that such a gap would not exist when the composer and the performer are the

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<sup>188</sup> Ngim 1997, 22–56, for the connection to Souris, see p. 52.

<sup>189</sup> Ngim 1997, 118.

<sup>190</sup> Hill 2007.

same individual”.<sup>191</sup> His own study reveals such premises to be shortsighted. Dingle highlights a lingering Romanticism in Messiaen’s style of playing and traces its aspirations to ideals at work in the conductors Leopold Stokowski’s and Pierre Monteaux’s early recordings of his orchestral works. This stance is contrasted with a post-war modernism focused on fidelity to the score, and Messiaen’s intellectual approach to some of his works.

Dingle mentions an instance where Messiaen prescribed a smooth and metronomic playing in slow movements, only to perform the same passage with constant shifts of nuances and agogics, which emphasize harmonic and structural changes. Such an intimate link between interpretation and structure comes to the fore in further examples of how new tempo indications, and other verbal clues in scores, are brought out with shifts of tone colour, or through various rhythmic modifications. Dingle highlights how recordings prompt attention to how different elements and events represent particular narrative ideas throughout a piece. He suggests that these renderings bring out this fundamental dimension of story-telling in a more immediate manner than scores. The latter source type shines forth as a secondary memory aid, at least within the orbit of the composer’s own performances:

We know that Messiaen regarded each rhythm as having a character, a “personnage,” and his recordings give the impression that the score is simply a reminder of a well-loved acquaintance, whose character Messiaen is conveying truthfully in his own head, even though there may be a divergence from the durational truth of the document itself.<sup>192</sup>

Existing studies on Messiaen’s pianism reveals a consensus in their general appreciation of his playing, regardless of whether they are based on personal recollections or analyses of recordings. Beyond the level of concrete observations on his playing, however, scholars have no common terminology or theoretical approach to the status of recordings as sources. A tentative conclusion from previous investigations is that Messiaen’s rhythmic modifications and rubato primarily represent neither any extraordinary measures nor a freedom to depart from the notated score. Rather, the evidence collected in this section indicates that his interpretations generally rest upon a forceful vision of the content and narrative within pieces. They correspond to particular contextual discourses on sound and exhibit structural conceptions that may be visible in the scores, or facilitate a novel appreciation of how the notation is conceived.

Scholars have articulated different stances on the significance of recordings as sources to Messiaen’s works, ranging from aspirations merely to highlight their importance through their own analysis to Ngim’s strong case for their ultimate authority. Dingle suggests a particular role for scores in Messiaen’s own playing, but is careful not to draw too general conclusions from the composer’s interpretations to later performers.

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<sup>191</sup> Dingle 2014, 29.

<sup>192</sup> Dingle 2014, 45.

Messiaen's organ playing have received much commentary, but few sustained analyses. There are some examples of perceptive criticism of recordings that discuss the status and impact of the composer's recorded interpretations on later players. Robert Sholl has called for new critical editions that take institutionalized aspects of playing within a tradition of performance into account. This stance tallies with collections of notes on instances where Messiaen suggested alternative approaches from his scores.<sup>193</sup>

Andrew Shenton has discussed the status of the composer's recording of the *Méditations sur le Mystère de la Sainte Trinité*, and analysed some of its features. Several aspects tally with observations on piano recordings, but Shenton's text was written too early to draw on more comprehensive studies in that field. He seeks the emergence of a distinct "manner of realization" for Messiaen's music, posits that the composer's recordings will play a vital role in this joint endeavour, but also suggests that interpreters might want to seek alternative routes, in order to make the music culturally relevant.<sup>194</sup> Without thematising Messiaen's style of playing in itself, Jon Gillock, in his guide to performances of the organ works, advocates a Romantic philosophy that emphasizes spiritual qualities, the ideas or message behind individual pieces and performers' ability to communicate the music's emotional dimensions.<sup>195</sup>

The novel field of performance analyses that investigate Messiaen as a composer-performer reveals a general coherence on the level of actual observations of his style of playing. The present summary has also shown that discussions of piano and organ performances concur in their analyses. As a contrast, the studies available reveal greater inconsistency in their conceptualization of this playing and its artistic ideals. It is clear that recordings add layers of information beyond notated scores and that Messiaen as a performer exhibits a conception of rhythm in tension with the regularity in symbolisations of note-values in a score. Gillock also claims that spiritual meaning and a flexible timing lies beyond what he calls such "a rudimentary kind of graph".<sup>196</sup>

The evidence of Messiaen's piano recordings, as analysed by Hill, Ngim and Dingle, suggests that recordings give testimony to a musical meaning that is more complex than scores readily show. The difference concerns whether the meaning is posited to lie above, or become manifest in, the sonic structures of a piece. Findings from Messiaen's pianism suggest that scholars and performers need to use recordings as sources to how the scores represent the composer's mode of narration through sound, together with expressive features in his rhythmic groupings.

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<sup>193</sup> Sholl 1996, Latry & Mallié 2008.

<sup>194</sup> Shenton 2007.

<sup>195</sup> Gillock 2010, 3–10.

<sup>196</sup> Gillock 2010, 3.

## 4. Investigating intersections: Methods and topics

The present chapter is a significant transition within the dissertation. Previous chapters have primarily been devoted to analyses of extant theories and scholarship, on musical modernism and on Messiaen in particular. Having assembled theoretical perspectives, and provided a reading of how specialized scholarship have followed broader paradigms in research, it is now time to set up the three case studies within the dissertation. In the actual working process, the overarching questions and some of the theoretical underpinnings were in place from the outset. The case studies grew out of the main aims. The cover essay was written after the articles, based on preceding sketches of ideas and theorists to be included. This method entails a relatively loose connection between the discrete articles and the chapters in the present essay. To be more precise, the essay largely operates on a meta-level for the integral project.

The investigation of Messiaen's different activities inherently elicits analyses of various kinds of sources. The ambition to learn from recent modernist studies calls for critically informed methods of investigating sources such as books, published interviews, scores and recordings. These categories are, however, not of equal importance in the dissertation. Messiaen's verbal statements document predispositions in his thinking and his understanding of professional roles with a relative clarity and in an extended manner well beyond the input from scores and recordings. His writings are not only spotlighted as one of the main areas of investigation, as products of his manner of theorizing. Oral and written comments on performance also shape the approach taken here to his activity as a performer.

On a general level, statements of the kind presented in the first chapter shape the integral disposition throughout the dissertation, including the interest to study Messiaen as one of several modernist composers, and to heed the importance of certain intellectual predispositions in the construction of modernist outlooks on the role of the composer. Textual interpretation is thus by far the most important method in the dissertation.

The choice to give texts such a prominent role has consequences for how intersections between activities are perceived. A kind of scholarship that emphasises musical analysis could have been prone to investigate writings to the extent that they illuminate certain features of Messiaen's musical syntax, or the inspiration behind a particular work under consideration. Writings and recordings could thus have been used as auxiliary sources to analyses of published scores, possibly extended to include sketches from composition processes. It is vital to heed that negotiations of the relative importance of different source types reveal scholars' own reflected or assumed understanding of the most central aspects in being a composer.

The decision to approach Messiaen primarily through his writings goes hand in hand with the choice to spotlight theorizing as a distinct activity. It entails no criticism per se of studies that operate through musical analysis of different kinds. Nevertheless, it seeks to complement previous scholarship at a junction

deemed beneficial to advance knowledge on concepts and ideas at work in Messiaen's composition processes.

In this chapter, three sections outline choices and aspirations behind each case study. Before that, the following introduction discusses general methodological convictions, relevant for the approach to textual interpretation in the entire dissertation. These methods are intimately linked with the fundamental premises on language and human self-consciousness stated already in the first chapter. They reflect a certain standpoint within the evolution of hermeneutics, as a method and as a philosophical tradition.

The very notion of method has had an uneasy relationship with hermeneutical philosophy, following Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Wahrheit und Methode*. A basic question is the possible lasting relevance of his critique that discussions of method inevitably lean towards a rule-based quest for regularity, derived from a logic within the natural sciences. Of specific importance in this dissertation is Gadamer's concomitant objection against aspirations to induce a historical distance towards the object of study.<sup>197</sup> The lasting challenge from Gadamer-inspired scholarship is whether attempts to formulate a clear-cut method might run contrary to how meaning arises from a circular dialogue between an interpreter and sources, in research as well as more broadly in human existence.

This dissertation follows another strand of hermeneutical thought. It rests on a conviction that a clear historical distance towards predispositions at work among twentieth century composers entails possibilities to understand these conceptions better. Previous considerations in relation to Dahlhaus's interpretation of Schoenberg's poetics and Nattiez's call for a dialogue with composers' writings have already begun to articulate the framework employed here. As noted in that context, Schleiermacher's hermeneutical stance contains imperatives to interpret what is distinct and significant in a historical author like Messiaen, based on attempts to gather as much knowledge as possible on his intellectual context.

To be more precise, Schleiermacher's outlook calls for consideration of four interrelated dimensions: The first two are comparative investigations of prevalent style and uses of languages in a historical context, both on a communal level and by an individual author. While these levels of study can rest more heavily on general rules and previously attained knowledge, a greater amount of imagination beyond stipulated guidelines is required in order to perceive how thinking shapes uses of language. Schleiermacher calls investigations of the latter aspect divinatory, a term that highlights the pursuit of new knowledge. This aspect tallies with the mentioned need for a gapology, and with how recent Messiaen scholarship has begun to investigate breeches in the composer's manner of writing.

A basic point in Schleiermacher's outline of how thought shapes uses of language is that interpretations, both on communal and individual levels, cannot fully be brought under general rules. Rather, the individual who interprets must

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<sup>197</sup> On problems pertaining to methods and criticism of Wilhelm Dilthey on historical distance, see Gadamer 2010, 9–15.



bring his or her own talents of understanding both ways of speaking and of thought processes into play with the sources and the author under consideration. According to such a vision, hermeneutics is not a science, but rather a normative discipline with distinct methodological requirements. Instead of resting on established rules, it calls for critical awareness and transparency in interpretation, and seeks to promote enhanced practices of interpretation.<sup>198</sup> In spite of the ambition to understand historical sources, the imagination of a talented and informed reader will add perspectives beyond the foreseeable and the generality of fixed rules.

Schleiermacher's basic premise that language and thought reciprocally influence each other rests upon more fundamental convictions of the final incompatibility of self-consciousness and language. His kind of Romantic philosophy resisted contemporary attempts in German Idealism to overcome the gulf between transcendental and empirical layers of self-consciousness, and thus to ground philosophy and knowledge on identity between the stability of thought and the transitory realm of concrete experiences, feeling and imagination.<sup>199</sup> The dissertation's premises on the lack of a complete perspicuity in language and in human self-consciousness emerge from this line of thought, just as the concomitant methodological imperative to complement Messiaen's statements with dimensions that remained implicit in his writings.<sup>200</sup>

Alternative approaches would certainly have been possible. The most apparent option is perhaps to set up some brand of discourse analysis, drawing on similarities with this broad field pertaining to how language constructs social reality, the importance of varying contexts and the influence of language in forming identities. A critical reading of how discourses on modernist composers operate beneath individuals' distinct self-consciousness could have followed tenets in Foucault's *The Archaeology of Knowledge*.<sup>201</sup> It would also have been possible to develop Fulcher's Bourdieu-inspired study of composers as intellectuals further. Indeed, the rise of composers' status throughout modernity readily lends itself to investigations that encompass Bourdieu's differentiation between cultural, social and symbolic forms of capital. Messiaen's characteristic role as a French professor also brings certain aspects of Bourdieu's analysis of academia into play.<sup>202</sup> Studies along such lines could complement this one in notable ways.

In contrast, the hermeneutic stance taken here has four main advantages. 1) It emphasises the interplay between communal and individual uses of language, thus potentially eliciting sufficient attention to both perspectives.<sup>203</sup> 2) It follows

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<sup>198</sup> On Schleiermacher's hermeneutics, see notably Frank 1985, Scholtz 1995, 93–125, Schleiermacher 2012.

<sup>199</sup> See e.g. Bowie 2003, Bowie 2007, Forster 2012, Jaeschke & Arndt 2012.

<sup>200</sup> On my own understanding of Schleiermacher's theory of subjectivity and its relation to aesthetics, see, with further references to previous literature, Lundblad 2015a, Lundblad 2015b.

<sup>201</sup> Foucault 1972.

<sup>202</sup> Bourdieu 1988, Bourdieu 2021.

<sup>203</sup> On the lasting theoretical relevance of Schleiermacher's reciprocity between language and individuality, in relation to post-structuralism and postmodernism, see Frank 1984, Frank 1986.

the stated choice to proceed with a milder kind of critical distance, which primarily seeks enhanced understanding of how different activities actually intersected in Messiaen's creativity. 3) It corresponds to current concerns in Messiaen scholarship on his writings. 4) Finally, its origin in classic philology prompts scholars to execute something of the same concern for minutiae and historical contexts that once made a figure like Schleiermacher a seminal interpreter of biblical texts and works from Greek antiquity. The kind of transparency called for in such a method prompts the following reflection on methods in each case study.

#### 4.1 Reconstructing absent discursivity: A latent poetics between writings and composition

The first study addresses the influence of theoretical principles in Messiaen's compositions. A couple of broad questions call for scrutiny. The first is to what extent Messiaen held principles on music that at all approaches the coherence of a theory, and in that case, how such conceptions were constituted. The second is how theoretical kinds of reflection influenced his composition processes. Furthermore, the purported epistemic authority of theoretical principles prompts further consideration: Is it reasonable to posit that Messiaen perceived his compositional processes as realisations of scientifically warranted principles? Is the often-noted eclecticism in his style perhaps a sign that he had scant interest in forming a system out of intuitive artistic choices?

Preliminary considerations included the choice of a relevant topic for the case study, and the concomitant selection of sources to be studied. The investigation obviously called for analysis both of sources to Messiaen's principles about music and to his musical works. In line with the general preference for writings just outlined, it was deemed easier to identify a relevant area for investigation within the corpus of Messiaen's texts than through musical analysis. The first decision was thus to find an apposite body of texts to investigate.

It was a natural decision to turn to the *Traité de rythme, de couleur, et d'ornithologie*. The publication of this treatise is the main impetus behind current explorations of Messiaen's intellectual context, including his readings and use of musical and philosophical principles from other authors. It has also provoked the most relevant reflection on his manner of writing, on the authority of his claims, and evaluations of them in comparison to acknowledged academic standards. The ambition was to pursue a topic beyond the themes already investigated in recent studies.<sup>204</sup> As it often happens, an accidental but beneficial connection was needed to elicit a circular movement between my questions, primary sources and secondary literature.

Messiaen's most sustained discussion of Gregorian chant are two chapters in the fourth volume of the *Traité*. The text openly testifies to the author's theoretical preference for the Solesmes chant scholar dom André Mocquereau,

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<sup>204</sup> See the final part of section 3.1.

and clarifies that the presentation stems from Messiaen's teaching at the conservatoire. Recent studies by Daniel K. S. Walden and Dom Patrick Hala had revealed close intellectual connections between Mocquereau, the composer Vincent d'Indy and the German musicologist Hugo Riemann on the matter of rhythm in chant.<sup>205</sup> Furthermore, Balmer, Lacôte and Murray had shown how Messiaen's main method of analysing melodies stems from d'Indy. Through the notion "melodic contours (*contours mélodiques*)", Messiaen abstracted different melodic formulae from plainchant songs and turned them into what the authors call a "melodic and formal matrix" for his own melodic writing.<sup>206</sup>

This constellation of new insights provided a two-fold opportunity. It became possible to investigate Messiaen's debt to a musicological and artistic paradigm that had sought to develop a fully scientific theory of rhythm and expressivity in plainchant. There was also a ground in recent musical analysis to posit that Messiaen's based his melodic writing on the mentioned "matrix" drawn from Gregorian melodies. Together, these advancements provided ground for a hypothesis that Messiaen had inherited a theoretical approach to plainchant, possibly transformed it, but also ascribed it a kind of general validity, and used it in his own compositions. A final piece of evidence definitely prompted the decision to investigate this topic. The *Traité* contains an editorial comment from Loriod, following tables of how melodic motions in different chant neumes are posited to be ingrained in works by Western composers from Scarlatti to Messiaen. Loriod writes:

It is a pity that Olivier Messiaen did not mention the innumerable Neumes from Plain-chant which inspired his works. The reader will find hundreds.<sup>207</sup>

This comment contains a clear impetus to pursue an exercise in gapology, in order to reconstruct an absent discursive explanation of the underlying conception of neumes, a logic that ostensibly inspired their transfer from plainchant melodies into the fabric of Messiaen's own music. The method chosen for such an enterprise was called an "archaeological reconstruction", and rested upon a belief that writings by Mocquereau, d'Indy and Riemann could be used to build a common outlook, which would shed light on artistic implications also in Messiaen's statements.

Relevant texts by the four authors were read in parallel, and different topics throughout them were referenced, with the aim of recognising the most central common concerns. Messiaen's disparate comments on plainchant in lectures, interviews, and in the *Technique* could gradually be linked to underlying concepts, and their implications be interpreted in this broader framework. The process included recurrent choices of topics to pursue further, or to discount, as there was no premeditated scheme of the compass and constitution of the theory to be reconstructed. The central criterion was that the themes spotlighted in the

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<sup>205</sup> Walden 2015, Hala 2017.

<sup>206</sup> Balmer, Lacôte & Murray 2017, 313–336, especially 314–315, 320–324.

<sup>207</sup> "Il est dommage qu'Olivier Messiaen n'ait pas cité les innombrables Neumes de Plain-chant qui ont inspiré ses oeuvres. Le lecteur en trouvera des centaines.", Messiaen 1997, 38.

final reconstruction would form a relevant part in Messiaen's purported theory, or in a background picture that illuminated how he came to hold his distinct views.

Towards the end of the process, the material was divided into two main categories. The first sections in the final article concern the significance of Messiaen's main sources, including the theoretical principles which he encountered in reading them. The second part outlines key aspects of the reconstructed theory, forming a kind of coherent whole that in every part corresponds to ideas in Messiaen's different writings. The hermeneutical aspiration was to see how he drew upon common concepts in predecessors' writings, set new accents through a personal selection of ideas, and then finally integrated aspects of his outlook in compositions. In order to investigate the transfer of theorems into music, scores were scrutinized for traces of the reconstructed principles. Special attention was given to works composed during years marked by sustained preoccupation with issues in plainchant. Some of the findings were new, in other cases could previously discussed uses of chant be explicated further.

The method combines the comparative level in Schleiermacher's hermeneutics with a divinatory construction of a previously unknown coherence. The use of previous authors to interpret implications in Messiaen's outlook provides a case study also of the dictum to understand a writer better than he understood himself, i.e., to make an implicit theoretical background explicit. The main problems in this kind of investigation arguably mirror its merits. In similitude to Dahlhaus's study of Schoenberg's poetics, it points out a nexus of principles that are posited to have shaped the composer, but that are not assembled or explicated in any given source. The compass of the reconstructed theory stems from recurrent personal choices, which prompts questions whether Messiaen ever held the outlined coherent view.<sup>208</sup>

This question must remain open, to a large extent. The task is in fact not to replicate the composer's thoughts, as they might have been present in his own mind. Rather, the interpretation can only concern ideas as they can be shown to appear in his writings and scores. Further studies of the same sources are typically needed to estimate the choices made throughout a constructive reading of this kind. The value of the study largely hinges on its potential to stimulate further analyses of how Messiaen possibly made creative use of the highlighted ideas on plainchant in compositions beyond the examples given here.

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<sup>208</sup> In this regard, reconstructions of Messiaen's ideas face similar challenges and possibilities as corresponding work on other composers: "In fact, following hermeneutic philosophy, we can never come to think in terms of Schoenberg's poetics as he might have done; all interpretations are impacted the interpreter's positions in regard to the past", Covach 2000, 315.

## 4.2 Sonic renderings of scores or musical ideas? Investigating purposes in performance

The second study addresses how performance intersects with Messiaen's role as a composer. Even though previous studies concur on central features in Messiaen's style of performance, there is neither a conceptual framework nor common methods for evaluations of his interpretations, as records of the composite role as a composer-performer. The second chapter's theoretical perspectives on this subject prompt attention to the ontological difference between scores and concretisations of works in performance. A central question is whether a musical interpretation should be evaluated against the notated score, or possibly runs parallel to the score as a different representation of the work's unity and meaning. Previous reflection on the different roles and kinds of knowledge ascribed to composers and performers also calls for investigations of how they merge in the case of a composer who performs his or her own works.

The situation concerning sources is conspicuously different from the first study. It has already been established that Messiaen was shaped by a modernist predisposition that paid scant attention to performance in its way of talking about music. Only a few suggestive remarks, most of them already discussed in the first and third chapters, provide testimonies of how Messiaen reflected on the role of performance. A basic question was how to use such comments in an analysis of his manner of performance, and how then to complement them with other modernist perspectives. An initial survey of extant statements made it clear that Messiaen reiterated a common modernist principle of fidelity to scores as an essential feature in performance. At the same time, recollections from his teaching suggested a more complex view, in which scores and sonic concretisations both serve the realisation of a higher meaning. Previous scholarship had typically followed the first outlook, thereby investigating differences between notated scores and Messiaen's documented interpretations as conspicuous contrasts, or a freedom at odds with modernist streaks in his stress on fidelity to the notation.

A preliminary step was the decision to use Messiaen's advice to interpreters in the preface to his *Quatuor pour la fin du temps* as a key to interpret apparent differences between his notation and recorded performances. This choice was not original, but rather followed a similar employment of the same brief text in Dingle's previous survey of piano recordings.<sup>209</sup> Nevertheless, it was deemed possible to draw further insights from an outlook that situates faithful adherence to rhythms in the score on another level than a need for exaggerated gestures and liveliness in actual concert situations. Traces of the same vision in other statements by Messiaen could be collected and a broader picture established. The hypothesis arising from such a reading was that the process of learning and preparing a work for public performance contains a different focus across its distinct stages. Inspired by perspectives that clearly differentiate between notation and actual performances, such a holistic way of approaching variances

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<sup>209</sup> See Dingle 2014.

offered a possible route of regarding these two elements as constituting a diversity within a common unity. It was adopted as the basis for an interpretation of how Messiaen negotiated between these distinct ideals and purposes in performance.

A second preparatory step was to find relevant source material for analysis. The scarcity of investigations of Messiaen as an organ player is remarkable, considering his elevated stature as composer of a seminal body of works for the instrument. This lacuna made it the natural focus. Rather than pursuing further studies of his pianism, it was clear the spotlight should be directed in this direction. The immediate impetus behind the entire case study was in fact a novel opportunity to compare no less than three recorded versions of Messiaen playing his *Livre d'orgue* (1951–52). The availability of three versions of the same work played by the composer is unique. Musicians and scholars had previously been able to access only one rendering of each organ piece by the composer, from a set of recordings made in 1956.<sup>210</sup> This fact inevitably turned a single recording into a kind of original sonic version of each piece. This circumstance previously made it hazardous to evaluate which aspects of Messiaen's playing were unique for the 1956 version, and which traits had a more constant significance.

The method of analysis needed to include observations of different kinds. Differences in time between notated values and the length of relevant notes in performances were obviously a key factor to investigate. A growing preoccupation with recordings in musicology coincided with the development of computer-based analysis, from the outset in the 1990s often drawing upon methods from psychology and cognitive sciences. The development of different kinds of software has enabled graphic representations of various elements in actual music-making, among them timing, intensity and frequency. Such methods instil a marked sense of objectivity, beyond limitations of perception among the scholars who use them. A significant problem in early analyses of temporal questions was the time-consuming labour of marking the onset and release of individual tones in recordings, in order for the software to calculate their length. The evolution of AI-based software for automatic transcriptions of audio to score notation currently offers ever smoother possibilities for visual renderings of musical performances. I have previously tried to explore the potential in such software for analyses of organ recordings, but have yet to encounter a kind of transcription that can provide a sufficiently exact picture of Messiaen's recordings from the 1950s. The lacking technical quality in these mono recordings, the distance between microphones and the instrument, as well as the inexact onset caused by this distance and indistinct tonal properties of organ pipes in comparison to other instruments, together cause considerable challenges.

An initial survey of the *Livre d'orgue* indicated that only a few passages would benefit from computer-assisted analysis. In most other cases, issues of timing relate to specific ideas and other expressive features in the music, a circumstance

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<sup>210</sup> As an exception, the composer's recording of the *Méditations sur le mystère de la Sainte Trinité* was made in 1972.

which calls for human discernments of temporality within a more complex artistic nexus. The choice was to pursue computer-assisted measurements of some key time lengths in the relatively simple audio-editor *Audacity*. Such procedures are still conditioned by my markings of individual notes in the software. This degree of human inexactitude is nevertheless inevitable, as the analysis needs to reflect specific artistic ideas behind particular ways of notating rhythm. The major bulk of the analysis rests heavily not only on my role as a musicologist, but also on a critical apparatus built on personal experiences of learning, performing and discussing interpretations of this music. The type of questions posed throughout the analysis thus largely represents a kind of implicit artistic knowledge that is brought to a level of explicit scholarly reflection.

This circumstance is linked to a further choice in the article to complement close analyses of Messiaen's three recordings with a less thorough examination of further available complete recordings of the *Livre d'orgue* from other interpreters. The underlying question is the composer's role in shaping a subsequent tradition of interpretation. The composer's 1956 recordings and his coaching of other prominent players clearly makes Messiaen a vital agent, not only in composing the *Livre*, but also in the aesthetic process of its reception. Micro-analyses of timing were not deemed necessary in the case of other performers' versions. The conceptual framework in the article was found sufficient, together with my own informed experience of evaluating organ interpretations, for a general evaluation of how performers adhere to the score, or possibly rather follow Messiaen's own manner of rendering the cycle in performance.

### 4.3 Texts and music in the intellectual reception of Messiaen

The third case study continues to investigate the relative importance of Messiaen's diverse activities, and the kind of sources they resulted in. It stands clear that the writing and editing of texts were significant aspects of Messiaen's manner of being a composer. This feature spotlights his participation within a broader transformation of the role of a composer throughout musical modernism. Theorizing and analysis of his own works served their dissemination and enabled comprehension of their meaning, albeit only along the lines of his authorial intentions. Even though such enterprises clearly shaped the appreciation of his works and status as a composer, Messiaen scholarship has only recently begun to remedy what has been called "an alarming paucity" in the number of reception studies.<sup>211</sup>

As seen in the previous survey of literature, Messiaen's writings have clearly shaped the course of musicological studies, both when his verbal promulgation

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<sup>211</sup> Dingle & Fallon (eds.) 2013, 265. The comment stems from an editorial introduction to a section of four studies on reception. Among the scant investigations that have developed such perspectives, see also brief accounts of papers on Messiaen reception in Eastern Europe in Beirão, Schlee & Budde (eds.) 2006, 331–338.

of intentions have been followed and contested. As a contrast, the impact of his texts and his music in other academic disciplines has remained uncharted territory. The third study is intended to investigate how these different kinds of sources have shaped recognition of Messiaen as a composer, well beyond musicology and music scenes. The questions that prompt the enquiry include the following: How significant was the role played by text genres such as printed interviews and programme notes in the dissemination of his works? To what extent was his works interpreted in line with the ideas articulated in such sources? Which broader discourses on musical modernism shaped readings and listening practices in the reception of the composer and his music?

As a preliminary delimitation, the scope of the investigation was focused on perceptions and employments of Messiaen in French culture throughout the twentieth century. Writings by the philosopher Gilles Deleuze, alone and together with psychoanalyst Félix Guattari, provide an exemplary case study in this regard. There is already a small but distinct literature on connections between Deleuze and Messiaen, which is hardly surprising in light of the composer's apparent significance in the philosopher's work. Deleuze's writings have also been credited as one of the most momentous philosophical employments of music during the century. His *A Thousand Plateaus*, co-written with Guattari, is the most important text in this regard. A lasting and expanding musicological interest in Deleuze strengthened the incentive to investigate this literature. The choice to pursue this connection clearly marks the examination as a case study. There is from the outset no ground to evaluate whether that this material reveals aspects of Messiaen reception of a more general nature.

In order to reconstruct the actual transfer of musical concepts and ideas into Deleuze's thought, the investigation needed to retrace the philosopher's encounters with Messiaen in a more detailed manner than in previous studies. In contrast to earlier articles, it could not rely on mere thematic concurrences or a fleeting exchange of ideas. It rather proved essential to detect, as closely as possible, which discrete texts and works Deleuze had studied, by Messiaen or on Messiaen. All of his writings, with or without Guattari, were taken into account.

This process was facilitated by an extant list of references to different musicians throughout the whole corpus of texts.<sup>212</sup> The task calls for epistemic humility, as there is no obvious reason to assume that every individual link to the composer left traces in Deleuze's writings. Nevertheless, references throughout published texts and recollections by students provided a basis for surveying the philosopher's knowledge and experiences of Messiaen. The study thereby came to touch upon a notable bifurcation between sound and thought in Deleuze's reception of music: The popular singers he listened to and cherished form a distinct repertoire from the set of modernist composers whose work were employed for philosophical reflection.

The methods adopted to recreate the process of Deleuze's Messiaen reception share several similarities with the first case study. Once more, the first task was to survey the relevant texts and make notes of how the composer surfaces in

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<sup>212</sup> Waterhouse 2015.



relation to specific topics. Beyond explicit references, my reading of *A Thousand Plateaus* and some other notable texts revealed passages alluding to or paraphrasing texts by Messiaen. The possibility to establish such hidden links elicited further scrutiny whether Deleuze and Guattari drew directly upon Messiaen's texts, or if other authors can have mediated their reception.

Previous research had established Boulez as the single most influential composer throughout Deleuze's writings. Consideration of relevant texts by Boulez thus proved necessary, especially as they pertain to Messiaen. It soon became clear that Boulez's outlook on the intellectual and cultural relevance of musical modernism shaped much of Deleuze's estimation of Messiaen's significance. At the same time, the central role Messiaen plays in the ecological approach to music in *A Thousand Plateaus* indicated that there also was a direct line of influence unconnected to Boulez. In other instances, Deleuze appeared to have drawn independent links between concepts used by Boulez and music by Messiaen.

Just as in the first study, the task was to reconstruct an intellectual influence and the creative adoption of ideas from one author to another. My relatively deep knowledge of Messiaen's writings provided a possibility of finding hidden connections beyond the more obvious ones, either in the form of thematic similarities or in the actual wordings of allusions or paraphrases of Messiaen's concepts and writings. The method of collecting central topics and then arranging them into a new systematic order followed similar procedures as in the first article. Another reader would likely have organised findings in different ways, possibly detected other connections, and allowed a slightly different picture to emerge. Hermeneutic investigations of this kind are a collective work, in which individual scholars complement each other and gradually build a fuller picture.

The focus in this context was to interpret how Messiaen was perceived and employed, and how different sources contributed to shape the contours of his reception. As an investigation of Deleuze, the method used here can be contested. Musicologists drawing upon Deleuzian concepts are typically focused on how these ideas can be developed further, and thereby stimulate novel approaches not least to contemporary music.<sup>213</sup> The kind of genesis behind some of these notions reconstructed here stands in tension with a fundamental aspiration in Deleuzian thought to perceive the diffusion of ideas as processes that resist premediated categories. The article stands on its own as a reception study focused on Messiaen, but may also elicit further reflection on how Deleuze responded to music, primarily from written sources, and implications arising from such encounters across different media.

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<sup>213</sup> See notably Campbell 2013, Macarthur, Lochhead & Shaw (eds.) 2016, Moisala, Leppänen, Tiainen & Väättäinen (eds.) 2017.



## 5. Précis of case studies

This chapter summarizes the procedures, contents and main outcomes of the three case studies. It thereby facilitates the process of gaining an overview of the investigations, and the ongoing debates they relate to. The focus here is to provide a richer synopsis of the research than discussions of purely methodological concerns, or the general questions at work throughout the dissertation. The following final chapter will relate the results gained in the case studies to the overarching aims.

### 5. 1 Universal neumes: Chant theory in Messiaen's aesthetics

As discussed in the preceding chapter, the first article examines influences from Gregorian chant on the composer's artistic outlook and compositional techniques. This theme has been a central and recurrent topic throughout the still brief history of Messiaen scholarship. Point of departure for the present study is the apparent lack of consensus in scholarship on how to conceptualize and explore this manifest influence. There is a notable divide between scholars who situate such studies in a theological or liturgical setting vis-à-vis those who stage predominantly technical examinations. Messiaen's professed joy in improvising on chant melodies can readily be invoked to bolster the first kind of approach, together with unequivocal statements that Gregorian chant is the only truly liturgical music for Catholic worship. A sub-argument in the article is that aspirations to elevate liturgy as a qualitatively unique realm should be reconfigured in light of broader cosmological principles, through which Messiaen moved seamlessly within his theological and technical layers of argument.

On the technical level, it has been argued that Messiaen assimilated Gregorian chant into his musical language to an extent that surpasses corresponding procedures by previous colleagues. The present study confirms this view, but on a distinct and novel conceptual basis. An important preliminary step is to note, with support from previous research, that the use of plainchant conjoins different techniques, among them direct citation (sometimes for semantic purposes), paraphrases, and a less overt remodelling of traits from chant into Messiaen's own musical syntax. A following step establishes that the composer's own writings provide no manifest gateway for perceiving a comprehensive vision behind these heterogeneous techniques. Recent analytical work from Balmer, Lacôte and Murray is more helpful, as the authors have shown how Messiaen assimilated melodic contours from chant into his own works. This technique spotlights neumes as a basic building block in music, and thereby confirms their centrality in the composer's idiosyncratic musical analysis. Neumes were highlighted not least in Messiaen's *Lecture at Notre-Dame*, in which these melodic formulas are interconnected with a distinct rhythmic flexibility.<sup>214</sup> Somewhat baffling, without an explanation of the underlying rationale, is a claim

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<sup>214</sup> Messiaen 1978.

that birdsong, Greek and Hindu rhythm, no less than Chopin's rubato techniques, exhibit similar expressive qualities, drawn from neumes.

An investigation of this subject matter was seen to require a novel method of reconstructing a set of supporting conceptual and artistic pillars, on which Messiaen's understanding of plainchant arguably rests. The main argument is that the seemingly heterogeneous uses and invocations of Gregorian chant throughout the composer's musical analysis, writings and compositions are grounded in a more fundamental outlook, which itself remains implicit, rather than being succinctly articulated. Consequently, the article takes on broader questions of coherence in and between these kinds of sources.

The main bulk of the article provides what here is called an *archaeological reconstruction* of Messiaen's readings of Mocquereau and d'Indy. Messiaen's theoretical approach to neumes is shown to emerge from these authors' similar aesthetic outlook, and a further common ground in Riemann. A first step is a close reading of two chapters devoted to plainchant in the fourth volume of Messiaen's *Traité de rythme, de couleur, et d'ornithologie*. The first of these outlines the general idea that melismatic neumes form the basis, not only for chant, but also for birdsong and Western art music. The text gives many musical examples, but fails to explicate the rationale behind Messiaen's use of neumes in forming his own musical language.

The second chapter explicitly elevates Mocquereau as Messiaen's main source of inspiration. Particular attention is given to the chapter on "The Origin of Rhythm" in Mocquereau's treatise *Le nombre musical grégorien*. That section itself grew out of correspondence with d'Indy, and reading of a similar chapter in the first volume of the latter's *Cours de composition musicale*. Beyond this interwoven influence from the two main sources, it can be established that Messiaen's analytical procedures stem from d'Indy's notion and method of reading music through the lens of melodic skeletons (*charpente mélodique*). Furthermore, Messiaen's *Traité* reveals an awareness of d'Indy's dependence on Riemann and points out similarities between these two and Mocquereau, although Messiaen most likely cannot have known that Riemann and Mocquereau also stood in direct communication with each other on rhythm and expressivity in plainchant.

The next section notes Messiaen's youthful articulation of the need for rhythm to be liberated from conventional metre and what he calls the "enemy" of fixed measure. A central point is that Messiaen's stance on the matter follows a kind of scientific universalism in Mocquereau, which had induced a break with longstanding Romantic aspirations draped in similar aesthetic concepts. Mocquereau's mentor Dom Joseph Pothier had advocated a turn towards textual accents as the basis for flexibility of rhythm, in the act relying heavily on natural instincts and a subjective sense for a living religious tradition. His disciple discretely changed the course of chant studies at Solesmes towards an abstract and truly universal ground for scholarship and performance in the origin of rhythm.

A separate section interprets how Messiaen stands indebted to d'Indy's simultaneously conceptual and historical explication of such a theory, itself derived from a broadly Hegelian methodology. D'Indy perceived history as a microcosm, and theorized how a historical point of departure in Greek antiquity gradually evolved in a spiral movement, constantly expanding and yet normatively dependent on its roots. Most crucial is his division of music's history into three discrete periods: A *rhythmo-monodic* (until the thirteenth century), a *polyphonic* (until the seventeenth century) and a *metered* era (lasting into the twentieth century). Messiaen belonged to a later generation than d'Indy, but nevertheless shared both the older colleague's qualitative preference for the Christian art of plainchant and the understanding that a purely rhythmic origin of music constitutes a lasting norm for later expansions of a living musical language. Gregorian chant is deemed to hold a unique role in history thanks to its beneficial merger of metrical patterns from antiquity with the expressive layer of melody. D'Indy's periods also illuminate the basic but otherwise enigmatic structure of Messiaen's two main treatises, which both follow the posited historical evolution from rhythm to melody and further to harmony. In contrast to d'Indy and his teacher Maurice Emmanuel, Messiaen discards a pessimistic teleology of music, and rather situates his own actualization of ancient rhythms as part of an inevitable progression towards a more complex musical language.

Having thus completed the overview of general characteristics in Messiaen's reception of theories of rhythm in chant, four thematically ordered sections investigate the relevance of different areas for his sense of expressivity and his own music. A posited origin of rhythm in Greek antiquity is given a markedly mathematical, rather than linguistic, interpretation. The idea that arithmetics has a truly universal validity supports Messiaen's self-image of being a "rhythmician" who explores the very fabric of reality. His treatise *Technique de mon langage musical* explicitly couples Mocquereau's rhythm theories to Messiaen's own experiments with prime numbers. Secondly, claims for universality explain convictions that neumes are present in birdsong, at least on the interrelated theorem that different ecological rhythms – among them those of human beings and birds – all participate in a prior and common structure of reality. Thirdly, Greek doctrines of a shared rhythm at the basis of all the arts were adopted into Mocquereau's system of chironomy, a system of notating the rise and fall of movement in chant melodies into a kind of choreographic system (intended for conducting). Messiaen explains this system in conspicuous detail in his *Traité*, and experimented with a graphic notation of alterations between binary and ternary groups in his early orchestral work *Les offrandes oubliées*.

Messiaen's idea that neumes are a basic building block with a particular expressivity is shown to rely on a fourfold structural outlook on music, taken over by Mocquereau from Riemann. The three authors share a similar understanding that rhythm proper is relational, arises from tensions within musical movement, and operates on a higher level than an underlying atomic substrate. Whereas Riemann spoke of motifs, neumes are the first level of

rhythm for Mocquereau. They constitute melodic groups that undergo transformation in interplay with other groups, and yet retain a stable identity. Mocquereau's notions of *arsis* and *thesis* rearticulate a schematic vision in Riemann of a constant intensifying and corresponding passing away within musical movement. Messiaen shares a similar outlook, but turns against a forceful and formulaic systematicity in Mocquereau's reliance upon Riemann. His transferral of this general pattern of movement seeks greater flexibility and abstracts the kind of motions posited to lie in discrete neumes from the Gregorian repertoire, thus liberating them to be set in new musical contexts.

A more literal and at the same time creative reception is Messiaen's explicit inspiration from Mocquereau's theory of four dimensions in sound. The ordering of durations, pitches, intensities and modes of attack that constitute Messiaen's heavily influential *Mode de valeurs et d'intensités* is based directly on Mocquereau. Within the same set of works, *Neumes rythmiques* represents a manifest attempt to compose with the building blocks of neumes, understood as a fixed integration of characteristic rhythmic, melodic, dynamic and timbral qualities. The entailed view that melodic movement is set within a compound of sound also informs Messiaen's coloristic experiments with harmonic shadings of birdsong throughout the 1950s. This composite understanding of melody possibly indicates why Messiaen came to provide citations of Gregorian melodies with harmony and particular sonic qualities in his late works.

The conclusion claims that the present reconstruction has revealed an idiosyncratic but on its own premises largely coherent theory of neumes, which connects otherwise seemingly heterogeneous aspects of Messiaen's preoccupation with, and use of, Gregorian chant. A corollary and further argument is that Messiaen's writings require further investigations, in search of underlying theorems that below the surface instil a greater unity than has previously been recognized. The sources spotlighted point towards a need for a more comprehensive investigation of influences from a late-Romantic aesthetic paradigm, in which d'Indy and Riemann are central figures to consider. As a proper theory of chant, Messiaen's reception of d'Indy and Mocquereau exhibits notable deficiencies, when regarded in a contemporary light. It would, however, be misguided to invoke Messiaen as a chant scholar. The relevance of his opinions on the matter rather lies with its creative potential in shaping the composer's own musical language. To investigate this influence would require further comprehensive analytical studies beyond the examples given in this article. Several possible vistas for such investigations are suggested at the end.

Besides the main claims, the article engages with previous literature on the discussed topics. The text thereby takes a stand on several key issues that are interconnected with the main theme of plainchant and neumes. Indeed, the extended relevance of chant theory throughout many aspects of Messiaen's aesthetics follows naturally from the voiced conviction that it fulfilled a more or less global role in his understanding of universality in music. As a case study within the dissertation, this reconstruction of a distinct chant theory in Messiaen's writings sheds new light on his intellectual universe, as well as his

methods of appropriating ideas from previous authors, and serves as an argument for a notable coherence between writings, compositions, and performance ideals. The most manifest example of such an artistic unity is perhaps the dynamic shading captured in the notions of *arsis* and *thésis*, which was intimately connected with ideals of expressivity in Mocquereau's chironomy for chant melodies. Messiaen cherished this outlook, employed it in the early work *Les offrandes oubliées*, and allowed it to shape his experimental *Quatre études de rythme*. Mocquereau's theory of sound as composite directly influenced Messiaen's serial techniques and his experiments to capture the timbre of individual species of birds through harmonic colouring.

## 5. 2 Sentiment beyond chronometry: A performance history of Olivier Messiaen's *Livre d'orgue*

The second study transfers the spotlight from writings, aesthetic ideas and compositions to the interplay between works and performance. It takes off from comments by Boulez on Messiaen as situated at the middle of notable important contradictions within twentieth century music. In this case, a general tension between Romantic expressivity and modernist compositional techniques is highlighted. In Dingle's verdict, this particular contradiction is especially acute in considerations of Messiaen as a composer-performer. Commentators have recurrently noted conspicuous differences between scores and the composer's own manner of playing. A study of three available recordings of the organ cycle *Livre d'orgue* represents a major step forward in the possibility of investigating concurrences or tensions between Messiaen's notated scores and his sonic renderings of the same works.

