

Zeitschrift: Basler Jahrbuch für historische Musikpraxis : eine Veröffentlichung der Schola Cantorum Basiliensis, Lehr- und Forschungsinstitut für Alte Musik an der Musik-Akademie der Stadt Basel

Herausgeber: Schola Cantorum Basiliensis

Band: 31 (2007)

Artikel: Improvisation and textlessness in the monophonic Parisian conductus of the thirteenth century

Autor: Llewellyn, Jeremy

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-868950>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 18.01.2026

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

IMPROVISATION AND TEXTLESSNESS IN THE MONOPHONIC PARISIAN CONDUCTUS OF THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY

by JEREMY LLEWELLYN

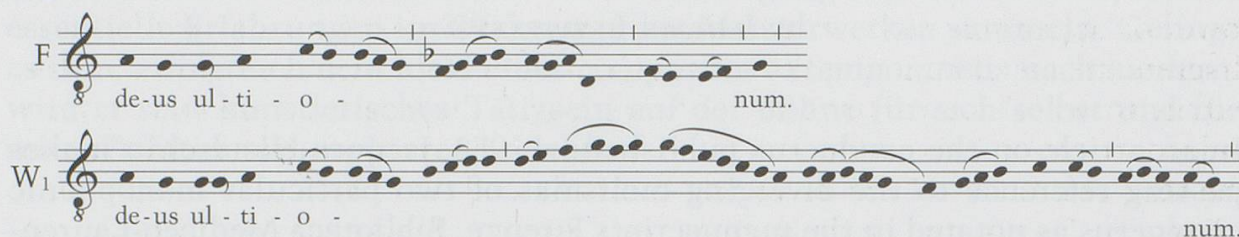
In an article on the conductus published in 1952, Jacques Handschin makes passing reference to the diverging melismas of two particular monophonic conductus as notated in the manuscripts Firenze, Biblioteca Mediceo-Laurenziana Pluteus 29.1 (F) and Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, Guelf.628 Helmst. (W₁). He continues, „so spiegelt sich im Melisma eher als im syllabischen Teil etwas von ‚improvisatorischer Freiheit‘“.¹ The phenomenon of melismatic bursts which conclude certain Parisian monophonic conductus and their polyphonic counterparts is, naturally, well-known; of interest is Handschin's eminent caution, signalled by his inverted commas, in associating them with a form of ‚improvisatory freedom‘ and his supposition that different rules were at play in the transmission of syllabic and melismatic portions of the compositions under consideration. These twin concerns form the basis of the following study; concerns which probe the nature of the relationship between text and textlessness and its manifestation on parchment and as performance.² A first step will entail accounting for the different melodic versions of the final melismas in the manuscripts F and W₁. Thereafter the focus will switch to the ways in which these melismas are integrated into the whole of the conductus composition. Prime attention will be accorded only one of the two monophonic conductus mentioned by Handschin (for reasons that will become apparent): *Quomodo cantabimus*, an embittered appeal to the God of Judgment by Philip the Chancellor.³

¹ Jacques Handschin, „Zur Frage der Conductus-Rhythmik“, *Acta Musicologica* 24 (1952), 113–130, quotation from page 117.

² A first discussion of the materials presented here took place at a symposium ‚Textlessness in Musical Repertories 800–1300‘ at the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis, February 2009.

³ For the most recent musicological study of Philip the Chancellor, see Anne-Zoé Rillon-Marne, *Philippe le Chancelier et son œuvre: étude sur l'élaboration d'une poétique musicale*, doctoral dissertation, Université de Poitiers, 2008; and id., „Convaincre et émouvoir. Les conduits monodiques de Philippe le Chancelier, un médium pour la prédication“, in: *La place de la musique dans la culture médiévale* ed. by Olivier Cullin (= *Recontres Médiévales Européennes* 7), Turnhout 2007, 99–113. A fundamental study from the perspective of literary studies remains Peter Dronke, „The Lyrical Compositions of Philip the Chancellor“, *Studi Medievali* 3a Serie xxviii (1987), 563–592, reprinted as study X in Peter Dronke, *Latin and Vernacular Poets of the Middle Ages*, Hampshire 1991.