The analysis of recordings rests upon a previous discussion of a distinct approach to performance, articulated by Messiaen as a brief advice to interpreters in a preface to his *Quatuor pour la fin du temps*. Players are advised to begin by studying the outer-musical ideas behind each movement. A second step consists in learning the score, exactly as notated. In order to get rhythms right, Messiaen calls on interpreters to count an underlying stream of note values, a substrate below the music that nevertheless is helpful as a corrective against inexact renderings of the notated durations. This call for chronometric exactitude tallies with a general movement since the 1920s in favour of precise and clear realizations of notated works. It is characteristic for Messiaen though to advise performers only to retain a *sentiment* of this exactitude in concerts. Having first mastered the chronometric level, they are encouraged to seek liveliness and sensitivity in performance. To this end, a learned but now innate sense for the notated work is to be combined with particular interpretational techniques, such as exaggerated nuances and modifications of tempo. Traces of this complex but only briefly expounded conception of works and performance continued to surface in later interviews with Messiaen. In this article, this outlook forms the basis of a methodology focused on observing accord or divergences between notation and performances, with an aim of understanding

how the ideal of retaining a sentiment of notated durations, rather than reproducing them chronometrically, shaped Messiaen's organ playing.

Having outlined this particular approach to notation and performance, the article surveys Messiaen's estimation of recordings and sets them in historical context. There is nothing to suggest that he regarded such sonic documentations as yet another means to instil his authority as a composer. When asked about discrepancies between scores and his 1956 recordings of the organ works, Messiaen habitually told performers to adhere to the printed text. Some of the more conspicuous incongruities concern timbre and registration, an area in which Messiaen had refined his palette since the publication of organ works from the 1930s. As a contrast, all three recordings of *Livre d'orgue* happened within a few years since its composition. Divergences thus reasonably stem from Messiaen's style of playing, rather than constituting a significant change in his perception of the work. In addition to more in-depth analyses of Messiaen's three versions, the article studies 13 complete recordings of the cycle by other artists, made throughout the twentieth century and until 2017. The organists who have specialized in Messiaen and undertaken recordings of *Livre d'orgue* have either sought the composer's advice and the public authority of his endorsement, or studied with some of the organists who themselves had been in contact with Messiaen. To include their different versions makes it possible to evaluate to which degree there is a more or less unitary tradition of interpretation, based on Messiaen's own teaching and recordings.

The analysis follows the structure of the cycle, movement by movement. Already the first movement, "Reprises par interversion", spotlights the centrality of acoustics, and organists' need to adjust their interpretation to different venues. Messiaen clearly heeded divergences between the three sonic milieus he played in. He also played the work with a clear sense of the intended drama. Louis Thiry was the first other organist to record *Livre d'orgue*, and he retained the composer's liberty of changing note values, rather focusing on the musical meaning of the movement. Among later interpreters, a consensus was soon established to heed the notated values more carefully.

This is a major trend throughout the following movements, as is an increasing tendency to emphasise a smooth legato touch. In the first "Pièce en trio", the analysis draws a link between Messiaen's playing and impressions from Boulez's contemporary aleatory music. As a contrast, versions from the twenty-first century have moved away from neoclassical timbres towards warmer colours and a more relaxed playing, at times with a notable use of rubato. "Les Mains de l'Abîme" contains a grand depiction of the Dauphiné mountains in the French Alps, here captured through an interplay of short and very protracted tutti chords. A close analysis of Messiaen's versions reveals manifest divergences from the notated chord lengths, albeit without any apparent loss of their intended musical meaning.

The depiction of birds in "Chants d'oiseaux" is given impetuous and charismatic renderings by Messiaen, in the article compared with Yvonne Loriod's contemporary recordings of birdsong pieces for the piano. The



composer exerted greater control and refinement in birdsong in a later recording of his *Méditations sur le mystère de la Sainte Trinité*. Later interpreters have fulfilled this tendency towards more carefully crafted renderings, in the act losing something of the spontaneity in Messiaen's playing in the 1950s.

In the fiercely virtuosic "Les Yeux dans les roues", later players clearly surpass the composer in terms of control and evenness of tone. This verdict does nevertheless not in itself warrant conclusions that Messiaen lacked the technical standard to perform his music on par with other organists. In contrast to other performers' versions, two of the studied renderings by Messiaen are live performances. The breath-taking pace in his world premiere of the piece from Stuttgart finds him struggling, but at the same time reveals an audacious and uncompromising spirit at the keyboard. The concluding "Soixante-quatre durées" highlights a marked contrast between the composer's theoretical idea of the piece and the performer's focus. In spite of keeping track of the compositional aspiration to make audiences experience 64 different durations, arranged in falling and expanding orders, Messiaen's playing brings out the accompanying layer of birdsong, which theoretically is supposed to be a mere auxiliary addition. He elevates the drama in such motions to a state of sheer exuberance and surpasses other players in this regard. However, any retained sentiment of the main idea behind the movement is on brink of vanishing altogether.

Close analyses of Messiaen's three recorded performances provide a more solid base to draw conclusions on his insufficiently studied style of playing at the organ. Invoking his distinct outlook that liveliness and modifications beyond the notated score provide an ideal beyond a preceding level of chronometric accuracy provides a gateway beyond previously assumed antitheses between exactitude and individuality in interpretation. In some of the movements, Messiaen exhibits a strong sense for what he called the sentiment of notation, even when he clearly ventures beyond its letter. In a piece like the final movement, the layer of liveliness and drama appears to move above any innate grasp of notated durations. The analysis suggests that some aspects of Messiaen's playing might be influenced by other aesthetic tendencies in music from the 1950s. His recordings from the decade should therefore not necessarily be taken to reflect a consistent approach throughout an entire career.

No later recording artist has moved significantly beyond parameters established in Messiaen's own interpretative choices, as documented in his recordings and communicated in his coaching of other players. The gradual transformation through records towards repeated listening might explain a general tendency among subsequent performers to focus more on rendering the notated score. Even in this regard, it is necessary to exert caution before drawing too wide conclusions from discrepancies between score and sound in Messiaen's recordings. At least, there is nothing to suggest that the composer himself regarded his commercial 1956 set as a primary source, in its own right, to the works. Having said that, any of his documented renderings convey valuable information on Messiaen's understanding of his compositions, not least thanks to their different medium than the notation in their scores.

### 5. 3 Deleuze reads Messiaen: Durations and birdsong becoming philosophy

The third article reconfigures the spotlight away from investigations of Messiaen's person. Questions of intersections between different areas in his activity are still very much in the limelight, but they are now set within a broader interest in how these roles shaped the intellectual reception of Messiaen. Gilles Deleuze's writings, partly in co-operation with Félix Guattari, provide fertile sources for investigations of such processes. Messiaen played a distinct and already recognized role in their outlook on music, and their thought is currently inspiring significant strands in musicology.

In line with the methodological aspiration to reconstruct the use of different kinds of sources, the article first provides an overview of Deleuze's musical experiences, in general and of Messiaen in particular. It stands clear that actual listening to music remained quite distinct from a philosophical employment of musical concepts. The French popular singers Deleuze liked to hear forms a repertoire seemingly at odds with the highbrow set of classical and modernist composers referenced and used in his and Guattari's writings. Students and colleagues at Paris-VIII in Vincennes were instrumental in bringing new music into Deleuze's seminar. Messiaen's old student Daniel Charles directed the university's music department. The first ascertained contact between Deleuze and Messiaen's music occurred when Pascale Criton played *Chronochromie* on a tape recorder in the seminar in 1975.

In a second preliminary step, Boulez's writings on Wagner and the *Ring* are studied as a distinct gateway to a Boulezian historiography of musical modernism. On the one hand, Deleuze and Guattari estimated Messiaen's most well-known experimental techniques in line with Boulez's commentaries on their epochal but subsequently surpassed value. A separate section in the article reconstructs recurrent references to several of Messiaen's most well-known rhythmic techniques in expositions of Deleuze's and Guattari's rhizomatic model of thought. In line with Boulez's outlook, serial experiments in Messiaen's work after the Second World War is there posited to have set all parameters in music free for novel connections. Boulez himself, and especially John Cage, are composers who more obviously realized the kind of continuous variation that inspires rhizomatic thinking.

On the other hand, Boulez's portrayal of Wagner brought together a number of themes that would continue to resound in Deleuze's (with and without Guattari) further reception of Messiaen. The article surveys a range of topics on which such direct influences can be detected and evaluated. Detailed comparisons of texts by Messiaen and *A Thousand Plateaus* reveal a number of unaccounted citations and paraphrases of statements by the composer, including a political employment of the distinction between metric and non-pulsed time. Beyond this common and broadly Bergsonian approach to time, Deleuze and Guattari follows closely in the wake of Messiaen's theory of heterogeneous superimposed biological times, including references to Gaston Bachelard's work.

Ecological themes, including birdsong, have previously been recognized as central aspects in a line of influence that ventures beyond Boulezian interests. Deleuze and Guattari use theories from the ethologist Jakob von Uexküll to construct a musical understanding of nature, including a belief that biological and animal behaviour can legitimately be invoked in articulating an ecocritical portrayal of human existence. In doing so, they are inspired by Messiaen's preference for birds and his perceptive gaze of their singing as a compound act, in which social and expressive aspects coincide. In spite of this interest, Deleuze and Guattari formulate a theory of biopolitical signification at work in birdsong that deviates from Messiaen's observations of a basic and characteristic stability in the singing both of a species and individual birds.

*A Thousand Plateaus* clearly builds on Messiaen in expounding an essential link between music and a highly estimated state of becoming. Central to this idea is that music has a strong deterritorializing tendency, which sets blocks of sounds free from prevailing structures. This liberating force is at the same time in itself potentially destructive, and requires a constant and reciprocal reterritorialization. The article stresses the general theoretical import of this articulated tension, arguing that Deleuze and Guattari make philosophical use of birdsong, rather than to enter into dialogue with ecological concerns as such.

Interestingly, as a kind of Messiaen reception, their philosophical schema can be shown to have captured key elements in Messiaen's own musical adaptations of birdsong long before musicological analyses arrived at similar conclusions. The composer stated, in a philosophically somewhat crude manner, that he sought mimetic authenticity when transcribing and reworking the sound of birdsong into musical notation. Recent findings of recorded birdsong employed for such purposes have facilitated detailed reconstructions on how these transfers actually were made. Consequently, it is now possible to observe that Messiaen used characteristic motifs from a particular species, but created novel larger structures from them, in line with diverse mathematical and rhythmic parameters. As the article spells out, these procedures align closely with a Deleuzian dialectic between movements of de- and reterritorialization. *A Thousand Plateaus* thus articulates a perceptive theoretical exposition of Messiaen's compositional processes. In order to arrive at this felicitous gaze, however, the authors had to circumvent the composer's verbal statements of his own procedures.

A final section of the analysis spotlights how Deleuze continued to use concepts from Messiaen in his book on Francis Bacon's paintings. More precisely, he employs the schema of interaction between different rhythms called *rhythmic characters* by Messiaen. This notion is appropriated to shed light on a movement within Bacon's triptychs, in which the agency is transferred from their manifest figures to rhythms of colouristic interplay. Deleuze thus finds a similar dialectic to be at work as the interplay between rhythmic motifs, landscapes and colours highlighted in Boulez's Wagner. This conclusion reinforces the article's argument that Deleuze's reception of Messiaen is simultaneously delimited, shaped and facilitated by a particular Boulezian artistic outlook on modernism.

A further observation is the limited explicit impact on any of Messiaen's compositions on Deleuze, with the exception of recurrent references to *Chronochromie*. As a contrast, almost every allusion or reference to Messiaen can be retraced to Boulez's writings or to published interviews with Messiaen. This evidence suggests that written expositions of Messiaen's musical language prepared the way for a philosophical employment of its main concepts. Such a conclusion highlights the possibility for a modernist composer like Messiaen to shape the reception of his work through the spoken and written word.

For a non-specialist like Deleuze, the works in themselves are more difficult to employ, as such a process often would require an independent analysis and conceptualization of their potential philosophical meaning. His reception of Messiaen provides a valuable case study of how Messiaen – like Boulez – created a lasting impression of his own cultural relevance through language. The conclusions of the article also suggest that Deleuze's employment of music should not be regarded as a radical transfer of meaning from the medium of sound into philosophical prose. Rather, the modernist music he built heavily upon was already thoroughly conceptualized by its most influential composers.

## 6. Conclusion

The dissertation reconsiders intersections between different roles in Messiaen's versatile professional activity. Ongoing scholarly renegotiations of common modernist hierarchies between the status of composers and other professional roles prompt such an enquiry. The increasing historical distance from twentieth century composers and norms that guided their self-perception on such issues enables investigations that move beyond their own views and statements. This chasm has elicited a renewed interest in discursive patterns that shaped common modernist conceptions of composers as original artists, with a rational command over an individual artistic system and an acknowledged standing as intellectuals. Of particular value in this study has been to learn from previous studies that consider the status of writings, abstract principles and their influence in composers' creative work. Some of the most prominent composers during the century were also active as performing artists, a circumstance that makes it pertinent to reflect on the scarcity of both primary discourse and secondary studies of the composite activity of modernist composer-performers.

Under the inspiration of broader trends in studies of musical modernism, Messiaen's theorizing and his contributions within performance were chosen as the main areas of investigation. To be more precise, these fields are not studied as discrete entities, but from an interest in how they contribute to an enhanced knowledge of his integral creativity. Rather than continuing a previous tendency of treating the composer as an artist apart, Messiaen was situated within certain modernist intellectual predispositions on both subject matters. Questions pertaining to the influence of such conceptions on his self-perception, and in the reception of his work, counted among the driving problems throughout the dissertation. This move follows a scholarly tendency to reconsider authorial intention in musical modernism, and to seek out approaches that complement composers' own vision.

A particular understanding of subjectivity and of participation in a common usage of language underlies this shift. Neither self-consciousness nor communal discourses are regarded as perfectly self-perspicacious. A study of artists particularly reinforces the need to recognize and enquire how vital strands of human experience are intuitive, or negotiated through symbols other than language. In such a light, it would be asking too much that a composer held a conscious perception of all his or her artistic choices, sources of influence and communicative strategies.

Scholars seeking a more comprehensive knowledge of historic figures, among them composers, are rather prompted to attain insights into dimensions that possibly went beyond these individuals' self-reflection, and the verbal sources that communicate their views. This outlook follows a vision of subjectivity and concomitant methods of investigation in German hermeneutics, particularly Friedrich Schleiermacher. Some of these aspects have notably been applied in Dahlhaus's study of Schoenberg's poetics of music.

A similar lack of complete transparency is found in the use of communal concepts. Hayes's survey of modernist composers' predispositions testifies to an

intrinsic obliviousness in fundamental aspects of their professional self-understanding. Basic convictions that are commonly shared within a distinct circle of people rarely provoke controversy, or call for reflection, and thus often remain veiled below the surface of their communication.

In line with these premises, characteristic traits in Messiaen are not sought in abstraction from the predispositions and norms that he shared with prevalent contemporary outlooks. These are rather held to arise from his individual employment of common concepts and artistic ideals. In some cases, the possibility of spotlighting the absence of commentary on a particular topic is a vital outcome in itself. Messiaen's scant self-reflection on his own performances as pianist and organist would possibly have been most conspicuous in another cultural setting. Within his own historical context, this trait rather makes him appear middle-of-the-road. The dissertation has articulated a number of verdicts on distinctive attitudes and standpoints that serve to pinpoint Messiaen's dependency and distance from common discourses among and surrounding modernist composers. Comprehensive investigations would be necessary to formulate more conclusive verdicts in this regard.

A preliminary answer to the posed question of modernist conceptions that shaped Messiaen's self-understanding can still be given here. On matters of direct relevance in the present study, he concurred in a general tendency of making use of science, and expressed a pride in having established novel technical means within music. His conviction that philosophical and scientific knowledge is useful, but not a goal in itself, was conditioned by an anti-positivistic belief that truth ultimately is a theological concept. Although Messiaen's motives stand out from many non-believers, the idea that science and technology can be employed in composition, without thereby submitting to any primacy of scientific truth, was part and parcel of a common intellectual paradigm among modernist composers in his own context.

A recurrent trait in descriptions of Messiaen's musical style and intellectual universe is a transhistorical eclecticism that allowed him to abstract both musical principles and theoretical ideas from their original context, and to create new coherences by placing them next to each other. While these practices typically clash with musicologists' historical sensitivity, such methods have been highlighted as a general feature in many composers' manner of analysing historical repertoires. Brelet's philosophical treatment of music has been highlighted as an example of an academic eclecticism that resembles Messiaen's intellectual profile. A vital difference is that the composer engaged with fundamental philosophical and theological problems without either training or formal competence in any of these fields.

This observation induces a transition from the content of Messiaen's convictions to its epistemic authority. The dissertation uses the term theorizing as an umbrella concept, which holds together writing and other communication of theoretical principles with attention to the institutional situation of these activities. Fulcher has studied the increasing acknowledgment of composers as public intellectuals in French modernism, and Hayes has pointed to the

qualification that many of them also were granted an academic authority. Messiaen's teaching at the Paris conservatoire is vital to consider further, not least in order to discern to what extent his intellectual eclecticism influenced his many prominent composition students. This manifest trait sets him apart from other academic teachers and writers, such as Hindemith, Schoenberg and Babbitt. Less idiosyncratic among composers' analyses of music is a distinct focalization in Messiaen's class on music history and theoretical knowledge as vital tools to stimulate students in their personal quests to develop new solutions to musical problems.

The first case study probes deeper into Messiaen's creative employment of theoretical principles, drawn from other authors. It follows in the wake of recent studies on the posthumous *Traité de rythme, de couleur, et d'ornithologie* that have noted the text's prehistory in teaching sessions at the conservatoire. The treatise's absence of methodological and discursive explanations has often been noted, testifying to an apparent lack of any desire of resembling a musicological style of writing. Its possible origin in notes intended for oral communication is a central background to heed, together with observations on how the constellation of material and analyses were intended for an audience of musicians and budding composers, rather than a scholarly community. Messiaen's writing elicits investigations that reconstruct thought patterns that played a vital significance in his artistic outlook, but which remained tacit in his texts, or possibly never was a part of his conscious self-reflection.

The influence of plainchant is an area that was almost impossible to grasp in a comprehensive manner prior to the publication of the fourth volume of the *Traité*. Two chapters on the topic explicitly situate Messiaen's presentation of Dom Mocquereau's theory of rhythm in a teaching situation, and reveal the composer's willingness to reference insights from previous authors. Instead of any manifest wish to shine forth as a solitary or original thinker, Messiaen credits his sources of influences, borrows individual traits and aspects that he finds useful, and appears content to rely on their perceived authority.

His evaluations of these texts are nevertheless independent, albeit without the criticism of theoretical or historical incongruities typical of a scholarly trained mind. It is natural to keep investigating the *Traité* as an essential source to Messiaen's personal poetics, and as an integral part of his manner of teaching composition. Nattiez's stress on dialogue with composers' text may here induce a beneficial streak of musicological self-criticism, prompting attention to differences between the treatise's pedagogical purpose and the kind of critical awareness and stringency desirable in scholarship.

Previous research had provided a beneficial reconstruction on how closely Mocquereau interacted with d'Indy and Riemann in working out what I call a multi-layered theory of rhythm in chant. Likewise, influences from d'Indy's analytical filter for melodic motions had already enabled a grasp of how a certain method of transforming chant melodies provided a matrix behind much of Messiaen's melodic writing. The present article could undertake an *archeological reconstruction* of how theoretical traits from this circle of authors shaped

Messiaen's approach to plainchant. The analytical idea that neumes represent a micro-level of melodic motion at work in any music, including birdsong, appeared as central. This stance rests on particular and purportedly universal epistemic principles in musicology at the turn of the century 1900. The underlying logic tallies with mathematical and ecological dimensions in Messiaen's thought, although the theoretical warrants proved too inflexible for his intellectual approach. D'Indy's *Cours de composition musicale* informed a vision of plainchant as the living source to ancient Greek metrics and Riemann's late Romantic outlook provided a vital backdrop for Mocquereau's and Messiaen's conceptions of rhythmic expressivity in chant melodies.

It was possible to establish influences from discrete aspects of the reconstructed chant theory in compositional ideas throughout Messiaen's career. His early *Les offrandes oubliées* reveals traces both of a rhythmic schema of ascending and descending energies within phrases and graphic signs to indicate these patterns in conducting. The later *Neumes rythmiques* rests on the idea that the melodic motion in neumes has a correspondent rhythmic and dynamic structure. Serial techniques in the iconic modernist work *Mode de valeurs et d'intensités* reproduce a five-fold theory of sound in Mocquereau's *Le nombre musical grégorien*. Further research is needed in order to discern to what extent the chant scholar's theory informed moves towards harmonic and instrumental colourings of birdsong and in the citation of Gregorian melodies in mature key works.

The findings in the article suggest that Messiaen's regarded plainchant as a universal building block in music, and that the extant repertoire of such liturgical songs thereby was interesting as a material for employment in his own works. There is an apparent fascination in his writings with previous authors' abstract principles, and his dependency on them is explicitly stated in many cases. There are scant traces of a critical questioning of their epistemic authority, although Messiaen obviously felt free to evaluate them independently. It is natural to assume that he adopted chant theories with a conviction that they rested upon a firm scientific basis. This belief may have reinforced aspirations to realise parameters in his own music that he deemed objective, and that ostensibly followed a natural course in music history.

No suggestion can be found that Messiaen would have regarded his academic teaching and writing on chant as a delinquent stance, to use Nattiez's term. Nevertheless, readings of previous authors are shaped by a practical and creative sense for how theoretical outlooks can be put to use in composition. However, the transformation of these ideas into musical techniques remains veiled to a significant extent. The outcome of transitions from theory to composition appears quite direct and literal, not least in the case of how Mocquereau's theory of sound was employed. A great deal of imagination nonetheless lies behind such transfers. Future critical analyses can probably point out differences between the verbal articulation of such theories and their functions within Messiaen's compositions. The inspiration gained from chant scholarship was not a fixed set



of ideas. Rather, this outlook was complex and flexible enough to enable a changing employment, in tandem with Messiaen's own artistic development.

The case study is merely one of several recent investigations that investigate lasting traces of musical and intellectual cultures from the turn of the century 1900 in Messiaen's development. Beyond making a claim for the general methodological relevance of such an approach, it is difficult to discern the overall validity of the topic pursued here in relation to the basic question of how theorizing intersects with composition. Topics like birdsong and harmonic colouring may give other results, not least because Messiaen was less manifestly inspired by previous theorists in these areas. The logic of the reconstructed chant theory would entail that the findings have a universal significance in his music as a whole. However, such inferences should not be peremptorily assumed in the case of a composer who remained at liberty to employ ideas only to the extent that they were useful in teaching or composition.

The composite role as a composer-performer was investigated in the second case study. This topic is, however, not entirely separated from the questions and outcome of the first article. Griffiths has been seen to speak of a dialogue between system and taste in Messiaen's music, thereby echoing the composer's own reflection on tensions between strictures and freedom in his works. A conspicuous and daring freedom has often been perceived as characteristic of Messiaen's style of playing his piano and organ compositions. Such observations appear to rest on a conception of interpretation that echoes his firm demands that musicians exercise fidelity to his meticulously notated scores, a discourse at the heart of musical modernism after Stravinsky. Testimonies from teaching indicate that Messiaen simultaneously regarded both scores, sounds and performances as different means of representing a higher unity and meaning in a composite ontology at work in his pieces.

The study of the composer's three recorded performances of the *Livre d'orgue* was set up as an analysis of tensions between different approaches to rhythm in the score and sonic realisations. The playing in some movements exhibit an apparent disregard for notated rhythms, while others display a sense of spontaneity that also departs from the score's literal level. The final movement, "Soixante-quatre durées", is marked by a constitutive tension between premeditated design and a level of expressivity, here in the form of birdsong. Messiaen plays this piece with a characteristic sense of drama, even to a point where his artistic focus appears to dismantle the overall technical idea on which it rests.

The use of gestures and agogics may nevertheless not primarily represent a daring freedom. Messiaen's style of playing may rather have a distinct purpose that goes beyond what he could achieve within the limits of musical notation. It is possible to conclude that he followed the advice given to other interpreters of giving up control over chronometrical accuracy in performance situations. The stated purpose at that stage should rather be to make use of gestures and tempo modifications that increase sensitivity and liveliness in the interpretation.

Beyond the predisposition of fidelity to the notation, Messiaen's style of playing is unique, in comparison with later recorded versions, for its striking ability to convey the original musical ideas behind movements. It is natural to interpret this feature as an intersection of the composer's strong sense for the music with the performing artist. At the same time, this trait can also be regarded as an embodied knowledge that adds a distinct level of insight into Messiaen's compositional process beyond the logic in musical notation. It is difficult to say to what extent this level of knowledge remained implicit and fleeting, rather than to be made explicit and given the permanence of verbalization. Ngim might be correct in his previously noted claim that Messiaen performed a kind of truth that may have remained subconscious, but the question is better left undecided until further evidence possibly emerges.

The lack of statements from Messiaen on his experiences of performance remains a noteworthy and lamentable trait for scholars with an interest in this dimension. In any case, the present analysis prompts an intellectual approach that regards his score and his interpretations as complementary means to work out, designate and realise the musical idea that lies at the heart of each individual movement. Each of these means have their own intrinsic potential and limitations.

Such a viewpoint is inspired by Brelet's and Ingarden's stress on the temporal difference between the stability of notation and the realisation of music within time. It also tallies with Boulez's description of the premeditation in writing as one pole in a complex appreciation that finally gives priority to the perception of a musical work. Messiaen's generosity towards other interpreters, and his reluctance to elevate his own style of playing as normative, echo the openness for heterogeneity of interpretation theorised by Ingarden. On the one hand, the composer's own recordings are certainly highly valuable, as they impart vital information beyond the mode of symbolisation at work in notation. On the other hand, it would transgress the ontological difference between scores and performances highlighted in the dissertation to elevate recordings as the single most important source type.

Messiaen's recordings and his tuition of other organists helped to establish a loose tradition of interpretation. In Nattiez's words, the composer is a central agent both in the poietic process and the esthetic reception. The organists who have recorded the *Livre d'orgue* are in many cases artists promoted by the composer, or at least guided by him, as well as younger players who studied with people in the former categories. In spite of different temperaments and deviant acoustical conditions, there is a general congruity in the approach among later interpreters.

An early version played by Louis Thiry stands out for its proximity to Messiaen's mesmerising style, including a manifest disregard for some of the exactly notated values. Later players follow Messiaen's call for fidelity to the scores to a higher degree than his advice to add exaggerations and temporal gestures beyond the notation. Such a conclusion begins to answer the question of how different sources have shaped the reception of his works. The artistic

reception of Messiaen's organ works rests heavily on ideals of reproducing the score, together with a written and oral tradition, harking back to the composer, of how his music should be played. While his recordings are a vital source type, later players have rarely used them as a kind of sonic testimony that might warrant a style of playing similar to Messiaen himself.

The question of the relative influence of different source types is a central methodological feature in the study of Deleuze's reception of Messiaen, with or without Guattari. Such an approach represents a departure from previous interpretations of the same topic, which have been prone to consider thematic concurrences between the composer and the philosopher without the kind of close analysis undertaken here. The findings indicate that published interviews were instrumental in disseminating Messiaen's views to a larger audience. Unreferenced quotations and paraphrases in *A Thousand Plateaus* of statements from Samuel's conversations with the composer could be identified. Beside references to a few other authors on Messiaen, the impact of Boulez's portrayal of his teacher's role in musical modernism was conspicuous.

Boulez's mediation is nevertheless a complex matter. In line with his historiography, Deleuze and Guattari approached Messiaen as a vital figure whose serial techniques once managed to set all musical parameters free, before music could move on towards a rhizomatic aesthetics. At the same time, Boulez's analysis of Wagner's *Ring* cycle brought together concepts of a non-pulsed temporality, rhythmic characters, melodic landscapes and colours. These connections could be shown to shape approaches to Messiaen that venture beyond a Boulezian gaze.

These more independent links enabled the employment of Messiaen's discourse on birdsong in Deleuze's and Guattari's musically influenced vision of counterpoint and landscapes in nature and human interaction. At a later stage, Deleuze had obviously studied Messiaen's notion of rhythmic characters, and brought it into his analysis of rhythm and colour in Francis Bacon's triptychs. On a more general level, Deleuze's employment of ideas from Messiaen was clearly facilitated by a common post-Bergsonian approach to time, which the two also shared with Boulez.

In contrast to apparent trails from Messiaen's interviews, his musical works left scarce traces in Deleuze's thinking. The exception is *Chronochromie*, which was brought to the philosopher's seminar at Vincennes by the composer Criton. Incidentally, the set of techniques and themes in this orchestral work mirrors Boulez's conceptual links between a non-pulsed temporality, rhythmic characters and landscapes. *Visions de l'Amen* is the other example of a work mentioned by Deleuze, a circumstance that might stem from having heard the music, or from its prominent role in Goléa's published interview book.

These findings provide evidence that writings were much more significant than compositions in Deleuze's philosophical reception of Messiaen. This case study thereby reinforces a view of writing as an essential feature, rather than an auxiliary activity, in the composer's dissemination of his artistic vision. At the

same time, it indicates that public recognition of Messiaen's person and ideas could arise independently of his music in itself.

In spite of the primacy of written sources unravelled in the third case study, its outcome does not necessarily support prevalent interpretations of a "tyranny of the author" at work in the reception of Messiaen. Deleuze and Guattari were perspicuous enough to disregard the composer's philosophically crude descriptions of having attained mimetic authenticity in the musical employment of birdsong. The analysis reveals them to turn these compositional techniques into an exemplary case of a general dialectic between deconstruction and reconstruction of extant materials in artistic creativity. In doing so, they in fact anticipate later musicological findings of how Messiaen relied on recordings of birdsong, and how he transformed melodic cells into new musical structures in his compositions. *A Thousand Plateaus* is thus, below the surface, an early instance of circumventing authorial intentionality and opening Messiaen's music to new approaches.

In such a retrospective light, Deleuze and Guattari herald the creativity of recent musicological attempts in complementing perspectives in modernist composers' own discourse. The case studies in this dissertation have sought to take such approaches further. They all seek to widen knowledge on intersections between different roles in Messiaen's activity through close attention to his statements and writings. Their common answer to the question how a clear distance can enable new investigations is to scrutinise such primary sources as thoroughly as possible, thereby allowing them to generate new approaches, when confronted by other theoretical perspectives.

Contextualisation is a central methodological aspect, as it gives clearer contours to Messiaen's ideas, including their degree of dependency and originality in relation to other modernist composers. Distance is thus an aspect that in many cases in fact brings the scholar closer to the object of study. Messiaen's theorizing is together with his experience in performance, and a whole range of further activities, areas that will continue to elicit novel studies. There are still many sources to interpret, more to learn about his context and his way of integrating lessons from these activities into his compositions. A time that generously recognizes the value of musicological scrutiny of an increasing number of roles will probably make Messiaen appear ever more composite. Potentially future generations may understand him so much better than he understood himself, because he was dependent on intellectual predispositions all too ready to emphasise ideals of unity, coherence and rationality in a composer. Messiaen had such qualities, of course, but he was kaleidoscopic and more composite than most of his colleagues. Musicology is gradually approaching a similar heterogeneity in its methods, and this is promising.

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## Appendix: Original publications





**Universal neumes: Chant theory in Messiaen's aesthetics**  
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# Universal Neumes: Chant Theory in Messiaen's Aesthetics

JONAS LUNDBLAD

**Abstract** Gregorian chant exerted a pivotal influence on Olivier Messiaen's spiritual and musical universe. Scholars have noted his theological preference for this repertoire and its central role in his organ playing, and have observed how some of Messiaen's melodies contain obvious traces from chants. Recent analytical work has ventured further and shown how plainchant in fact served as a melodic and formal matrix behind the composer's musical language. This article raises the additional claim that Messiaen's employment of plainchant rested upon an idiosyncratic and questionable – but largely coherent – theory of neumes as a more or less universal feature in music. A quasi-archaeological reconstruction proves necessary to reconstruct this conception from the composer's fragmentary and enigmatic statements. The article investigates Messiaen's readings of Vincent d'Indy and Dom André Mocquereau, including ideas from Hugo Riemann, showing that rhythm is a most central element in their similar connections between chant and freedom of expressivity in contemporary music. All in all, chant theory is highlighted as a vital element in analyses of Messiaen's own music, as well as a theoretical framework that explains many of the composer's seemingly eclectic connections between different repertoires.

It is both evident and uncontested that Gregorian chant exerted a central influence on Olivier Messiaen's characteristic universe. A substantial body of research has discussed what *kind* of influence it exerted, and yet this question remains anything but settled. Theologically inclined commentators have been keen to gloss on the composer's conviction that plainsong is the only truly liturgical music.<sup>1</sup> Messiaen's personal fondness for undertaking organ improvisations on chants further situates the significance of chant in such a setting.<sup>2</sup> It is Messiaen's liturgical predilection for Gregorian

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<sup>1</sup> As professed in a 1977 lecture under the rubric 'Liturgical Music': 'There is only one: *plainsong*. Only plainsong possesses all at once the purity, the joy, the lightness necessary for the soul's flight toward Truth.' Olivier Messiaen, *Lecture at Notre-Dame*, trans. Timothy J. Tikker (Paris: Alphonse Leduc, 2001), 5.

<sup>2</sup> Messiaen said that playing for Sunday Vespers 'afforded me one of my greatest joys – improvising on Gregorian themes'. Almut Rössler, 'Conversation with Olivier Messiaen on December 16, 1983, in Paris', Almut Rössler, *Contributions to the Spiritual World of Olivier Messiaen*, trans. Barbara Nagg and Nancy Poland (Duisburg: Gilles & Francke, 1986; originally published as *Beiträge zur geistigen Welt Olivier Messiaens* (Duisburg: Gilles & Francke, 1984)), 117–44 (p. 138).

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chant that inspires, for example, Wolfgang Bretschneider's claim that, 'The image of his life and creativity, his convictions and his spirituality would remain a fragment without this "extraordinary treasure".'<sup>3</sup>

Such theological or liturgical aspects contrast with more technical approaches. Jason Hardink has suggested that, 'Messiaen was the first composer to assimilate the language of Gregorian chant and feature it in composition in much the same way as we speak of other composers absorbing folk idioms into their compositional style.'<sup>4</sup> Messiaen's method was, however, certainly not unprecedented in this regard. On the contrary, organist composers and mentors such as Charles-Marie Widor, Marcel Dupré and Charles Tournemire had done the same in some of their works. Nevertheless, Hardink's verdict raises the question of whether Messiaen's language is permeated with chant to a degree beyond that of his predecessors.

A comment from Harry Halbreich appears to resolve tensions between such different viewpoints: 'Plainchant occupies a unique place among Messiaen's sources of inspiration. It is the only source whose impact is as much spiritual as material.'<sup>5</sup> The composer's multivalent use of Gregorian melodies largely proves him right. David Lowell Nelson has categorized Messiaen's different compositional procedures and shows how he sometimes cites plainchant melodies for semantic theological purposes, sometimes only paraphrases them within a musical language that resembles chant.<sup>6</sup> As a consequence, explanations of chant's influence must note its impact on several distinct levels.

Messiaen himself provides no unequivocal support for plainchant's ostensibly unique role. A preliminary version of his treatise *Technique de mon langage musical* names plainsong and Debussy as the two most influential sources behind his music.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>3</sup> 'Das Bild seines Lebens und Schaffens, seiner Überzeugungen und seiner Spiritualität bliebe ohne diesen "außergewöhnlichen Schatz" Fragment.' Wolfgang Bretschneider, "'Le plain-chant – source de toute notre musique occidentale": Der Cantus Gregorianus bei Olivier Messiaen', *La cité céleste: Olivier Messiaen zum Gedächtnis: Dokumentation einer Symposienreihe*, ed. Christine Wassermann Beirão, Thomas Daniel Schlee and Elmar Budde (Berlin: Weidler, 2006), 139–54 (p. 139). See, in a similar vein, Dieter Buwen, 'Gregorianik im Werk Messiaens', *Musik und Kirche*, 71 (2001) 349–55; and Dorothee Bauer, *Olivier Messiaens Livre du Saint Sacrement* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2015), 104: 'Zum anderen ist die Gregorianik für Messiaen untrennbar mit der Liturgie verbunden' ('On the other hand, Gregorian chant is for Messiaen inseparably linked with the liturgy').

<sup>4</sup> Jason M. Hardink, 'Messiaen and Plainchant' (DMA dissertation, Rice University, 2006), 3.

<sup>5</sup> 'Le plain-chant occupe une place unique parmi les sources d'inspiration de Messiaen. C'est la seule dont l'impact soit autant d'ordre spirituel que matériel.' Harry Halbreich, *L'Œuvre d'Olivier Messiaen* (Paris: Fayard, 2008), 173. Reflecting Hardink's argument above, Halbreich compares Messiaen's employment of chant to Bartók's integration of folk music. *Ibid.*, 174.

<sup>6</sup> 'It is possible to find music that resembles chant in many of Messiaen's works. The spectrum of chant influences includes the composer's own melodies that have some features of chant, melodies that may resemble a specific chant, and specific chants that are either quoted or paraphrased and labelled in the score.' David Lowell Nelson, 'An Analysis of Olivier Messiaen's Chant Paraphrases' (Ph.D. dissertation, Northwestern University, 1992), 7–8.

<sup>7</sup> Olivier Messiaen, Dossier sur *Technique de mon langage musical* (1941–2), Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, RES VMA MS-1540 (6). For Messiaen, plainchant is the common term for all liturgical singing in the Western (Catholic) church. He holds the Roman (Gregorian) tradition to be the single lasting form of an earlier multitude of plainchant traditions. See Olivier Messiaen, *Traité de rythme, de couleur, et d'ornithologie*, 7 vols. (Paris: Alphonse Leduc, 1994–2002), iv (1997), 7.

The printed version juxtaposes influences, without explanation of their interrelationship, from 'birds, Russian music, Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*, plainchant, Hindu rhythms'.<sup>8</sup> It would thus seem that Messiaen certainly drew heavily on plainchant, but as one of several distinct sources.

A literal reading of such statements can reinforce tendencies to assume a fragmentary disorderliness in Messiaen's creative reception of musical, literary and theological sources. Not least the composer's colossal and collage-like *Traité de rythme, de couleur, et d'ornithologie* is frequently found wanting in clarity and coherence. The absence of discursive explanations certainly makes it difficult to find underlying connections between its encyclopedic catalogues of seemingly disparate topics.<sup>9</sup> Bretschneider noted that plainchant for Messiaen is 'the source of all our Western music', but unfortunately he eschews further investigation of this claim. Bretschneider's understanding that chant's liturgical and symbolic significance would stand opposed to 'purely technical and aesthetic perspectives' seems to reinforce a further conviction that Messiaen's outlook forms a mosaic of associations rather than a comprehensive theory.<sup>10</sup> In a similar fashion, Hardink discusses notable elements in Messiaen's approach, but provides no framework for studying their interconnections, even though he calls the composer an 'intensively systematic artist'.<sup>11</sup>

This article ventures beyond the view that plainchant serves as one of several unrelated influences (whether primarily spiritual or material) on Messiaen. The point is not to discard other aspects, but to reveal how technical and semantic employments of chant melodies relate to a more fundamental and analytical approach to plainchant

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Following Messiaen's own terminology, the terms Gregorian chant, plainchant and plainsong are here used as synonyms.

<sup>8</sup> Olivier Messiaen, *The Technique of my Musical Language*, trans. John Satterfield (Paris: Alphonse Leduc, 1956; rev. edn 2002; originally published as *Technique de mon langage musical* (Paris: Alphonse Leduc, 1944)), 7. Cf. Robert Sherlaw Johnson, *Messiaen* (London: Dent, 1975; 2nd edn, 1989), 21: 'The most important sources of Messiaen's melodic patterns are plainchant and, since 1941, birdsong.'

<sup>9</sup> Characteristic of Messiaen's thought in the *Traité* is, as noted by Stefan Keym, 'den oftmals enzyklopädischen, katalogartigen, im Detail sehr genauen, zugleich aber bisweilen erstaunlich unsystematischen, fragmentarischen und generell wenig diskursiven Ansatz [...] Wer in diesem Traktat umfassende Werkanalysen und eine erschöpfende Darlegung der einzelnen Aspekte von Messiaens musikalischer Sprache sucht, mag angesichts des sprunghaften, offenen Charakters vieler Kapitel enttäuscht sein' ('the often encyclopaedic, catalogue-like approach, very precise in detail, but at the same time every so often astonishingly unsystematic, fragmentary and generally scantily discursive [...] Whoever seeks comprehensive work analyses and an exhaustive explication of the individual aspects of Messiaen's musical language in this treatise may be disappointed, in view of the desultory, open character of many chapters'). Keym, 'Olivier Messiaen: *Traité de rythme, de couleur, et d'ornithologie* (1949–1992), en 7 tomes, Paris, Alphonse Leduc, 1994–2002', *Musiktheorie*, 19 (2004), 269–74 (pp. 273–4). See also Christopher Dingle, *Messiaen's Final Works* (Abingdon: Ashgate, 2013), 11: 'While he provides ample information on what material is actually in the music, Messiaen says little about how his techniques fit into the broader scale of composition. It is easy to be dazzled by his lists, categorizations and explanations and, as a consequence, fail to see the analytical wood for the trees.'

<sup>10</sup> 'Fernab von jeder rein technischen oder ästhetischen Betrachtungsweise'. Bretschneider, 'Le plainchant – source de toute notre musique occidentale', 145; and cf. *ibid.*, 139, 148, 154.

<sup>11</sup> Hardink, 'Messiaen and Plainchant', 3.

in the composer's writings. It retraces the roots of a decisively theoretical conception of plainchant that has remained unrecognized, or at least has not been thematized as a comprehensive vision. In order to remedy the fragmentary nature of Messiaen's own writings, the first aim is to undertake a kind of 'intellectual archaeology' of the composer's readings on chant, in order to see how he draws upon ideas in previous literature.<sup>12</sup> Beyond the range of sources studied in Yves Balmer, Thomas Lacôte and Christopher Brent Murray's work on Messiaen as borrower,<sup>13</sup> this study works primarily with the texts he read, analysed and used in his writings.

The task of identifying relevant sources would have been cumbersome without recent findings by Daniel K. S. Walden and Dom Patrick Hala. They have revealed how the musical aesthetics of Dom André Mocquereau – Messiaen's most cherished authority on chant – was developed in conversation with Vincent d'Indy and Hugo Riemann.<sup>14</sup> The indisputable influence of Mocquereau on Messiaen's understanding of Gregorian chant here establishes a broader framework that sheds light on Messiaen's dependence on a late Romantic trajectory rarely considered in studies of his sources.<sup>15</sup>

In addition to historical studies of such connections, analytical work has lately instilled a heightened awareness of plainchant's far-reaching impact on Messiaen's musical syntax. In one of the most significant recent contributions to Messiaen scholarship, Balmer, Lacôte and Murray provide vital clues. Their reading primarily of *Technique de mon langage musical* unveils a distinct technique of *melodic lending* hidden behind its statements that, 'Plainchant is a mine of rare and expressive melodic contours' and that, 'We shall make use of them [the contours], forgetting their modes and rhythms for the use of ours.'<sup>16</sup> Their further analysis reveals how Messiaen typically retains melodic shapes and rhythmic characters from chant melodies, but disintegrates their actual melody and harmony. In other words, *contours* from chant

<sup>12</sup> As it is put at the outset of a valuable concordance to Messiaen's sources on plainchant: 'In order wholly to understand and evaluate the formation of Messiaen's unique technical language [...] it is imperative to examine how he was influenced and borrowed (often quite heavily) from a range of sources.' Gareth Healey, *Messiaen's Musical Techniques: The Composer's View and Beyond* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 13.

<sup>13</sup> 'Our research is based on the simultaneous exploration of three immense corpora: Messiaen's music; the body of music he loved, played, and analyzed; and his writings.' Yves Balmer, Thomas Lacôte and Christopher Brent Murray, 'Messiaen the Borrower: Recomposing Debussy through the Deforming Prism', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 69 (2016), 699–791 (p. 704).

<sup>14</sup> Daniel K. S. Walden, 'Dom Mocquereau's Theories of Rhythm and Romantic Musical Aesthetics', *Études grégoriennes*, 42 (2015), 125–50; Patrick Hala, *Solesmes et les musiciens*, 2 vols. (Solesmes: Éditions de Solesmes, 2017–20), i: *La Schola Cantorum* (2017).

<sup>15</sup> As exceptions, influences from d'Indy and Riemann are studied in James Mittelstadt, 'Resonance: Unifying Factor in Messiaen's *Accords spéciaux*', *Journal of Musicological Research*, 28 (2009), 30–60; in Tobias Janz, 'Messiaen's Mozart und die "Théorie de l'accentuation"', *Olivier Messiaen: Texte, Analysen, Zeugnisse*, ed. Wolfgang Rathert, Herbert Schneider and Karl Anton Rickenbacher, 2 vols. (Hildesheim: Olms, 2012–13), ii: *Das Werk im historischen und analytischen Kontext* (2013), 219–37; and in Wolfgang Rathert, 'Messiaen und die Geschichte', *ibid.*, 295–307.

<sup>16</sup> Messiaen, *The Technique of my Musical Language*, 36. See Yves Balmer, Thomas Lacôte and Christopher Brent Murray, *Le modèle et l'invention: Messiaen et la technique de l'emprunt* (Lyons: Symétrie, 2017), 29–54.

melodies pass through the 'deforming prism' of his own harmonic modes and are reproduced with new pitches.<sup>17</sup>

Recognition of this technique allows Balmer, Lacôte and Murray to identify many previously unrecognized chant models in Messiaen's music. They can therefore argue that chant functions as a melodic and formal matrix for the composer's own style.<sup>18</sup> The melodic motifs in Gregorian neumes are pivotal to the melodic contours that lie at the heart of such processes.<sup>19</sup> Messiaen regards chant neumes as an archetypal set of melodic contours with universal significance, applicable to all kinds of music: to apply a certain 'neumatic lens' is Messiaen's primary method for analysing melodies within virtually every conceivable musical language.<sup>20</sup>

The composer's own 1977 *Lecture at Notre-Dame* offers a promising, albeit enigmatic, vantage point for witnessing applications of this approach. Messiaen claims that, 'The marvellous thing about plainsong is its neumes,' and goes on to argue that, 'The neumes are melodic formulae [...] also found in the songs of birds: the Garden Warbler, the Black-Cap, the Song-Thrush, the Field Lark, the Robin, all sing neumes. And the admirable quality of the neume is the rhythmic suppleness which it engenders.' This suppleness supposedly emerged in Greek and Hindu rhythms, but Messiaen also claims that it was this quality that 'Chopin tried to rediscover in his rubato'.<sup>21</sup>

The suggestion that neumes can be found even in birdsong is baffling at first. However, Wai-Ling Cheong has shown that the breakthrough of Messiaen's distinct *style oiseaux* around 1952–3 followed in the wake of deeper studies in chant and Greek metrics. She points out how these interconnections continued to shape the *Traité*, where analyses of melodic motifs in birdsong are replete with detailed references to different neumes (see Figure 1).<sup>22</sup> Cheong gives tentative explanations of Messiaen's

<sup>17</sup> Messiaen, *The Technique of my Musical Language*, 35. For earlier approaches, see Sherlaw Johnson, *Messiaen*, 20–1; Anne Le Forestier, *Olivier Messiaen: L'Ascension*, Cahiers d'analyse et de formation musicale, 1 (Paris: Alphonse Leduc, 1984); and Hardink, 'Messiaen and Plainchant', 40–6.

<sup>18</sup> For Messiaen, 'Le plain-chant constitue en premier lieu une matrice mélodique et formelle, permettant la mise en œuvre de son propre langage intervallique et modal, tout en s'éloignant d'une technique de composition motivique et de travail thématique' ('First, plainchant constitutes a melodic and formal matrix, allowing the implementation of its own intervallic and modal language, while moving away from a technique of composition based on motifs and thematic work'). Balmer, Lacôte and Murray, *Le modèle et l'invention*, 314.

<sup>19</sup> For an emphatic but somewhat too general categorization of Messiaen's early language as a 'style neumatique', see François Sabatier, 'Olivier Messiaen et Charles Tournemire: Autour du chant grégorien', *L'orgue*, 283 (2008), 37–48 (p. 44).

<sup>20</sup> 'Cette méthode d'identification de neumes au sein d'une mélodie [...] est élevée par Messiaen au rang de procédure analytique majeure, efficiente pour tout répertoire. Cette conception revient à envisager le neume comme un "contour mélodique"' ('This method of identifying neumes within a melody [...] is elevated by Messiaen to the rank of a major analytical procedure, applicable to any repertoire. This conception amounts to considering the neume as a "melodic contour"'). Balmer, Lacôte and Murray, *Le modèle et l'invention*, 44.

<sup>21</sup> Messiaen, *Lecture at Notre-Dame*, 5.

<sup>22</sup> As she argues, 'The extent to which neumes and Greek rhythms fill the main body of *Traité V* leaves us with hardly any doubt about their importance in Messiaen's mature birdsong.' Wai-Ling Cheong, 'Neumes and Greek Rhythms: The Breakthrough in Messiaen's Birdsong', *Acta musicologica*, 80 (2008), 1–32 (p. 8). See also Rob Schultz, 'Melodic Contour and Nonretrogradable Structure in the Birdsong of Olivier Messiaen', *Music Theory Spectrum*, 30 (2008), 89–137 (p. 89).

Figure 1 Messiaen's neumatic analysis of his *La fauvette des jardins*, p. 37, last 7 bars, based on Messiaen, *Traité*, v/1, 395–6. Image reproduced from Wai-Ling Cheong, 'Neumes and Greek Rhythms: The Breakthrough in Messiaen's Birdsong', *Acta musicologica*, 80 (2008), 1–32 (p. 10).

rationale behind this idiosyncratic nexus, among them a suggested religious motive to employ the widest possible range of techniques in his offerings to the Catholic faith.<sup>23</sup>

The second aim of this article is to complement the findings of Balmer, Lacôte and Murray on the one hand, and those of Cheong on the other. They have already helped to establish a 'neumatic lens' at the heart of Messiaen's method of analysis and shown how it functions as a creative matrix in his own language. The following discussion adds the further claim that these aspects are rooted in a speculative theory of neumes. An archaeological examination of antecedents in Riemann, d'Indy and Mocquereau explains Messiaen's universalism concerning neumes, including both expressive ideals and the method of using chant as a prism for analysing music of all kinds. Speculative dimensions in this particular line of thought lead Messiaen to fundamental musical principles and (inspired by them) the creative employment of chant that eventually distinguishes his approach from lessons first learnt from teachers and mentors such as Dupré, Maurice Emmanuel and Tournemire.<sup>24</sup> This study sets out to reconstruct Messiaen's theoretical stance and the now largely

<sup>23</sup> 'Having steeped himself in the musical portrayal of birdsong that embraces both neumes and Greek rhythms, he may have found himself empowered to draw freely on the wealth of techniques and materials accumulated over the years in creating his finest offerings to the Catholic faith, which he had from the very beginning of his career set up as the most important mission of his music.' Cheong, 'Neumes and Greek Rhythms', 30; and cf. *ibid.*, 25–30.

<sup>24</sup> The aim here must be limited to an investigation of how Messiaen draws upon Riemann, d'Indy and Mocquereau, rather than to provide in-depth comparisons with other French predecessors.



forlorn trajectory of historical musical aesthetics upon which it builds. The primary ambition is understanding rather than critique, which is not to be confused with some assumed premiss that the theory would have lasting validity. On the contrary, many assumptions and implications cannot be sustained in a contemporary light, a circumstance that, however, has little bearing on Messiaen's idiosyncratic use of it in response to topical developments in music.

The article first surveys Messiaen's chapters on plainchant in the fourth volume of his *Traité*, with an emphasis on his reception of Dom Mocquereau and neumes. This task permits a further reconstruction of links between Mocquereau, d'Indy, Riemann and Messiaen. Having established biographical and intellectual connections between these authors, the article proceeds to situate Mocquereau's and Messiaen's stance towards earlier conceptions of 'free rhythm' in the French Romantic revival of Gregorian chant. A discussion of historiography then forms a central part of the overall claim for a distinct theory of chant in Messiaen's writings, including the further argument that chant is a categorically different source from other influences, such as Greek or Hindu metrics. Indeed, a schema of music's evolution throughout history, imbibed from Mocquereau and d'Indy, here emerges as a central but often overlooked category in Messiaen's aesthetics.<sup>25</sup> Within this outlook, the melodic element in plainchant grows out of ancient rhythm, before harmony eventually emerges from this dual rhythmic-melodic nexus.

Having touched upon how d'Indy's vision of history influenced Messiaen's early career and humanism, the article reconstructs the implications of arguments for the historical and systematic primacy of rhythm. Such a tenet combines ontological and mathematical speculation, an ecological basis for music and a correspondence between music and dance that is of immediate relevance for Mocquereau's performance editions of chant. This ideal rests on a fluctuation between *arsis* and *thesis*, notions that connect Messiaen with a sensitivity for expression that is rooted in Riemann's romanticism. After a discussion of these links, the final section of the article retraces the basis in Mocquereau's writings for the novel theory of sound represented by Messiaen's *Neumes rythmiques* and a similar integration of rhythm, harmony and sound colour in some late works.

The multilayered theory of chant reconstructed here is conspicuously kaleidoscopic. Indeed, its fundamental logic suggests that neumes not only lie at the heart of human and avian music, but also constitute a universal element in music. The complexity of this vision opens vistas that allow numerous hidden links to be traced between chant theory and many different aspects of Messiaen's own music. The ambition here must be restricted to a reconstruction of the theory itself, together with references to compositions on which it exerts a palpable influence.

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A reconsideration of connections with Emmanuel and Tournemire would also be specifically pertinent in the light of the theory presented in this article.

<sup>25</sup> Rathert's 'Messiaen und die Geschichte' is an important pioneer study of the topic, which, however, has had a limited impact on anglophone scholarship.

## Neumes in *Traité* and the nexus of influences behind Messiaen's theory

The first challenge is to survey Messiaen's principal text on chant and to set its content in context. During his lifetime, remarks on Gregorian chant appeared in fragmentary form throughout *Technique de mon langage musical*, as well as in various interviews and lectures, but these sources fail to formulate a clear-cut conception. Two chapters in the fourth volume of the posthumous *Traité* contain Messiaen's most detailed and significant exposition of plainchant.<sup>26</sup> These chapters have been helpfully annotated and incisively – but only selectively – studied and compared with other sources, but their broader aesthetic significance remains largely undiscussed.<sup>27</sup> This dearth of scholarly interest echoes Messiaen's limited success during his teaching at the Paris Conservatoire in conveying his vision of Gregorian chant. Students have described how he stressed knowledge of plainchant as a significant step in a composer's education, as well as its relevance to modern music. The teaching sought to reveal in this repertoire 'a survival of fundamental principles from Greek metrics and a distillation of all possible melodic movements'.<sup>28</sup> As this comment indicates, Messiaen treated chant as a kind of universal melodic matrix that simultaneously provided links back to forlorn teachings on rhythm.<sup>29</sup>

Demonstrating how a 'distillation' of plainchant has provided a basis for Western music is a central preoccupation in the first chapter of the *Traité* to discuss chant. Messiaen's main thesis is stated already on the first page: 'The orthography of plainchant is neumatic, that is to say, it employs the grouping of sounds called *neumes*. These melismas [...] we find in birdsong and in all music.'<sup>30</sup> He then enumerates common neumes, demonstrating how their melodic patterns are contained in modern music. For example, having presented the *torculus* with its three distinct sounds (down, up, down, with the first and third pitches never identical), Messiaen finds this pattern

<sup>26</sup> In line with Cheong's remarks on the relevance of neumes and Greek rhythms for Messiaen's development in the 1950s, it is worth noting that his work on these topics for the *Traité* stem from 1949 and the ensuing years. On the genesis and later editing of the *Traité* by Messiaen's widow, Yvonne Loriod, see Olivier Messiaen, *Music and Color: Conversation with Claude Samuel*, trans. E. Thomas Glasow (Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 1994; originally published as *Musique et couleur: Nouveaux entretiens avec Claude Samuel* (Paris: Pierre Belfond, 1986)), 39–40; Stefan Keym, *Untersuchungen zur musiktheatralen Struktur und Semantik von Olivier Messiaens Saint François d'Assise* (Hildesheim: Olms, 2002), 233; and Jean Boivin, 'Genesis and Reception of Olivier Messiaen's *Traité de rythme, de couleur, et d'ornithologie*, 1949–1992: Toward a New Reading of the Composer's Writings', *Messiaen Perspectives 2: Techniques, Influence and Reception*, ed. Christopher Dingle and Robert Fallon (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 341–61.

<sup>27</sup> Previous discussions appear in Bretschneider, 'Le plaint-chant', 147–9; Healey, *Messiaen's Musical Techniques*, 13–20; Balmer, Lacôte and Murray, *Le modèle et l'invention*, 42–52; and Stephen Broad, 'Recontextualising Messiaen's Early Career', 2 vols. (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Oxford, 2005), i, 137–8; and Hardink, 'Messiaen and Plainchant', 12–25, 47–50.

<sup>28</sup> 'Ceci n'est nulle part aussi clair que dans le plain-chant, où Messiaen relève à la fois une survivance des principes fondamentaux de la métrique grecque et un concentré de tous les mouvements mélodiques possibles.' Jean Boivin, *La classe de Messiaen* (Paris: C. Bourgois, 1995), 207.

<sup>29</sup> On chant in Messiaen's teaching, see also Messiaen, *Music and Color*, 176.

<sup>30</sup> 'L'orthographe de plain-chant est neumatique. C'est-à-dire qu'il utilise des groupements de sons intitulés *neumes*. Ces mélismes [...] nous retrouvons dans le chant des oiseaux et dans toute musique.' Messiaen, *Traité*, iv, 7.

Figure 2 Messiaen, *Traité*, iv, 9. © Copyright Editions Musicales Alphonse Leduc. Used by kind permission of Hal Leonard Europe Limited.

in the opening right-hand figure of Debussy's 'Reflets dans l'eau' from *Images* (see Figure 2).<sup>31</sup> In a similar fashion, the ornamented version of the second theme in the Andante from Mozart's 'Jupiter' Symphony is seen to duplicate the movement of a *climacus resupinus*: three descending sounds and a final note one step higher than the first (see Figure 3).<sup>32</sup> In its final edited form, Messiaen's chapter concludes with an appendix that gives further 'examples of Neumes that inspired the great Musicians'.<sup>33</sup> Without explaining the analytical method on which these excerpts rest, examples of each neume are found in melodic themes drawn from modern music. Messiaen finds, for example, the *scandicus flexus* – three ascending notes, and a final descending interval – in eight works (see Figure 4).<sup>34</sup>

Climacus resupinus :

La variante ornementale du 2<sup>e</sup> thème, dans l'Andante de la Symphonie « *Jupiter* » de Mozart :

violons est une succession de Climacus resupinus.

Figure 3 Messiaen, *Traité*, iv, 10. © Copyright Editions Musicales Alphonse Leduc. Used by kind permission of Hal Leonard Europe Limited.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>33</sup> 'Annexe: Voici quelques exemples de Neumes qui ont inspiré les grands Musiciens.' *Ibid.*, 35–40. On the appendix, see Balmer, Lacôte and Murray, *Le modèle et l'invention*, 47–52.

<sup>34</sup> Messiaen, *Traité*, iv, 36.

*SCANDICUS FLEXUS* :

MOUSSORGSKY (Khovantchina - Scène du Prince Golitsyne)		STRAWINSKY ( <i>Sacre du          Printemps</i> )	
MESSIAEN* (8 <sup>e</sup> Prélude)		MOZART ( <i>Flûte enchantée</i> - air de Sarastro -)	
MOZART (id. Sarastro)		BERLIOZ ( <i>Chanson du          Roi de Thulé</i> )	
BEETHOVEN ( <i>Sonate pathétique</i> - Andante -)		GRIEG ( <i>Per Gynst</i> - chanson de Solveig -)	

Figure 4 Messiaen, *Traité*, iv, 36. © Copyright Editions Musicales Alphonse Leduc. Used by kind permission of Hal Leonard Europe Limited.

The text points out that neumes can move in both conjunct and disjunct intervals. The singular focus on identifying ascending and descending figures in melodies results in an unusual and abstract analysis which completely ignores pitches and harmonic functions. An editorial comment from Yvonne Loriod confirms the centrality of neumes for her late husband but provides no keys to grasp their significance: ‘It is a pity that Olivier Messiaen did not mention the innumerable Neumes from Plain-chant which inspired his works. The reader will find hundreds.’<sup>35</sup> Scholars have noted that ‘Messiaen views these neumes and the musical shapes they represent as an intrinsic, inevitable aspect of Western music’, but the rationale he used in collecting these excerpts has remained perplexing.<sup>36</sup> Only through Balmer, Lacôte and Murray’s analysis of melodic borrowing has it become clear how neumes are treated as melodic motifs, separated from the harmonic framework central to melodies in modern tonality.

The *Traité*’s second chapter regarding chant is more theoretically discerning and sheds further light on Messiaen’s sources and approaches. The impetus, pedagogical background and method of the chapter is clearly stated at the beginning:

<sup>35</sup> ‘Il est dommage qu’Olivier Messiaen n’ait pas cité les innombrables Neumes de Plain-chant qui ont inspiré ses œuvres. Le lecteur en trouvera des centaines.’ Messiaen, *Traité*, iv, 38.

<sup>36</sup> Hardink, ‘Messiaen and Plainchant’, 49–50. On Messiaen’s analysis of his own *Île de Feu 1*, Hardink argues – quite problematically – that, ‘Commentary links his music to neumatic notation, but the connection is not vital to his conception of the music’ (p. 51). With regard to the same phenomenon in *Technique de mon langage musical*, it has been deemed ‘difficult to understand the impetus for these “derivations” if one takes them at face value because, while we can see that Messiaen’s examples are inspired by the basic shape of the “source”, the resulting melodic phrases clearly owe much more to Messiaen’s techniques than they do to the “source” material’. Broad, ‘Recontextualising Messiaen’s Early Career’, i, 87. For Healey, Messiaen’s compilation of musical examples is ‘highly questionable’: ‘The only real value of this section is to highlight the composers in which Messiaen was interested.’ Healey, *Messiaen’s Musical Techniques*, 17.

Just as there are several concepts of time, so there are several concepts of rhythm. The theory of *arsis* and *thesis* is one of these concepts. It is, without a doubt, the simplest, the most obvious, perhaps the most specifically human [...] Having often tried to explain to my students the admirable work, in two volumes, that Dom Mocquereau devoted to plainchant and Gregorian rhythm – the work entitled *Le nombre musical grégorien* – I have always found that the first section of the first volume, ‘The Origin of Rhythm’, however luminously thought out, written as it is in an easy and agreeable style, and furnished with abundant examples, was extremely difficult to penetrate, even after renewed reading and meditation. So for my own reading (as for my students), I will attempt to make a summary of the 11 chapters by Dom Mocquereau dedicated to rhythm. All of that which follows is thus a condensation of Dom Mocquereau’s thought, with ample citations of the original – and, where necessary, my [own] grain of salt.<sup>37</sup>

Messiaen also discusses the work of Dom Joseph Gajard (1885–1972) and Auguste Le Guennant (1881–1972), but, as proclaimed in the quotation above, their mentor Dom André Mocquereau (1849–1930) is the main source of influence on his own understanding of Gregorian chant.<sup>38</sup> Even the initial chapter on chant relies heavily on both annotated and hidden quotations from this ‘greatest theoretician of plainchant’.<sup>39</sup> From this endorsement of Mocquereau, Gareth Healey has inferred that, ‘Messiaen saw his teaching as an extension of the Solesmes tradition to which he so firmly aligned himself.’<sup>40</sup> Such a stance is, however, now too indistinct, in the light of increasing scholarly attention to disagreements between leading agents within the Solesmes community.

At Solesmes, Mocquereau had initially collected and edited sources to establish a firm historical basis for broader aesthetic ideas proposed by his mentor Dom Joseph

<sup>37</sup> ‘Comme il y a plusieurs concepts du temps, il y a plusieurs concepts du rythme. La théorie de l’*arsis* et de la *thesis* est un de ces concepts. C’est sans doute le plus simple, le plus évident, peut-être le plus spécifiquement humain [...] Ayant souvent essayé d’expliquer à mes élèves l’admirable ouvrage en 2 tomes que Dom Mocquereau a consacré au plain-chant et à la rythmique Grégorienne – ouvrage intitulé: “*Le Nombre musical Grégorien*” – j’ai toujours constaté que la 1<sup>re</sup> partie du 1<sup>er</sup> tome: “l’origine du rythme” – pourtant lumineusement pensée, écrite dans un style aisé, agréable, et pourvue d’exemples abondants – était extrêmement difficile à pénétrer, même après lectures et méditations renouvelées. Aussi vais-je tenter de faire pour mes lectures (comme pour mes élèves), un résumé des onze chapitres que Dom Mocquereau a dédiés au rythme. Tout ce qui va suivre est donc un condensé de la pensée de Dom Mocquereau, avec de larges citations de l’original – et, s’il y a lieu, mon grain de sel.’ Messiaen, *Traité*, iv, 43.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 26–32, 52–6. See Dom Joseph Gajard, *Notions sur la rythmique grégorienne*, 2nd edn (Paris: Desclée, 1944), and Auguste Le Guennant, *Précis de rythmique grégorienne, d’après les principes de Solesmes* (Paris: Institut Grégorien, 1948). It is notable that Maurice Duruflé based his reception of chant on Dom Gajard, filtered through Le Guennant, who served as director of the Institut Grégorien de Paris; see Ronald Ebrecht, *Duruflé’s Music Considered* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2020), 10.

<sup>39</sup> Messiaen, *Music and Color*, 69. ‘Ma façon de lire le plain-chant, de le jouer, de le chanter [...] correspond aux règles, aux lois de Dom Mocquereau.’ Quoted in Boivin, *La classe de Messiaen*, 207. For a concordance between Mocquereau’s and Messiaen’s texts, see Healey, *Messiaen’s Musical Techniques*, 13–20. Quotations here follow Dom André Mocquereau, *Le nombre musical grégorien: A Study of Gregorian Musical Rhythm*, trans. Aileen Tone, 2 vols. (Paris: Tournai, 1932–51).

<sup>40</sup> Healey, *Messiaen’s Musical Techniques*, 15.

Pothier (1835–1923). As the result of internal conflicts, Mocquereau would eventually be given full responsibility and freedom to shape the course of chant scholarship and performance practice. To strengthen the scholarly standard, he sought to keep up with the latest developments in musicology at the turn of the century. At a time when French Catholicism was entangled in a ‘cultural war’ with secular republicanism, he ‘made every effort to cast himself as a sort of bridge between the monastic community and the aesthetic debates that were electrifying the compositional community of turn-of-the-century France’.<sup>41</sup>

As part of these aspirations, Mocquereau began a significant correspondence in 1896 with Vincent d’Indy (1851–1931), co-founder of the private conservatoire Schola Cantorum in Paris.<sup>42</sup> D’Indy was a strident proponent of a distinct Catholic culture and the foremost public spokesman for a new philosophy of musical education in which renewed attention to Gregorian chant played a significant role. Although commonly dismissed in post-war modernism, towards the end of his life d’Indy was hailed as a ‘bold innovator’ and the ‘uncontested leader of the new school’. Beyond a common confessional identity, Mocquereau could here learn from a figure hailed for ‘*the comprehensive sweep of his ideas*’.<sup>43</sup>

More specifically, Mocquereau read a draft of the rhythm chapter in d’Indy’s treatise *Cours de composition musicale*, which was based on the syllabus at the Schola Cantorum.<sup>44</sup> Mocquereau soon applied its ideas to Gregorian studies, not least in his magnum opus *Le nombre musical grégorien*.<sup>45</sup> Messiaen appears to have read this treatise already during his studies at the Conservatoire.<sup>46</sup> As seen above, his own *Traité* expresses a desire to illuminate and convey Mocquereau’s treatment of ‘the origin of rhythm’: the fruit of Mocquereau’s reading of the *Cours*. At this point, it is noteworthy that Messiaen highlights Mocquereau as a theorist of rhythm, a stance that introduces a turn away from melody as the central element in plainchant.

<sup>41</sup> Walden, ‘Dom Mocquereau’s Theories’, 136. On intersections between social, political and aesthetic aspects of Gregorian chant towards the turn of the century, see Katherine Bergeron, *Decadent Enchantments: The Revival of Gregorian Chant at Solesmes* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998); Jane F. Fulcher, *French Cultural Politics and Music: From the Dreyfus Affair to the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Katharine Ellis, *The Politics of Plainchant in Fin-de-siècle France*, Royal Musical Association Monographs, 20 (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 47–67; and Benedikt Lessmann, ‘Appropriations of Gregorian Chant in Fin-de-siècle French Opera: *Couleur locale* – Message-Opera – Allusion?’, *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 145 (2020), 37–74.

<sup>42</sup> For documents and analyses of contacts between Solesmes and the Schola Cantorum, see Hala, *Solesmes et les musiciens*, vol. i.

<sup>43</sup> Verdicts from Louis de Serres, Louis Laloy and Erik Satie, cited in Brian Hart, ‘Vincent d’Indy and the Development of the French Symphony’, *Music and Letters*, 76 (2006), 237–61 (p. 238). Hart wrote that, ‘D’Indy arguably influenced musical directions in *fin de siècle* France more than any other individual except Debussy’ (*ibid.*, 237).

<sup>44</sup> For correspondence concerning the rhythm chapter, see Hala, *Solesmes et les musiciens*, i, 407–10, 426–31; see also Walden, ‘Dom Mocquereau’s Theories’, 133–5. Quotations from the treatise below follow Vincent d’Indy, *Course in Musical Composition, Volume 1*, trans. and ed. Gail Hilson Woldu (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010).

<sup>45</sup> ‘Pour dom Mocquereau, d’Indy représentait la quintessence de l’intelligence musicale de l’époque.’ Hala, *Solesmes et les musiciens*, i, 407.

<sup>46</sup> Pierrette Mari, *Olivier Messiaen: L’homme et son oeuvre* (Paris: Seghers, 1965), 14.

There is, however, also a vital direct influence from d'Indy's *Cours* to consider.<sup>47</sup> When asked about his inspiration to teach musical analysis, Messiaen pointed out that, 'Since my childhood, I had pored over the composition treatise of Vincent d'Indy [...] That's how musical analysis came into my life.'<sup>48</sup> The method of analysing music from all ages through Gregorian neumes is in fact taken directly from the *Cours*, together with the implication that it makes chant relevant to the creation of new music.<sup>49</sup> D'Indy's analysis of cyclical form in Franck's Violin Sonata notes how three motifs serve as a melodic skeleton or framework – *charpente mélodique* – for the whole piece. He finds the *torculus* neume in all three motifs and holds it to function as a basic thematic cell for the whole sonata (see Figure 5).<sup>50</sup> D'Indy's *charpente mélodique* and the concomitant method of analysis is clearly the model for Messiaen's concept of *contour mélodique*.

A further theoretical connection lies behind this method. As noted in a snub by Camille Saint-Saëns, Hugo Riemann was a vital source for d'Indy's theories.<sup>51</sup> The conception that motifs constitute the most basic building blocks in music is a

<sup>47</sup> A still relevant observation is that, 'Insufficient notice has been taken of the marked similarities between d'Indy and Messiaen, not only in their mature mysticism, but also in their theological cast of mind and mode of existence.' Andrew Thomson, *Vincent d'Indy and his World* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 219. There are obvious similarities between d'Indy's *Cours* and the prominent role of Gregorian chant in composition studies and the renewal of contemporary music. On such traits, see Fernand Biron, *Le chant grégorien dans l'enseignement et les œuvres musicales de Vincent d'Indy* (Ottawa: Les Éditions de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1941).

<sup>48</sup> Messiaen, *Music and Color*, 175. 'Messiaen's use of the technical word *neume* to describe the basic units in his own melodic-rhythmic thought was already current at the Schola Cantorum.' Robin Freeman, 'Trompette d'un ange secret: Olivier Messiaen and the Culture of Ecstasy', *Contemporary Music Review*, 14 (1996), 81–125 (p. 86). On d'Indy's 'neume filter', see Jean Boivin, 'Musical Analysis According to Messiaen: A Critical View of a Most Original Approach', *Olivier Messiaen: Music, Art and Literature*, ed. Christopher Dingle and Nigel Simeone (London: Routledge, 2016), 137–57 (p. 147).

<sup>49</sup> 'L'influence de Vincent d'Indy professeur sur la vie musicale contemporaine laisse entrevoir la valeur intrinsèque de son enseignement, l'excellence de sa méthode d'éducation fondée sur l'étude et l'analyse des œuvres de tous les temps. Cette méthode cependant tire avant tout sa valeur du fait qu'elle remonte aux sources de notre art musical: le chant grégorien.' Biron, *Le chant grégorien*, 24–5. 'D'Indy provided a scheme whereby composers might apply rhythmic principles of Gregorian chant to their music, rendering explicit the possible applications of Gregorian rhythmic principles to classical musical practices that were only implicit in *Le nombre musical*.' Walden, 'Dom Mocquereau's Theories', 131.

<sup>50</sup> Vincent d'Indy, *Cours de composition musicale*, ii/1 (Paris: Durand, 1909), 423–4; cf. d'Indy, *Course*, 73. On the connection between this example and Messiaen, see Balmer, Lacôte and Murray, *Le modèle et l'invention*, 46.

<sup>51</sup> 'Ce qui me met fort à l'aise pour discuter les idées de M. d'Indy, c'est que bien souvent, de son propre aveu, ces idées ne sont pas les siennes, mais celles de l'Allemand Hugo Riemann' ('What makes me at ease discussing Mr. d'Indy's ideas is that very often, by his own admission, these ideas are not his, but those of the German Hugo Riemann'). Camille Saint-Saëns, *Les idées de M. Vincent d'Indy* (Paris: Pierre Lafitte, 1919), 11. Notable here is Saint-Saëns's remark that the method of applying Greek metrics to the performance of modern repertoire was also imported from the 'other side of the Rhine'. Writings by the Greek philologist Rudolf Westphal first inspired Jules Combarieu, whose 1897 texts are important precursors to d'Indy and Messiaen. See Jules Combarieu, *Études de philologie musicale: Théorie du rythme dans la composition moderne d'après la doctrine antique, suivie d'un Essai sur l'archéologie musicale au XIXe siècle et le problème de l'origine des neumes* (Paris: Picard, 1897).

le premier et le plus pur modèle de l'emploi *cyclique* des thèmes dans la forme Sonate : en effet, indépendamment des idées musicales appartenant en propre à chacune des pièces de cette œuvre, *trois motifs* générateurs ou conducteurs spéciaux ( $x$ ,  $y$ ,  $z$ ), successivement exposés, participent à la construction de ce véritable monument musical, auquel ils servent en quelque sorte de « charpente mélodique » :



La cellule  $x$ , génératrice de toute l'œuvre, se retrouve même dans les dessins  $y$  et  $z$ , en tant que *neumes mélodiques* : elle consiste en un *torculus* (♣) portant un accent expressif sur sa note centrale (*fa* ♯).

Le dessin  $y$ , contenant en ses *trois dernières notes* le *torculus* de  $x$ , s'expose pour la première fois au début du développement du *deuxième mouvement* (S), et se reproduit, sous diverses formes, dans la *Fantaisie* et le *finale*.

Figure 5 D'Indy's motivic analysis of Franck's Violin Sonata, taken from his *Cours de composition musicale*, ii/1, 423–4.

quintessentially Riemannian idea. His 'primacy of thematic over tonal structure' inspired d'Indy's, and therefore also Messiaen's, treatment of melodic contours.<sup>52</sup> As discussed in the fourth volume of Messiaen's *Traité* (near to its chapters on chant), d'Indy created a theory of accentuation that bridges melodic motion and rhythm. Messiaen notes that d'Indy follows Riemann's terminology, although he could just as well have employed Mocquereau's terms *arsis* and *thésis*. A central point is that melodic shapes are regarded as carriers of active or passive rhythmic motion, a tension that Messiaen analyses in Mozart with recourse to Riemann's notions of masculine and feminine rhythmic groups.<sup>53</sup> The *Traité* clearly perceives thematic connections between Riemann and Mocquereau, even though Messiaen cannot have known that the German theorist and the Solesmes scholar corresponded directly on these matters.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Thomson, *Vincent d'Indy*, 65.

<sup>53</sup> See Messiaen, *Traité*, iv, 133–6; and on Riemann's notions in d'Indy's *Course*, see Thomson, *Vincent d'Indy*, 136–7.

<sup>54</sup> For explicit cross references, see foremost Mocquereau, *Le nombre musical grégorien*, 64, which points back to a detailed discussion of Mocquereau in Hugo Riemann, 'Ein Kapitel vom Rhythmus', *Die Musik*, 3 (1903/4), 155–62. Further references appear in *Antiphonarium tonale missarum XIe siècle: Codex H. 159 de la Bibliothèque de l'École de Médecine de Montpellier*, Paléographie musicale: Les principaux manuscrits de chant grégorien, ambrosien, mozarabe, gallican, 7, ed. Dom André Mocquereau (Solesmes: Imprimerie Saint-Pierre, 1901), and Hugo Riemann, *Handbuch der Musikgeschichte*, 2 vols. in 5 parts (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1904–13), i/2: *Die Musik des Mittelalters* (1905). Walden, 'Dom Mocquereau's Theories', 127, reports that archives at Solesmes hold 21 letters exchanged between the two.



At this point, it seems clear that there is a web of influences running between Riemann, d'Indy, Mocquereau and Messiaen. Before seeking to untangle their implications, Messiaen's motives for engaging with chant theory need to be surveyed against the backdrop of recent scholarship on Gregorian revivalism in France.

### Contrasting outlooks on 'free rhythm'

At the outset of his *Technique de mon langage musical*, Messiaen includes Gregorian chant among the sources that can set music free to fulfil a new calling, at a moment when forms within the era of tonality have grown 'old'. As he puts it,

We shall not reject the old rules of harmony and of form; let us remember them constantly, whether to observe them, or to augment them, or to add to them some others still older (those of plainchant and Hindu rhythms) or more recent (those suggested by Debussy and all contemporary music).<sup>55</sup>

Prior to this, Messiaen claims to have 'special ideas on [...] prosody, and the union of the musical line with the living inflections of speech'.<sup>56</sup> He aspires 'to make melody "speak"' and to establish its unequivocal primacy. This stance entails that harmony must confine itself to what lies 'in a latent state in the melody'.<sup>57</sup> That six chapters on rhythm precede Messiaen's treatment of melody and melodic contours suggests that 'living' qualities of melody themselves rest upon a prior rhythmic basis. In articles from the late 1930s, he had already established the centrality of chant in liberating the originality, vitality and variety of a 'living' (*vivant*) music. Plainchant had been proclaimed 'the most living, the most original and the most joyously free' of Catholic treasures.<sup>58</sup>

For Messiaen, these qualities stand opposed to a prevalent antithesis of freedom: the 'laziness' of habitually relying on conventional equal or ternary metre.<sup>59</sup> The first

<sup>55</sup> Messiaen, *The Technique of my Musical Language*, 8.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>58</sup> 'Le plain-chant, langue musicale officielle de L'Eglise, est certainement la plus vivant, la plus originale, la plus joyeusement libre des œuvres religieuses.' Olivier Messiaen, 'De la musique sacrée', *Carrefour*, June–July 1939, 75, cited here from Stephen Broad, *Olivier Messiaen: Journalism 1935–1939* (Abingdon: Ashgate, 2012), 75, and above in translation from *ibid.*, 136. On 'living' music, see also Olivier Messiaen, 'Musique religieuse', *La page musicale*, 5 February 1937, 1 (repr. in Broad, *Olivier Messiaen: Journalism*, 63–4), and Stephen Broad, 'Messiaen and *Art sacré*', *Messiaen Perspectives 1: Sources and Influences*, ed. Christopher Dingle and Robert Fallon (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 269–78.

<sup>59</sup> 'Paresseux, les vils flatteurs de l'habitude et du laisser-aller qui méprisent tout élan rythmique, tout repos rythmique, toute variété, toute respiration rythmique, toute alternance dans l'art si difficile du nombre musical, pour nous servir sur le plateau illusoire du mouvement perpétuel de vagues trois temps, des quatre temps plus vagues encore, indignes de plus vulgaire des bals publics, de la moins entraînée des marches militaires.' Olivier Messiaen, 'Contre la paresse', *La page musicale*, 17 March 1939, 1, cited from Broad, *Olivier Messiaen: Journalism*, 68–9, cf. translation on p. 130: 'Lazy: the vile flatterers of habit and laissez-faire who scorn all rhythmic undulation, all variety, all respiration, all alternation in the subtle art of musical meter, serving us instead, on the illusory platter of perpetual motion, vague 3-in-a-bars and vager 4-in-a-bars, native to the most vulgar of public dances and the most limping of military marches.'

chapter on rhythm in his *Technique de mon langage musical* mentions Mocquereau's teaching on neumes in the context of a desire to 'replace the notions of "measure" and "beat"'. The first significant example given from Messiaen's own music illustrates his aspiration to create an 'ametrical music' in which 'the rhythm is absolutely free'.<sup>60</sup> Such a quest for freedom beyond the 'enemy' of fixed measure was a long-standing aesthetic idea in French musical thought, although its implications varied throughout time and between different agents. Messiaen follows statements by d'Indy and Mocquereau, both deeply rooted in a Romantic endeavour to employ chant as a means of venturing beyond strict metre.<sup>61</sup> His dependency on these authors entails a particular approach to rhythmic freedom that becomes apparent when set against the wider history of French chant theory.

The view that plainchant melodies had been degraded by incorporating fixed metre was integral to Romantic chant theories and underpinned ambitions to restore melodies to a more original state. Such aspirations emerged in tandem with theories of what such pristine qualities implied. Towards the middle of the nineteenth century, restoration efforts in the Benedictine abbey at Solesmes had firmly rejected 'mensuralism' and the idea that the durations of notes were established by mathematical relationships to a basic note value. Their contrasting 'equalism' exerts a lasting impact on Messiaen's *Traité*: 'Except in some particular cases [...] all the sounds are of equal value.'<sup>62</sup> This terminology is potentially misleading, however. It captures an ambition to break free of fixed proportions, but equalism simultaneously induced a new rhythmic inequality, based on accentuation patterns in the Latin texts of chant melodies.

Mocquereau's mentor Dom Pothier advocated such a verbal turn as the basis for a more flexible rhythm. For him, attention to textual accents inspired more subtle changes between longer and shorter syllables, thus allowing 'free' expressivity in

<sup>60</sup> Messiaen, *The Technique of my Musical Language*, 9, 11. The example is the opening of 'Les anges' from Messiaen's *La nativité du Seigneur*.

<sup>61</sup> 'And it is not unreasonable to think that rhythm, free in the future as it had been in the past, will once again reign over music and liberate it from the bondage under which it was held – for nearly three centuries – by the usurping and debilitating domination of the poorly understood measure.' D'Indy, *Course*, 58. Having studied this text, Mocquereau comments in a letter to d'Indy (21 January 1901): 'Je me réjouis de me trouver d'accord avec vous, car pour moi, l'ennemi, c'est la mesure, et le rythme est tout, et c'est surtout dans le chant grégorien que cela est vrai' ('I am delighted to find myself in agreement with you, because for me, the enemy is the measure, and rhythm is everything, and this is especially true in Gregorian chant'). Hala, *Solesmes et les musiciens*, i, 429.

<sup>62</sup> 'Sauf certains cas [...] tous les sons ont une valeur égale.' Messiaen, *Traité*, iv, 7. For a rich survey of scholarly debate on Gregorian rhythm, including these central terms, see Nancy Phillips, 'Notationen und Notationslehren von Boethius bis zum 12. Jahrhunderts', *Die Lehre vom einstimmigen liturgischen Gesang*, ed. Thomas Ertelt and Frieder Zaminer, *Geschichte der Musiktheorie*, 4 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2000), 293–623. The classic presentation remains Pierre Combe, *Histoire de la restauration du chant grégorien d'après des documents inédits* (Solesmes: Abbaye de Solesmes, 1969), trans. Theodore N. Marier and William Skinner as *The Restoration of Gregorian Chant: Solesmes and the Vatican Edition* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2003).

performance.<sup>63</sup> The turn towards linguistic models nevertheless had its limits. As put in Pothier's *Les mélodies grégoriennes d'après la tradition*, a certain liberation from language is necessary when a fixed metre obstructs 'natural' rhythmic instincts:

There are two kinds of proportion and consequently two kinds of rhythm. If proportion is established on a rigorous and invariable basis, as in verses, it is measured; if proportion is only determined by the natural instinct of the ear, like in speech, it is free.<sup>64</sup>

In line with this antithesis, Pothier contrasts a linguistic *rhythme poétique* with the freedom in a *rhythme oratoire*.<sup>65</sup> The latter hinges upon a natural instinct, 'interior sensibility' and 'unseen impulse'. This subjective response and religious spontaneity is at once an ideal in performance and serves to situate chant in human nature and a 'living tradition' of liturgy.<sup>66</sup>

Mocquereau's preface to *Le nombre musical grégorien* praises Pothier's work for its incontestable religious and aesthetic merits. It affirms Pothier's 'accentualism' but subtly transforms its meaning. While sensitive in tone, this preface heralds a decisive aesthetic turning point within the Solesmes tradition. Pothier's intuitive streaks are slyly set aside as antiquated when Mocquereau speaks of a general 'desire for more profound knowledge' and 'true principles' in rhythm – not only for scholarly reasons, but also to overcome uncertainties and imperfection in performance.<sup>67</sup>

Mocquereau's aim is to venture beyond Benedictine manuals on Gregorian rhythm from the preceding decades by adopting a more universal approach than considering

<sup>63</sup> As put by Pothier's associate Augustin Gontier, who ostensibly coined the notion of *rhythme libre*: 'Le plain-chant est une récitation modulé dont les notes ont une valeur indéterminée et dont le rythme, essentiellement libre, est celui du discours.' Gontier, *Méthode raisonnée de plain-chant: Le plain-chant considéré dans son rythme, sa tonalité et ses modes* (Paris: V. Palmé, 1859), 1. See also *ibid.*, 4–7; Combe, *The Restoration of Gregorian Chant*, 26–8; and Benedikt Lessmann, *Die Rezeption des gregorianischen Chorals in Frankreich im 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhundert* (Hildesheim: Olms, 2016), 168. Pothier 'considered the Latin text with its accents a basic factor of the rhythmic life, particularly in the syllabic and neumatic chants or passages, in which the textual accent should make itself felt in the performance as a stress of the corresponding note of the melody'. Willi Apel, *Gregorian Chant* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1958), 127.