Example 1 presents the final melisma of *Quomodo cantabimus* as found, respectively, in F and W₁:⁴

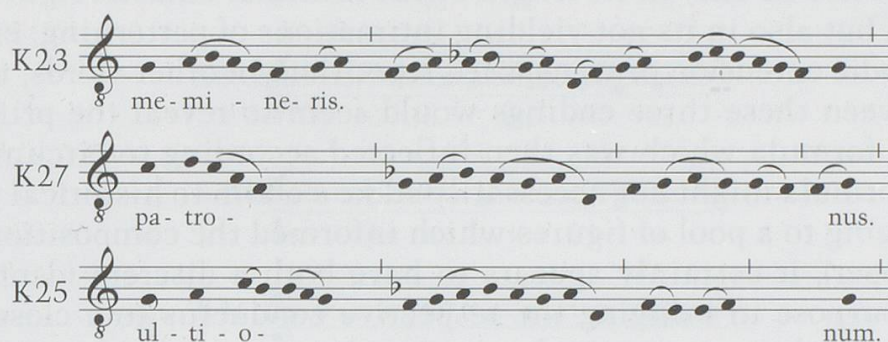


Two markedly different strategies seem to be at play. These pertain not only to the length of the melismas, but also to the tonal space that each stakes out. In the version transmitted in F, the final pitch *G* is approached from below, in contrast to the descending *baG* figure at the very opening of the melisma at (*ulti*)o(*num*) with which the conductus could, conceivably, end. A vertical stroke intervenes, immediately followed by a *b^{fa}* sign and an ascent of a fourth from *F* to this selfsame altered pitch. An oscillation on *a* leads to a noticeable break with stepwise melodic movement in the shape of a drop from *a* to *D*, a fifth below; a decoration of the lower second finally leading to a full close on *G*. The version in W₁ appears more restless: reaching ever upward, it first uses *G* as a springboard up to *d*; articulated and refreshed, it makes the final ascent to the summit, briefly teetering on the edge between *f* and *g*. From this high *g*, the melisma descends precipitately, avoiding, however, the full descent of the octave to the final *G*. Instead, it reaches twice more for the heights, first with an oscillation on *b* and then a concluding rise and fall to *c* before approaching the final from above. In contrast to the version in F, the melisma in W₁ is marked out by purely stepwise movement, even luxuriating in it.

⁴ *Quomodo cantabimus* can be found in F on folios 425v-426r and in W₁ on folio 185r (168r). For facsimile editions of the manuscripts, see *Firenze Biblioteca Mediceo-Laurenziana, Pluteo 29*, 1 ed. by Luther Dittmer (= *Publications of Mediaeval Musical Manuscripts* 11), New York [n.d.], and *Die mittelalterliche Musikhandschrift W₁: vollständige Reproduktion des „Notre Dame“-Manuskripts der Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel, Cod. Guelf. 628 Helmst.* ed. by Martin Staehelin, Wiesbaden 1995. An edition and facsimile of the monophonic compositions in W₁ now exists as *Monophonic Tropes and Conductus of W₁: The Tenth Fascicle* ed. by Jann Cosart (= *Recent Researches in the Music of the Middle Ages and Early Renaissance* 38), Wisconsin 2007. For ease of reference, the 'K'-numbering system of monophonic conductus devised by Gordon Anderson has been adopted; see Gordon A. Anderson, „Notre-Dame and related conductus: a catalogue raisonné“, *Miscellanea musicologica* vi (1972), 153–229, and vii (1975), 1–81, as well as *Notre-Dame and Related Conductus: Opera Omnia* ed. and transcr. by Gordon A. Anderson, Vol. 6, *1pt Conductus – Transmitted in Fascicule X of the Florence Manuscript*, Henryville 1981, which includes translations, annotations, and information about textual and musical concordances. In the following discussion, I will restrict myself to the two main 13th-century manuscripts and leave aside the broader transmission of certain conductus as laid out in Anderson's edition (Huelgas, Fauvel, Sabina). See, however, Nicolas Bell, „Observations on the Monophonic Conductus of the Las Huelgas Codex“, in: *Medieval Sacred Chant: From Japan to Portugal* ed. by Manuel Pedro Ferreira, Lisboa 2008, 225–233.