<sup>64</sup> 'Il y a deux sortes de proportion, par conséquent deux sortes de rythme. Si la proportion est établie sur des bases rigoureuses et immuables, comme dans les vers, le rythme est mesuré; si la proportion n'est déterminée que par l'instinct naturel de l'oreille, comme dans le discours, le rythme est libre.' Dom Joseph Pothier, *Les mélodies grégoriennes d'après la tradition* (Tournai: Desclée, 1880), 179. For a corresponding view in Moritz Hauptmann's coeval theory of metre, see William E. Caplin, 'Theories of Musical Rhythm in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries', *The Cambridge History of Western Music Theory*, ed. Thomas Christensen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 657–94 (p. 679).

<sup>65</sup> This distinction had already appeared in Gontier, *Méthode raisonnée de plain-chant*, 3.

<sup>66</sup> 'The real value of the neumes resulted "spontaneously", as Pothier put it, from good pronunciation, creating rhythms so natural they never had to be written down. Such spontaneity recalled Pothier's original description of the Gregorian song, in whose accents he had heard a similarly instinctive expression – the "spontaneous cry of religious thought and feeling".' Bergeron, *Decadent Enchantments*, 108; see also *ibid.*, 104–12.

<sup>67</sup> Mocquereau, *Le nombre musical grégorien*, 15–17. Mocquereau states that there has been a 'lack of definite rules for the rendition of rhetorical musical rhythm and the imperfection of neumatic notation' (p. 17). The disagreement between Pothier and Mocquereau has even been called an 'intellectual war'; see Bergeron, *Decadent Enchantments*, 87, and Ellis, *The Politics of Plainchant*, 47–67.

merely language, notation or particular musical parameters.<sup>68</sup> This stance is symbolic of a wider shift in Romantic music theory and aesthetics, in which Riemann had rejected previous accent theories for lacking systematicity.<sup>69</sup> In a similar vein, *Le nombre musical grégorien* suggests that questions of language and notation belong within the (mere) ‘matter of rhythm’; as such, they demand a preceding grasp of the very ‘nature of rhythm’. Mocquereau posits certain ‘natural laws of rhythm’ from which human language, chant and Pothier’s devotional spontaneity could not possibly be exempt.<sup>70</sup>

Thus, before even mentioning the rhetorical and musical elements on which *Gregorian rhythm* is based, we begin by studying the rhythm *in itself*, so to speak, that is rhythm stripped, as far as possible, of anything which might obscure it, complicate it, or distort its fundamental principles [...] by so doing, [this] will enable us to penetrate to its core, and to see it in its naked truth.<sup>71</sup>

As approvingly noted by Riemann himself, this ambition first requires Mocquereau to establish an abstract aesthetic foundation, which later can be applied to the specific realm of plainchant.<sup>72</sup> Such a move echoes how Riemann incorporated aspects of natural sciences into music theory to provide a universal foundation for its claims.<sup>73</sup> Messiaen’s later reception of chant theory follows such a turn towards a natural basis and adheres to its supposed universality and well-grounded epistemology. Mocquereau’s move beyond Pothier’s accents and intuitive subjectivity explains why Messiaen approached melody from the vantage point of rhythm. As a faithful student of *Le nombre musical grégorien*, he was convinced that a proper understanding of music

<sup>68</sup> Mocquereau, *Le nombre musical grégorien*, 28, 130–5.

<sup>69</sup> The ‘attempts by theorists, such as Lussy, to break away from the mechanical performance of metrical accents by proposing a variety of rhythmic and expressive accents result in a hotchpotch of ad hoc formulations and individual solutions lacking theoretical precision and (especially important for Riemann) any sense of *system*’. Caplin, ‘Theories of Musical Rhythm’, 683.

<sup>70</sup> To give a further example, medieval authorities are recognized to ‘represent the liturgical melodies as belonging to free rhythm, musical or rhetorical. This rhythm cannot, of course, claim any exemption from the laws of general Rhythmics.’ Mocquereau, *Le nombre musical grégorien*, 19–20.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>72</sup> It is characteristic of Mocquereau that he ‘als obersten Satz aufstellt, dass alles schlichteste Natur und Einfachheit sein müsse. Aber was ist schlichte Natur und Einfachheit auf dem Gebiete des Rhythmus? Die Notwendigkeit, das Grundwesen des Rhythmus zu definieren, um seine unbehinderte freie Herrschaft auf dem Gebiet des gregorianischen Chorals erwiesen und zugleich erläutern zu können, zwingt Dom Mocquereau, auf philosophisch-ästhetisches Gebiet zu übertreten, und damit gewinnt seine Studie eine allgemeinere Bedeutung’ (‘establishes a highest principle that everything must be of the plainest nature and simplicity. But what is plain nature and simplicity in the field of rhythm? The necessity to define the essence of rhythm, in order to be able to demonstrate and at the same time to explain its unhindered free reign in the field of Gregorian chant, forces Dom Mocquereau to cross over into philosophical-aesthetic territory. Thereby, his study acquires a more universal significance’). Riemann, ‘Ein Kapitel vom Rhythmus’, 156.

<sup>73</sup> ‘Music theory belongs among the natural sciences, in the sense that art is nature; music theory would have a right to exist even if it only fulfilled the single purpose of proving the immanent law-abiding order of artistic creation.’ Letter from Riemann to Franz Liszt (1879), quoted in Alexander Rehding, *Hugo Riemann and the Birth of Modern Musical Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 20. As noted on the same page, ‘Riemann recognised that in order for music theory to be taken seriously, if it wanted to say anything authoritative about music at all, it had to partake of the prestige that the natural sciences enjoyed.’

and rhythm in music requires a prior grasp of an abstract essence of rhythm. In contrast to Pothier's references to a 'living tradition', Messiaen does not approach the potential in chant for a living expressivity in music from liturgical or specifically religious viewpoints. His theory of chant rather rests upon an amalgamation of systematic and historical arguments – as the following discussion will demonstrate.

### Progress and universality in the spiral of history

A characteristic feature of a broad 'quest for the origins of music' at the turn of the twentieth century is the way in which theories from the natural sciences were merged with theories of a gradual and law-bound unfolding of artistic creation throughout history.<sup>74</sup> The historical origins of music received a distinct value in such a paradigm, together with the goal, influenced by German idealism, 'to discover one single source, one natural principle, with which to explain harmony and metre in its entirety'.<sup>75</sup> The rhythm chapter from d'Indy's *Cours* which Mocquereau asked to study is steeped in both these aspirations. Both aspects need be surveyed here. Initially, it is noteworthy how d'Indy's conception of art rests upon an evolutionary framework:

Art, in its course throughout the ages, can be reduced to the idea of the *microcosm*. Like the world, like peoples, like civilizations, like man himself, it goes through successive periods of youth, maturity and old age, but it never dies, and renews itself perpetually. It is not a closed circle, but a spiral which constantly rises and progresses.<sup>76</sup>

D'Indy's quasi-Hegelian spiral movement is directed towards constant progression, but its continually expanding movement remains governed by an original central or systematic axis. To attain further expansion within the spiral, it is necessary to pay close attention both to an original point of departure and the (normative) evolution of history from that point up to the present.<sup>77</sup> D'Indy's teaching syllabus also rested on

<sup>74</sup> Alexander Rehding, 'The Quest for the Origins of Music in Germany circa 1900', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 53 (2000), 345–85.

<sup>75</sup> Rehding, in *Hugo Riemann*, 23, is here referring to Moritz Hauptmann. Riemann was praised precisely for his ability to explain music, in its entirety, from a single highest principle; see Michael Arntz, *Hugo Riemann (1849–1919): Leben, Werk und Wirkung* (Cologne: Concerto, 1999), 229. See also Peter Rummenhölter, 'Der fluktuierende Theoriebegriff Hugo Riemanns: Musiktheorie zwischen Idealismus und Naturwissenschaft', *Hugo Riemann (1849–1919): Musikwissenschaftler mit Universalanspruch*, ed. Tatjana Böhme-Mehner and Klaus Mehner (Cologne: Böhlau, 2001), 31–6.

<sup>76</sup> Vincent d'Indy, 'Une école d'art répondant aux besoins modernes', *La tribune de Saint-Gervais*, 6 (1900), 303–14 (p. 305), quoted in translation from Thomson, *Vincent d'Indy*, 118–19. See also d'Indy, *Course*, 37.

<sup>77</sup> 'The spiral combines the circle, representing perfection, with the straight line, representing progress – one thinks of Dante's Mount Purgatory, with its rising succession of interconnected circular cornices. Even the graded hierarchy of musical courses, comprehensively listed in his speech, evokes the ascending circles of the heavens in Dante's Neoplatonic conception of Paradise; each moving circle represents an area of doctrine, with the highest, the crystalline heaven, controlling the movements of the lower.' Thomson, *Vincent d'Indy*, 120. See also Jann Pasler, 'Paris: Conflicting Notions of Progress', *The Late Romantic Era: From the Mid-19th Century to World War I*, ed. Jim Samson, *Man and Music*, 7 (London: Macmillan, 1991), 389–416 (pp. 401–5).

the need for composers to study the history of musical forms before they made their own creative contributions beyond the imprints of a preceding tradition.<sup>78</sup> The ‘basic foundation’ for his *Cours* is a division of music history into three ‘grand eras’. They are, in turn:

- (1) *the rhythm-monodic era*, from the third to the thirteenth century,
- (2) *the polyphonic era*, from the thirteenth to the seventeenth century,
- (3) *the metered era*, from the seventeenth century to our time.<sup>79</sup>

These periods and terms are pregnant with implications. D’Indy dates the birth of a specifically musical art, in which rhythm and (melodic) monody coincide, to the third century. The inner logic of his spiral therefore entails that studies of the origins of rhythm must hark back to a pre-musical age and revisit its historical foundations in antiquity.

D’Indy’s ‘spiral’ left a distinct imprint on Messiaen’s early career. As a newly appointed member of the teaching staff at the Schola Cantorum, he was involved in the formation of the concert society La Spirale in 1935. The honorary president of the group was Nestor Lejeune, who as director of the Schola Cantorum was responsible for appointments of a new generation of progressive teachers.<sup>80</sup> Messiaen’s adaptation of chant theory and of the universality implied in d’Indy’s ‘neume filter’ clearly embraced an ideological legacy at this institution, but he nevertheless belonged within a new wave of Catholic art.<sup>81</sup> Notions of free rhythm attained particular political connotations within an emerging nonconformist spirituality, as is evident in Messiaen’s connections between a rhetoric of liberation from the monotony of metre and a humanism centred on ideals such as love, spirituality and sincerity of emotion.<sup>82</sup>

Such a new “‘integral” humanism’ – to use Jacques Maritain’s topical expression – underpins Messiaen’s aspiration to create a “‘true”, that is to say spiritual, music. Music

<sup>78</sup> Gail Hilson Woldu, ‘Vincent d’Indy, *musicien artiste*, and the *Cours de composition musicale*’, in d’Indy, *Course*, 1–33 (pp. 8–15).

<sup>79</sup> D’Indy, *Course*, 37, cf. *Antiphonarium tonale missarum XIe siècle*, 162.

<sup>80</sup> On La Spirale and a 1934 reshuffle at the Schola Cantorum, see Nigel Simeone, ‘La Spirale and La Jeune France: Group Identities’, *Musical Times*, 143/1880 (2002), 10–36; Broad, ‘Recontextualising Messiaen’s Early Career’, i, 105–10.

<sup>81</sup> On transformations in Catholic culture away from conflicts between faith and modern culture in d’Indy’s generation, see Stephen Schloesser, *Jazz Age Catholicism: Mystic Modernism in Postwar Paris 1919–1933* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005).

<sup>82</sup> Olivier Messiaen, ‘La transmutation des enthousiasmes’, *La page musicale*, 16 April 1936, 1: ‘Plus de rythmes monotones par leur carrure même; nous voulons librement respirer!’ Quoted from Broad, *Olivier Messiaen: Journalism*, 61; cf. Messiaen, *Traité*, i (1994), 58: ‘Laissons de côté le “pas cadence” des soldats, affreusement anti-nature! La marche libre – la vraie – ne comporte jamais deux groups de pas de durée absolument identique.’ As put by Stephen Schloesser in *Visions of Amen: The Early Life and Music of Olivier Messiaen* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 242: ‘Messiaen was fully immersed in the search for a new music, a new order, and a new “integral” humanism.’ See also Jane F. Fulcher, ‘The Politics of Transcendence: Ideology in the Music of Messiaen in the 1930s’, *Musical Quarterly*, 86 (2002), 449–71, and Fulcher, *Renegotiating French Identity: Musical Culture and Creativity in France during Vichy and the German Occupation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 289–95.

that is an act of faith. A music that touches all subjects without ever ceasing to touch God.<sup>83</sup> This quest for unlimited connections between human culture and the divine serves as a theological warrant behind Messiaen's musical eclecticism. It also helps to explain why Mocquereau was such an attractive theoretical inspiration for him. In *Le nombre musical grégorien*, Messiaen was convinced he had found universal principles applicable to any kind of musical sources. While Greek and Hindu metrics provide beneficial examples of rhythm, to plainchant is ascribed 'perfect freedom'.<sup>84</sup> In other words, this consummate Christian music is categorically different from other sources. It functions both as the official musical language of the Church and as a theory for all music, in an asymmetric model of Christian inclusivity.

At the same time, Messiaen's extensive explorations in ancient rhythms echo d'Indy's stress on the necessity of remaining in living contact with the origins of an ordered and gradual evolution of civilization and music. D'Indy's designations for the three ages of music shed light on how historical evolution, rather than theological arguments per se, plays a key role in the elevation of chant above these vital sources. It has already been noted that Messiaen regarded plainchant as a living link to ancient Greek metrics. On a level of principle, d'Indy's designation of a rhythm-monic period implies a similar dual interconnection between Greek metrics and melodic plainchant. Rhythm-monic singing forms a historical repertoire that keeps the legacy of a pre-musical era alive.<sup>85</sup> As melodic *music*, chant both incorporates pure rhythm and adds a further layer of expression. Within such an outlook, Mocquereau's *Le nombre musical grégorien* is significant because it thematizes this reciprocity of rhythm and monody: it seeks out natural and historical (Greek) origins for rhythm that remain normative in what d'Indy deemed the 'eminently expressive character of Gregorian chant'.<sup>86</sup>

Like d'Indy, Messiaen associates historical periods with characteristic musical elements or techniques, albeit in a way that dissociates his stance from conventional musical historicism.<sup>87</sup> The overall organization of the material in Messiaen's two major treatises is arguably the most illuminating testimony to his reception of d'Indy's

<sup>83</sup> 'Je réclamaï plus haut une musique "vraie", c'est-à-dire spirituelle. Une musique qui soit un acte de foi. Une musique qui touche à tous les sujets sans cesser à Dieu.' Messiaen, 'De la musique sacrée', quoted from Broad, *Olivier Messiaen: Journalism*, 76 (trans. on p. 137); cf. Messiaen, *The Technique of my Musical Language*, 7. Schloesser, *Visions of Amen*, 242, highlights how Messiaen was inspired by Jacques Maritain's *Humanisme intégral: Problèmes temporels et spirituels d'une nouvelle chrétienté* (Paris: F. Aubier, 1936). Although this is certainly relevant, Messiaen takes a divergent aesthetic route from the intellectual neoclassicism preferred in Maritain's circle. See Douglas Shadle, 'Messiaen's Relationship to Jacques Maritain's Musical Circle and Neo-Thomism', *Messiaen the Theologian*, ed. Andrew Shenton (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 83–99.

<sup>84</sup> 'Le plain-chant lui-même, d'une liberté rythmique cependant parfaite'. Olivier Messiaen, 'Billet parisien: Réflexions sur le rythme', *La sirène*, May 1937, 14, quoted from Broad, *Olivier Messiaen: Journalism*, 28 (trans. on p. 91); cf. Schloesser, *Visions of Amen*, 108–11.

<sup>85</sup> 'Actually, the flexibility of the neumes of plainchant, the use of *arses* and *theses*, and the combining of twos and threes in plainchant correspond in a certain sense to a survival of Greek meters.' Messiaen, *Music and Color*, 75.

<sup>86</sup> D'Indy, *Course*, 104.

<sup>87</sup> On 'die Synchronie zwischen Epochen und Techniken', see Rathert, 'Messiaen und die Geschichte', 223–4.

schema of evolution. Within them, chant provides a beneficial vantage point for interpreting what has been called a ‘fundamental ambiguity’ in Messiaen’s approach to melody and rhythm.<sup>88</sup> *Technique de mon langage musical* claims an unequivocal primacy for melody and yet it is launched with detailed explorations of rhythm.<sup>89</sup> Comparing the *Cours* and the *Traité*, Tobias Janz has rightly called the former the ‘hypotext of a palimpsest’, a verdict that holds both on individual parts and concerning the whole structure.<sup>90</sup> Volumes 1–3 of the *Traité* are devoted to fundamental rhythmic principles, before the exposition of plainchant in the fourth volume represents the introduction of melody and thus of music proper in history. The lengthy treatment of birdsong in the fifth volume bridges melody and the introduction of harmony, a topic treated in two final volumes. In its overarching design, the *Traité* thus mirrors the division of history in d’Indy’s three main epochs.

In spite of these concurrences, Messiaen takes a highly personal approach to historiography, as is evident from his treatment of rhythm. He employs d’Indy’s language of an ordered progress in steps but also adheres to a vigorous orientalism in French music and in comparative philology. A few decades before him, d’Indy’s spiral and the teaching at the Schola Cantorum opposed theorems of a purely linear progression in music, often associated with the Paris Conservatoire and political republicanism.<sup>91</sup> As a contrast to both outlooks, Messiaen heralds the newfound interest in rhythm, not least from oriental sources, as the recovery of an expressive sensibility that has been lost in Western musical history.<sup>92</sup>

His conviction that rhythm has been given proper attention only recently mirrors, whether knowingly or not, a schema articulated in sketches for François-Joseph Fétis’s never completed treatise on rhythm. Fétis had posited a development in four stages from a prevailing ‘unirhythmical’ stage, in which music is constrained by a single static metre and operates in basic binary or ternary units. For him, progress towards greater expressive capacities called for techniques that permitted more sophisticated and

<sup>88</sup> Balmer, Lacôte and Murray, *Le modèle et l’invention*, 88.

<sup>89</sup> *The Technique of my Musical Language* is introduced by this methodological statement: ‘Knowing that music is a language, we shall seek at first to make melody “speak”. The melody is the point of departure. May it remain sovereign!’ (p. 8) What follows are six chapters on rhythm, before Messiaen finally discusses melody. The *Traité* investigates rhythm throughout three volumes before turning to plainchant – and thereby to melody – in its central and fourth tome.

<sup>90</sup> ‘Vincent d’Indy’s *Cours de composition musicale* – ein Text, der an vielen Stellen wie der Hypotext eines Palimpsests durch die Oberfläche von Messiaens *Traité* durchscheint’. Janz, ‘Messiaens Mozart’, 295.

<sup>91</sup> On these approaches, see Pasler, ‘Paris: Conflicting Notions of Progress’, 390–407; Catrena M. Flint, ‘The Schola Cantorum, Early Music and French Political Culture, from 1894 to 1914’ (Ph.D. dissertation, McGill University, Montreal, 2006); Peter Asimov, ‘Comparative Philology, French Music, and the Composition of Indo-Europeanism from Fétis to Messiaen’ (Ph.D. dissertation, Cambridge University, 2020).

<sup>92</sup> ‘Il y a tout de même dans l’histoire une succession ordonnée d’événements. Dans la civilisation occidentale, en tout cas, la mélodie est apparue en premier lieu, puis l’harmonie, ensuite le souci du timbre, plus tard le souci rythmique dont je suis un peu responsable, enfin il y a une caractéristique connue en Orient depuis longtemps mais qui est tout à fait récente en Occident, c’est le souci de la nuance et du tempo, des oppositions et de l’alliage de la nuance et du tempo.’ Claude Samuel, *Entretiens avec Olivier Messiaen* (Paris: Pierre Belfond, 1967), 53.



flexible types of metrical organization.<sup>93</sup> Messiaen echoed a similar Enlightenment conviction of inevitable progress towards increasing complexity in music, at least in the earlier part of his career. While Riemann and d'Indy in a pessimistic teleology feared a final eclipse of music in modernity, the radical young Messiaen saw in the 'old rules' of homophonic plainchant a source of progression towards greater rhythmical and expressive complexity.<sup>94</sup> Although plainchant is described as a consummate art in itself, Messiaen believes there is still room for composers to strive further towards an 'inexhaustible' music, 'powerfully original' and with 'varied means of expression', even a 'divine melody that will draw us into the sanctuary of the melodies of the Beyond'.<sup>95</sup>

As a student, Messiaen first encountered similar expressive rhythmic ideals in the work of Maurice Emmanuel. There are many overlapping tendencies between what he learnt at the time and in his later thorough reading of Mocquereau.<sup>96</sup> Nevertheless,

<sup>93</sup> Fétis's four consecutive stages are labelled *unirhythmique*, *transirhythmique*, *plurirhythmique* and *omnirhythmique*. See Fétis's 'Du développement futur de la musique: Dans le domaine de rythme', *Revue et gazette musicale de Paris*, 19 (1852), 281–4, 289–92, 297–300, 325–7, 353–6, 361–3, 401–4, 457–60, 473–6; Mary I. Arlin, 'Metric Mutation and Modulation: The Nineteenth-Century Speculations of F.-J. Fétis', *Journal of Music Theory*, 44 (2000), 261–322; and (on the necessity of polyrhythm), Messiaen, *Traité*, i, 30–1.

<sup>94</sup> 'Im Unterschied zu der – eine deutliche Beeinflussung durch Riemann zeigenden – pessimistisch-teleologischen Auffassung d'Indys, dass mit der Moderne der endgültige Niedergang der Musik als Tonkunst drohe, hält sich Messiaen allerdings an das aufklärerische, in mancher Hinsicht an Vico und Herder anknüpfende Fortschrittsmodell Fétis', das die Geschichte der musikalischen Syntax (insbesondere der Tonalität) als Entfaltung einer Totalität der Phänomene ("pluritonique" bzw. "omnitonique") deutet; 'So liegt in der Einstimmigkeit des Gregorianischen Gesangs für ihn bereits ein Modell rhythmischer Freiheit der Avantgarde.' ('In contrast to d'Indy's pessimistic-teleological conception – showing a distinct influence from Riemann – that with modernity the final decline of music as an art is looming, Messiaen adheres to Fétis's Enlightenment model of progress, in several respects following on from Vico and Herder, which interprets the history of musical syntax (especially tonality) as an unfolding of a totality of phenomena ("pluritonic" or "omnitononic"); 'For him, the monophony of Gregorian chant already contains a model of the rhythmic freedom in the avant-garde.') Rathert, 'Messiaen und die Geschichte', 227, 223.

<sup>95</sup> 'Cette vie – inépuisable et toujours nouvelle à ceux qui la cherchent – appelle des moyens d'expression puissamment originaux et variés.' Messiaen, 'La transmutation des enthousiasmes'. Cf. Messiaen, 'Musique religieuse': 'la divine mélodie qui seule nous introduira dans le sanctuaire des mélodies de l'au-delà', quoted from Broad, *Olivier Messiaen: Journalism*, 63–4, 62 (trans. pp. 125, 123). On this progressive tendency, see also Hans Rudolf Zeller, 'Messiaens kritische Universalität: Versuch über neue und "außereuropäische" Musik', *Olivier Messiaen*, Musik-Konzepte, 28, ed. Heinz-Klaus Metzger and Rainer Riehn (Munich: Edition Text + Kritik, 1982), 56–77 (p. 62).

<sup>96</sup> In spite of differences in details, Emmanuel and Mocquereau were in unison on the application of terms drawn from contemporary philology; see Maurice Emmanuel and Amédée Gastoué, 'R. P. Dom André Mocquereau: Le nombre musical grégorien ou rythmique grégorienne: théorie et pratique. – Tome I.', *La tribune de Saint-Gervais*, 14 (1908), 258–64; cf. Asimov, 'Comparative Philology', 90. Messiaen wavered on how deep an influence Emmanuel's teaching at the conservatoire had had on him. Emmanuel is left out of the homage to teachers in Messiaen, *The Technique of my Musical Language*, 7, and according to Messiaen, *Music and Color*, 72–3, Messiaen did not venture deep into Greek rhythms as a student. As a contrast, see the paean in 'Olivier Messiaen parle de Maurice Emmanuel', in Maurice Emmanuel, *Histoire de la langue musicale* (Paris: Henri Laurens, 1911). On biographical aspects and further concurrences such as those relating to modality, birdsong transcriptions, Hindu rhythms and the centrality of the notion of sound, see Ulrich Linke, 'Von Vögeln und Modi – sowie vom Tod und vom Weiterleben. Olivier Messiaens Lehrer Maurice Emmanuel', *Olivier Messiaen und die Französische Tradition*, ed. Stefan Keym and Peter Jost

Messiaen's affirmation of a progressive potential in chant implies that he sides with Mocquereau and d'Indy against Emmanuel, who sought continuity with, rather than evolution from, Greek metrics and for whom medieval music – not to speak of modern metre – already constituted a regression.<sup>97</sup> For Messiaen it was never a matter of composing new music according to results in recent scholarship, as if a leap straight back to rhythms from ancient sources would be possible. Rather, the melodic layer in plainchant has instilled an irreducible contribution in the unfolding of music and thereby gives the Gregorian melodies the status of a focal point in history. Messiaen's speculative approach to the origin of rhythm clarifies this prominence further, in that his reception of Mocquereau inspires musical principles that ostensibly stem from plainchant and its living contact with the very essence of rhythm.

### **The primacy of rhythm: mathematics, ecology and beauty of gesture**

Having looked at historiographical motives behind quests for a lost essence of rhythm in chant, it is now time to engage with vital motives and implications in Messiaen's reception of chant theory. A natural point of departure is d'Indy's and Mocquereau's shared view that rhythm is 'the original and primordial element of all art', a thesis from which a number of central aesthetic convictions follow.<sup>98</sup> Such a statement indicates that a broad and unitary concept of art is assumed to precede its manifestations in particular art forms, such as music, dance and visual arts. *Le nombre musical grégorien* cites an informative passage from d'Indy's *Cours*:

*Rhythm* is the primordial element. One must consider it as anterior to all other elements of music; primitive peoples know, as it were, no other musical manifestation. Many peoples know nothing of the existence of harmony; some may know nothing of melody; but none ignore rhythm.<sup>99</sup>

Within d'Indy's framework, rhythm is fundamental in both temporal and aesthetic regards: it precedes the historical evolution of music proper and is universally recognized by all human beings. The *Cours* meets idealist methodological expectations that it should be possible to deduce rhythm, in its entirety, from a single proposition and states: 'Order and Proportion in Space and Time: this is the definition of *Rhythm*.' The *Traité* cites d'Indy's principle, and Messiaen elsewhere commented on Mocquereau's slight

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(Cologne: Dohr, 2013), 143–81, and on a common influence from German classical studies, see Wai-Ling Cheong, 'Ancient Greek Rhythms in Messiaen's *Le sacre*: Nietzsche's Legacy?', *Musicology*, 27 (2019), 97–136. Konstantine Panegyres, 'Classical Metre and Modern Music', *Greek and Roman Musical Studies*, 6 (2018), 212–38, provides a good summary of Emmanuel's work but in the case of Messiaen fails to realize the relevance of plainchant in the reception of Greek metrics.

<sup>97</sup> On Emmanuel's historiography, see Rathert, 'Messiaen und die Geschichte', 232–4.

<sup>98</sup> D'Indy, *Course*, 37.

<sup>99</sup> Mocquereau, *Le nombre musical grégorien*, 44–5; d'Indy, *Course*, 51. Cf. Messiaen's comment in Messiaen, *Music and Color*, 67: 'I feel that rhythm is the primordial and perhaps essential part of music; I think it most likely existed before melody and harmony.'

reformulation of it.<sup>100</sup> The latter's version is commended, but without the assumption that it could serve as a single and conclusive statement:

Rhythm is the one musical notion that cannot be defined simply. Innumerable definitions have been proposed, both good and bad according to the perspective from which they're viewed. One of them – by Dom Mocquereau – is very famous and sums up the ideas of Plato and the ancient Greeks on the subject: 'Rhythm is the ordering of movement.' This definition has the advantage of being applicable to dance, to words, and to music, but it's incomplete.<sup>101</sup>

As Messiaen notes, the possibility of applying this principle to different art forms is a central feature. Although d'Indy and Mocquereau differ on matters of classification, both authors subscribe to a 'Greek' subdivision of art into two main branches that operate primarily either with space or with time.<sup>102</sup> Music belongs within the latter category, but the primacy of an abstract 'nature' of rhythm implies that the difference between the 'matter' of space and time is only one of degree. The idea of a primordial order that conjoins space and time serves as a focal point also in Messiaen's theory of rhythm, connecting his preoccupation with (1) mathematics, (2) nature and birdsong and (3) a gestural approach to chant.

The foundation of Messiaen's rhythmic order on mathematics is central to claims for the universality of neumes, because it induces a ground for rhythm deemed even more fundamental than nature itself. For d'Indy, melody is a compound that unites the realms of nature and culture – including Pothier's emphasis on accents in language.<sup>103</sup> He also conjoins natural and psychological dimensions when speaking of an inherent '*need in our mind*' for creative apperceptions of rhythm.<sup>104</sup> The vital point here is, however, that all other dimensions in rhythm are tied back to a truly universal mathematic structure.<sup>105</sup>

Modern misconceptions of Mocquereau often stem from failures to grasp how his turn towards a 'Greek' order similarly induces a law-bound basis for language and chant rhythm, which in fact inspires rather than restricts a markedly anthropocentric and

<sup>100</sup> D'Indy, *Course*, 48–9; Messiaen, *Traité*, i, 41.

<sup>101</sup> Messiaen, *Music and Color*, 67, cf. Mocquereau, *Le nombre musical grégorien*, 43; Messiaen, *Traité*, i, 41.

<sup>102</sup> D'Indy, *Course*, 48–9; Mocquereau, *Le nombre musical grégorien*, 37–8.

<sup>103</sup> 'Music depends at once on the *mathematical* sciences through Rhythm, on the *natural* sciences through Melody.' D'Indy, *Course*, 50; cf. *ibid.*, 51: 'Melody, which springs directly from language through accent, is almost as widely prevalent as Rhythm.'

<sup>104</sup> D'Indy, *Course*, 53 (emphasis original). D'Indy's connection between psychological dimensions and natural inclinations is almost literally taken from Hugo Riemann, 'Ideen zu einer "Lehre von den Tonvorstellungen"', *Jahrbuch der Musikbibliothek Peters*, 21/22 (1914/15), 1–26 (p. 7), discussed in Klaus Mehner, 'Hugo Riemanns "Ideen zu einer "Lehre von den Tonvorstellungen"', *Hugo Riemann*, ed. Böhme-Mehner and Mehner, 49–57 (p. 52).

<sup>105</sup> To say that Messiaen believed in 'die Doppelnatur der Musik als natürliches Phänomen und geschichtliche Realität' ('music's dual nature as a natural phenomenon and historical reality') captures a similar polarity, albeit with another conception of nature; see Rathert, 'Messiaen und die Geschichte', 223.

creative stance.<sup>106</sup> The mathematical implications in Mocquereau's title *Le nombre musical grégorien* stand on the border between, or possibly bridge, textual and arithmetic approaches to chant. Pothier had spoken of 'numbers' in connection with an experiential ground for 'oratorical' freedom. It remains enigmatic whether Mocquereau's 'Gregorian number' refers primarily to such freedom or else to d'Indy's very different claim that rhythm 'is expressed in numbers and depends on *arithmetic laws*'.<sup>107</sup>

Messiaen is less ambiguous on the aesthetic division between language and mathematics, unmistakably following in the wake of d'Indy. As d'Indy does in the *Cours*, Messiaen highlights music as the final art within the quadrivium of medieval learning and emphasizes how it bridges the gulf between arithmetic knowledge and human art.<sup>108</sup> Mathematics and music become closely related intellectual enterprises, which also relate to other sciences. This backdrop indicates the relevance of Messiaen's fascination with ancient and medieval learning, as well as his inclination for arithmetic, especially the notion of numbers.<sup>109</sup> Such an ontological basis for rhythm goes hand in hand with his proud self-image of being a 'rhythmician', including a claim that explorations in rhythm and music provide valuable insights into the order of the world.<sup>110</sup>

This outlook has direct bearings on the method of finding neumes at work in all kinds of music. It logically entails that analysis can reveal the same universal rhythmic patterns in music by all composers who, while also responding to historical and cultural contexts, have been perceptive enough to build their own musical syntax on universal laws.<sup>111</sup> As a further example of such reciprocity between music and mathematics,

<sup>106</sup> See Mocquereau, *Le nombre musical grégorien*, 27 and 21–2, where 'natural laws of rhythm' explicitly have priority over 'the accentuation and natural rhythm of the words themselves'. As Mocquereau continues, 'There exists only one general system of Rhythmics; its fundamental laws are based on human nature itself' (*ibid.*, 38). Tensions between natural and artistic aspects have been difficult to conceptualize in modern research. Apel, *Gregorian Chant*, 275–81, treats Mocquereau as a theorist of textual accents but also indicates contradictions in such a reading. Furthermore, 'Es ist, wie auch Katherine [*sic*] Ellis angemerkt hat, die große Widersprüchlichkeit Mocquereaus, dass er in Fragen der melodischen Restitution der Choräle eine wissenschaftliche, strikt an den Quellen orientierte Position einnimmt, in seiner Choralrhythmuslehre jedoch kaum den Maßstab der Objektivierbarkeit genügt' ('As Katherine [*sic*] Ellis has noted, Mocquereau's great contradiction is that he takes a scholarly position on questions of melodic restitution of chants, strictly oriented towards the sources, while his theory of rhythm in plainchant hardly satisfies the standard of objectivity'). Lessmann, *Die Rezeption des gregorianischen Chorals in Frankreich*, 171–2; cf. Ellis, *The Politics of Plainchant*, 112.

<sup>107</sup> D'Indy, *Course*, 50; cf. Pothier, *Les mélodies grégoriennes*, 179: 'Le rythme libre est appelé *nombre* par les orateurs.' Lessmann, *Die Rezeption des gregorianischen Chorals in Frankreich*, 171, is somewhat too certain that Mocquereau follows Pothier.

<sup>108</sup> Messiaen, *Traité*, i, 52; d'Indy, *Course*, 49–50.

<sup>109</sup> As Alain Louvier notes, 'Messiaen, qui se défendait d'être mathématicien, semblait fasciné par le Nombre' ('Messiaen, who denied being a mathematician, seemed fascinated by numbers'). Messiaen, *Traité*, iii (1996), 1.

<sup>110</sup> See, for example, Messiaen, *Music and Color*, 67, 249; and Rathert, 'Messiaen und die Geschichte', 222–3.

<sup>111</sup> 'So wäre für Messiaen das Arbeiten mit dem Ton in seiner räumlich-diastematischen und zeitlich-rhythmischen Qualität auch für einen heutigen Komponisten immer ein erster Anfang, der sich nicht prinzipiell, sondern nur graduell von der Situation eines antiken, mittelalterlichen oder sogar außer-europäischen Komponisten unterscheiden würde' ('So for Messiaen, working with the tone in its

*Technique de mon langage musical* reveals how Messiaen drew a direct link between Mocquereau's theory of rhythmic variety in neumes and his own 'predilection for the rhythms of prime numbers (five, seven, eleven, thirteen, etc.)'.<sup>112</sup>

The sketched ontological basis for rhythm also explains the presence of neumes in birdsong. D'Indy had already used the abstract primacy of rhythm to advocate a universal naturalism. He situates the preoccupation of ancient Greek scholars with human speech and metre within a comprehensive ecology, ranging over areas such as astronomy, biology and zoology:

*Rhythm* is universal; it appears in the movement of the stars, in the periodicity of the seasons, in the regular alternation of the days and nights. It is found in the life of plants, in the cry of animals, and even in man's posture and speech.<sup>113</sup>

The integral first volume of Messiaen's *Traité* reads like a formidable explication of a universal rhythmic order, both realized in and holding together a complex of 'super-imposed times' in nature. Within an underlying evolutionary schema similar to d'Indy's, different time structures are arranged starting from an origin in astronomy and geology before turning to birds, minerals, plants and animals. Only thereafter does the human time of dance and language appear on the scene, as preparation for sustained explications of Greek and Hindu rhythms. These patterns are then posited to have survived in music by Beethoven, Ravel, Claude Le Jeune and Messiaen himself.<sup>114</sup>

The method of treating rhythm as a universal phenomenon implies that Messiaen's theological basis for Gregorian chant and its rhythms rests on a more abstract basis than the religious and liturgical sensibilities of Pothier's generation. D'Indy cites the conductor Hans von Bülow's quip 'In the beginning there was Rhythm!' and in a similar paraphrase states that rhythm is, 'in the genesis of Art, the vitalizing and generative element, akin to the *fiat lux*, the Word of God, in the genesis of universe'.<sup>115</sup> Although Messiaen finds Bülow 'disrespectful' towards the Bible, his own invocation of Thomas Aquinas at the outset of the first volume of the *Traité* reads like a less markedly vitalistic version of d'Indy's basic point. God's eternity is here the focal point that interconnects and sustains all created time structures.<sup>116</sup> Messiaen's theory does not therefore hinge upon individual religious experience or liturgical tradition. Rather, the mathematical order behind all music is held to rest upon a created cosmological

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spatial-diatematic and temporal-rhythmic quality would always be an initial beginning also for a contemporary composer, who would not be set apart in principle, but only by degrees, from the situation of an ancient, medieval or even non-European composers'). Rathert, 'Messiaen und die Geschichte', 223. For a similar view, see Mocquereau, *Le nombre musical grégorien*, 33.

<sup>112</sup> Messiaen, *The Technique of my Musical Language*, 9.

<sup>113</sup> D'Indy, *Course*, 51.

<sup>114</sup> See specifically the section 'Les rythmes extra-musicaux et leur influence sur le rythme musical', Messiaen, *Traité*, i, 52–68. Without insight into the theoretical framework, Messiaen's outline may seem 'a *pot-pourri* of ideas, largely quoted out of context, with little underlying pattern or relevance'. Andrew Shenton, 'Time in Olivier Messiaen's *Traité*', *Music, Art and Literature*, ed. Dingle and Simeone, 173–89 (p. 176).

<sup>115</sup> D'Indy, *Course*, 51. Cf. Olivier Messiaen, *Conférence de Bruxelles: Prononcée à l'Exposition Internationale de Bruxelles en 1958* (Paris: Alphonse Leduc, 1960), 11, which paraphrases Mocquereau, *Le nombre musical grégorien*, 47, on the historical beginning of rhythm.

<sup>116</sup> Messiaen, *Traité*, i, 7–9, 41.

foundation, gradually realized in the evolution of nature.<sup>117</sup> Within this common order, it is less surprising to find similarities between the expressiveness of birds, Chopin and liturgical singing.

Finally, the integration of time and space in rhythm implies a particular reciprocity between music and gestures. The *Cours*, *Le nombre musical grégorien* and the *Traité* all describe an original unity of the spoken word, music and dance as ‘*arts of motion*’.<sup>118</sup> As put by Mocquereau, in Greek dramatic performances, ‘There was but *one rhythm* that could simultaneously give form to three things: musical sounds, words, and orchestration.’<sup>119</sup> D’Indy describes how a felicitous combination of rhythmical and plastic arts carried an intrinsic sacrality, which was lost when the corporeal element of dance was excluded from Christian liturgy in the Middle Ages. While the rhythm and artistic expressivity of the sung word was developed further in Gregorian chant, it remained separate from the art of dance – which, instead, continued to inspire Western instrumental and symphonic music.<sup>120</sup>

In close proximity to d’Indy, Mocquereau uses Greek concepts to revive a conception of music as a form of constant motion and change. Its imagined reciprocity with physical motions is intended to highlight a dimension of rhythm lost in a metrical era.<sup>121</sup> As put in a statement that Messiaen cites verbatim: ‘All the rhythmic theories of antiquity were summed up in a single idea repeated under endless forms: *the beautiful ordonnance of movement*’ (emphasis original).<sup>122</sup> The notion of beauty points to an intrinsically spatial aspect, and Mocquereau seeks to instil awareness of a *real* movement in the melodic curves of plainchant. It is hardly surprising that Messiaen found this approach difficult to transmit to students, because Mocquereau argues that melodies quite literally bring forth a palpable movement from one location to another. For him, this reality of rhythmic motion must not be disregarded as a mere analogy to visible movements in space. Vocal motion is portrayed to walk on ‘feet’ of an infinitely light and flexible character, far from the incessant ‘brutality’ of metrical regularity:

The voice indeed moves neither accidentally nor mechanically; its risings and fallings are of a more spiritual than material nature, moved, as it is, by a vital and spontaneous power, a power both free and intelligent.<sup>123</sup>

<sup>117</sup> See Messiaen, *Traité*, iii, 349, for an example of how Messiaen cites Book of Wisdom 11:20 and Daniel 5:25 to situate the notion of numbers in a speculative theological framework.

<sup>118</sup> Mocquereau, *Le nombre musical grégorien*; Messiaen, *Traité*, iv, 43; cf. D’Indy, *Course*, 50.

<sup>119</sup> Mocquereau, *Le nombre musical grégorien*, 38; cf. d’Indy, *Course*, 49, and Messiaen, *Traité*, iv, 43.

<sup>120</sup> D’Indy, *Course*, 58.

<sup>121</sup> As succinctly put in Messiaen, *Traité*, iv, 43, citing and paraphrasing Mocquereau, *Le nombre musical grégorien*, 109: ‘Dans la philosophie d’Aristote, se mouvoir signifiait *changer* [...] Les Grecs avaient donné le nom d’*arts de mouvement* à la poésie, à la musique, et à la danse. Par nature, ces arts sont soumis au changement: leur existence est successive et s’écoule, goutte à goutte, dans le temps’ (‘In the philosophy of Aristotle, motion signifies *change* [...] The Greeks had given the name *arts of motion* to poetry, to music and to dance. By nature, these arts are subjected to change, their existence is successive and flows, drop by drop, in time.’) (Emphases original.)

<sup>122</sup> Mocquereau, *Le nombre musical grégorien*, 109; Messiaen, *Traité*, iv, 43.

<sup>123</sup> Mocquereau, *Le nombre musical grégorien*, 112. Messiaen summarizes a longer elucidation on the same page: ‘Le mouvement vocal, celui de la mélodie grégorienne surtout, emprunte le moins possible à la matière. Il se meut, mais invisiblement; il marche, mais avec légèreté. “Le Beau est léger;

Mocquereau's chant editions were largely aimed at inspiring performances of chant informed by the kind of movement suggested here. Central to this endeavour is a certain energy that carries melodic phrases from their inception through various intermediary points to a final cessation. As Messiaen puts it in a paraphrase of Mocquereau's argument,

The voice that articulates a phrase, recites a verse, sings a melody, moves in its own manner. It goes from the first articulation up to the final syllable, successively passing all the intermediary syllables. On this passage, it mimics the motion of a dancing body, or better, that of a bouncing ball; it rises, falls, from bearing point to bearing point, until the definitive rest that brings to a close phrase, melody, and rhythm.<sup>124</sup>

Mocquereau's most conspicuous attempt to convey his vision to a broad audience is his plastic system of *chironomy* for Gregorian chant. This particular system is succinctly explained by Messiaen: 'What is chironomy? It is – etymologically – the rule of the hand: that is to say, the indication of rhythmic motion by means of waves of the hand.'<sup>125</sup> As Mocquereau saw it, there was a constant tradition in chant performance – ostensibly going back to Greek drama – of a conductor indicating a composite musical and plastic rhythm through hand gestures. He distanced himself from fixed patterns of movement in contemporary solfeggio and a mere striking of beats. Nevertheless, a parallel law-bound system of conducting emerges in Mocquereau's system, designed to embody his vision of rhythmic subtlety and flexibility. This chironomy involves gestures that visibly capture falling and rising motions, as shown in Figure 6.<sup>126</sup>

Beyond such simple rhythmic elements, Mocquereau wants to capture a reinvigoration of melodic energy within the wider compass of a phrase. He expounds on the movement of a ball that bounces several times on the ground on its passage from the beginning to the end of its motion. In this roundabout manner he indicates where melodies in a similar fashion 'hit the ground' (see Figure 7).<sup>127</sup>

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tout ce qui est divin marche sur des pieds délicats." (Nietzsche)' ('The vocal motion, that of the Gregorian melody especially, borrows as little as possible from the material. It moves, but invisible; it walks, but with lightness. "The beautiful is light; everything that is divine walks on delicate feet." (Nietzsche)' Messiaen, *Traité*, iv, 43. On Nietzsche's influence on rhythm theories in French music, see Cheong, 'Ancient Greek Rhythms in Messiaen's *Le sacre*', and Rainer Cadenbach, 'Wie Hugo Riemann sich von Carl Fuchs dabei helfen ließ, "das erlösende Wort" einmal bei Nietzsche zu finden. – Zu einer vergessenen Kontroverse über künstlerisches Schaffen und "Phrasierung"', *Hugo Riemann*, ed. Böhme-Mehner and Mehner, 69–91.

<sup>124</sup> 'La voix qui articule une phrase, déclame un vers, chante une mélodie, se meut également à sa manière. Elle va de l'articulation première jusqu'à la syllabe finale, en passant successivement par toutes les syllabes intermédiaires. Dans ce passage, elle imite le mouvement de l'homme qui danse, ou mieux, celui d'une balle qui rebondit; elle s'élance, s'abaisse, se relève, et parvient ainsi, d'appuis en appuis, jusqu'au repos définitif qui clôt à la fois la phrase, la mélodie, le rythme.' Messiaen, *Traité*, iv, 43.

<sup>125</sup> 'Qu'est-ce que la chironomie? C'est – étymologiquement – la règle par la main: c'est-à-dire l'indication du mouvement rythmique au moyen d'ondulations de la main.' Messiaen, *Traité*, iv, 51; cf. *ibid.*, 54.

<sup>126</sup> Mocquereau, *Le nombre musical grégorien*, 117.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.* See pp. 120–2 for Mocquereau's analogy with the way in which a golf club sets a ball in motion, complete with an image of his imaginary golfer! On Gajard's rendering, see Messiaen, *Traité*, iv, 53–4.



Figure 6 Mocquereau, *Le nombre musical grégorien*, 117.

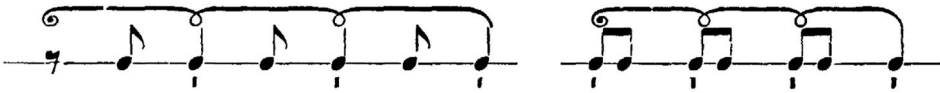


Figure 7 Mocquereau, *Le nombre musical grégorien*, 117.

There is no reason to follow Mocquereau's chironomy in further detail, but it is noteworthy how much space Messiaen devotes to it. He cites extensively from *Le nombre musical grégorien*, as well as from Gajard's transmission of his teacher's system. Having first presented images of various rhythmic elements similar to the ones reproduced here from Mocquereau, Messiaen then gives his own renderings of longer melodic lines according to this method. One of the most elaborate examples shows a formulaic pattern of movements to be used by imaginary conductors. It reveals how such chironomy is derived from close analyses of rhythmical structures in chant melodies. In Messiaen's view, a major benefit in *Le nombre musical grégorien* is that rhythm is shown to have a 'cinematic order'. This order brings the arguably most well-known aspect of Mocquereau's theory into play: the conviction that rhythm is in its very nature an 'alternation of momentum and rest, of *arsis* and *thésis*'.<sup>128</sup> Messiaen's own chironomy for *Ostende nobis Domine* shows how meticulously he applies these twin concepts in analysis and performance suggestions. The letter A (for *arsis*) provokes ascending or 'bouncing' motions in the chironomy, whereas T (for *thésis*) brings about descending motions (see Figure 8).<sup>129</sup>

Similar graphic representations of rhythmic movements beyond strict measures appear in Messiaen's work around 1930, suggesting an initial influence from Mocquereau at this time. *La mort du nombre* for soprano, tenor, violin and piano depicts an apocalyptic disintegration of time and space. The composer's own poetry articulates a contrasting vision of a new liberated existence strikingly similar to the light movement envisioned by Mocquereau.<sup>130</sup> The orchestral piece *Les offrandes oubliées*

<sup>128</sup> 'Alternance des élans et des repos, des *arsis* et des *thésis*'. Messiaen, *Traité*, iv, 44.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>130</sup> Messiaen's own lyrics for the piece articulate it thus: 'Plus légers que des oiseaux de plumes, plus légers que le vide, plus légers que ce qui n'est pas, nous planerons audessus d'un rêve. Le poids du nombre sera mort. Le poids du nombre sera mort. Il sera mort! mort!' ('Lighter than feathered birds, lighter than empty space, lighter than what is not, we will soar above a dream. The weight of number will be dead. The weight of number will be dead. It will be dead! dead!'). Olivier Messiaen, *La mort du nombre* (Paris: Durand, 1931), 9–11, translation in Schloesser, *Visions of Amen*, 118.



The image displays a musical score for a vocal line, likely from a Mass by Olivier Messiaen. The score is presented in four systems, each consisting of a vocal line with rhythmic notation above it and a standard musical staff below. The lyrics are: "de no-bis Dó-mi-ne mi-se-ri-cór-di-am tu-am: et sa-lu-tá-re tu-um da no-bis." The word "Ostén-" is written above the first system. The rhythmic notation uses letters 'A' and 'T' to denote accents and rests, with various symbols like slanted lines and brackets indicating specific rhythmic values. The vocal line is written in a stylized, wavy notation that follows the contour of the notes. The musical staff below each system shows the corresponding notes and rests, with a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a common time signature.

Figure 8 Messiaen, *Traité*, iv, 61. © Copyright Editions Musicales Alphonse Leduc. Used by kind permission of Hal Leonard Europe Limited.

Très lent, douloureux, profondément triste (♩ = 44)  
con Sord.

1<sup>rs</sup> VIOLONS  
2<sup>ds</sup> VIOLONS  
ALTOS  
VIOLONCELLES  
CONTREBASSES

*M.B.* – Les signes placés au dessus du quatuor concernent le chef d'orchestre. ♩ = ½ temps – □ = 1 temps binaire – Δ = 1 temps ternaire.

Figure 9 Messiaen, *Les offrandes oubliées*, bars 1–3. © 1931 Durand Ed. With the kind permission of Editions Durand.

presents conductors with a system for representing the music's alternation between binary and ternary groups (see Figure 9).

While the actual signs depart from Mocquereau's, a syntax based on groups of two and three reiterates the most notorious aspect of Gregorian rhythm theories from Solesmes. Furthermore, as in his chironomy for the *Ostende nobis Domine*, Messiaen uses a diagonal mark to denote what he (perplexingly enough) calls '½ temps'.<sup>131</sup> In the light of his reception of Mocquereau, it seems clear that this indicates a middle ground or high point of tension, within shorter or longer periods. Such traces of influences suggest how a primitivist turn to the 'old rules' of plainchant was an important aspect of Messiaen's youthful aspirations for a more complex rhythmical language.<sup>132</sup> At the same time, Mocquereau's chironomy broadly prefigures later graphic notation, which – somewhat like Messiaen's neumes – typically prescribes gestures and motions without fixed pitches.<sup>133</sup>

A suggestion that post-war graphic notation would stand connected to plainchant or recourses to Greek antiquity seems far-fetched in historiographies shaped by high modernism and the avant-garde. Nevertheless, there is a certain logical progression from ideas about a historical and systematic primacy of rhythm to particular expressive ideals in Messiaen's music, as well as to allusions to chironomy in his own compositions. Explorations up to this point have outlined how Messiaen's readings in chant theory instilled a conviction that music is firmly situated in a mathematical and

<sup>131</sup> Olivier Messiaen, *Les offrandes oubliées: Méditation symphonique pour orchestra* (Paris: Durand, 1931), 1. Messiaen credits the conductor Roger Désormière with the invention of these signs and points out that they also were employed in the orchestral version of his song cycle *Poèmes pour Mi*; see Messiaen, *The Technique of my Musical Language*, 29.

<sup>132</sup> Messiaen, *The Technique of my Musical Language*, 8. 'By employing this notation, Messiaen was engaging in modernist primitivism, pointing ahead to his future by aligning himself with a certain faction of the past.' Schloesser, *Visions of Amen*, 109.

<sup>133</sup> Hardink, 'Messiaen and Plainchant', 22–4. On 'neumatic' methods within graphic notation in modern music, see Pierre Boulez, *Orientalisms: Collected Writings*, ed. Jean-Jacques Nattiez, trans. Martin Cooper (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), 84–7.

ecological order. This stance provides a truly universal basis for his analyses of music through neumes and reveals an assumed inner connection between such disparate repertoires as birdsong and plainchant. Having first reconstructed these fundamental ideas in dialogue with their roots in d'Indy and Mocquereau, it is now possible to take a closer look at the musical potential in a Greek-inspired theory of rhythm as 'the beautiful ordonnance of movement'.<sup>134</sup>

### Neumes as motifs within Riemannian dynamic shadings

The examples of chironomy given above have already indicated how Messiaen postulates a schema of different levels in rhythm, from basic elements to larger and multiplex structures. As outlined in the *Traité*, this outlook follows Mocquereau, who enumerates four rhythmic layers, with the 'phrase' as the highest unit (see Figure 10). This schema can also be found in d'Indy and harks back to a systematic theory in Riemann.<sup>135</sup>

In addition, *Le nombre musical grégorien* establishes the primordial unit of a 'short or indivisible elementary pulse'. This 'atomic' level is equivalent to syllables in language and remains a substrate below the simplest of the four rhythmic layers.<sup>136</sup> Such a minimal pulse that itself remains inappreciable is crucial to Messiaen's understanding of 'an uninterrupted succession of equal durations' at the bottom of rhythm. He regards awareness of these 'atoms' crucial for performers of his music. Listeners, however, perceive only the 'rhythmizing' of the flow that takes place in his practice of adding 'to any rhythm whatsoever a small, brief value which transforms its metric balance'.<sup>137</sup> Stephen Broad has traced Messiaen's distinct technique of added values to Mocquereau's performance ideals in chant; a musical backdrop would then be Riemann's method of clarifying rhythmic structures through prolongations of their first note.<sup>138</sup> Messiaen, however, ardently denied that his 'added values' constitute a kind of notated rubato.<sup>139</sup> Recent research appears to prove him right, in reconstructions of his notion from Hindu sources without the Riemannian performance aspects.<sup>140</sup> Nevertheless, the following discussion aims to show how Riemann's Greek-inspired term 'rhythmizing' explains why he regarded neumes as carriers of rhythmic motion, as well as highlighting expressive ideals intrinsic to this understanding.

<sup>134</sup> Mocquereau, *Le nombre musical grégorien*, 53, Messiaen, *Traité*, iv, 43.

<sup>135</sup> Mocquereau refers to these 'stages' as 'elementary rhythm', 'rhythm-incise', 'rhythm-member' and 'rhythm-phrase'; *Le nombre musical grégorien*, 46, Messiaen, *Traité*, iv, 45.

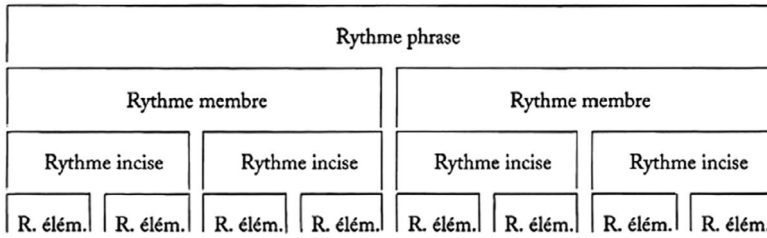
<sup>136</sup> Mocquereau, *Le nombre musical grégorien*, 222–3, 48–9.

<sup>137</sup> Messiaen, *Musical Color*, 68; Messiaen, *The Technique of my Musical Language*, 10. On 'the foundation of a basic, indivisible pulse', 'crucial to accurate performance but not to a listener's perception of larger rhythms', see Hardink, 'Messiaen and Plainchant', 25–7.

<sup>138</sup> Broad, 'Recontextualising Messiaen's Early Career', i, 133–8; Hugo Riemann, *Musikalische Dynamik und Agogik: Lehrbuch der musikalischen Phrasierung auf Grund einer Revision der Lehre von der musikalischen Metrik und Rhythmik* (Hamburg: D. Rother, 1884), 9.

<sup>139</sup> Roessler, *Contributions to the Spiritual World of Olivier Messiaen*, 133.

<sup>140</sup> Balmer, Lacôte and Murray, *Le modèle et l'invention*, 347–51; Asimov, 'Comparative Philology', 251 n. 30.



(R. élém. = rythme élémentaire).

Figure 10 Messiaen, *Traité*, iv, 45. © Copyright Editions Musicales Alphonse Leduc. Used by kind permission of Hal Leonard Europe Limited.

For Riemann, the capacity of ‘rhythmicizing’ first arises from a motion and expressive potential in tensions between several notes. In contrast to the atomic level of individual notes, he calls the first rhythmic layer that instils such movement ‘motifs’.<sup>141</sup> Mocquereau echoes this stance and adds a notable emphasis on a certain qualitative criterion: ‘*Rhythm is ordered movement* [...] A series of sounds – syllables or musical tones – does not suffice to constitute a rhythm’ (emphasis original).<sup>142</sup>

Mocquereau thus accepts the idea that a rhythmic order originates in dynamic relations between several events, a Riemannian vision that leads him beyond the primacy of syllabic chant advocated by Pothier. In the wake of Riemann’s motifs, he speaks of neumes as the first layer of rhythm proper. The neume is defined as ‘a melodic group’ which ‘expresses a *musical idea*’. It thus ‘retains its *form*, its individuality and autonomy’ (emphases original) even when detached from its original melodic context.<sup>143</sup> As put in *Le nombre musical grégorien*,

The *word* in language and the *neum* in music are individuals of a highly sociable nature. They exist only to meet, associate and combine in phrases – musical or literary. The neums, in so doing, become flexible and lend themselves to certain transformations and modifications which bring the individual neum into a closer relation with its surroundings in the phrase, fitting it more intimately into the general melodic and rhythmic scheme.<sup>144</sup>

As a basic building block, the neume is ascribed both a constant form and a capacity for adaptation and transformation into different musical structures. Messiaen’s neumatic analyses and technique of melodic borrowing capture the former tendency,

<sup>141</sup> The ‘Rhythmisieren’ is never individual notes, rather motifs of at least two notes function as the ‘kleinsten Einheitsgebild von bedeutsamem Inhalt und bestimmtem Ausdruckswerte’ (‘minutest unitary structure of significant content and particular expressive values’). Hugo Riemann, *System der musikalischen Rhythmik und Metrik* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1903), p. VIII. A motif is thus a ‘kleinen Organismus von eigenartiger Lebenskraft’ (‘small organic unit with a peculiar vitality’) and the original ‘Bewegungselement’ (‘element of movement’) in music. Riemann, *Musikalische Dynamik und Agogik*, 11.

<sup>142</sup> Mocquereau, *Le nombre musical grégorien*, 43. As Mocquereau duly acknowledges, the initial definition is taken from Plato, *Laws* II 665a.

<sup>143</sup> Mocquereau, *Le nombre musical grégorien*, 245.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 246.

towards distinctiveness and permanence, with the implication that the musical *idea* within a neume remains identifiable in changing musical settings.<sup>145</sup> Furthermore, Mocquereau discusses cases where pitches are changed to facilitate the melodic flow within a neume or the proper interplay with other neumes.<sup>146</sup> This trait is a second vital element for turning neumes into a general method of analysis and into creative tools in modern composition.

As these considerations reveal, Messiaen's conception of neumes is derived from theories that inscribe movement and tensions between distinct events ('beats') into the fabric of any truly rhythmic syntax. This basic principle makes it highly problematical to argue, as Hardink does, that: 'The concept of stasis in Messiaen's output [...] owes its aesthetic to Gregorian chant.'<sup>147</sup> Messiaen himself had no concept of *stasis*, although he could describe himself as a 'static composer' because of his musical preoccupation with eternity. However, this aspect is in fact at odds with the late Romantic tradition which informed his reception of plainchant.<sup>148</sup> Rather, influences from chant theory inspired visions of a musical language brimming with dynamic tensions, as shown when he suggests an analogy between simple neumes and appoggiaturas or passing notes in modern harmony.<sup>149</sup>

Within this framework, it is natural to see how Mocquereau's theory suggested a possible route for liberating rhythm in the writing of new music. *Le nombre musical grégorien* could teach Messiaen how rhythm, as a form of ordered movements,

seizes the imperceptible undulations of sonorous bodies, unites them, organizes them in more varied and more ample undulations; arranges them with intelligence and taste in a perfect order; this it is that gives to them a form, that spiritualizes them in a certain sense, and gives them movement, beauty and life.<sup>150</sup>

The ideal advocated here is a certain Apollonian refinement that spiritualizes motion. In other words, rhythm should venture beyond a 'pathological' tendency in early Romantic affect theories, where metre and human experience of it passively 'succumbs' to momentary affects.<sup>151</sup> Mocquereau follows Riemann's move away from simple alternations between distinct and ostensibly unrelated accents and unaccents. The German theorist had articulated a conception of 'gradually changing intensity of two or three tones grouped into a *metrical motif*'. The most important

<sup>145</sup> 'In the case of a neum, the relation of pitch between its notes is established without regard to the notes which may precede or follow the neum.' Mocquereau, *Le nombre musical grégorien*, 227.

<sup>146</sup> Such 'substitution is found not only in *recto tono* recitation but it occurs constantly in the living flow of the Gregorian melodic phrase'; 'There are other cases where [...] these substitutions are not caused by a modification in the melody. They are caused by the *position* of certain notes in relation to other notes or neumes, so that their pitch may be considered *in relation to what precedes or what follows* the intermediary note' (emphases original). *Ibid.*, 233–4.

<sup>147</sup> Hardink, 'Messiaen and Plainchant', 7.

<sup>148</sup> Messiaen, *Music and Color*, 103–4; cf. Messiaen, *Traité*, i, 7–9.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, iv, 8.

<sup>150</sup> Mocquereau, *Le nombre musical grégorien*, 43–4.

<sup>151</sup> His general Dionysian preferences notwithstanding, Nietzsche articulated a contrast between an ancient ethical metric of time and a 'barbaric' – as well as pathological – modern metric of affect; see letter from Friedrich Nietzsche to Carl Fuchs, August 1888, reprinted in Cadenbach, 'Wie Hugo Riemann sich von Carl Fuchs dabei helfen ließ?', 87–8.

feature of a metrical motif is its ‘dynamic shading’ (*dynamische Schattierung*): a steady growth, a becoming, or a ‘positive development’ leads to a ‘dynamic climax’ followed by a passing away, a dying off, or a ‘negative development’.<sup>152</sup> Mocquereau’s notions of *arsis* and *thésis*, or *élan* and *repos*, translates Riemann’s ‘becoming’ and ‘passing away’ and intends to capture similar flexible and subtle gradations.<sup>153</sup> The inserted crescendo and diminuendo signs in Messiaen’s chironomy reveal how his rhythmic analyses also rest on such a shifting intensity within phrases. The assumed ground of both music and plastic arts within a common nature of rhythm helps to explain why neumes in chironomy are regarded as conjoined melodic and metrical motifs, in line with a late Romantic, ‘ultra-expressive’ ideal in performance.<sup>154</sup>

There is also a lasting influence on Messiaen’s chironomy, through Mocquereau, from the most notorious aspects of Riemann’s break with nineteenth-century accent theories: namely, his often dogmatic conviction that every single metrical unit contains an upbeat and a downbeat, as well as his refusal to place the beginning of motifs on metrically strong positions. Sometimes referred to as having propounded an ‘axiomatic anacrusis (*Auftaktigkeit*)’, Riemann argued that earlier accent theories had failed to account for an ascending motion at the origin of musical movements. He regarded such energy necessary for phrase structures to take off, but claimed that the real aesthetic worth of metrically accentuated motifs lies in a contrary repose.<sup>155</sup>

*Le nombre musical grégorien* scrupulously transmits Riemann’s conviction that the energy and equilibrium between these different shadings are reiterated at all four layers of rhythm. Messiaen endorses Mocquereau’s ‘final synthesis’ of all rhythms to a dynamic and ‘indissoluble union of momentum and rest’. In plainchant, at least, he also accepts a deconstruction of all rhythms into underlying alternations between groups of two and three, arguing that they symbolize basic binary or ternary motions in the human body.<sup>156</sup> A primacy of irregularity and tension becomes manifest in the further suggestion that even spondaic metre emerges from an archetypal

<sup>152</sup> Caplin, ‘Theories of Musical Rhythm’, 684.

<sup>153</sup> Riemann himself deems Mocquereau’s terms *élan* and *repos* preferable because of their philosophic profundity; see Riemann, ‘Ein Kapitel vom Rhythmus’, 159.

<sup>154</sup> ‘That the crescendo and decrescendo notations were meant as actual indications of tone intensity is obvious from much of Riemann’s discussion; thus his, like Lussy’s, is clearly a theory of musical performance, one rooted in a Romantic aesthetic of ultra-expressivity.’ Caplin, ‘Theories of musical rhythm’, 684. Cf. Messiaen, *Traité*, iv, 47, 51.

<sup>155</sup> Rehding, *Hugo Riemann*, 73, and Hartmut Krones, ‘Hugo Riemanns Überlegungen zu Phrasierung und Artikulation’, *Hugo Riemann*, ed. Böhme-Mehner and Mehner, 93–115, especially p. 94.

<sup>156</sup> ‘C’est ce dernier rythme – le rythme à la fois binaire et ternaire ou *rythme mixte et libre* – qui est d’un usage constant dans le plain-chant, par le fait même de l’écriture et de la pensée neumatiques. Selon Dom Mocquereau, la nature nous en donne l’exemple. “La Marche de l’homme est binaire; sa respiration est ternaire. Quant au rythme mixte et libre, il est partout autour de nous; c’est même l’état ordinaire des mouvements rythmiques dans les éléments. Les ondulations sonores et visibles des flots de la mer, les mouvements dessinés des montagnes, le bruit du vent.” (It is the latter rhythm – rhythm being at the same time binary and ternary, or *mixed and free rhythm* – which is in constant use in plainchant, precisely because of the neumatic writing and thinking. According to Dom Mocquereau, the example lies in nature itself: “The pace of the human being is binary; his breathing is ternary. As for the mixed and free rhythm, it is everywhere always around us; it is even the ordinary state of the rhythmic movements within elements. The sound waves and visible ripples of the sea, the motions

forward-directed or 'iambic' motion.<sup>157</sup> In this way, Messiaen's reception of Mocquereau's *arsis* and *thésis* retains Riemann's general phrase schema of a necessary 'upbeat motion', a middle point – called *ictus* – and an ensuing cessation of intensity.

The *Traité* nevertheless deems the chant scholar 'insatiable' in his Riemann-like synthesis. This is a point where Messiaen – like d'Indy – breaks with Mocquereau's 'Teutonic systematicity', articulating an enhanced awareness of historical heterogeneity in music, and thus beginning to recede from the strict universality posited by Riemann. The fourth volume of the *Traité* discusses at length d'Indy's theory of articulation, which in its analyses of masculine and feminine melodic groups employs Riemann's basic schema of becoming and passing away within phrases. While its articulation in the *Cours* is deemed appropriate in music from Gluck to Wagner, Messiaen declares it 'absurd' to search for its constitutive elements in plainchant or Stravinsky.<sup>158</sup> His own chironomy for chant models certainly employs the notions and concomitant vision of Mocquereau's similar theory of *arsis* and *thésis*. In contrast, however, to the more dogmatic use of these basic patterns in his own chapter on Mozart, Messiaen's analyses of plainchant incorporate these shadings of intensity in a much less heterogeneous fashion.<sup>159</sup> In this flexibility, supposedly, lies the primary aesthetic value of plainchant for Messiaen.

As this stance makes clear, the argument that plainchant provides a link back to original and universal rhythmic theories does not imply that particular rhythmic

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drawn in the mountains, the noise of wind.”) (Emphases original.) Messiaen, *Traité*, iv, 47; cf. Mocquereau, *Le nombre musical grégorien*, 67–8.

<sup>157</sup> “Le rythme égal n'est donc que la réduction du rythme inégal ternaire, rythme primordial et naturel” (Dom Mocquereau, id.). Première synthèse: les rythmes primitifs ou élémentaires se réduisent à deux: a) rythme inégal iambique b) rythme égal spondaïque. Deuxième synthèse: les autres sortes de rythmes sont réductibles à ces deux formes qui en restent les archétypes. Troisième synthèse: le rythme spondaïque est un resserré du rythme iambique. Quatrième synthèse: l'un et l'autre sont des variations du principe rythmique fondamental: arsis – thésis. Cinquième et dernière synthèse: union indissoluble de l'élan et du repos. Arsis et thésis ne sauraient exister l'une sans l'autre. Elles sont “les deux phases d'un mouvement un et indivisible”. (“The even rhythm is therefore only the reduction of ternary uneven rhythm, primordial and natural rhythm” (Dom Mocquereau, id.). First synthesis: the primitive or elementary rhythms are reduced to two: a) uneven iambic rhythm b) even spondaic rhythm. Second synthesis: the other kinds of rhythm are reducible to these two forms, which remain their archetypes. Third synthesis: the spondaic rhythm is a contracted iambic rhythm. Fourth synthesis: both of them are variations of the fundamental rhythmic principle: arsis – thesis. Fifth and final synthesis: indissoluble union of momentum and rest. Arsis and thesis cannot exist one without the other. They are “the two phases of a single and indivisible motion”.) (Emphases original.) Messiaen, *Traité*, iv, 46; cf. Mocquereau, *Le nombre musical grégorien*, 62, 65.

<sup>158</sup> Messiaen, *Traité*, iv, 140. This stance tallies with a verdict that Mocquereau's alternation between binary and ternary motion is accurate in chant, but must be disregarded as a universal theory of rhythm: ‘Pour Dom Mocquereau, tous les rythmes se ramènent à l'agencement du 2 et du 3. Je ne souscris pas à cette opinion pour tous les rythmes. Pour un certain nombre de rythmes seulement – et parmi eux les neumes du chant Grégorien – Dom Mocquereau a raison. Son esprit de synthèse est insatiable. Il rentre tous les rythmes possibles dans la combinaison 2 et 3.’ *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>159</sup> Compare, for example, Messiaen's chironomy for *Ostende nobis Domine* (see Figure 8 above) with the chapter on d'Indy and Mozart: Messiaen, *Traité*, iv, 131–70. See also Po-Yi (Nelson) Wu, ‘Messiaen's Dynamic Mozart’, *Olivier Messiaen: The Centenary Papers*, ed. Judith Crispin (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 281–300 (pp. 282–3); and Janz, ‘Messiaens Mozart’, 298–9.

patterns in historical chant provide timeless norms for the further evolution of music. It is necessary to distinguish between a fundamental theoretical level and its adaptation in compositional practice. Messiaen's emphasis on chant as a model for 'ametical' music employs ideas from Mocquereau against the chant scholar's own strict system. The rhythmic symmetry on four levels articulated in *Le nombre musical grégorien*, from motifs to full-scale phrases, stands heir to a manifest norm of regular eight-bar periods in Riemann. To accept the underlying logic of such symmetry would, however, oppose the core values Messiaen seeks to salvage from plainchant. In the end, he is a more emphatic champion of 'freedom' in chant than Mocquereau, and must find his role model's rhythmic theories 'incomplete'.<sup>160</sup>

### From Mocquereau to new orders of sound

Beside Messiaen's theoretical affirmation of a modified form of the expressive ideal of dynamic shading, there is a more manifest – albeit perhaps surprising – creative reception of *Le nombre musical grégorien* to consider here. Once more, the inspiration comes from Mocquereau's quest for a 'pre-musical' universality, which entails a primacy of sound over particular elements in music (or language).<sup>161</sup> Messiaen could here find incentives for an emancipation of sounds from traditional musical structures, a central preoccupation in his musical context of the late 1940s and early 1950s. His celebrated serial pieces from the middle of the century have typically been compared to dodecaphony, Boulez, or Pierre Schaeffer's *musique concrète*. Influences from Mocquereau's theory of sound on Messiaen's distinct brand of serialism have been less widely appreciated. The thesis that 'Rhythm is ordered movement' beyond a 'series of sounds' led the Gregorian scholar to argue that:

These movements must be put in order and harmoniously arranged. This ordinance, this putting in order, is the form itself of rhythm. This it is that disposes harmoniously the succession of short and long sounds, high and low sounds, and every kind of timbre.<sup>162</sup>

In the *Traité*, Messiaen takes *Le nombre musical grégorien* and meticulously reproduces its positing of four, and later five, dimensions inherent in the phenomenon of sound. The original quadruple concerns the interplay between (1) the quantitative order (durations); (2) the dynamic order (intensity); (3) the melodic order (itches); and (4) the phonetic order (timbres).<sup>163</sup> These distinct and 'interpenetrating' orders in sound provide an obvious link to Messiaen's *Mode de valeurs et d'intensités*, together with a decisive stress on human agency in the ordering of sound. This piece creates a composite 'mode' of 24 durations, 7 dynamic levels, 36 notes and 12 *touches* (modes of

<sup>160</sup> For an image of symmetry on Riemann's four rhythmic levels, see Caplin, 'Theories of Musical Rhythm', 687, and cf. Mocquereau, *Le nombre musical grégorien*, 46, 53–4 (with reference to Riemann).

<sup>161</sup> 'Sound is the basis of all music, of all speech, of all rhythm, whether musical or rhetorical.' Mocquereau, *Le nombre musical grégorien*, 40.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 40–1; cf. Messiaen, *Traité*, i, 44; iv, 44.



attack). An order of 12 modes of attack on the piano is clearly not quite the same as different timbres in a more literal sense. Nevertheless, the basic parameters behind this groundbreaking work are a sounding corollary of Mocquereau's four orders, albeit further advanced.<sup>164</sup>

The most distinctive aspect of Messiaen's serialism is arguably its focus on the element of rhythm. This trait echoes how Mocquereau's chant theory outlined a fifth, 'cinematic' order, or simply 'The Rhythmic Order, properly speaking'.<sup>165</sup> As Vincent Benitez notes, 'For Messiaen, manipulating the order of durations was a key element [...] in discovering different kinds of movement beyond the simple forward.'<sup>166</sup> A topic worth investigating further is to what extent the subtle flexibility and dynamic shading inherent in Mocquereau's theory of *arsis* and *thésis* influenced Messiaen's serial explorations of movement, in *Quatre études de rythme* and beyond.

The individual piece that first springs to mind in this context is *Neumes rythmiques*. This explicit attempt to turn the movement in different neumes into an element for new compositions was highlighted already in 1958, in a tribute written by his student Karlheinz Stockhausen.<sup>167</sup> Messiaen's exposition of the work in the third volume of the *Traité* in fact contains his single most lucid explication of neumes. He explains that neumes in chant are 'melodic groups rather than rhythmic groups';<sup>168</sup> nevertheless, he argues that their primary musical interest originates in shadings between *arsis* and *thésis*. In preparation for the composition, Messiaen first transposed the kind of movement supposedly inherent in the originally melodic gestures of neumes into a new 'language' of individual rhythms. Each rhythmic neume then received a fixed intensity – certainly artificial, but often inspired by the intensity of its original melodic gesture.<sup>169</sup> Equipped with such a fixed repertoire of sonorous rhythms, Messiaen was able to build entire phrases that recreate irregular, 'fluid, deceptive and imaginative' shadings of intensity, much in the spirit of Mocquereau.<sup>170</sup>

<sup>164</sup> See Olivier Messiaen, *Quatre études de rythme, with analysis by the composer* (Paris: Durand, 2008), 12–14; Messiaen, *Traité*, iii, 125–31. On its rendering of, and move beyond, Mocquereau's orders, see Vincent Benitez, 'Reconsidering Messiaen as Serialist', *Music Analysis*, 28 (2009), 267–99 (pp. 280–4).

<sup>165</sup> Mocquereau, *Le nombre musical grégorien*, 42. 'Messiaen's preoccupation with time and eternity led him to favour rhythm over other musical parameters in his serial techniques; for this reason, his serial practice bears little resemblance to orthodox 12-note technique. Messiaen used pitch and/or timbre to either complement or delineate rhythmic designs through contrasts of tonal colour.' Benitez, 'Reconsidering Messiaen', 267.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>167</sup> Karlheinz Stockhausen, 'Messiaen ist ein glühender Schmelztiegel', *Olivier Messiaen: La cité celeste – Das himmlische Jerusalem: Über Leben und Werk des französischen Komponisten*, ed. Thomas Daniel Schlee and Dietrich Kämper (Cologne: Wienand Verlag, 1998), 29 (first published in *Melos*, 25/12 (1958), 392).

<sup>168</sup> 'Les neumes du plain-chant sont en réalité plutôt des groupes mélodiques que des groupes rythmiques.', Messiaen, *Traité*, iii, 147.

<sup>169</sup> Messiaen, *Traité*, iii, 147–54; iv, 62–5.

<sup>170</sup> Peter Hill, 'Piano Music II', *The Messiaen Companion*, ed. Peter Hill (London: Faber, 2008), 307–51 (p. 317). 'Messiaen's purpose [...] is to bring back to musical sound its syncretic entity, which was characteristic of plainchant, which [the] composer considered to be the best music in the world. However, he doesn't stylize the sound of plainchant, he tries to follow the way of deconstruction [...]

This procedure allows Messiaen to disentangle the cinematic movement theorized by Mocquereau from the distinct repertoire of plainchant. Neumes become a creative tool in the development of a new musical language that almost literally reproduces fundamental ideals in Mocquereau's theory of sound, while forming completely new structures. The theory of interconnecting orders of sounds is, however, no less significant than the Riemannian shading of intensity articulated in the interplay between *arsis* and *thesis*. Messiaen's rhythmic neumes are not primarily to do with durations; rather, from the outset they are compound and sounding phenomena that embody a kind of melodic movement, a certain fixed intensity and, in fact, a specific timbre.

As the composer's own exposition of *Neumes rythmiques* reveals, neumes are rhythmic elements that in every appearance retain the same basic rendering in every parameter. While durations can vary slightly, the inherent shading of intensity in Messiaen's version of a *podatus*, a *clivis* or a *torculus* remains constant. They are reproduced with a fixed melodic movement, but the conviction that timbre is an intrinsic element also inspires Messiaen to add colour by means of harmonic 'resonances'. In the first section of neumes, each bar represents a distinct neume. While the constant central pitch throughout the nine bars is an *e'*, it is both set within different structures of melodic intensity, and receives different colourings through the resonance of added chords (see Figure 11).<sup>171</sup>

This technique is of pivotal importance in understanding connections between the reception of Mocquereau's theory of sound in rhythm and Messiaen's refined rendering of birdsong as developed in the 1950s. The crucial point is that harmonic resonances – or chords – are conceived as an integral aspect in neumatic analyses of a single melodic line. This conviction mirrors the statement in *Technique de mon langage musical* that harmony lies 'latent' in melody. It requires Messiaen to develop complex homophonic harmonic textures in order to reproduce resonances within the melodies of birdsong in an ostensibly 'authentic' manner. The link between plainchant and birdsong highlighted by Cheong can at this point be explained as (at least) a threefold interconnection:

- (1) The natural basis behind Messiaen's chant theory presupposes an ecological and evolutionary unity between birdsong and the music of humanity.
- (2) Birdsong shines forth as representative of the flexibility and rhythmic subtleness dormant in a proper understanding of rhythmic-melodic neumes, through which birdsong also can be analysed.

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and re-create the main features of plainchant on a new level of understanding.' Tatiana Tsaregradskaya, 'Sound Attack in the Works of Olivier Messiaen: Total Serialism Revisited', *Lietuvos muzikologija*, 14 (2013), 152–9 (p. 157).

<sup>171</sup> 'Messiaen's technique here [...] is to add chords above or below melodic notes in order to colour them with resonances, using harmony as an organist uses registration.' Paul Griffiths, *Olivier Messiaen and the Music of Time* (London: Faber, 1985; repr. 2008), 149. On developments of individual neumes in the piece, see p. 151, and cf. Paul Francis McNulty, 'Olivier Messiaen: The Reluctant Avant-Gardist: A Historical, Contextual and Analytical Study of the *Quatre études de rythme* and the *Livre d'orgue*' (Ph.D. dissertation, Durham University, 2014), 229–33.

**Bien modéré** (neumes rythmiques, avec résonances, et intensités fixes)

The musical score consists of two systems of three staves each. The first system (bars 3-5) is marked with 'A T A T A T A T' above the staves. The second system (bars 6-8) is marked with 'A T A T T T' above the staves. The score includes various dynamic markings such as *p*, *mf*, *f*, *ff*, and *ppp*, as well as articulation marks like 'dr.' and 'g.'. The key signature is one sharp (F#).

Figure 11 Messiaen, *Neumes rythmiques*, bars 3–11 (analysed as a succession of *arsis* and *thesis* in Messiaen, *Traité*, iii, 156). © Copyright Editions Musicales Alphonse Leduc. Used by kind permission of Hal Leonard Europe Limited.

- (3) An accurate musical rendering of melodic lines in birdsong requires harmonic colouring, in line with the theory of sound orders that Messiaen found articulated in Mocquereau's *Le nombre musical grégorien*. It is thus also natural to see a manifest continuity between the experimentation with such orders in a piece like *Neumes rythmiques* and the development of bird style in ensuing works from the 1950s.

An obvious objection against a one-sided stress on influences from Mocquereau on Messiaen's integration of rhythm, melody and even harmony is that his previous experiments with resonance appear to be unconnected to writings on chant. However, as shown by James Mittelstadt, vital ideas behind the development of Messiaen's harmonic language – most notably regarding the concept of resonance – are inspired by readings of d'Indy, and possibly of Riemann.<sup>172</sup> The obvious affinity between them and Mocquereau indicates that further attention to Messiaen's creative reception of the

<sup>172</sup> Mittelstadt, 'Resonance', 33–7.

Gregorian scholar's cinematic order may prove a fertile route to the analysis of the integration of durations, melody and sound-colour into the composer's late works. Its vision of sound as a perfect integration of duration, intensity, pitch and timbre would possibly explain the gradual turn towards the harmonic and instrumental colourings of plainchant essential to works such as *Couleurs de la cité céleste* and *Et expecto resurrectionem mortuorum*. Another significant passage where Messiaen makes use of Mocquereau's orders of sound, including timbre, is the opening of 'Les stigmates' from the opera *Saint François d'Assise*.<sup>173</sup>

### Conclusion: chant theory as an integrative but camouflaged influence

This article can be seen as a lengthy gloss on Messiaen's characteristic statement that, 'The marvellous thing about plainsong is its neumes.'<sup>174</sup> When this and other sayings are contextualized, Messiaen's theoretical approach to neumes arguably becomes 'the marvellous thing' in his reception of contemporary literature on chant. 'Archaeological' investigation of a backdrop in writings by Riemann, d'Indy and Mocquereau allows a reconstruction of Messiaen's claim for the universality of neumes as a peculiar but largely coherent and comprehensive theory. This vision brings together some of the composer's most characteristic and speculative ideas on music with a number of distinct techniques both explicit and implicit at the surface level of his writings.

The potential benefits of this reconstruction for future scholarship bridge the same macro and micro levels as the theory itself. Recent studies have already demonstrated that a certain 'neumatic lens' – inherited from d'Indy – plays a central role in Messiaen's assimilation of Gregorian chant into his own music, not least in the *style oiseaux* developed in the 1950s. This article draws attention to theoretical foundations behind these procedures.<sup>175</sup> It shows how Messiaen presupposed a unitary dimension common to all music, on intertwined mathematical, natural, historical and theological grounds. On these particular premisses, his references to 'neumatic' formulas in modern composers make logical sense, as does his connection of expressiveness in birdsong with Chopin's rubato.

<sup>173</sup> I thank one of the reviewers for highlighting 'Les stigmates'. See Olivier Messiaen, *Saint François d'Assise*, Act 3, Tableau 7 (Paris: Alphonse Leduc, 1990), Figures 3–4, 7–8. The four rhythmic layers in the Easter chant as a 'mélodie de timbres' in *Couleurs de la cité céleste* is another example that resembles Mocquereau's schema; see also Wai-Ling Cheong, 'Plainchants as Coloured Time in Messiaen's *Couleurs de la cité céleste*', *Tempo*, 64/254 (2010), 20–37. Stefan Keym's detailed exposition of sources behind the use of colour in the musical 'building blocks' of *Saint François d'Assise* cites Messiaen on 'rhythmic colours' in his *Les petites liturgies* and points out influences from d'Indy; see his *Untersuchungen*, 153–231. The integrative 'rhythmic' theory of sound articulated by Mocquereau might provide a novel framework to integrate the wide array of influences.

<sup>174</sup> See, as earlier, Messiaen, *Lecture at Notre-Dame*, 5.

<sup>175</sup> A previous lack of awareness of this veiled universality behind Messiaen's neumatic method of analysis becomes apparent in the, in itself correct, observation that, 'Many commentators are also struck by the astonishing – and revealing – links that the analyst draws between works of widely divergent styles, sometimes composed centuries apart, certainly a typical trait of his teaching.' Boivin, 'Genesis and Reception', 350.

Such a comprehensive vision of plainchant points beyond itself to wider vistas within Messiaen's musical thought. An open question is, to what degree does scholarly analysis require a conscious distance from the often opaque terminology in his two main treatises?<sup>176</sup> However, the primary challenge is arguably not to pass verdict on Messiaen's collage-like catalogues of sources and techniques, but to comprehend underlying threads that explain the rationale behind them. His style of writing provides a good case for the lasting relevance of the hermeneutic dictum to 'understand a writer better than he understood himself'.<sup>177</sup> The reader often needs to reconstruct underlying concepts and frameworks that make intelligible the fragments on the surface level of the texts. It may well be that Messiaen himself was only dimly aware of fundamental premisses at work in his own musical universe, a circumstance that calls for conscientious attempts to piece them together.

A study of plainchant not only raises the need for further investigations of Messiaen's reception of German music theory, partly through French authors such as d'Indy and Mocquereau,<sup>178</sup> but also indicates the centrality of an evolutionary outlook, in which medieval chant preserves an ancient metric legacy, forms a distinct repertoire on its own and carries seeds for modern harmony within its own sounding structures. This framework sheds light on the enigmatic interplay between the main elements of music in Messiaen's thought. It explains why his main exposition of plainchant occurs in the fourth volume of the *Traité* – devoted to melody – where it arches over from the initial volumes on rhythm to the subsequent tomes on harmony.

A second area of study is a look at how the reconstructed theory of chant shaped Messiaen's own musical language. He claimed that all well-written music contains a 'constant alternation' between *arsis* and *thésis*, as 'perfectly delineated by the greatest theoretician of plainchant, Dom Mocquereau'.<sup>179</sup> Thus, it would seem that the main lesson Messiaen drew from Mocquereau was a particular expressive ideal of 'rhythmic suppleness', a flexible schema of rises and falls within phrases. This article highlights traces of Mocquereau in works by Messiaen from 1930–1 and points out resemblances between the chant scholar's writings and motifs behind Messiaen's own progressive language, as articulated in the composer's early journalistic writings and the *Technique de mon langage musical*.

<sup>176</sup> For an emphatic argument in favour of an analysis liberated from constraints in Messiaen's own concepts, see Healey, *Messiaen's Musical Techniques*.

<sup>177</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher's classic presentation of this ideal reads: 'Complete understanding grasped in its highest form is an understanding of the utterer better than he understands himself'; and, 'The task is also to be expressed as follows, to understand the utterance at first just as well and then better than its author. For because we have no immediate knowledge of what is in him, we must seek to bring much to consciousness that can remain unconscious to him.' Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics and Criticism: And Other Writings*, ed. Andrew Bowie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 266, 23.

<sup>178</sup> Riemann and Mocquereau are certainly influential figures in the link between Messiaen and a German trajectory of Greek philology, originating with Nietzsche. See Cheong, 'Ancient Greek Rhythms in Messiaen's *Le sacre*: Nietzsche's Legacy?'

<sup>179</sup> Messiaen, *Music and Color*, 69.

In spite of the claim that such a schema should permeate all music, Messiaen's neumatic analyses of melodic contours or a certain historiography of music need not imply that chant provided a matrix behind his own compositional processes in every case. Indeed, significant caution is called for regarding the epistemological status of his theoretical claims. As put by Jennifer Donelson, Messiaen's writings 'oscillate between a sort of absolute notion of fundamental aesthetic principle (which was really more of a conviction of the things discovered through his own musical language)' and expressions of a deeply felt personal vocation.<sup>180</sup> In general, it might be more apt and fruitful to study how absolutist theoretical convictions and Messiaen's own artistic sensibility stand reciprocally linked than to examine their literal purported implications. It would therefore be natural to investigate further how Mocquereau's theory of *arsis* and *thésis* inspired the composer's own 'musical poetics'.<sup>181</sup> The most obvious way would be to reconsider works from the 1930s or early 1940s, and in them search for connections between the schema of 'becoming' and 'passing away' and Messiaen's still enigmatic 'special ideas [...] on prosody, and the union of the musical line with the living inflections of speech'.<sup>182</sup> Further investigations of how Messiaen read d'Indy's *Cours* and Mocquereau's *Le nombre musical grégorien* promise to illuminate one of his most cherished aesthetic principles: the possibility of regarding musical sentences as constituting a succession of melodic periods, in which harmony and different rhythmic techniques serve the expressive intensity latent in melody itself.<sup>183</sup>

Mocquereau's integration of duration, intensity, pitch and timbre as constituent layers in a truly rhythmic or 'cinematic' order exerted a more distinct influence on Messiaen, one that surfaces in serial techniques developed in *Neumes rythmiques* and used in the composer's late works. The compound theory of sound articulated in *Le nombre musical grégorien* can also potentially explain why Messiaen again came to cite Gregorian melodies in works from the 1960s, having previously sought rather to amalgamate their musical qualities into his own syntax. Moving away from earlier convictions that plainchant should not be harmonized, Messiaen now developed an

<sup>180</sup> Jennifer Donelson, 'How Does Music Speak of God? A Dialogue of Ideas between Messiaen, Tournemire, and Hello', *Mystic Modern: The Music, Thought, and Legacy of Charles Tournemire*, ed. Jennifer Donelson and Stephen Schloesser (Richmond, VA: Church Music Association of America, 2014), 317–29 (p. 328). In a similar vein, Hans Rudolf Zeller discusses Messiaen's personally experienced rather than argumentative and critical approach to (Western) universal claims, highlighting 'das Moment der immanenten Kritik an jenem Universalitätsanspruch, der dank einer merkwürdig partiellen Weltfremdheit auch in der Musik die höchst spezifischen eigenen Intentionen und Kriterien für allgemein- oder alleingültig hielt und allerdings von jeher nie um Mittel und Wege verlegen war, sie auch auf den Rest der Welt auszudehnen' ('the moment of immanent critique of that claim to universality which, thanks to a curious and partial unworldliness also in music, deemed his own highly specific intentions and criteria to be universally or exclusively valid and, indeed, never was at a loss for ways and means to extend them even to the rest of the world'). Zeller, 'Messiaens kritische Universalität', 59–60.

<sup>181</sup> On tensions between theoretical claims and Messiaen's musical poetics, see Tobias Janz, 'Musikalische Poetik und musiktheoretischen Denken in Olivier Messiaens *Traité de rythme, de couleur, et d'ornithologie*', *Musiktheorie im Kontext: V. Kongress der Gesellschaft für Musiktheorie*, ed. Reinhard Bahr and Jan Philipp Sprick (Berlin: Weidler, 2008), 177–89.

<sup>182</sup> See once more, Messiaen, *The Technique of my Musical Language*, 7.

<sup>183</sup> See *ibid.*, 8, 44.

interest in harmonic and timbral colourings of chant melodies. To posit Mocquereau's theory of sound as the sole source behind the idea that melodies contain an inherent harmonic resonance would be reductionistic. Nevertheless, experiments with harmonic colourings in birdsong throughout the 1950s follow naturally from the multi-dimensional understanding of neumes and sound articulated by the Gregorian scholar. Further work on neumes in the *style oiseaux* might here benefit from readings of *Le nombre musical grégorien*.

The claim that plainchant exerts a unique influence on Messiaen's music is not new. This article endorses this view but seeks to modify the grounds on which it is articulated. Messiaen used plainchant in many different ways and this repertoire certainly held a prominent liturgical and theological significance for him. However, more crucial in this context is how its syntax was amalgamated into the fabric of his own language. Messiaen's reception of Mocquereau's theory of neumes is a central backdrop that sheds light on this transformation of historical plainchant into building blocks in the composer's deeply personal brand of musical modernism. Most crucially, chant theory also functioned as an intellectual filter that allowed Messiaen to situate his own creativity within the broader evolution of music. Finally, and perhaps above all, it provided him with what he held to be a truly universal theory of music, regardless of whether it was created by human or by avian voices.





**Sentiment beyond chronometry: A performance history of Olivier  
Messiaen's *Livre d'orgue***  
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***Sentiment beyond Chronometry:***  
*A Performance History of Olivier Messiaen's*  
*Livre d'orgue*

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*Sentiment bortom kronometri:  
en interpretationshistorisk studie av Olivier Messiaens Livre d'Orgue*

Tonsättaren Pierre Boulez påpekade att hans lärare Olivier Messiaen (1908–1992) stod mitt i en av 1900-talsmusikens mest betydande spänningar: i hans verk är ett fokus på kompositionstekniker avsett att understödja en mer romantisk strävan mot ett intensivt musikaliskt uttryck och känsla. Spänningen kan diskuteras som aspekter av en modernistisk respektive romantisk musiksyn och gör sig direkt påmind i studier av Messiaen som interpret av sina egna verk.

Till skillnad från en rad befintliga undersökningar av Messiaens pianospel har motsvarande analytiska studier av hans interpretation av egna orgelverk inte genomförts tidigare. Under lång tid har en uppsättning kommersiella inspelningar från 1956 utgjort den främsta källan till detta område, vid sidan av diverse kommentarer som spridits genom elevens skrifter. Det har funnits en vitt spridd uppfattning att Messiaen tar sig mycket stora friheter i förhållande till sina egna partiturer, utan att bakomliggande konstnärliga ideal diskuterats vidare. Artikeln påvisar att tonsättaren själv upphöjde partituren som gemensam norm för verkens interpretation och betraktade sina egna inspelningar som ett högst personligt uttryck.

I denna studie har tre inspelningar av cykeln *Livre d'Orgue* med Messiaen som interpret kunnat detaljstuderas, tillsammans med 14 senare kompletta versioner med andra organister. Analysen utgår från tonsättarens egna råd till interpreten i förordet till verket *Quatuor pour la fin du temps*. Där fastslås att musiker först måste lära sig spela musiken exakt som noterat för att senare vid framföranden enbart behålla notvärdens sentiment och forma musiken med personlig frihet och agogik. I flera av de sju satserna blir det tydligt att Messiaen spelar med en stark känsla för sina bakomliggande idéer, även till en punkt där han inte längre bibehåller kontroll över partiturens notvärden. Trots att en senare interpretationshistoria till stor del bygger på att organister underordnat sig tonsättarens auktoritet sker tidigt en riktning mot ett mer exakt återgivande av notationen.

Analysen påvisar att Messiaen tycks följa de råd han formulerade i sitt nämnda förord. Artikeln lyfter också fram skilda akustiska förhållanden som avgörande för olika versioners tempi och artikulation. En annan slutsats är att Messiaens skivor från 1956 till stor del bör betraktas som uttryck för sitt eget decenniums estetik och synsätt på inspelningar. Den frihet som tidigare kommentatorer tillskrivit Messiaen som interpret kan till viss del förstås i ljuset av hur betydelsen av återkommande lyssning till inspelningar förändrade interpretationsideal under andra hälften av 1900-talet.

*Sentiment beyond Chronometry:*  
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*Creative Contradictions in Messiaen as Composer-Performer*

Pierre Boulez once described his teacher Olivier Messiaen as “a man who is preoccupied strongly with techniques, but who puts forward, in the first place, expression”. Speaking in the year 1988, Boulez added the comment that Messiaen was “exactly in the centre of some very important contradictions of this century” (Dingle 2014, 29).<sup>1</sup> This remark was intended to highlight compositional and aesthetic developments but is equally apposite in regard to ideals of musical performance. The Messiaen scholar Christopher Dingle cites Boulez’s remarks in order to highlight how creative contradictions between technique and expression “become especially acute in considering Messiaen as composer-performer” (Ibid.).

A standard trope in discussions of Messiaen’s 1956 recordings of his at the time published oeuvre for the organ is the remarkable freedom the composer grants himself. In comparison to predecessors in the French organ tradition, Messiaen’s scores had attained a new level of technical complexity, not least as pertains to rhythm and an enhanced exactitude in the prescription of timbres (registers). This tendency echoed a broader modernist trajectory towards text-centred ideals of performance, in lieu of performers licensing themselves freedom to correct, rearrange or improvise beyond composers’ notation. Such a development was commonly presented as a progression beyond a prevalent Romantic tradition, which emphasized expression and depth of feeling. A corresponding transition took place concerning renderings of musical time, when new chronomet-

1 Comments from “Messiaen at 80”, a TV program aired on BBC2 on December 10, 1988.

rical demands transformed performance traditions at least perceived to be grounded in subjective intuition (Philip 1992, 7–93, Hill, R. 1994).

*Livre d'orgue* (1951–1952) represents a peak of abstract modernism among Messiaen's organ works. Its seven movements exhibit some of his most radical explorations of multi-dimensional serial techniques and rhythmic experiments. To render these structures audible, chronometrical fidelity to the notated text would seem more apposite, at least at first, then subjective intuition or freedom. However, Romantic traits in performance need not necessarily stand opposed to modernist demands for objectivity and metrical exactitude. Messiaen himself defied criticism of lingering Romanticism in his organ music – “I'm not ashamed of being a Romantic” – and reversely implied that this tradition entailed an intensity of perception lacking in his own age (Messiaen 1994a, 120).

This article explores tensions between Romantic and modernist traits in Messiaen's style of organ performance through close analyses of his own recordings of *Livre d'orgue*. It also investigates the further history of interpretation by taking all complete sound recordings of the work into account (as listed among the references at the end of the text).<sup>2</sup> Messiaen recorded the cycle both within the 1956 set and in several radio broadcasts of live performances. The latter sonic sources uniquely permit a comparison of different renderings by the composer and thus allows for more general conclusions than previous commentary on the 1956 recordings (as discussed below). Of particular interest in the wider comparison is to investigate to what extent the composer's own approach continued to shape subsequent interpretations by other performers.

Messiaen's organ playing has, in fact, not yet been comprehensively evaluated, in contrast to the literature on his pianism. More specifically, although reviews and other pieces of criticism many contribute valuable observations, such genres of writing seldomly provide space for a deeper probing of aesthetic outlooks at work in the actual evaluation (for noteworthy examples of criticism in reviews, see Milsom 1992, Sholl 1996). The following analysis adopts a distinct gateway to tensions between Romanticism and modernism in the temporality of performance. It evaluates whether the composer heeded his own advice on how performers can reconcile fidelity to the notated text with a desire for vivid interpretations.

<sup>2</sup> Beside commercial and thereby publicly available recordings, other documentation of performances may appear that have been unavailable during the time of the investigation. A good case is Gillian Weir's 1979 recording in Washington for the BBC, which was published as late as 2021 by Decca Eloquence. This version could be used here but similar renderings may in the future find their way from archives to public releases.

As articulated in a preface to the *Quatuor pour la fin du temps* (1940–1941), Messiaen (1942, p. IV) suggests that performers are free to add expressive parameters when they first have mastered a basic chronometrical fidelity to the notated score. A key notion is that performances must “preserve the sentiment” of individual pieces and movements, as embodied both in the text and extra-musical ideas behind the compositions.<sup>3</sup>

Messiaen’s performances of the *Livre d’orgue* are investigated from the standpoint of accord or creative divergence between the levels of rhythmic notation and sonic renderings of their musical meaning. Most observations are gained from close and repeated listening to the recordings, but some clarifications of details stem from measurements of durations in the software *Audacity*. An initial résumé of Messiaen’s approach to interpretation provides further background. A subsequent introduction to the recordings used in this research also discusses the status of such sources, in relation to the ontology of works, the authority of a composer’s interpretation and the proper contribution of individuality in performance.

### *An Exact Romantic: Messiaen on Interpretation*

The preface to *Quatuor pour la fin du temps* contains a brief but significant account on how to interpret Messiaen’s music (the following paragraphs all relate to Messiaen 1942, p. IV). He articulates a basic schema, which provides a background even for latter utterances on the same topic. Players are first advised to read the composer’s preceding commentary on the subject matter of each movement, together with an exposition of his rhythmic language. Insights into the work’s meaning and techniques should apparently establish a basic understanding, but mastery of the score is said to arise on a more practical level. Messiaen clarifies that performers need not preoccupy themselves with ideas during the execution: “[t]hey just have to play the text, the notes and the exact values, to do the indicated nuances well”.

To realise correct note values, and to handle absences of a set time signature, Messiaen suggests that performers count a basic underlying flow of semiquavers when learning the piece. To continue doing so in public performance would, however, “weigh down” their playing in an inappropriate manner. At this point, performers “will need to preserve in themselves the sentiment of the values, nothing more”. The brief par-

<sup>3</sup> Translations from French source texts stem from the author.

agraph explains neither this enigmatic idea nor how Messiaen used the complex term “sentiment”. Nevertheless, it is possible to conclude that he posits a progression from chronometrical mastery of the notated values to a subjective apprehension of rhythm. The term is partly a synonym both to feeling and perception. More importantly, it denotes a kind of understanding and appreciation of objects that is intuitive and thereby formed apart from reasoning or empirical observation.<sup>4</sup>

A final stage adds a layer of subjective spontaneity beyond notated values, even though this remains implicit. Messiaen refers to habitual means of enhancing expressivity in a still prevalent Romantic tradition of performance, encouraging interpreters not to relinquish “exaggerated nuances, *accelerandi*, *rallentandi*, all that makes an interpretation lively and sensitive” (Messiaen 1942, p. IV).

In a brief paragraph, Messiaen has sketched five stages throughout the process of learning and performing his *Quatuor*. His outline contains some interesting tensions, among them the distinct break between extra-musical aspects and the process of learning the score. The general trajectory from chronometrical control to freedom and vividness is noteworthy, together with the central concept of retaining a “sentiment” of note values. These different stages can be fitted into a flow chart, based on Messiaen’s own terms, which outlines the recommended process of interpretation:

Study extra-musical ideas and compositional techniques →  
Play the score, exactly as notated →  
Count note values when learning the score →  
Give up counting, but preserve the sentiment of note values  
in performance →  
Add exaggerations in nuances and tempo modifications,  
in order to achieve liveliness and sensitivity.

Even the final advice is not intended to encourage unbridled subjectivism. Nevertheless, Messiaen calls for an individual contribution beyond the score that distances him from his own influential organ teacher Marcel Dupré. In the latter’s philosophy, “the performer must never allow his own personality to appear. As soon as it gets through, the work is betrayed”. Organ playing according to Dupré’s aesthetics called for fidel-

4 For a contemporary definition in a source of considerable normative import, see the entry *sentiment* in *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, 8<sup>th</sup> ed., 578.



ity to the text, perfect clarity and respect for the dynamics indicated by the composer (Dupré 1984, 43; on similar traits in earlier French organ recordings, see Jullander 2004). As a contrast, Messiaen’s emphasis on liveliness and sensitivity harks back to his aspiration, articulated throughout the 1930s, to create a “living” music. Beyond both traditionalism and neo-classicism, he sought a “spiritual” trajectory that would unleash emotions and create a new vibrant atmosphere. Supple rhythms drawn from plainchant and Hindu metrics would set the mind free from constraints in rigid metre (Broad 2012, 61–64 [English translation 123–125]; Schloesser 2014, 241–245).

Messiaen would repeatedly dismiss understandings that his novel rhythms constituted some kind of “notated rubato”, i.e., attempts to codify performance practices (Rößler 1986, 133). Rather, as outlined in the 1944 treatise *Technique de mon langage musical*, tensions between freedom and an exact execution of notated rhythms relate to the construction of a new rhythmic language. Messiaen aimed for an “ametric music”, a term which the translator John Satterfield felicitously defines as “music with free, but precise, rhythmic patterns”. When the composer cites the opening of “Les anges” from his *La nativité du seigneur* (1935) as an example of a rhythm that is “absolutely free”, he evokes neither carelessness nor intuitive spontaneity (Messiaen 2002, 9, 11). His novel rhythmic techniques must rather be rendered with precision, in order to achieve the desired freedom from traditional metric strictures. It is worth remembering that comments in the *Quatuor* and the *Technique* stem from a time when performers still struggled to comprehend Messiaen’s notation of rhythm, and when he felt a need to inculcate its originality.

Messiaen later commented on criticism from John Cage that his precise notation left too little freedom for performers. More specifically, Cage deemed that Messiaen’s often clearly demarcated sections, with different tempi, failed to provide space for “time-curves” to unfold (Rößler 1986, 132, 170). As a response, Messiaen stressed that he has notated

very exact rhythms and they have to be performed very exactly. But once one performs them very exactly, one is then in no way prevented from making an “interpretation” which embraces freedom, love, passion, motion and all such things. No one should be allowed to make music as if he were made of wood. One must reproduce the musical text exactly. But not play like a stone. (Rößler 1986, 133.)

This statement was made in 1983 and indicates that Messiaen continued to rely on the dual expectations of exactitude and a layer of added expressive qualities. A stern commitment to the accuracy and precision of the scores remained characteristic of his standpoint (Hill 1994a, 273, 279; cf. Messiaen 1994a, 201–202). Yvonne Loriod – brilliant post-war pianist, Messiaen's second wife and the inspiration behind much of his mature writing for her instrument – continued to stress that “complete fidelity to Messiaen's text is vital”. She also highlighted rhythm as a crucial and particularly difficult element to realize (Hill 1994b, 287). At the same time, scores were still regarded a means to transmit works and their extra-musical ideas. As the pianist Peter Hill recollects from private sessions with the composer,

he emphasized that, despite their meticulous clarity, his scores are not an end in themselves. For Messiaen the “music” was not in the notes, nor in the sounds they represent, but in the meaning which lies beyond and which through sound we hope to reveal. (Hill 1994a, 282.)

Comprehension of the meaning behind the notation obviously remained central. It also comes across in Messiaen's advice “not to be over-literal, for if too pedantic the pianist may miss the overall sense”. He also called for performers “always to phrase with flexibility, to allow the music to breathe” (Hill 1994a, 278). In piano recordings, the composer added vitality and drama to the text through a liberal use of articulation marks, fermatas and caesuras, and an “almost unbelievable tempo rubato” (Ngim 1997, 132, for a complete list of Messiaen's recordings as a pianist, see Dingle 2014, 47). These traits confirm a lasting dependency on a Romantic style of performance that would continue to set Messiaen apart from modernist ideals of interpretation and recording from the 1950s.

Comparisons of two recorded versions of Messiaen's *Visions de l'Amen* (1943) indicate that most such alterations were constant features of his interpretation, albeit executed in slightly different ways. His gestures depart from notated values, often adding further emphasis, contrasts, or accentuating passages of particular expressiveness (Ngim 1997, Dingle 2014). Messiaen brings out drama even in his abstract *Quatre études de rythme* (1949–1950), not least by making clearly audible gestures out of shifting metrical units, and shaping birdsong passages with a splashy rubato (Hill 2007). A marked incongruity between Messiaen's performance and his articulated understanding of a piece arises at some points. The composer insisted that performers maintain a metronomic approach to the extremely slow representations of eternity in the two “Louange” movements

in the *Quatuor*. As a contrast, his own renderings are marked by extensive agogic shifts, emphasizing their harmonic structure (Dingle 2014, 36–40). This example indicates that “Messiaen the performer” at times clearly departed from the vision of “Messiaen the composer”.

### *Recordings as Records*

In June 1956, Messiaen recorded his then complete organ works in Sainte-Trinité in Paris, the church where he had served as permanent organist since 1931. The project was timely after a decade of rapid developments in sound technology. Messiaen could record onto tape, which provided the benefit of being able to edit different takes into complete versions of each piece (Day 2000, 19–26). However, the mono technology used by the Ducretet-Thompson label was not on par with the most prominent stereo recordings of the time. Messiaen’s recordings come across as impromptu documentary sessions in comparison with the lush sonic impressions provided by Mercury for his teacher Dupré (recorded from 1957) or the meticulous preparations behind Jeanne Demessieux’s organ albums for Decca (recorded from 1947). Messiaen used no more than six days for the entire production. The taxing *Livre d’orgue* was recorded on a single day, together with the five movements in *Messe de la Pentecôte* (1949–1950) and the early works *Le Banquet céleste* (1928) and *Diptyque* (1930). Quite a feat, at least if the documentation of dates truly is correct.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to this limited amount of time, Messiaen faced the Trinité organ in a poor state, with dead notes, problems in air supply and severe shortcomings in tuning. The sonic result of “Les eaux de la grâce” from *Les corps glorieux* (1939), has been deemed to simulate “the giddy sensation of drowning. A watery gurgle haloed in phantom squeaks and groans, it must surely rank as one of the oddest noises ever heard coming out of an organ” (Milsom 1994, 59, on the instrument, see Glandaz 2014). Considering these unsatisfactory conditions, the decision to go ahead with the recordings can appear surprising – at least on the assumption that the intended result was a definite or perfect sonic rendering. The undertaking can be understood in light of the commercial success of LP records at the time, which prompted a string of important documentation projects

<sup>5</sup> First issued on LPs from the Ducretet-Thompson label, the recordings have later been remastered and reissued on several labels. See details on dates of recording in the booklet accompanying the “Olivier Messiaen edition” from Parlophone (further details in the list of references).

of previously unheard and brand-new repertoires (Day 2000, 92–108). As an example, Yvonne Loriod had commenced her recordings of Messiaen's piano music for Véga records a few months earlier.

Recordings by composers were also topical, having been promoted since the late 1920s by Igor Stravinsky as the optimal medium for a composer-performer to establish a correct manner of interpretation. Stravinsky argued that performers should use composer's recordings as "a sure means [- -] of learning exactly how the author demands his work to be executed" (Stravinsky 1962, 150, Philip 2004, 140–182). In retrospect, Pierre Boulez rejected the implied sense of a timeless authenticity in such an outlook, but also confirmed its influence when he launched his own recording career in 1955:

I do not consider my recordings as examples *ad vitam aeternam*. There was a given moment in the realm of the disc, this obsession with saying "There, I make my discs, and that must be the model for all that is going to follow!" That was Stravinsky. (Boulez 2011, 21.)

Messiaen's French premiere of *Livre d'orgue* took place within the Domaine Musical concert series, which propelled its organizer Boulez to become a conductor and a recording artist. According to anecdotes, both Messiaen and Boulez were unprepared for the crush of some 2000 people who gathered at Sainte-Trinité on 21 March 1955 to hear the composer perform this already legendary work. The Boulez connection situates Messiaen's concert performance and his ensuing recordings within a musical context that itself was instrumental in establishing the centrality of objectivity, purity, and fidelity to the text, not least in recordings (Hill and Simeone, 2007, 1–19, for Boulez's influence on recording practices, see the index to Day 2000).

Boulez's mature stance echoes Messiaen's own view of the authority of recordings. He voiced deep concerns with the increasing medialization of music, arguing that musicians must not seek to learn their craft "through sterile recordings, as far removed from music as photography can be from painting" (Messiaen 1994b, 53, my translation). Jennifer Bate described how Messiaen toyed with the purported authority of his recordings after having heard her perform his organ works for the first time, but only to turn around and dismiss the idea:

Messiaen's initial reaction to my performance was not encouraging. "Well, I suppose you have my records?" Embarrassed, I had to confess otherwise. The point was pursued inexorably until, in desperation, I promised

next day to buy everything he had ever recorded. This brought a shout of laughter – “But that is how I play it on my records, and no one plays Messiaen like that.” (cited from Milsom 1994, 60.)

As a teacher of his own music, Messiaen granted a similar license for individuality and plurality – at least to gifted performers who submitted themselves to his judgment. Hill remembers an openness to consider novel perspectives on his works and relates how the composer “never showed the slightest inclination to impose an alien style on my playing”. Furthermore, “neither of us had in mind producing an ‘authentic’ performance, if by that one means the performer copying with exact fidelity a composer’s own perceptions of his music” (Hill 1994a, 281). Further evidence of such hospitality is Messiaen’s praise of very different pianists who performed his works. Most conspicuous is the contrast between his own Romantic style of playing and the modern fiery precision characteristic of Yvonne Loriod. The composer could also commend interpretations based on unmistakably different perceptions of the works than his own, as in the case of Peter Serkin (Messiaen 1994b, 202, Dingle 2014, 42–43).

Such evidence suggests that Messiaen never posited that his recordings constituted an “ultimate authority” in matters of interpretation (cf. Jullander 2012). There is also no evidence that he perceived them as prescriptive “hypernotations”, providing other performers with a sonic layer of information beyond the limits of textual notation (cf. Burlin 2012). When queried by Gillian Weir about discrepancies between his scores and recordings, Messiaen consistently gave priority to the printed text (Weir 1992). At the same time, however, he did use the recordings with students in his analysis class at the Paris conservatoire (Ahrens 1992).

Written commentary on Messiaen’s organ recordings is surprisingly scarce but has tended to concentrate on registration or highlighting disparity between notated texts and sonic renderings. According to Christopher Dingle, “interpretations range from mildly enlightening to the outrageous, usually, though not always, conveying the music in renditions that most protagonists would not even dare to consider. These recordings should be avoided by anyone who believes in definite performances!” (Dingle 1994, 552). In a more modest vein, organist Timothy Tikker observes that “some of what he does in terms of tempo, rhythm, and even registration appears to be at odds with the published scores” (Tikker 2008, 60). In terms of style, Messiaen’s propensity for both extremely slow and fast tempi is manifest throughout the set. Standard features of a Romantic performance tradition are clearly audible, such as freedom in the realisation of grace notes and a tendency to shorten brief notes. Flexibil-

ity of tempo is most evident in passages built on birdsong (Tikker 2008, 60–61). A general impression is Messiaen's adherence to Dupré's articulation norms on the organ: a default absolute legato and contrasting clarity in any staccato. In terms of tempo and rubato, however, Messiaen brings the expressive toolbox of a late-Romantic pianist to the organ console.

It is clear that the composer in the year 1956 had refined his choice of timbre (registration) in some of his earlier works. In some cases, tempo relations between different passages also differ notably from the scores. Comments given in Messiaen's teaching and annotations in his own copies of scores also testify to these developments (Latory and Mallié, 2008, Gillock 2010). In regard to these new ways of approaching such aspects of the works, it is only natural that the recordings differ in detail from the printed text.

As a contrast to the case described above, Messiaen's three recordings of *Livre d'orgue* analysed in this article were made only a few years after the work was composed. Any divergences from the score thus reasonably stem from his style of playing or external circumstances, rather than constituting a change in his perception of the work. This situation resembles the case of *Méditations sur le Mystère de la Sainte Trinité* (1969), which the composer recorded in the same year as the first public performance (1972). There is still a marked incongruity between Messiaen's notation and performance, in the realisation of rhythms and renderings of dynamics and tempo relations (Griffiths 1985, 220–224, Shenton 2007, on tempo relations in late works, cf. Hill 1994a, 278). The evidence of the *Méditations* thus suggests that Messiaen's notation and playing constitute different layers within works, even in this case of a large-scale composition that first evolved from improvisations and thereby embodies aspects of his playing in the score itself.

To evaluate the interplay between spontaneity and consistency of interpretation in Messiaen's organ playing was difficult as long as only one recording of each work was available. The original impetus for the present article was a novel possibility to compare no less than three complete versions of *Livre d'orgue* played by the composer.<sup>6</sup> The first of them documents the world premiere of the piece, performed on 23 April 1953 in the Villa Berg in Stuttgart, serving as recording studio and concert hall for

6 Messiaen also performed at least parts of the *Livre* in Brussels for a 1954 radio broadcast. The first half of the first movement is available at [http://euscreen.eu/item.html?id=EUS\\_EC65D54BD6D84EE68859B5EBA18464BE](http://euscreen.eu/item.html?id=EUS_EC65D54BD6D84EE68859B5EBA18464BE) [accessed 15 Aug 2022].

the South German Broadcasting company.<sup>7</sup> The hall was equipped with a brand new Walcker organ. Its 72 stops included a broad Romantic foundation but also incorporated a rich set of mutations and mixtures. Messiaen cherished the latter stops, a stance that echoes his 1958 statement that the Karl Schuke organ at the Berlin Hochschule der Künste was ‘perfect’ for the *Livre* (Tikker 1989). The Stuttgart instrument is enclosed in a large wooden compartment just below the roof and speaks into a markedly dry acoustics.

The difference from the lush acoustics at Sainte-Trinité spotlights organists’ challenge to adapt to new instrumental colours and spatial conditions. This aspect also comes to the fore in a radio documentation of Messiaen’s live performance of *Livre d’orgue* in the Göteborg concert hall on 3 December 1957. He played its 1937 Marcussen organ, a large instrument with 100 stops, which like the Stuttgart instrument boasted a warm sonic foundation together with mutations, mixtures and neo-classically voiced reeds (Börjesson 2013).<sup>8</sup> With a reverberation between 1.2 and 2 seconds, the Göteborg hall provides a middle ground between Sainte-Trinité and Villa Berg.

The possibility of comparing three recorded versions by Messiaen opens a path to treat the 1956 recordings not so much as a single or definitive sonic text, but more as documentation of a distinct event. It becomes possible to distinguish between consistent traits of interpretation and particular aspects determined by the distinct acoustic site and the timbres available at the organ in Sainte-Trinité. The existence of several versions constitutes an advantage over commentators prone “to dismiss the more surprising elements of the composer’s performance as being accidental, the product of a lack of control or the whim of the moment” (Dingle 2014, 46), without having been able to investigate the matter.

Among the recordings by other interpreters throughout the twentieth century, early versions from Almut Rößler and Jennifer Bate were made under the composer’s artistic guidance. Louis Thiry was the first French organist to record the work and would eventually provide a second version at Messiaen’s own Sainte-Trinité organ. He was particularly esteemed by the composer. Gillian Weir acquired fame for her Messiaen interpretations and made a set of recordings directly for the BBC at the National

7 Some of the literature erroneously claims that Messiaen performed the *Livre* already in 1952. I thank Prof. Dr. Clytus Gottwald, editor for contemporary music at the SDR at the time, for precise recollections, shared over e-mail in August 2019.

8 The instrument has been removed to give room for a new Rieger instrument, inaugurated in 2021.

Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, Washington, DC, before turning out CD recordings from the Danish Aarhus Cathedral. The Swedish organists Erik Boström and Hans-Ola Ericsson were both in contact with the composer in the process of learning and recording his complete organ music. Rudolf Innig provides listeners with a written transcription of his own conversation with Messiaen on the work. The Dutch player Willem Tanke and the American Colin Andrews studied the works with some of the aforementioned authorities. Olivier Latry holds several of the most prestigious posts in French organ culture and was held in high regard not least by Loriod.

These brief biographical notes indicate how a broad tradition of performance gradually evolved throughout the twentieth century and how it remains at work even in the early twenty-first century. Performers at least of Messiaen's later and more advanced works have typically been publicly endorsed by the composer or have sought advice from him or organists who themselves has studied with Messiaen. There are exceptions and even artists within this distinct tradition of interpretation certainly display individuality and difference. Nevertheless, private tuition within this budding tradition does no less than recordings of Messiaen's works by the same organists remain within the orbits of a delimited "authentic" manner of realisation, harking back to the composer (Milsom 1994, 60). Messiaen was hospitable in endorsing performances of the pieces also on modern neo-classical instruments, adding clarity and force of attack, partly at the expense of the warm tonal palette at his disposal at Trinité and similar French symphonic instruments. The instruments chosen by other performers throughout the twentieth century fulfil this shift towards modern neo-classical timbres. Whereas the famous main organ at Notre-Dame in Paris, as used by Latry, is versatile enough to render both main strands audible, Andrews's and Tom Winpenny's choices manifest a return towards a more symphonic sonic basis in recordings from the twenty-first century.

The following analysis discusses each movement in turn, focuses on Messiaen's versions and adds points of particular interest from performances by other players.



*Listening through the Livre*

**“Reprises par interversion”**

**Messiaen’s durations: Trinité 6’22, Stuttgart 4’34, Göteborg 5’06**

This first movement manifests Messiaen’s distinct kind of serialism, with its method of coordinating note values, modes of attack, timbres and registers of pitches. These techniques are employed to stage a dramatic interplay between three rhythmic characters (of Hindu origin). The expanding note values of the *pratâpaçekhara* “attacks” the diminishing *gajajhampa*, while the immobile *sârasa* surveys the scene from the Grand-Orgue. In the composer’s Trinité recording, these “personalities” are effectively projected. The forceful Bombarde 16’ inspires Messiaen to an energetic attack for each pedal entry and this massive sound lingers as a background behind the following entries on the manuals.

R: bourdon 16, hautbois, cymbale Pos: prestant 4, nazard 2 2/3, tierce 1 3/5, piccolo 1 G: bourdon 16, bourdon 8, flûte 4 Ped: bombarde 16 seule

Modéré

Figure 1. “Reprises par interversion”, bar 1–5

The difference in acoustics makes Messiaen perform the piece almost two minutes shorter at the Villa Berg than at Trinité. The Göteborg performance is more similar to the Stuttgart version, both in interpretation and timbres. At Trinité, a flexible and rhythmically sustained legato allows listeners to “imagine the movement of the stork’s long neck in motion” (*sârasa* means stork, Gillock 2010, 166). In Stuttgart, the sense of drama arises from a quicker tempo, rather than from the idiosyncratic character of the individual voices. In Göteborg, Messiaen occasionally lingers on the *sârasa*’s figures more in the manner of the Trinité performance, as if wavering between two different attitudes to these motifs.

The basic underlying note value in the movement is the 32<sup>nd</sup> note, with durations ranging in length from a single 32<sup>nd</sup> to eighteen 32<sup>nds</sup> (see pedal note in bar 2). In Messiaen's performances longer note values are shortened, in the pedal considerably so. This feature changes internal relations between note values considerably, not least in the live performances where longer values are quite dramatically abridged. The staging and overall sense of the piece remains intact, but exact note values are simply not respected. Messiaen maintains a sense of the work's overall architecture, with its four parts containing the identical tone material in different orders. Timings for the four parts differ slightly more in the live performances – between 1'28 and 1'33 at Trinité, 1'02 and 1'09 in Stuttgart, and 1'10 and 1'17 in Göteborg – but the third part is always somewhat broader.

Like the composer, Thiry shortens longer note values and, at Trinité, moves forward even though strong pedal tones still dominate the acoustics. This feature in fact constitutes a greater problem at Trinité than in the grand space at Notre-Dame, as Latory's version indicates. Bate establishes a more chronometrically accurate attention to notated values, which later players would follow. In Århus, Weir gives particularly sensual legato to the *sârasa* figures, whereas her Washington rendering is notably more dramatic. Innig, Tanke, Andrews and Michael Bonaventure hold back the momentum and stand out for being more protracted in tempo than Messiaen at Trinité. The contrast between the composer's brief Stuttgart performance and the stately 1956 version highlights acoustics as a central factor in the choice of tempo. The liberties Messiaen grants himself amount to a striking realization of the imperative to retain the movement's sentiment and musical idea, rather than chronometric accuracy in itself.

### **“Pièce en trio”**

**Messiaen's durations: Trinité 1'47, Stuttgart 1'43, Göteborg 1'39**

This piece represents one of Messiaen's most striking employments of Hindu rhythms to move beyond regular measurements. It consists of seventeen bars, each presenting his adaption of a single rhythm (sixteen in all, as one of them is duplicated). As a very tight structure of three interlocking timbres, it is less dependent on acoustics and is also played in a similar tempo in Messiaen's different recordings.

Messiaen consistently uses the breath mark before the fourth bar as a structural pause before a new section, whereas identical signs elsewhere simply result in a brief break in the legato touch. Grace notes in the pedal are given a sustained melodic quality, whereas 32<sup>nd</sup> notes and grace notes

in the manuals are unsentimentally played through to the next main note. Although all voices are generally played legato, Messiaen has moved far from any Dupré-style consistency of touch. As fingering in the score indicates, the hands are free to jump for larger intervals, relinquishing smooth cantabile qualities. The close recording from Villa Berg accentuates improvisatory qualities which resemble impressions from Boulez’s contemporary aleatory music.

This tendency marks both the composer’s and Rößler’s renderings, which are the briefest on record. Thiry and Bonaventure displays a similar approach but gives slightly more time. Weir and Innig move towards a cantabile touch and a more thoughtful probing. Boström and Ericsson are both almost as brief as Messiaen, with the former resembling the composer’s playing and the latter adopting a flexibility between momentum and repose. Andrews and Winpenny suggest that twenty-first century performances tend towards a warmer and more relaxed interpretation, with the difference that Winpenny at times adopts a notable rubato to enhance expressivity.

**“Les Mains de l’Abîme”**

**Messiaen’s durations: Trinité 7’06, Stuttgart 5’16, Göteborg 5’55**

This movement depicts the grandeur of the Dauphiné mountains in the French Alps in a spectacular tutti rendering of the Hindu *manthikâ* rhythm. The first bar is repeated identically five times throughout the piece and provides an interesting case study of tensions between exactitude and the imperative to retain a sentiment of the notation.

**Bien modéré**

*Manthikâ 1er*

Figure 2: “Les Mains de l’Abîme”, bar 1

Organists will typically count the basic note value of 32<sup>nds</sup>, as an aid to give proper relations between the three chords (equalling 43, 1 and 45 32<sup>nds</sup>, respectively). Presumably, multiplications of the duration of the single 32<sup>nd</sup> note chord with the numbers 43 and 45 would approximate the durations of the longer chords. When measured at close range in spectrograms, the 32<sup>nd</sup> chords in the Trinité performance are consistently around 0.2 seconds in length (sometimes approaching 0.3 seconds). Multiplications with the 43 and 45 would consequently suggest chords lengths of 8.6 and 9 seconds. In Messiaen's rendering, the longer tutti chords range between 5.8 and 7.9 seconds. Interestingly enough, and contrary to expectations created by the notation, the first chord is in every instance somewhat more prolonged than the final (although at times only with a difference of 0.1 second).

A purely mathematical analysis will, however, fail to capture other intentions, among them Messiaen's wish to have a prolonged emphasis on the brief 32<sup>nd</sup> chords (Rößler 1986, 167). Performers will also have to clear out sonic space for them between the longer massive chords, especially in large acoustics. If rests between the 32<sup>nd</sup> notes and the attack of the ensuing longer chords are included in the timing of the short chords, they consistently last around 0.4 seconds (sometimes approaching 0.5) in the Trinité recording. On such an account, which carries considerable musical logic, the two longer chords would need to approach 17.2 and 18 seconds, respectively, to provide exact renderings of the notated durations. In this light, Messiaen's long chords in fact fall short of half their note values. This point is made acute in the dry acoustics at Stuttgart. The 32<sup>nd</sup> chords are typically 0.2 seconds, but the longer chords are as brief as 4.1 and 6.6 seconds (the first here always longer than the third). Having said that, such discrepancies between score and performance will only be perceived in analysis. When experienced in ordinary listening, Messiaen is highly successful in projecting the forceful grandeur of his musical idea in this bar. In this regard, the sentiment of the values is retained, even when performances are chronometrically inexact.

The middle part of the movement provides a case study of the composer's rendering of his meticulously notated spectrum of tempi. Two sections marked *Presque Lent* are almost exactly equal in duration at Trinité, with eight notes around 1.15 seconds in duration. The corresponding number in *Très lent* is 2.33 seconds, although Messiaen adopts a more fluent tempo when septuplets enter. The *Lent* section on p. 9 is played with a typical duration of 2.2 seconds per eight note. As this texture continues, Messiaen plays with an increasing forward momentum, most notable in

the final polyrhythm 9:8. The live takes confirm that his performance is consistent with the notation of tempi, although quicker figures are brought out in a palpably livelier manner. At Stuttgart, his leaning forward towards the end of the *Lent* is so conspicuous that the polyrhythmic figures almost form a separate middle section between the surrounding slow and forceful sections.

Among other performers, only Weir has something of Messiaen's impetuous approach to the long chords, especially in the quick version in Washington (5:37), in which they are cut short. As a contrast, Boström and Tanke stay with the long chords in the *manthikâ* rhythm. Thiry's 1972 version is perfectly controlled but somewhat static, whereas Rößler brings expressivity to figures in the middle part. Ericsson and Thiry at Trinité successfully bring out the durations of chords but also convey their musical grandeur, together with a notable lyric mysticism in the middle sections. Latry has access to a particular majestic sound for the forceful mountain sections. Durations for the entire movement differ considerably, with Tanke and Innig at the far side (9:07 and 9:19, respectively). All other players seek to control the rhythmic element to a far greater degree than the composer's intuitive approach at the console.

### **“Chants d'oiseaux”**

**Messiaen's durations: Trinité 7'37, Stuttgart 6'59, Göteborg 7'13**

This charming and popular piece provides relief within the *Livre's* high abstraction. It represented a major step forward in Messiaen's adaption of birdsong into music, being the first work that depicts a distinct species at a specific time of day and a particular geographical site.<sup>9</sup> The composer's playing displays a consistent approach to the lengthy bird solos and the musical characters of the included species (blackbird, nightingale, song thrush, robin). Varying sonic qualities nevertheless convey very different atmospheres. The refrain that launches the piece, and then recurrently re-appears in inversions, is given a broader character in Göteborg. This circumstance can simply reflect hesitation concerning ensuing changes of registration, which appear to be the source of a somewhat wobbly rendering in Stuttgart (and palpable extra-musical noise in Göteborg.)

<sup>9</sup> Messiaen refers to Fuligny and the forests of St.-Germain-en-Laye, as well as Gardépée in the department of Charente. This information contradicts his dating of *Livre d'orgue* to 1951, because his first visit to Gardépée took place in April 1952 (Chadwick and Hill, 2018, p. 21, note 9).

Clearly audible cuts in the Trinité recording suggest that it was done in sections, thus avoiding such disturbances.

Throughout the 1950s, Messiaen's *style oiseaux* was evolving in tandem with Yvonne Loriod's characteristic qualities and temperament at the piano. The composer's realisation of birdsong can fruitfully be compared with her contemporary renderings of similar material. A 1953 recording of the newly finished *Réveil des oiseaux* is particularly interesting, as this work's birdsong techniques follow closely in the wake of "Chants d'oiseaux".



Figure 3: "Chants d'oiseaux", beginning of final nightingale solo

Messiaen's playing in the final nightingale solo resembles aspects of Loriod's version of the corresponding opening solo in the *Réveil*. Her tight rendering of the bird's repeated notes is feasible on the piano, where each new attack remains audible. In contrast to the close recordings of her piano, the spacious Sainte-Trinité requires Messiaen to take a broader tempo. Nevertheless, both here and in the dry acoustics in Stuttgart, repetitions are partly indistinct. Characteristic for Loriod's 1959 landmark recording of the brand new *Catalogue d'oiseaux* is an unsentimental panache and accuracy, even when playing with an almost violent rapidity. Messiaen adopts brisk tempi for the blackbird and robin, but he is less successful in accuracy and evenness of attack. Quick figures are often insufficiently articulated for providing a clear and exuberantly silvery sound. Still, a distinct sense of each bird's character is well achieved. In the shape and direction of individual figures and gestures, Messiaen's playing appears spontaneously crafted and varies between performances. Consequently, breath marks and even notated rhythms appear to suggest a possible manner of phrasing. As suggested by Messiaen himself, they should not be taken all too *fastidiously* (Zacher 1982, 101).

Loriod's interpretation had undergone a notable transformation at the time of her second recording of the *Catalogue* in 1970. The close first recording is replaced by a warmer sonic atmosphere and Loriod gives

greater attention to colours. She adds a momentous emphasis at times and employs a manifest use of rubato to accentuate vital high notes (Chadwick and Hill 2018, 185–187). Messiaen’s 1972 recording of the bird solos in *Méditations* displays a similar development. Not only is the recording quality and the state of the instrument much improved, but his playing is also marked by higher technical proficiency, greater clarity and a more premeditated use of rubato. The 1956 recording of the “Chants d’oiseaux” thus represents a particular historical conception of birdsong and is not necessarily characteristic of Messiaen’s playing throughout his long career.

Other performers respond differently to motifs in the birdsongs. However, while this movement would appear to provide ample space for individuality, all versions display a somewhat paradoxical uniformity. Beginning with Thiry and Rößler, neo-classical tone colours are generally married to renderings of great clarity, evenness of touch and a precise rendering of the score. Innig’s registration and dry staccato in the recurrent *ritornello* retains a sense of the sang-froid of Messiaen’s own 1950s. Most recordings have a durata of around eight minutes, with Boström’s unsentimental coolness and Andrews’s protracted poetry being exceptions in opposite direction. Thiry’s later version has gained some rubato and Ericsson displays the contrast in tempo between birds. Winpenny’s instrument is more similar to Trinité and he allows the soft nightingale to sound conspicuously distant, as does Latry. More exact and carefully crafted than Messiaen’s versions, those of other interpreters lack the composer’s impetuous spontaneity.

### “Pièce en trio”

**Messiaen’s durations: Trinité 8’30, Stuttgart 7’30, Göteborg 7’13**

Like the initial piece, this movement is built upon the interplay of three (Hindu) rhythmic characters. Messiaen’s perception is set out in the posthumous *Traité*: “The principal thing is: the rhythmic work of the upper 2 voices”, “one must scrupulously make the values stand out; the least false duration would destroy all the rhythmic effect.” The rhythms are intended to depict the “geometry of mountains, rocks and peaks”, the clarity of registration suggests sun and snow, whereas the so-called “principal melody” played in the pedal instates a “nostalgic” and “melancholic” feeling (Messiaen 1996, 196–198). In Messiaen’s own view (1996, 204), he “always executed the ‘Pièce en trio’ very rigorously, playing each duration very exactly, with a scrupulous precision.”

This verdict is largely accurate, because the composer gives clear-cut and objective renderings of the notated rhythms, consistent across different tempi. Clarity is attained through a marked projection of more lively figures, as well as brief articulation pauses in large intervals. Initial legato markings for each voice are thus not allowed to compromise the overarching clarity of structure. Thiry maintains a sense of aleatoric whim that echoes the composer's shaping of lively rhythms. His second rendering appears influenced by the contemplative and stable manner of playing established by Bate and Weir. Rößler equals the forward momentum of Messiaen's live versions, whereas Andrews breaks out of the collective norm with a timing of 12:20 – three minutes slower than Weir's protracted Washington recording.

### **“Les Yeux dans les Roues”**

#### **Messiaen's durations: Trinité 1'32, Stuttgart 1'36, Göteborg 1'29**

Messiaen here faces the most ferociously virtuosic piece he ever composed for the organ. When seated at the console, he is anything but lax in his response to the task: the Trinité recording remains the quickest version among all commercial recordings of this showpiece and the Göteborg version is in fact yet a few seconds shorter. This live performance is also the most successful of his renderings, with a clarity of sound that allows notes to blend into a unified sound. In both the Stuttgart and Paris versions, passages of conspicuously uneven articulation appear to stem from technical difficulties, rather than to be interpretative choices. In the mercilessly revealing acoustics at Villa Berg, Messiaen struggles with the daunting task to play the public premiere of the piece in a live version. As a contrast, the crisp penetrating quality of the chamade trumpets of his Metzler organ at Geneva enables Thiry to bring off the piece at an equally quick pace, but with precision and an extraordinary swing to its changing rhythmic groupings. Weir seeks to bring out the rhythms with the aid of rubato, but her instruments and venues unable a similar clarity. Latry also draws spectacular chamade stops but in a blurring acoustics. Boström and Ericsson demonstrate a brilliant even staccato and are only marginally slower than the composer. Tanke's version has the most striking urgency and drama, aided by the forceful impact of his instrument at the Sint Bavo Cathedral in Haarlem. The more mellow sound of Andrews's and Winpenny's organs are a far cry from such sonic ferociousness.



## “Soixante-quatre durées”

Messiaen’s durations: Trinité 10’43, Stuttgart 8’57, Göteborg 9’54

The final movement is as technically fascinating as palpably problematic in performance. It is built on durations from a single 32<sup>nd</sup> to sixty-four 32<sup>nds</sup>, minuscule differences which Messiaen is convinced that human beings can discern – at least through education. At the same time, he grants that they cannot be grasped in “direct sensation”; “a strong dose of imagination” is required. He also confesses to have feared that listeners would fail to appreciate the rhythmic structure, or simply find it boring! Therefore, durations were “coloured” in different timbres, and gestures from birdsong were added to make the music more attractive (Messiaen 1996, 225–228).

R: bourdon 16, bourdon 8, octavin 2 Pos: clarinette, nazard 2 2/3, quintaton 16  
G bourdon 16, bourdon 8, flute 4, quinte 2 2/3 Péd: flûte 4 seul

Modéré

The musical score is presented in three systems. The first system (bars 1-3) shows a piano (pp) and legato texture. The second system (bars 4-5) includes a forte (f) dynamic and a mezzo-forte (mf) dynamic. The third system (bars 6-7) features a forte (f) dynamic. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

Figure 4: “Soixante-quatre durées”, bar 1–6

In light of Messiaen’s technical aspirations, a rhythmically exact rendering of the 64 different durations seems paramount. The birdsong is to

have a subsidiary function and facilitate comprehension of the durations. In performance, Messiaen quite drastically departs from these priorities. Whereas the score indicates that the dynamics for the birdsong are to be stronger than the durations themselves – even “almost aggressively” so, no other recording accentuates the birds as much as the composer (Messiaen 1996, 227). In all three versions, individual birdcalls are brought out with an almost ferocious energy. Messiaen keeps listeners’ attention in a tight grip through his strong-willed projection of their motifs and consistently accentuates quick passages through even livelier tempi. As a result, the final movement contains flashes of brilliantly virtuosic playing. There are some minor but notable textual differences from the score in both live versions, most likely the result of spur-of-the-moment excitement.

Other versions highlight the centrality of timbres and sonic presence in the recording, as vital aspects in making a performance more dramatic or contemplative. Durations range from Thiry’s 9:01, at Trinité, to Andrews’s 12:17. The choice of basic tempo, however, turns out to have a lesser impact than the presence of sound, especially in the birdsong solos. In the close recording of Thiry’s organ at Geneva, there is something of the raw aggression asked for, in spite of the general polished clarity of playing. Sounding from the positive closest to the microphones, the reed stop perfectly captures the dry bass “kik” of a great spotted woodpecker. In later virtuoso passages, drama is allowed to trump evenness of touch. Innig’s version is recorded at close range and thereby makes a strong sonic impression. Tanke draws an immensely powerful solo, which turns his slow version into one of the most potent. As a contrast, Bate and Rößler exhibits the most contemplative and balanced timbres, with a concurring control over the tempo (on the priority of counting the underlying rhythm, see Rößler 1986, 149, 168).

The final movement displays Messiaen at the height of his interpretative abilities, with a charismatic authority second to none. His striking artistic perception of the music involves a sovereignty over the notated score that no other performer allows themselves. This success stems from the freedom of the added birdsong, which, however, itself gains priority of attention rather than facilitating appreciation of the 64 durations (Rößler 1986, 174–175). A notable gulf between Messiaen’s performances and his basic conception of the movement thus arises. Any retained “sentiment” of the compositional meaning is on the verge of vanishing altogether, when the performer Messiaen conveys the drama that was supposed to be a complementary idea.

## Conclusions

*Livre d'orgue* represents an extreme pole, rather than some middle ground among Messiaen's organ works. Caution is therefore needed before drawing wider conclusions about his art of interpretation. Nevertheless, a number of observations indicate the fruitfulness of highlighting tensions between the composer's calls for comprehension of meaning, exactitude and lively performances. As discussed in the introduction of this article, the constellation of these ideals spotlights a tension between Romantic and modernist traits in Messiaen's style of playing. Chronometrical accuracy is certainly not a characteristic feature of this manner of playing; subsequent performers display a higher level of exactitude or fidelity to the scores in this regard. Some minor differences between score and the composer's performances indicate that the notation at times suggests one of several possible styles of playing, most notably in birdsong passages.

Messiaen's ideal of retaining the sentiment of notation, more than its letter, goes hand in hand with a performance philosophy that partly relinquishes full control over note values. Later authorities on the organ works advise that performers continue to count a basic pulse, a stance that contrasts with the composer's own standpoint and conspicuous deviations in his recordings from note values in the scores. The following tradition of interpretation is in this regard more loyal to the composer's insistence on exactitude rather than to his own manner of rendering. Characteristic of Messiaen's playing is a keen sense of drama and a vivid perception of the ideas behind different movements. He ultimately gives priority to spiritual and theoretical aspects and in the act transforms exactitude and clarity from goals to means. While later organists revel in a more refined technical proficiency, Messiaen maintains a unique role among interpreters of the *Livre* on merits of charisma, vividness, and sheer audacity.

Contradictions between score and performances have often been discussed in terms of freedom. Such a view may support a vision that Messiaen, as a composer-performer, had the authority to license himself liberties beyond what later interpreters may dare. For better or worse, pupils and later players had to consider an emerging trajectory of "authentic" interpretation. The analysis here highlights a shift of focus in which accuracy in the representation of the notation soon became a more pressing concern for recording artists. This circumstance may, however, not least reflect the changing status of recordings themselves throughout the twentieth century. Such sources gradually gained a higher status as significant and permanent renderings of works and artists' abilities. Considering increasing expectations on technical brilliancy and evenness of sound that aro-

se in tandem with possibilities for repeated listening, it is not surprising that subsequent interpreters were unwilling to compromise such aspects in their work. As a contrast, nothing suggests that Messiaen treated his recordings as sources on par with his meticulously prepared scores. Messiaen's teaching and his 1956 recordings certainly set standards in some respects, but other performers did not follow suit in his far-reaching priority of imagination and drama over technical mastery. One of the outcomes of this article is a suggestion that the 1956 set needs to be studied further as a product of a particular post-war context, rather than the composer's own final word on the interpretation of his organ works.

The possibility to hear Messiaen perform at other venues than Sainte-Trinité accentuates the necessity of adjusting basically consistent interpretations to different acoustic conditions. Choices of instrument and their sonic presence on recordings also set later versions apart, more conspicuously than the interpretations per se. Several recent renderings have returned towards the warmth of symphonic instruments. It remains to be seen whether future performers move beyond a previous tradition of interpretation or dare recovering something of the composer's willingness to take risks, in the service of communicating his works and their meaning. In any case, analyses of Messiaen's recordings and their relation to his advice of performance raises a number of intriguing questions. More scholarly and artistic reflection is needed to evaluate Messiaen within broader renegotiations of composition and performance from the 1950s, as well the artistic potential his stance may continue to have for contemporary musicians.

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**Deleuze reads Messiaen: Durations and birdsong becoming philosophy**  
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# Deleuze reads Messiaen

## Durations and birdsong becoming philosophy

Jonas Lundblad

Gilles Deleuze was a professed ‘non-musician’ (Deleuze, 2006, p. 156). In contrast to a string of influential books on literature, visual art and cinema, he never produced a sustained study of music. Many of his writings nevertheless refer to musical concepts and repertoires, seemingly sporadically but often at key junctions. Traditional aesthetic understandings of musical immediacy leave manifest marks on Deleuze’s aspiration to create a philosophy beyond, or better, prior to, any primacy of representation. The influential *A Thousand Plateaus*, co-authored with Félix Guattari, provides a natural vantage point to survey his ‘musical ontology’ (Gallope, 2013) and his use of music, replete as it is with musical allusions and references to individual composers.

This iconic work has been judged to provide ‘the most ekphrastic deployment of music for philosophy in the twentieth century ... amalgamating the conceptual and sensual modalities (gestures, images, rhythms, sounds) of modernist music and those of philosophy’ (Scherzinger, 2010, p. 108). Deleuze’s and Guattari’s understanding of music indeed relies heavily on techniques drawn from modernist composers. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Webern, Berg, Messiaen, Varèse, Cage, Stockhausen, Boulez and Berio figure prominently, together with earlier figures such as Mozart, Beethoven, Schumann, Wagner and Mussorgsky.<sup>1</sup>

Among these, Pierre Boulez undoubtedly exerted an unparalleled influence on Deleuze. Mirelle Buydens (1990), Martin Scherzinger (2008, 2010) and Edward Campbell (2010, 2013) have retraced this link in detail. Although Boulez’s one-time teacher Olivier Messiaen surfaces regularly in Deleuze, and consequently also in the secondary literature, this connection has often been affirmed rather than investigated.<sup>2</sup> Ronald Bogue undertook pioneering work on Deleuze and Messiaen and established thematic emphases of lasting importance.<sup>3</sup> Ecological concerns and the role of birdsong count high among them, having later been

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<sup>1</sup> For an inventory of references to music throughout Deleuze’s writings, see Waterhouse, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Les deux musiciens contemporains qui ont plus attiré l’attention de Deleuze sont sans doute Messiaen et Boulez’ (Waterhouse, 2015, p. 267). Messiaen’s importance is also highlighted in Ardoin, Gontarski, and Mattison, 2014, p. 1; Döbereiner 2014, p. 267; Beckman, 2017, p. 88.

<sup>3</sup> The article ‘Rhizomusicology’ (Bogue, 1991) was later incorporated into the book *Deleuze on Music, Painting, and the Arts* (Bogue, 2003). For other texts that touch upon Messiaen in Deleuze, see Bogue, 2004a and 2004b (the later reprinted in Bogue, 2007).

interpreted most significantly by Sander van Maas (2013).<sup>4</sup> Among further studies to probe deeper than passing comments or allusions, Amy Bauer has shown how ‘for Deleuze, Messiaen’s music [the orchestral work *Chronochromie*] represented the joyful engagement of cosmic forces’ (2007, p. 161). Catherine Pickstock engages with Deleuze and discusses Messiaen as a predecessor of a postmodern turn towards religious transcendence in art music (2008).

The present article differs from previous studies both in scope and in method. It moves below a bird’s-eye view on thematic concurrences between music and philosophy, seeking an enhanced critical insight into Deleuze’s actual use of Messiaen in his own work. The method contrasts conspicuously with Bogue’s programmatic decision to abstain from a retracing of discrete sources and concrete lines of influences. His work seeks ‘to describe the process of ‘becoming’ that takes place between Deleuze-Guattari and Messiaen—one that is paradigmatic of the ‘encounters’ that generate the unpredictable theoretical developments of *Mille plateaux*’ (Bogue, 1991, pp. 85–86). The point is to show how *A Thousand Plateaus* and Messiaen’s music can shed light on each other and thereby aid modern interpreters.

A common outcome of previous studies is that they highlight and interpret notable thematic concurrences between Deleuze (with or without Guattari) and Messiaen, including direct citations and references to the composer. The following analysis offers similar material but also ventures beyond Deleuze’s manifest citations of Messiaen and observations that the philosopher develops topics already treated by the composer. The article moves further into the philosophical workshop and investigates in detail what Deleuze actually heard and read by Messiaen. Its first section maps out Deleuze’s encounters with music, in general, and ends with a summary of his sources to Messiaen. This background enables a more comprehensive insight into Deleuze’s manner of transferring concepts and musical techniques from Messiaen, often setting new accents to make them serve new purposes in his philosophical framework. Close comparisons between texts by Deleuze and Messiaen enable detection of unaccounted quotations or allusions, not least in *A Thousand Plateaus*.

Such an approach may not be immediately relevant in the eyes of scholars who cherish ideals of a free-floating and creative exchange of ideas, inspired by Deleuze’s own model of rhizomatic thought (whose musical aspects are discussed below). Proponents of a Deleuzian turn in musicology are generally less interested in the musical genesis of some of Deleuze’s key concepts than what these very notions may continue to achieve.<sup>5</sup> The contrasting path taken here illuminates how Deleuze responded to a polarity in modernist music between ‘conceptual

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<sup>4</sup> ‘There has been a trend – a “minoritarian” one, to be sure – in the literature on Messiaen to use references by Gilles Deleuze to this composer as a starting point for an ecocritical appraisal of his music’ (Maas, 2013, p. 175).

<sup>5</sup> Among recent Deleuzian music studies, see notably Buchanan and Swiboda, 2004; Hulse and Nesbitt, 2013; Macarthur, Lochhead and Shaw, 2016; Moisala, Leppänen, Tiainen and Väättäinen, 2017.

and sensual modalities' (cf. previous citation from Scherzinger). Messiaen is a composer who famously elucidated his musical language in countless interviews, lectures and writings, in the act establishing conceptual contours for its reception. Later scholarship has often sought new approaches to understand and experience his music, highlighting tensions and limitations in Messiaen's own theoretical apparatus (see foremost Healey, 2013). Deleuze's and Guattari's thought provides a noteworthy chapter in the reception history of Messiaen's writings and music, shedding light not least on interrelations between these two modes of communication. Tensions between them also touch upon the complex relation between artistic and conceptual knowledge in Deleuze. The question is particularly thorny since some of his writings advocate a radical transdisciplinarity and transfer of ideas across disciplines, whereas other texts set clear boundaries between science, philosophy and art (Campbell, 2020). Before assuming some kind of 'ekphrastic' transfer always to be at work when a philosopher studies a composer, it is worth investigating to what degree Deleuze drew on musical concepts rather than on sonic experiences of actual music.

The role of writings in the reception of a composer like Messiaen has bearings on a further characteristic premise behind the following analysis. Deleuze and Guattari did not merely establish a direct line of influence from Messiaen: Pierre Boulez's writings functioned as a vantage point and prism for their employment of music, in general and in this particular case. Consequently, it is necessary to discern how some traces of Messiaen in their work are more immediate and how other uses are filtered through Boulez's distinct and tendentious vision of modernist music. Boulez's portrayal of Wagner as an originator of his own modernism here provides a novel point of departure to traverse the latter outlook from a new angle. This depiction of Wagner established interconnections between discrete conceptual motifs and constructed a certain narrative of musical modernism that Deleuze and Guattari readily adopted into their own endeavour of transforming philosophy. The links between motifs in Boulez's portrayal of Wagner also facilitated Deleuze's independent reading of how similar topics interconnect in Messiaen's music.

After that second preamble, the main analysis maps a range of prominent themes upon which Messiaen exerted either a palpable or tacit but still significant influence. The first of them is Deleuze's rhizomatic model of thought, including the idea that individual parameters need to be set free from fixed structures in order to facilitate new connections. The musically derived notion of continuous variation is central to this aspiration and here provides a bridge to the aesthetic concept of a non-pulsed time. The latter outlook is in *A Thousand Plateaus* connected with a theory of different superimposed rhythms, which itself opens for a vision of nature as inherently musical. Deleuze and Guattari employs Messiaen's musical transformation of birdsong within this ecological outlook. The gist of their theoretical use of such techniques highlights philosophical ideals of continuous becoming, virtuality and a general deconstruction and reconstruction of form and

material in art. Finally, Messiaen's notion of rhythmic characters provided Deleuze with a characteristic vantage point to rhythm and colours in painting, as articulated in his work on Francis Bacon.

## Students, texts and some listening: Deleuze's path to music

As put by his biographer François Dosse, Deleuze 'started listening to music quite late in his life, listened to very little, and had tastes running to Piaf, Paul Anka, and Claude François. He also liked Ravel's *Bolero*, about which he had planned to write something' (2010, p. 444). Deleuze gradually developed a sufficient interest in music to prepare a (never completed) book on the subject, on which he worked from the late 1980s to his death in 1995 (Dosse, 2010, p. 446). Apart from brief written references to Ravel, the only preserved public comments on these cherished artists stem from a series of television interviews from 1988 and 1989.<sup>6</sup> Before the camera, Deleuze challenged an understanding that he never listened to music or opera. He claimed to have ventured into music, but only for a brief period, because it required more time than he had available.<sup>7</sup> On the limited number of musical performances Deleuze visited, he noted that

each time I went to a concert, I found it too long since I have very little receptivity, but I always felt deep emotions. [...] I know that music gives me emotions... Simply, talking about music is even more difficult than speaking of painting. It's nearly the highest point (*le sommet*), speaking about music. (Stivale, n.d., p. 77)

As these comments indicate, strong emotional connections stood side by side with a limited patience for musical experiences. A respect for the need to be sufficiently immersed appears to have restrained Deleuze from speaking superficially on the subject. In the same setting, Deleuze confirmed his passion for Edith Piaf and acknowledged his interest in popular singers Charles Trenet and Claude François. Vocal timbre stands out as a pivotal criterion in his musical taste, together with a desire to experience innovative qualities in an artist (Stivale, n.d., pp. 74–76). These interviews are more suggestive than exhaustive, but they indicate how Deleuze could have analysed the popular music he was most immediately fascinated with.

As a contrast, inspiration from others determined the choice of composers used throughout his writings. Deleuze typically ventured into new fields as the result of encounters with people who opened new areas for reflection. At the time when he took up teaching in Vincennes at the experimental university Paris-VIII, Messiaen's previous student Daniel Charles had founded and been appointed the

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<sup>6</sup> The documentary *L'Abécédaire de Gilles Deleuze*, directed by Pierre-André Boutang, consists of conversations with Claire Parnet and was first aired in 1995.

<sup>7</sup> 'I listened to music quite a bit at a particular time, a long time ago. Then, I stopped because I told myself, it's not possible, it's not possible, it's an abyss, it takes too much time, one has to have time, I don't have the time, I have too much to do – I'm not talking about social tasks, but my desire to write things –, I just don't have the time to listen to music, or listen to enough of it.' (Stivale, n.d., p. 74)

first head of its department of music. Deleuze's interest in singing voices echoes themes in Charles's book *Le temps de la voix* (1978). *A Thousand Plateaus* also reveals an influence from Charles's influential *Pour les oiseaux (Entretiens avec John Cage)*. In the same department, Ivanka Stoianova was first a doctoral student and then herself a professor. In 1972, she published a significant article on Messiaen's employment of ancient Greek rhythms. Messiaen was thus certainly known and studied by musicologists at Vincennes.

In Deleuze's own seminar, students and young artists often functioned as catalysts for explorations of art, a pattern confirmed by music. The young musicians Richard Pinhas and Pascale Criton showed up in 1971 and 1975, respectively, and brought contemporary repertoires into discussions and creative explorations.<sup>8</sup> Both became longstanding friends, introducing their doyen to music from rock and traditional musics to spectralist Gérard Grisey and the microtonality of Russian-born composer Ivan Wyschnegradsky. At the outset of her time in the class, Criton brought a tape recorder and played a set of works including Messiaen's *Chronochromie*. This appears to be Deleuze's first documented encounter with the composer's music and, more specifically, with a work that would surface at key junctions throughout his writings (Criton, 2005). All in all, and any personal preferences for Paul Anka or Piaf notwithstanding, Deleuze's appreciation of music deepened through contacts with young artists preoccupied with artistic challenges within the French avant-garde scene – albeit not limited to art music (Dosse, 2010, pp. 442–446).

An early record of discussions on music stems from a 1977 teaching session, when Pinhas raised musical queries to Deleuze's repudiation of chronological time and his preference for so-called non-pulsed dimensions of time (Deleuze, 1998a). Deleuze soon let Boulez know of his interest in participating in an upcoming public seminar on musical time at IRCAM. The two had possibly been acquainted since the early 1950s but definitely established common grounds through this high-profiled event. In 1978, some 2000 auditors gathered for a discussion in which, of the three philosophers present, 'only Deleuze entered into the public debate with any enthusiasm' (Macey, 1993, pp. 398–399).<sup>9</sup>

Boulez later praised the philosopher's contribution in programme notes for memorial concerts he conducted in Deleuze's honour:

Gilles Deleuze is one of the very rare intellectuals who are profoundly interested in music. In 1978, he participated with Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault in a seminar organized by IRCAM on musical time, while he was himself engaged in the writing of *A Thousand Plateaus*. In a brilliant presentation he showed the acute and perspicacious

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<sup>8</sup> On Deleuze as teacher at Vincennes, see Dosse, 2010, pp. 345–361.

<sup>9</sup> Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes and Luciano Berio also contributed to the seminar. A video recording is available at <https://www.ircam.fr/article/detail/sons-dessus-dessous-18-le-temps-musical/> [accessed 2021-03-28].

manner in which he grasped the problems of musical composition and perception.  
(Murphy, 1998, p. 69)

For the seminar, Boulez had chosen five modern works as a common ground for the participants' exploration of temporal issues in music. Messiaen's iconic *Mode de valeurs et d'intensités* was one of them, but it sparked no interest on Deleuze's part. His speech acknowledges the work as a study in non-pulsed time, but without further comments or any reference to its composer.<sup>10</sup> As a contrast, the text introduces a thematic nexus of landscapes, colours and characters, explicitly connected with Wagner's treatment of musical motifs (Deleuze, 2006, p. 157–159). Deleuze leans heavily on an essay by Boulez, who himself claimed that this piece of writing on Wagner triggered the philosopher's reflection on music (Boulez, Menger and Bernard, 1990, p. 9).<sup>11</sup> Boulez would also remain the main composer, or possibly better, the main author behind musical references in Deleuze's writings. Besides passing references in several texts, the 1986 essay *Boulez, Proust and Time: 'Occupying without Counting'* expands on analogies between musical and literary modernism first outlined at the 1978 seminar (Deleuze, 1998b). A reciprocal influence from the philosopher can be detected in Boulez's Collège de France lectures.<sup>12</sup>

Many sources for Deleuze's and Guattari's reception of Messiaen can be retraced from notes in their writings, particularly in *A Thousand Plateaus*. They had studied interview books by Antoine Goléa (1961) and Claude Samuel (1967), as well as a substantial article by Gisèle Brelet on contemporary French music (1977).<sup>13</sup> Besides recurrent references to *Chronochronie*, a passing allusion to *Visions de l'Amen* is the only mention of an individual work by Messiaen in Deleuze's writings (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013, pp. 109–110; cf. Goléa, 1961, p. 95ff).

A tentative conclusion from this inventory corroborates Deleuze's point about having chosen not to listen more extensively to music. There is, for example, no reference to any of Messiaen's major birdsong pieces, despite the manifest influence of this topic in *A Thousand Plateaus*. Consequently, this article almost

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<sup>10</sup> The other works were Ligeti's *Chamber Concerto*, Boulez's *Éclat*, Stockhausen's *Zeitmasse* and Carter's *A Mirror on which to Dwell*; see Campbell, 2013, pp. 101–102.

<sup>11</sup> The text was Boulez's *Time re-explored*, published in the programme for the 1976 production of *Rheingold* at Bayreuth, later republished in Boulez, 1986, pp. 260–277; cf. Deleuze and Guattari, 2013, p. 643, n.14.

<sup>12</sup> Further references occur in Deleuze's *Dialogues* (with Claire Parinet), *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, *Foucault*, *A Thousand Plateaus*, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, *What is Philosophy?*<sup>2</sup> and *Negotiations*. See Waterhouse, 2015, pp. 267–268, 271; Scherzinger, 2008; Campbell, 2010, pp. 141–153.

<sup>13</sup> The most important source, by far, is Samuel's book. Citations given here follow Messiaen, 1994a, in so far as they concern passages unaltered in the second French edition (1986), on which this translation is based. Deleuze and Guattari, 2013, p. 354, also criticise a brief reference to birdsong in Messiaen in Moré, 1971, p. 99.



exclusively investigates Deleuze's reading (with or without Guattari) of *writings* by or on Messiaen, together with texts by Boulez relevant for establishing the framework in which Deleuze read and interpreted Messiaen.

## Weeds and serialism in a new order

In his influential essay on Wagner, Boulez calls for an immanent and purely musical understanding of the *Ring*, arguing that its composer sought nothing less than to find an entirely new structure of music. Throughout the tetralogy, musical motives gradually attained precedence over the dramatic text. Thus emancipated to fulfil purely musical functions, the expressive potential in Wagner's themes gained liberty from surrounding temporal and harmonic structures. Formal relationships were reconstituted when structure gave way to the fluidity of interaction between themes, themselves capable of infinite malleability. Above all, variation was redefined as a continuous transformation of musical parameters, for expressive purposes.

It was *transition* that gradually became Wagner's chief obsession, and this is conceivable only with material virtually divested of stability. (Boulez, 1986, p. 268)

Boulez's reading tallies with central aspects in Deleuze's and Guattari's thought and aesthetics. Traditional ways to conceptualise structure are discarded in favour of techniques that enable novel, flexible and continuous transitions. While working on *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari also read how Boulez posited himself as an heir of Wagner, having in common with his predecessor the ambition to construct large-scale forms and realise continuity in time from a single thematic kernel. Boulez provided the two authors with an analogy between the self-organising force of a weed and the freedom of musical motifs to seek out novel interconnections:

... a musical idea is like a seed which you plant in compost, and suddenly it begins to proliferate like a weed. (Boulez, 1976, p. 15; cf. pp. 16, 18, 54)

Deleuze and Guattari elaborate on Wagner and the posited connection between thematic development and a broader musical re-exploration of time.<sup>14</sup> They add a distinct stress on the absence of signification in music, but otherwise put Boulez's framework and principle of weed-like procreation into service when they introduce their rhizomatic model of thought in *A Thousand Plateaus*. Their (all too) general portrayal of music echoes Boulez's posited ascendancy of motifs over traditional form:

Music has always sent out lines of flight, like so many 'transformational multiplicities', even overturning the very codes that structure or arborify it; that is why musical form,

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<sup>14</sup> See Deleuze and Guattari, 2013, pp. 315 and 371, including a reference to Proust on Wagner mentioned in Boulez, 1976, p. 54.

right down to its ruptures and proliferations, is comparable to a weed, a rhizome. (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013, p. 11, with reference to Boulez, 1976, on p. 601, n. 8)<sup>15</sup>

Boulez's analysis of instrumental colours in the *Ring* highlights a musical ability to establish new internal connections and so undermine prevalent hierarchies and unidirectional lines. The latter kind is akin to what Deleuze and Guattari call traditional arboreal thinking. As Boulez puts it, Wagner creates complex lines in avoiding giving an entire melodic line or harmonic group to a single instrument. The interplay between colours that arise develops 'virtual' lines beyond the 'real' polyphonic lines, in which 'concept and reality may appear to change roles' (Boulez, 1986, p. 273).

This analysis provides a manifest case of Boulez's conviction that every original artist creates techniques that realise what he calls a diagonal or transversal line. Such lines remain situated in real vertical and horizontal lines but also establish distinct new dimensions. The concepts of virtual and diagonal lines became central in Deleuze's and Guattari's common aesthetics. They also elaborate on Boulez's ideal of diagonal polyphony, in which the traditional coexistence of voices gives way to blocks of sound. Beyond traditional punctual coordinates, such blocks move along transversal lines, located in a free-floating temporality devoid of particular localisable points (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013, pp. 345–346).<sup>16</sup>

*A Thousand Plateaus* contains a further brief historiographical sketch of musical modernism, shaped by Boulez's approach. At first sight, there is perhaps no immediate link between Messiaen and the description of how

the ferment in the tonal system itself (during much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries) that dissolved temperament and widened chromaticism while preserving a relative tonality, which reinvented new modalities, brought a new amalgamation of major and minor, and in each instance conquered realms of continuous variation for this variable or that. (p. 111)

Below the surface, however, Messiaen plays a notable role in this conceptually dense passage. His well-known invention of a tonal language based on new modes of limited transpositions echoes the sketched historiography of music. Messiaen also reconceptualised the term 'chromaticism' beyond the category of pitches, speaking of a chromatic ordering of different durations (Messiaen, 2004a, pp. 48, 52, 80, 135). A widened chromaticism and continuous variation in different musical parameters (or variables) are part and parcel of Boulez's appreciation of his teacher. Boulez sought to establish a teleological progression from Wagner's chromaticism over Mahler's orchestration of melodic lines and Schoenberg's serialism to Messiaen. A vital premise was that the invention of systematic twelve-

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<sup>15</sup> A further musical stress in the first chapter is the excerpt from the graphic score of Sylvano Bussotti's *Five pieces for piano for David Tudor* (the 4<sup>th</sup>) placed right at the top (p. 1).

<sup>16</sup> On polyphony and the construction of virtual lines described as heterophony, see Boulez, 1971, pp. 115–139, Boulez, 1991, pp. 227–234, Campbell, 2010, pp. 209–216, Kovács, 2004, pp. 82–125.

note techniques was the defining moment that antiquated ‘the diatonic era’ (1991, p. 225).<sup>17</sup> Messiaen’s momentous *Mode de valeurs et d’intensités* is described as a natural consequence and merger of Wagnerian harmony with the serial principles of the Second Viennese School. The piece is famously based on constructed series not only of pitches, but equally of durations (short to long), dynamics (soft to strong), as well as different kinds of attack (articulation) on the piano. For Boulez, this endeavour was seminal in expanding the meaning of chromaticism beyond pitches into a gradual series of values within any musical element. Messiaen’s accomplishment revealed that the notion of chromaticism can be applied to ‘any other smaller common factor which can serve as a basis for an arithmetical or logarithmic scale’ (Boulez, 1991, p. 226).

This particular historiography served to situate Boulez, together with Messiaen’s other students Karel Goeyvaerts and Karlheinz Stockhausen, at the spearhead of an international avant-garde who ostensibly represented the natural course of serialism beyond these epoch-making techniques.<sup>18</sup> Messiaen neither shared the conviction that his extended serialism necessarily entailed an epochal break with diatonic music, nor an interest to present himself as an amalgamation of Austrian (Webern) and French lines of musical progress. The catalytic effect of *Mode de valeurs et d’intensités* and its employment within the avant-garde in fact made him distance himself from the work.<sup>19</sup> Recent studies have also shown how his particular brand of serialism grew out of longstanding concerns for new expressive possibilities, primarily in the domain of rhythm (Benitez, 2009; McNulty, 2014).<sup>20</sup>

Messiaen’s spurning of Boulez’s historiography was added to the second edition of his talks with Claude Samuel (from 1986), when *A Thousand Plateaus* was already published. Hypothetically, it would have been interesting to see how Deleuze and Guattari would have reacted to such manifest historiographical differences. After all, Messiaen’s artistic decision to work on pieces based on birdsong throughout the entire 1950s – which they made significant use of –

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<sup>17</sup> Boulez’s article ‘Chromaticism’ was first published in Michel, 1958, but was also available to Deleuze and Guattari in Boulez, 1966, of which Boulez, 1991, is a translation. On the importance and utopian value ascribed to Messiaen’s systematic techniques, see Boulez, 1976, pp. 13–14, and 1986, pp. 415–418.

<sup>18</sup> More specifically, Boulez sought to realign with Messiaen as part of an ambition to shine forth as independent of René Leibowitz, for whose teaching of serialism he had previously left Messiaen. On this convoluted rhetorical twist, see Erwin, 2021, Delaere, 2002, and, for Boulez’s account of Messiaen’s experimental phase, Boulez, 1986, pp. 411–418.

<sup>19</sup> ‘I was very annoyed over the absolutely excessive importance given to a short work of mine, only three pages long, “Mode de valeurs et d’intensités”, because it supposedly gave rise to the serial explosion in the area of attacks, durations, intensities, timbres – in short, of all its musical parameters. Perhaps this piece was prophetic and historically important, but musically it’s next to nothing.’ (Messiaen, 1994a, p. 47).

<sup>20</sup> Benitez helpfully discusses early Messiaen scholarship, which followed a strict dodecaphonic norm of serialism. As a result, Messiaen’s serial techniques were frequently called ‘modal’ or ‘quasi-serial’ and his distinct vantage point in rhythm remained nebulous.

constituted a manifest aberration from the vision of music's futurity championed by Boulez.

As it stands, *A Thousand Plateaus* couples the rhizomatic model of thought with a Boulezian view of how Messiaen's widened chromaticism enabled continuous variation in all musical parameters.<sup>21</sup> Deleuze and Guattari single out John Cage as the epitomic rhizomatic composer, in line with the younger generation who regarded Messiaen's breakthrough as (merely) a step towards novel expressive possibilities. Taking the new autonomy of musical variables seriously, Messiaen had accomplished a break with an author-centred logic of composition, in the act creating an indeterminate space in which musical elements would be free to strike up new connections between themselves.<sup>22</sup> Of particular import throughout the book is Boulez's conviction that electroacoustic music enabled a further dissolution of natural constraints in the musical parameters first cast in chromatic series by Messiaen. With the help of electronics, punctual coordinates finally yielded to an 'absolute continuum' in all elements of sound. Boulez described how composition was thoroughly transformed when these novel techniques offered 'a non-limitation of possibilities', a vast continuum of yet undifferentiated potential from which composers were at liberty to 'extract' sounds and structures and chords.<sup>23</sup> Electronic techniques thus consummate a modernist reversal of form and thematic development, playing a seminal role in what Jean-Jacques Nattiez calls 'the impossibility of separating *material* from *invention*...the most long-standing of Boulez's ideas' (Boulez, 1986, p. 23).

This outlook tallies with Deleuze's and Guattari's aspiration to launch a reconceptualisation of philosophy beyond traditional dichotomies between form and matter. As noted by Scherzinger, Boulez's synthesizer functions as 'informing technical principle' in *A Thousand Plateaus*, where it 'becomes a philosophical entry point into the "immense mechanosphere" characterizing a new era: "the age of the Machine"' (2008, p. 131). Deleuze and Guattari regard its production of sound as a momentous event that annihilates dichotomies between musical form and matter. The synthesizer disassembles existing sounds into their constitutive elements and transforms them through an infinite number of potential

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<sup>21</sup> On the presence of a 'Boulezian' Messiaen in the excerpt cited from Deleuze and Guattari, 2013, p. 111, see Scherzinger, 2008, p. 138.

<sup>22</sup> 'It is undoubtedly John Cage who first and most perfectly deployed this fixed sound plane, which affirms a process against all structure and genesis, a floating time against pulsed time or tempo, experimentation against any kind of interpretation, and in which silence as sonorous rest also marks the absolute state of movement' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013, p. 311).

<sup>23</sup> 'In the domain of electronics, it is pretty obvious that we are dealing initially with a non-limitation of possibilities, whether of timbre, of tessitura, of dynamics, or of duration: an undifferentiated universe from which one has to create the various characteristics of the sound oneself, and thereby extract a work that is coherent not only in internal structure but also in the actual constitution of its sound material' (Boulez, 1991, p. 159).

connections between sonic parameters. The epochal importance of the instrument is coupled with rhizomatics, chromaticism and continuous variation.<sup>24</sup>

In Deleuze's and Guattari's Boulezian historiography, the synthesizer thus fulfils the reconceptualisation of music which Messiaen ostensibly initiated in the total serialism of *Mode de valeurs*. These interconnected ideas inform a dense passage that reads like a more elaborate articulation of the previously cited excerpt from *A Thousand Plateaus*:

But when chromaticism is unleashed, becomes a generalized chromaticism, turns back against temperament, affecting not only pitches but all sound components – durations, intensities, timbre, attacks – it becomes impossible to speak of a sound form organising matter; it is no longer even possible to speak of a continuous development of form. Rather, it is a question of a highly complex and elaborate material making audible nonsonorous forces. The couple matter-form is replaced by the coupling material-forces. The synthesizer has taken the place of the old 'a priori synthetic judgment', and all functions change accordingly. By placing all its components in continuous variation, music itself becomes a superlinear system, a rhizome instead of a tree, and enters the service of a virtual cosmic continuum of which even holes, silences, ruptures, and breaks are a part. (p. 111)

The quadruple of components in sound mentioned here harks back to Messiaen's experimental phase. His music is nevertheless obsolete, if the aesthetic calling of music requires a move beyond serialised chromaticism towards a sonic continuum. Deleuze and Guattari are often read as advocates for an aesthetic in which traditionally notated pitches must give way for post-serial, graphic, electronic or improvisational methods.<sup>25</sup> However, as the remaining sections of this article indicate, there are other strands in Deleuze's aesthetics that reconnect with further traits in Messiaen's compositional practices.

## Making durations audible

The central notion of continuous variation has also shaped readings of Deleuze's and Guattari's work on music. Van Maas questions how Bouge participates in a broader tendency 'to view Messiaen from the perspective of the continuous' (2013, p. 177). This can indeed be problematic, at least if Boulezian implications are accepted uncritically. The continuous is a multi-faceted and

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<sup>24</sup> Deleuze's own experience of synthesizers involved hands-on experiments. Richard Pinhas explored their use in rock music throughout the 1970s and introduced the technology to his philosophical mentor. They also experimented with their novel sound flux in the recording studio (Dosse, 2010, p. 444). This background is lacking in Scherzinger's outline (2008, pp. 136-137) of Boulez's writings as source for Deleuze's understanding of synthesizers.

<sup>25</sup> Speaking of Cage and rhizomatic music, Edward Campbell infers: 'It would seem that for Deleuze and Guattari, only music allowing continuous variation on every parametric level can aspire to the condition of generalized chromaticism, whether this be, for example, in Cage's indeterminate works, all kinds of serial and post-serial compositional approaches, graphic score works, free improvisation or electronic music' (2013, p. 38).

complex notion, not least because it involves both spatial and temporal aspects.<sup>26</sup> This article will discuss these two dimensions in turn, beginning with questions of musical time.

Messiaen, no less than Boulez, described himself as an heir to Wagner's motivic work. In fact, Boulez's approach stands in a manifest continuity with characteristic analyses of the German titan in Messiaen's teaching.<sup>27</sup> In 1972, Messiaen expressed his affinity with Wagner's quest for enhanced expression, highlighting how the latter's *leitmotifs* can 'depict the past, present and future, all at the same time.' (Rößler, 1986, p. 54). Reading Boulez perhaps first made Deleuze and Guattari note similarities between the malleability of Wagner's motifs and Messiaen's arsenal of techniques for modifying rhythmic cells.<sup>28</sup> One of their most noteworthy elucidations of the pivotal term 'the refrain' cites these methods.<sup>29</sup> A refrain facilitates interactions between previously non-connected elements and thereby contains a catalytic power to create new forms. As they put it in *A Thousand Plateaus*, the seed or internal structure of such a force has two essential aspects: augmentations and diminutions, additions and withdrawals, amplification and eliminations by unequal values, but also the presence of a retrograde motion running in both directions. (p. 405; see p. 648 n. 58 for references to Messiaen 1994a)

This elaboration is in its entirety built upon Messiaen's most famous techniques for the construction of a new rhythmic language. Deleuze and Guattari couple these devices with a self-organising force in the rhythmic material, especially a power in palindromic structures to expand and contract from a centre of their own. Furthermore, they grasp how Messiaen's techniques embody what has been called 'a clear metaphysical aspiration to overcome the unidirectional nature of the flow of time' (Fabbi, 2012, p. 60).

From Boulez's writings, the two authors could learn how Wagner worked with augmentations and diminutions of themes, just like Bach, Mozart and Beethoven. A crucial novelty is, however, that the Romantic visionary emancipated his themes from a dependence upon pre-existing chronological time. Their fluidity rather instil free-floating temporal experiences that arise from nothing else than their

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<sup>26</sup> For a helpful survey of temporal continuity in Boulez, see Hayes, 2021, pp. 41–59.

<sup>27</sup> On Wagner in Messiaen's teaching, including Boulez's response, see Bovin, 1995, pp. 260–269, and more broadly on the impact of Messiaen's teaching, Boulez, 1986, pp. 404–406.

<sup>28</sup> Boulez had readily granted his debt to these techniques: 'From my contact with Messiaen, then, I had taken only what could be of service to me – namely his work on rhythmic cells and their modification, interpolation, partial augmentation, diminution, and so on' (Boulez, 1976, p. 14; cf. Messiaen, 1994a, p. 82).

<sup>29</sup> The French term is *la ritournelle* but Brian Massumi's English translation of *A Thousand Plateaus* renders it as the *refrain*. Its musical connotations would have been far more readily understandable as *ritornello*.

own expressive potential.<sup>30</sup> *A Thousand Plateaus* elevate such tendencies as emblematic of all post-Wagnerian music, in the act alluding to Messiaen's techniques of augmentation and diminutions.<sup>31</sup>

A conceptual polarity between pulsed and non-pulsed time lay at the heart of Deleuze's path to music. Boulez provided him with these concepts and possibly inspired a previous use of the analogous Stoic notions *Chronos* and *Aion* (Deleuze, 2015, pp. 167–173; Buydens, 1990, p. 155).<sup>32</sup> Deleuze's IRCAM speech highlighted how Messiaen's *Mode de valeurs* 'developed or showed different aspect of this non-pulsed time' (2006, p. 157). *A Thousand Plateaus* would later invoke Boulez's contrast between the

'pulsed time' of a formal and functional music based on values versus the 'nonpulsed time' of a floating music, both floating *and* machinic, which has nothing but speeds or differences in dynamic. (p. 305)

In *Boulez, Proust and Time*, Deleuze treats the distinction as two opposite ways of coupling time and music together, citing Boulez on a choice of strategies to 'count to occupy space-time, or occupy without counting' (1998b, p. 70; cf. Deleuze and Guattari, 2013, p. 555; Boulez, 1971, p. 94).

An understanding that post-Wagnerian modernism decodes pre-existing note values and forms and establishes new temporal modes is central to Deleuze's and Guattari's conviction that music is relevant well beyond demarcated aesthetic ambitions. As Edward Campbell puts it, perceptions of music informed by the distinction between pulsed and non-pulsed time 'no longer make music audible in time, but rather make time audible in music' (2013, p. 105). Deleuze and Guattari may or may not have seen a similar dichotomy by Messiaen in a French biography of the composer:

The rhythmician [...] has the advantage of moving at will in the past and the future, and of chopping up time by retrograding and permuting it. 'Music is not in time, but time is in music'. (Mari, 1965, p. 59, my translation)

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<sup>30</sup> 'Neither Wagner nor Berlioz saw any need for this codification, which seemed to them absurd, archaic and totally contrary to the fluidity at which they aimed in their own music, which demanded its own musical time. It was precisely this that formed the novelty of Wagner's motifs, which are not only unattached to any definite or definitive tempo but obey no pre-existing formal hierarchy in their transformations' (Boulez, 1986, p. 267).

<sup>31</sup> 'Music has always submitted its forms and motifs to temporal transformations, augmentations or diminutions, slowdowns or accelerations, which do not occur solely according to laws of organization or even of development' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013, p. 315).

<sup>32</sup> In Deleuze and Guattari, 2013, p. 305, *Chronos* is 'the time of measure that situates things and person, develops a form, and determines a subject', whereas *Aeon* is 'the indefinite time of the event, the floating line that knows only speeds and continually divides that which transpires'.

Messiaen made further similar statements and added a stress on musicians' precedence over philosophers in their grasp of time.<sup>33</sup> Deleuze and Guattari heeded the basic idea that a reversal of agency between music and time turned composers into explorers that make aspects of time itself audible. This theme is central in *A Thousand Plateaus*, where it underpins a conviction that music both mirrors prevalent and realises novel structures in the fabric of being. The possibility of small musical motifs to constitute their own temporal fabric stands connected to what Deleuze and Guattari call a 'plane of immanence' or 'the plane of consistency or composition'. In this space, concepts resonate with each other in an undivided whole, remaining in flux and not submitted to the division that comes with a transfer to a determinate state. In brief, this link suggests a music that remains at one with movement, in an absolute and yet undivided sense, rather than to assume contradictions between substance and form. Such immanence is contrasted with a 'transcendent plan(e) of organization' at work when the development of form and subjects correspond to non-audible principles external to the sound or themes themselves.<sup>34</sup>

Messiaen is not a central reference when Deleuze and Guattari invoke music to elucidate these notions. Nevertheless, notable traces of his thought surface at key junctions. The IRCAM speech elucidates how 'the most immediate feature of such a so-called non-pulsed time is duration, time freed from measure, be it a regular or irregular, simple or complex measure'. The Bergsonian notion of duration is central for both Messiaen and Deleuze, together with the idea that a non-pulsed time stretches beyond common strategies in the apperception of rhythm 'to appose a common measure or a metric cadence to all vital durations' (Deleuze, 2006, p. 157). *A Thousand Plateaus* elaborates further on how a liberated sense for rhythm eschews coded temporalities and fixed metre:

It is well known that rhythm is not meter or cadence, even irregular meter or cadence: there is nothing less rhythmic than a military march. [...] Meter, whether regular or not, assumes a coded form whose unity of measure may vary, [...] whereas rhythm is the Unequal or the Incommensurable that is always undergoing transcoding. Meter is dogmatic, but rhythm is critical; it ties together critical moments. (p. 365)

In contrast to their understanding that such an antithesis between rhythm and metre is commonly recognised, Messiaen had previously said that

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<sup>33</sup> 'As a rhythmist, I've endeavored to divide this time up and to understand it better by dividing it. Without musicians, time would be much less understood. Philosophers are less advanced in this field. But as composers, we have the great power to chop up and alter time' (Messiaen, 2004a, p. 34). This statement was, however, a later addition to the version read by Deleuze and Guattari.

<sup>34</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, 2013, pp. 309–312, 314–316. The translator writes 'plan(e)' to indicate the presence of dual connotations at work, amalgamating geometrical 'planes' with 'plan' in the sense of conscious intention and organisation.



most people think that rhythm and the steady beat of a military march are one and the same. Whereas rhythm is in fact an unequal element given to fluctuations, like the waves in the sea, the sound of the wind, or the shape of tree branches. (1994a, p. 249)<sup>35</sup>

Deleuze and Guattari provide no reference to Messiaen, in spite of their verbatim citation on military marches and their adoption of his general gist. However, they couple his own ideal of true rhythm with a precedence of temporal aspects in continuous variation (which itself entails a link to Messiaen, as discussed above):

The smooth is the continuous variation, continuous development of form; it is the fusion of harmony and melody in favor of the production of properly rhythmic [sic] values. (2013, p. 556)

The authors possibly appreciated further affinities between their own work and Messiaen's outlook. There is a distant but noteworthy propinquity between their political aspiration to break away from the strictures of 'state philosophy' and Messiaen's strive throughout the 1930s to liberate rhythm from any militaristic regularity. In both cases, an undulating expressivity, inspired by human breath and movements in nature, signifies and heralds a new social order.<sup>36</sup>

Messiaen's most lucid elucidation of the two main temporal modes thematised by Boulez and Deleuze appeared in his posthumous and massive *Traité de rythme, de couleur, et d'ornithologie*. The first volume thereby, unintentionally, summarises several noteworthy concurrences between Deleuze and the two composers. The text itself was, however, printed too late (1994) to influence the philosopher. A table in the *Traité* summarises Messiaen's readings of Bergson on the contrast between what here is called pure duration and structured time:

**True duration**

*Duration is concrete* -  
evaluated by its relation to us

*Duration is heterogeneous* -  
always changing

*Duration is qualitative* - immeasurable

*Duration is subjective* - within us

**Structured time**

*Time is abstract* -  
an empty, static container

*Time is homogeneous* -  
all parts are identical

*Time is quantitative* - measurable

*Time is objective* - outside of us

(Messiaen, 1994b, p. 12, cited after Baggech, 1998, pp. 21-22)

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. p. 68: 'I'll take another very striking example of nonrhythmic music that is considered rhythmic: military marches. The march with its cadential gait, with its uninterrupted succession of absolutely equal note values, is anti-natural', and p. 67: 'rhythmic music is music that scorns repetition, squareness, and equal divisions, and that is inspired by the movements of nature, movements of free and unequal durations'.

<sup>36</sup> See further Messiaen, 1994b, p. 58: 'Laissons de côté le "pas cadencé" des soldats, affreusement anti-nature! La marche libre - la vraie - ne comporte jamais deux groupes de pas de durée absolument identique', and Messiaen, 2012, p. 61: 'No more rhythms made monotonous by their squareness. We want to breathe freely!' On the political aspects, see Fulcher, 2002, and Schloesser, 2014, pp. 241-243.

The basic antithesis between non-pulsed and chronological time is easily recognisable. Messiaen's distinction between subjective and objective dimensions is freely at odds with Deleuze and Guattari, who turn their focus away from a focal point in subjectivity towards qualities inherent in the artistic material itself.

However, Deleuze's reception of Messiaen displays an eclectic style of reading, which shrewdly perceives useful ideas and unexpected connections, but silently ignores points of difference. A conspicuous case is Messiaen's theological contrast between time and eternity, based on an ontological duality that the progressive atheist Deleuze programmatically sought to overcome.

Beyond the binary approach to time sketched so far, a characteristic trait in Messiaen's thinking is to regard rhythm as constituted by multiple superimposed layers. His outlook followed musicologist and composer André Souris, who in his turn built on philosopher Gaston Bachelard's reversal of an ontological monism in Bergson's conception of duration. The result was, in musical terms, a modification of the idea of non-pulsed time through concepts of rhythmic superimposition or polyphony (Benitez, 2009, pp. 272, 281–283, Hayes, 2021, pp. 14–18). The heterogeneity of rhythm is thus not only a matter of constant change but also stems from creative interaction between different strata. Deleuze highlighted time as 'heterochronous, heterogeneous, multiple and non-coincident' already in the IRCAM speech (2006, p. 157). On the same subject, *A Thousand Plateaus* makes use of Messiaen's positive vision of musical time, including ecological implications.<sup>37</sup>

Characteristic of Messiaen's reception of Souris is a spatial and natural situation of the possibly rather abstract idea of superimposed rhythms. The composer's elaboration on proper rhythm, cited above, highlighted fluctuations in nature as a basis for musical realisations of rhythm. At a key junction in *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari invoke Messiaen's cosmological conviction that the whole universe is replete with a multiplicity of rhythms. They introduce his concomitant view that 'music is not the privilege of human beings' and goes on to state how it is 'permeating nature, animals, the elements, and deserts as much as human beings' (p. 360). The authors further note how Messiaen's experiments with a chromatic ordering of durations have implications well beyond the emancipation of temporality from fixed measures. These techniques offered a path to make audible a synchronic interplay between the different life rhythms of human beings, animals and even purely geological objects. Deleuze and Guattari write:

Messiaen presents multiple chromatic durations in coalescence, 'alternating between the longest and the shortest, in order to suggest the idea of the relations between the infinitely long durations of the stars and mountains and the infinitely short ones of the insects and atoms: a cosmic, elementary power that ... derives above all from the labor of rhythm.' (pp. 359–360, citing Brelet, 1977, p. 1166).

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<sup>37</sup> For an example of thematic concurrence, see p. 7: 'We do not have units (*unités*) of measure, only multiplicities or varieties of measurement.'

The multiplicity of superimposed temporal modes thus provides a conceptual bridge from a free-floating timeframe to an ecological setting. This transition also demonstrates how Deleuze's reception of Messiaen moved beyond Boulez's connections between thematic development, non-pulsed time and rhizomatic principles. The vision of synchronic interplay between different life rhythms itself conjoins temporal and spatial dimensions. As such, it serves as a natural gateway to considering Messiaen's impact on spatial and ecological aspects of Deleuze's and Guattari's musical thought.

## Birdsong and music as becoming

The chapter 'Of the Refrain' in *A Thousand Plateaus* has become a key text in musical thought and creativity during the late twentieth and into the twenty-first century. The text makes significant use of spatial and ecological aspects in music, with explicit recourse to Messiaen's ideas.<sup>38</sup> Deleuze and Guattari explore rhythm as a broad biological and anthropological concept, with a distinct affinity to Messiaen's vision of superimposed rhythms throughout the universe. His particular articulation of the contrast between fixed metre and rhythm (discussed above) informs their outlook on rhythm as a virtual passage or progression in-between disparate points, elements and species (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013, p. 364). Messiaen's preoccupation with unequal durations is transformed into a characterisation of rhythm as a constant process of transcoding, in contrast to closed forms within a particular metre.

Meter, whether regular or not, assumes a coded form whose unit of measure may vary, but in a noncommunicating milieu, whereas rhythm is the Unequal or the Incommensurable that is always undergoing transcoding. (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013, p. 365)

Deleuze and Guattari continue and invoke Bachelard on a point no less central to Messiaen: The understanding that rhythm is a link, a passing and the energy which ties together distinct points or durations in a movement:

Meter is dogmatic, but rhythm is critical; it ties together critical moments, or ties itself together in passing from one milieu to another [...] Bachelard is right to say that 'the link between truly active moments (rhythm) is always effected on a different plane from the one upon which the action is carried out.' (2013, p. 365)

The concepts of rhythm and milieu are intertwined, as this excerpt indicates. Both notions conjoin ecological and anthropological dimensions with artistic dimensions. The notion of milieu is connected to a multi-layered and organic ontology of interiority and exteriority, substance and form. All living things are posited to harness four milieus: A milieu of materials *exterior* to the more basic

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<sup>38</sup> Commenting on this chapter, Bogue has argued that 'Chief among those who inspire in this enterprise is Olivier Messiaen, whose remarks on rhythm and birdsong provide several of the key concepts in *De la ritournelle*' (1991, p. 85).

and unformed elements, an *interior* milieu that regulates the complexity and differentiation within organisms, an *intermediary* milieu of membranes and limits, as well as an *annexed* or *associated* milieu that captures energy sources and relates to outer reality, through activities such as breathing, perception and reaction (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013, pp. 56–60, 364). This outlook provides a ground for further reflection on how rhythm and music reconfigure fluid connections between living creatures and their habitat.

Milieus are regarded as arising from the relative stability of a code, or the periodic repetition of a constitutive element. Alluding to a Boulez-inspired transformation of punctual elements into integrated blocks of sound, Deleuze and Guattari say that every milieu forms ‘a block of spacetime constituted by the periodic repetition of the component’ (2013, p. 364). At the same time, their creative force hinge upon constant change, adaption and co-operation.

Every milieu is coded, a code being defined by periodic repetition; but each code is in a perpetual state of transcoding or transduction. Transcoding or transduction is the manner in which one milieu serves as the basis for another, or conversely is established atop another milieu, dissipate in it or is constituted in it. (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013, p. 364)

This theory is more complex than previous preferences for non-pulsed time and a championing of musical motifs that break free of fixed structures. Deleuze and Guattari here recognise the need for codes and their degree of stability to establish milieus. Rather than opting for one of the contrasting aspects, they theorise a constitutive synchronicity of the tendencies to establish temporal codes and the unceasing reconfiguration of such structures. This ecological vision implicitly calls for another aesthetic than a one-sided preference for constant change. True rhythm may be smooth, but it is a continuous *development* of form rather than the *abandoning* of form all together (cf. Deleuze and Guattari, 2013, p. 556, cited above).

In this context, Deleuze and Guattari credit Jakob von Uexküll’s vision of nature as music, more precisely, of biological components as melodies in a counterpoint of reciprocal influence and creative force. His work provides a link to understand how the authors came to regard the sketched outlook on rhythm as encompassing the entire realm of living beings, from organisms to animal behaviour and human social existence.<sup>39</sup> The concept of territory provides a notable bridge from the overarching theoretical level to birdsong. Deleuze and Guattari allude to Messiaen’s employment of Greek and Hindu rhythms and invoke further examples from music history to establish that a refrain ‘always carries earth with it; it has a land (sometimes a spiritual land) as its concomitant’

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<sup>39</sup> Deleuze and Guattari studied the French translation of Uexküll’s *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans* (originally *Streifzüge durch die Umwelten von Tieren und Menschen*). Their theory of interiority and exteriority draws upon his exploration of a biological ground for signification and communication, in animals and human beings, considered a pivotal point of departure for modern ethology, biosemiotics and biocybernetics. On their reception, as it pertains to music, see Amrine, 2015.

(2013, p. 363). They heed ties between ancient metrical systems and distinct geographical regions, in the act taking odds with Boulez's criticism of Messiaen that a rhythmic language should be constructed *ex nihilo*. At the same time, Deleuze and Guattari point out that 'the bird sings to mark its territory' (2013, p. 363; cf. Boulez, 1976, p. 15).

Birds are central in explaining how milieus evolve into territories. For Deleuze and Guattari, such territorialisation occurs when constitutive components in a milieu cease to fulfil merely functional values and rather take on expressive qualities. The difference concerns modes of signification and the potential in certain marks to become qualitative, or matters of expression. The colours of birds or fishes remain purely biological functions related to actions such as mating, protection or aggression, until they attain a permanence and become characteristic marks of a species and its place within a habitat. Such a transformation is regarded as a rhythm and a process of territorialisation. For Deleuze and Guattari, it is vital that changes in signification are primary in relation to the organisation of new biological and social functions entailed in a territory (2013, pp. 366–367).

Acts of signification inherently border on artistic processes. Having suggested that territorialisation rests on 'the becoming-expressive of rhythm or melody', Deleuze and Guattari move on to highlight artistic dimensions in the delineation of territories and of having property:

Property is fundamentally artistic because art is fundamentally *poster*, *placard*... The expressive is primary in relation to the possessive; expressive qualities, or matters of expression, are necessarily appropriative and constitute a having more profound than being. (2013, p. 368)

As indicated here, expressive qualities are neither external signs of a preceding essence or identity nor purely subjective or emotional. Rather, Deleuze and Guattari call them 'auto-objective' and stress how identity and characteristic properties develop and attain objectivity in the expression of territorial limits towards others. Messiaen stresses a similar objectivity and holds that the common song of a species constitute 'a veritable musical language', precise enough for communication in courtship, feeding or warning (1994a, p. 86). He can also be used to reinforce the view that birdsong originates from negotiations of territorial ascendancy and that a bird's artistic proficiency is a powerful tool to set it above others within the avian hierarchy. Deleuze and Guattari adopt Messiaen's understanding that such an artistic manner of establishing a pecking order is preferable to ordinary human methods.<sup>40</sup> They claim that his ornithological

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<sup>40</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, 2013, p. 366, cite Messiaen, 1994a, p. 85 (rendered here in the translation of the latter): 'Strange though it may seem, a bird's song first has a territorial aspect: the bird sings to defend its branch, its field of pasture, and to affirm its ownership of a female, a nest, a branch, or a region in which it feeds. This is so true that territorial possession is often regulated by song contests, and if an intruder wishes to occupy a spot that doesn't belong to it, the real owner sings and sings so well that the intruder leaves... if the intruder sings better than the proprietor, the proprietor yields his place. Many differences

findings corroborate ethological observations that the advantage of human beings over animals concerns ‘means of overcoding, of making punctual systems’ (2013, p. 360). However, such an upper edge reinforces chronological and stratified thinking and thus constitutes an impediment to properly musical and natural qualities. A similar preference for nature as a site of authentic music informs a common disregard for the traditional distinction between noise and sound (Messiaen, 1994a, p. 35, Deleuze and Guattari, 2013, p. 351). *A Thousand Plateaus* develops this approach to comprehensive ecocritical vision, in which nature opposes industrial manufacturing and human violence through the non-pulsed power of music. To overcome such detrimental forces, it is necessary for the non-musical sound of the human being to form a block with the becoming-music of sound. (p. 360)

Birdsong in Messiaen plays a central role in the explication of what such a becoming entails. Essential to the argument in *A Thousand Plateaus* is a perspicacious view of birdsong as emblematic of a *becoming* that constitutes the truly musical aspect in music, rather than as a musical language that *is*. This theoretical approach rests on territorial aspects and birds’ irrevocable situation within a wider ecological web. Drawing upon Messiaen’s superimposed rhythms, Deleuze and Guattari claim that a properly musical grasp of birdsong establishes a diagonal block with fluid transformations on a molecular level. This vision requires a relinquishing of the idea that a musician would even try to imitate birdsong. Music is not at all concerned with representation or figuration of a particular event. It is nevertheless certainly not devoid of content. To the contrary, the molecular level is posited to stand in reciprocal interplay with a wider gaze on the entire cosmos.

*A Thousand Plateaus* explicates on musical expression in music as inseparable from how living creatures reconfigure their identity, emotions, and situation in the world. For Deleuze and Guattari, anthropological rites de passage as birth and death are exemplary of rhythm, in the sense of transformation and transition between different states. They note how actual uses of music can guide and enable life rhythms, among them a child’s desire to comfort itself through singing or birds’ aspiration to stave off others from their own territory. On a conceptual level, regardless of actual music-making, Deleuze and Guattari posit ‘that the *refrain* is properly musical content, the block of content proper to music’ (2013, p. 349).

As noted above, Messiaen informs the view that a refrain carries a geographical hold on a territory. *A Thousand Plateaus* adds a threefold vision of an existential hold on reality: Music establishes a point of stability within chaos, provides a safe space around that point, but also opens these circles for future co-operation with cosmic forces (pp. 362–363). Territorialisation is thus central to the activity

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between human beings should be regulated in this charming manner’. The last sentence is omitted in *A Thousand Plateaus* but fits readily with its rejection, on pp. 367–369, of the German ethologist Konrad Lorenz’s *On Aggression*.

inherent in the rhythmic work of refrains. Music is itself dependent on refrains for its existence, but music also entails a constant deterritorialisation, including both a possibility for change and an uprooting threat to life:

We are not at all saying that the refrain is the origin of music, or that music begins with it. It is not really known when music begins. The refrain is rather a means of preventing music, warding it off, or forgoing it. But music exists because the refrain exists also, because music takes up the refrain, lays hold of it as a content in a form of expression, because it forms a block with it in order to take it somewhere else. (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013, p. 300)

This comprehensive theory of music and becoming goes far beyond Messiaen's interest and use of birdsong, at least on first sight. However, Deleuze and Guattari are true adherents to a modernist aesthetic in their conviction that both philosophical ideas and musical structures must be 'de-territorialised' from their original context, in order to give voice to otherwise imperceptible states in nature. Music, including birdsong, must first attain a distance from nature. Its power to seize territorial motifs and melodies and to set free their potential for transformation establishes new blocks or self-standing structures of rhythm and sound. Deleuze and Guattari regard birdsong as sonic blocks that have taken up a certain existential hold on a territory and now form a medium of encounter with other avian singers, ecological conditions and with being as such. This view relinquishes the identity often assumed in an aesthetics of expression. A stress on becoming in and through sound also questions Messiaen's understanding that a species has a common stable language of communication. As put in *A Thousand Plateaus*:

If the sound block has a becoming-animal as its content, then the animal simultaneously becomes, in sonority, something else, something absolute. (p. 354)

The theoretical nexus established between music, nature and becoming in this book provides an idiosyncratic vantage point to consider encounters between avian and human creativity. Deleuze and Guattari eschewed getting bogged down in debates surrounding Messiaen's own claim that he provided 'perfectly authentic' renderings of birdsong in his music.<sup>41</sup> Beyond this rather infelicitous remark, the composer also pointed out the necessity for a different range of pitch and tempo in reworkings of birdsong, due to biological differences in the apperception of sound (Messiaen, 1994a, p. 95). In contrast to this technical discussion, *A Thousand Plateaus* stresses the impossibility of simple transcriptions, emphasising that singing is irreducibly interconnected with a bird's particular life and territory. On a level of principle, even intimations of imitation or representation of nature in music must be discarded. Rather, in the act of incorporating birdsong,

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<sup>41</sup> 'Tous ont été entendus en forêt et sont parfaitement authentiques. Les instruments essaieront donc de reproduire, autant que possible, les attaques et les timbres des oiseaux'. Olivier Messiaen, *Réveil des oiseaux* (pour Piano Solo et Orchestre), Partition d'Orchestre. Paris: Durand, 1953: 'Note' [unpaginated].

[t]he human musician is deterritorialized in the bird, but it is a bird that is itself deterritorialized, ‘transfigured’, a celestial bird that has just as much of a becoming as that which becomes with it. (p. 354)

Messiaen was himself transfigured by birdsong throughout the 1950s to some extent. A decisive turn towards nature opened a path to reconfigure his musical syntax, as an alternative to the negation of tonality in the most uncompromising phase of Boulezian modernism. Recent analyses reveal how the distinct *style oïseaux* that Messiaen developed throughout this decade entailed a possibility to conjoin serial techniques with prime numbers, rhythmic and melodic motifs from Greek metrics and plainchant (Cheong, 2007). Aspirations to recapture birds’ timbre also necessitated a more refined use of harmony as a sonic ‘colouring’ of melodies. Deleuze’s and Guattari’s philosophical framework illuminated essential aspects in Messiaen’s *modus operandi* before they were unravelled in musicological studies. The public release of sketchbooks of birdsong and findings in them how Messiaen partly worked from commercial recordings of American, Swiss and Swedish birds (*Radions fågelskivor*) have resulted in reconstructions of how original birdcalls were gradually transfigured into distinct passage in his works (Hill, 2013; Chadwick and Hill, 2018).

In a detailed study of the use of American recordings, Robert Fallon reveals how Messiaen often stayed close to pitches and to characteristic small-scale motifs in the song of a species. At the same time, he allowed them to establish new larger-scale sonic patterns:

The *style oïseau*, therefore, accurately conforms to its model at the level of the syllable and strophe, but not at the level of the song’s structure as a whole. (Fallon, 2007, p. 123)

Messiaen’s own procedures in composing birdsong echoes Boulez’s portrayal of a ‘Wagnerian’ modernism in that motifs are liberated from their original context and thereby form new musical structures. In retrospect, Deleuze’s and Guattari’s more conceptual than technical grasp of the encounter between avian and human music stands as a lasting testimony to their perceptive abilities. As a deterritorialized language, birdsong is regarded as ‘celestial’ and as a realm of autocreative rhythmic encounters between territories, birds and human musicians. *A Thousand Plateaus* shares a notable affinity with Messiaen’s own ‘surrealist’ approach to the representation of birdsong. Empirical exactitude is certainly important in this aesthetics, but as reconfigured by a theological conviction of birds as angelic creatures, situated on a fluid borderline between this world and a ‘virtual’ higher reality (Fallon, 2007; van Maas, 2013). Leaving theological aspects aside, such a virtual dimension exerts a notable influence when Deleuze and Guattari make use of other ideas from Messiaen to situate birdsong and its mode of becoming within a distinct theory of colour and landscapes.



## Rhythmic characters in landscapes of colour

Building on the previous distinction between metre and rhythm, Deleuze and Guattari outline how different expressive qualities together form ‘territorial motifs’ and ‘territorial counterpoints’. The first aspect entails a freedom from pulsed temporalities. The latter establishes virtual points in a habitat and indicate a power of living creatures to influence their own geographical setting, as well as other agents and events within it (2013, p. 369).

At this stage in the argument, Deleuze and Guattari have managed to naturalise their theory of rhythm as a creative force that moves in between fixed parameters. Their next step adds the further notion of a melodic landscape, in a passage that builds on Boulez’s ‘Wagnerian’ modernism but also establishes new connections to Messiaen:

We should say, rather, that territorial motifs form rhythmic faces or characters, and that territorial counterpoints form melodic landscapes. There is a rhythmic character when we find that we no longer have the simple situation of a rhythm associated with a character, subject, or impulse. The rhythm itself is now the character in its entirety; as such, it may remain constant, or it may be augmented or diminished by the addition or subtraction of sounds or always increasing or decreasing durations, and by an amplification or elimination bringing death or resuscitation, appearance or disappearance. Similarly, the melodic landscape is no longer a melody associated with a landscape; the melody itself is a sonorous landscape in counterpoint to a virtual landscape. (2013, p. 370)

Once more, Deleuze and Guattari allude to Messiaen’s techniques of augmentation, additional note values and serial ordering of durations. The further notion of rhythmic characters brings in another conceptual link that plays a central role in Deleuze’s theory of painting. Already the IRCAM speech claimed that the individuation of a landscape, an event or a life cannot be reduced to a single subject matter or a certain form. Deleuze rather posited that a non-pulsed time attains musical individuation through three particular aspects: ‘*sound landscapes, audible colors and rhythmic character*’. In his writings on Wagner, Boulez had used the notion of landscape in a metaphorical way, but Deleuze went further and suggested that music ‘envelops a distinct sound landscape inside it’ (Deleuze, 2006, p. 159). The IRCAM talk also heeded Boulez’s description of how characters in Wagner operas are associated with certain motifs, which themselves become characters inside the music (Boulez, 1986, pp. 261, 264–265). The further connection to Messiaen’s ecological landscapes came later, together with an unequivocal recognition that Messiaen had coined the notion of rhythmic characters (*personnages*).

The work *Chronochromie*, through which Deleuze apparently became acquainted with Messiaen’s music, plays a central role in coupling the notions of landscapes and rhythmic characters. Speaking of interactions between landscapes and characters in *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari write:

An example is Messiaen's *Chronochromie*, with its eighteen bird songs forming autonomous rhythmic characters and simultaneously realizing an extraordinary landscape in complex counterpoint, with invented or implicit chords. (2013, p. 373)

The chords mentioned here are in fact a prime example of Messiaen's colouristic approach to harmony. Traditional tensions and harmonic functions here give way to a conscious painting in sound, building upon synaesthetic links between individual chords and experiences of different colours. The complex *Chronochromie* is arguably the most emblematic of Messiaen's endeavours to conjoin systematic rhythmic permutations, colour and use of birdsong, in order to create a sonic landscape in non-pulsed time and replete with counterpoint (Bauer, 2007).

Deleuze continued to elaborate on the triadic nexus of landscapes, colour and rhythmic characters in his *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (first published in 1981). At this time, Deleuze was under a manifest influence from Messiaen's exposition of rhythmic characters. Messiaen highlights how a rhythmic theme in music can undergo a gradual subtraction or addition of notes, causing it seemingly to die away or to gain force. Having found such techniques in Beethoven and in Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*, Messiaen came to regard such processes anthropomorphically, as if the rhythms were characters in a drama. He associates expanding themes with aggressive forces and regards decreasing themes as passively subjected to the former, whereas a rhythmic group of constant note values functions as a neutral or attendant force.<sup>42</sup>

The analogy between such rhythmic events and human characters is an imaginative invention by Messiaen, which Deleuze readily employed. Focusing on human figures in Bacon's painted triptychs, he theorises a circular movement, or a resonance of reciprocal sway, within their three parts. Deleuze witnesses what he calls a rhythmic interplay between the three paintings, situated on a higher level than melodic lines, points and counterpoints on the canvases. No less than in the ecological setting elucidated so far, he finds an emerging autonomy of expressive rhythm, in this case from the pictorial or representative dimension and its sensorial colouristic figurations. In Deleuze's own opinion, his analysis of what happens in Bacon's painting is 'exactly' what Messiaen articulated in relation to music:

Rhythm would cease to be attached to and dependent of a Figure: it is the rhythm itself that would become the Figure, that would constitute the Figure. (2005, p. 51)

Another articulation of the same point explicitly ties this transformation to the composer and his notion of rhythmic characters:

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<sup>42</sup> Deleuze duly notes Messiaen's analysis of such dramatic settings in Beethoven and Stravinsky and cites the composer at some length on the interplay within such an imagined play (Deleuze, 2005, pp. 51–52; cf. Messiaen, 1994a, pp. 70–71). Referring to Samuel's and Goléa's interviews with Messiaen, Deleuze deems rhythmic characters an 'essential notion', p. 132, n. 9. On Messiaen's concept of characters, see Healey, 2004.

But from the point of view of the Figure themselves, these are rhythms and nothing else, rhythms as in a piece of music, as in the music of Messiaen, which makes you hear 'rhythmic characters'. (2005, xiv)<sup>43</sup>

As indicated in a conjoined reading of these excerpts and their place in the broader argument, Messiaen's concept of rhythmic characters exerted a significant influence on Deleuze's theory of painting. Indeed, a whole chapter in his book on Francis Bacon continues to elucidate on spatiality and the activity of figures with recourse to the composer's rhythmic techniques of augmentation and diminution, retrogradable rhythm, added note values and rhythmic characters (2005, pp. 53-60; cf. p. 132, n. 1). Deleuze saw a broader artistic potential in Messiaen's articulation of distinctively musical phenomena of rhythm and applied them in creative analyses of another medium of art.

### Conclusion: Musical concepts beyond music

Deleuze's use of Messiaen ranges across a number of distinct and yet interrelated topics, as discussed throughout this article. A closer comparison than in previous studies reveals several texts on or by Messiaen that Deleuze (and Guattari) definitely had studied. A determinate impact from Messiaen's musical works is much more difficult to ascertain, apart from *Chronochronie*, which extended a lasting and constructive influence throughout Deleuze's writings. Messiaen obviously came to play diverse roles in relation to different topics. Deleuze's and Guattari's expositions on music in a rhizomatic model of thought recurrently cite his rhythmic techniques, but Messiaen remains a secondary figure, used to reinforce artistic ideals more readily applicable to Boulez and Cage. The authors' estimation of Messiaen in this area follows Boulez's evaluation of his teacher's serial techniques as a crucial but surpassed stage in the evolution of modernist music.

Deleuze's preference for non-pulsed time over fixed rhythmic patterns is fully in line with Messiaen's rhythmic endeavours. However, both of them work within a common and broader post-Bergsonian paradigm that extends to many other artists, including Boulez. The present analysis nevertheless shows *A Thousand Plateaus* to build directly on Messiaen in some political applications of this temporal polarity. A more significant theoretical influence from Messiaen begins with his cosmological vision of superimposed rhythms, used by Deleuze and Guattari in their elaboration of rhythms in nature. The two authors side with Messiaen against Boulez on a cultural geographic origin of rhythm that ties human and animal life alike to a territorial ground. In a transfer from ethology to social philosophy based on theories from von Uexküll, *A Thousand Plateaus* elaborates on the function of and expressivity in birdsong as an ecocritical vision of coexistence.

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<sup>43</sup> This excerpt is drawn from Deleuze's preface to the first English edition, a text that draws heavily on Messiaen.

Messiaen's ornithology was instrumental in the evolution of the Deleuzian theory of signification that evolves out of discussions of birdsong. In spite of this initial concurrence, Deleuze and Guattari diverge from Messiaen's less perspicacious comments on authenticity in his creation of a distinct *style oiseaux* in works from the 1950s. *A Thousand Plateaus* makes birdsong paradigmatic of a general deconstruction and reconstruction of artistic material. In doing so, Deleuze and Guattari shrewdly spotlighted central elements in Messiaen's techniques of transferring birdsong into a novel musical language before musicological analyses arrived at similar conclusions. Their primary intention was hardly to comment on Messiaen's works in themselves, but a keen philosophical sense for this artistic dynamic nevertheless illuminated his musical techniques in a surprisingly perceptive manner. A similar unexpected novel application is Deleuze's late transferral of Messiaen's notion of rhythmic characters to colour and figures in Bacon's paintings.

Enhanced insight into Deleuze's creative use of Messiaen call for discrimination of how Boulez's writings both determined this reception and facilitated openings for Deleuze's original appreciation of links between topics first articulated in Boulez's depiction of Wagner as a champion of musical modernism. An aspiration to observe how Deleuze actually appropriated traits and concepts from music comes to spotlight the centrality of Boulez's and Messiaen's writings to determine the reception of their artistic projects and to make them readily available for philosophical use. Indeed, Deleuze apparently relied so heavily on writings on music that the lack of references to sonic experiences of music prompts critical questions regarding to what degree his writings at all employ 'music' as food for philosophical thought. Awareness of this decisive conceptual element in the modernist canon that served as material for so many key musical concepts in Deleuze's writings itself rules out all too rigid contrasts between philosophical and artistic insights in further employments of his thought.

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## Abstract

Gilles Deleuze's and Félix Guattari's celebrated work *A Thousand Plateaus* contains one of the most noteworthy philosophical employments of music from the twentieth century. Previous research has reconstructed how Deleuze imported musical concepts from Pierre Boulez into his thought, but analogous influences from Olivier Messiaen have been affirmed rather than investigated in detail. This article reconstructs the philosopher's reception of Messiaen's ideas on rhythm, a natural basis for music, birdsong and a colouristic dimension to sound. Working on the premise that a Boulezian modernism shaped Deleuze's general appreciation of music, the study takes off from the composer's portrayal of how themes in Wagner overturn prevalent structures and establish new modes of expression. Messiaen's role in *A Thousand Plateaus* and other Deleuzian writings confirms the centrality of this outlook, connected to rhizomatic ideals of continuous transition in all musical parameters. At the same time, Deleuze's reading of texts by and about the composer highlights ecological dimensions beyond Boulez's historiography of modernism. Despite scant attention to Messiaen's actual compositions, the philosopher's theoretical framework offers original perspectives on a virtual creativity at the heart of musical renderings of birdsong. The composer left a noteworthy imprint on Deleuze's affirmation of a certain artistic autonomy as a precondition for the power of music to render time and spaces audible.

**Keywords:** Gilles Deleuze, Olivier Messiaen, aesthetics, modernist music, musical time, rhythm, music and philosophy, Pierre Boulez, birdsong, ecology, colour, painting

## The author

Jonas Lundblad is a musicologist and organ recitalist. His research typically seeks out intersections between aesthetics and historical musicology in Swedish, German or French art music since 1800. Early German Romantic aesthetics, especially Friedrich Schlegel, is a focal area from a background in theological research. Olivier Messiaen is another central interest, both in performance and scholarship. Jonas has been a research fellow and teacher in the Department of Musicology at Uppsala University since 2014. He currently serves as editor for a multi-volumed history of church music in Sweden and himself authors a monograph on developments throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Previous edited volumes include *Lutheran Music Culture: Ideals and Practices* (De Gruyter, 2021).



Jonas draws on his dual competence as a recording artist. An ongoing series of CDs document previously largely unknown aspects of Swedish organ music. Recordings of Messiaen's organ works, set in their historical contexts with other repertoire, are due to appear from 2023.

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