The contrast between the two final melismas of *Quomodo cantabimus* in F and W₁ is so stark – the respective lengths, the exploration of tonal space, disjunct or conjunct melodic movement, an approach to the final G from the lower or upper neighbour note – that they could almost be considered as two discrete means of bringing the composition to a close. And in examining the extent to which these ways of conceiving and shaping final melismas were indeed discrete, it is possible to call upon the 83 monophonic conductus in the tenth fascicle of F, 65 of which similarly end on G.⁵

Example 2 sets out the final melisma of *Quomodo cantabimus* (K25) in the version from F together with the endings of two further monophonic conductus from this manuscript (K23 and K27):



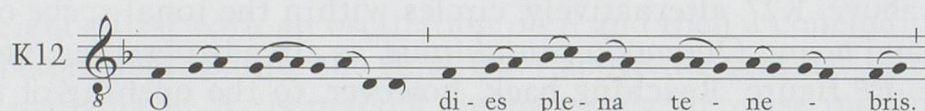
Each of the conductus approaches the final G from the lower second, although each arrives on F via a different path: K23 from descending stepwise motion from the c above; K27, alternatively, circles within the tonal space of a third between F and a; and *Quomodo cantabimus*, as already observed, prefers the chiasmic FE-EF figure. Reaching back, however, to the opening of the final melisma, it becomes immediately apparent that each composition rapidly privileges an ascent from F to b^{fa} followed seamlessly by an oscillation on a and a prominent drop of a fifth from a to D. That each of the endings continues on an F after this dramatic leap downwards might suggest that the very last flourishes are interchangeable, since each follows – with a differing appreciation of prolongation – the basic function of moving from F to the final G. This admixture of the individual and what might provisionally be termed the formulaic also features at the join between the end of the respective conductus text and the beginning of its final melisma. Thus, a threefold means of conceiving the final melisma of these conductus compositions emerges: the join between the texted part and concluding melisma, a distinctive melodic segment or formula, and a cadential prolongation.

The analysis of these short, closing melismas can, however, be pushed further. The melisma of K23 is noteworthy for its lack of notational articulation

⁵ The overwhelming preponderance of monophonic conductus notated on G was remarked on by Ruth Steiner in her dissertation which includes a catalogue of conductus incipits; see Ruth Steiner, *Some monophonic Latin songs from the tenth fascicle of the Ms Florence, Bibl. Laur. Plut. 29.1*, doctoral dissertation, Catholic University of Washington, 1963.

(in the form of vertical strokes) and this sense of flow is heightened by the conjunct movement up and down to the high *c*. In fact, this last ascent could be understood as taking-up and extending the initial rise from *F* to *b^{fa}*. In a similar way, the melisma of K27 could be divided into two if, significantly, the low *D* is removed: the initial gesture of *Gab^{fa}aGa* could be viewed as subsequently being transposed down a whole tone to *FGaGFG*. Construing such elements of melodic patterning and periodicity across the final melismas of K23 and K27 is not wholly satisfactory since, in each case, other individual moments in the overall shaping of the melody – most prominently the fifth drop from *a* to *D* – have, by necessity, to be overlooked. Nevertheless, such a viewpoint sets the final melisma of *Quomodo cantabimus* into relief; its simplicity does not lie only in its length or the minimal chiastic figure before the final pitch but also in its not yielding intimations of patterning, either by means of melodic extension or transposed repetition. In other words, the very variation between these three endings would seem to reveal the primacy of an underlying formula which was then inflected according to circumstance. Whereas the formula might not necessarily stake a claim to historical priority (that is, belonging to a pool of figures which informed the composition of the conductus proper), it certainly appears to have both a discrete identity and a functional purpose in bringing the respective conductus to a close.⁶ And, moreover, it is textless, or seemingly so.

Example 3 lays out the final line of poetic text of *Anglia planctus itera* (K12), a lament which ends with a series of five exclamations beginning with ,o'.⁷



Leaving the text initially to one side, it is clear that the melody employs the same procedure as the preceding examples: a rise from *F* to *b^{fa}* (albeit with a brief return to *G*); a circling on *a* before a disjunct fall to the low *D* (which, in this case, is repeated with a plica); and a final, prolonged gesture beginning on *F*, rising to *c* and then falling – in an extended manner encompassing pitch repetitions and the lower second – to *G*. Whereas the appearance of an extra tone or plica does not seem to upset the character of the melody in comparison to its purely textless counterparts, the busyness of the very final approach to the conclusion of the conductus stands out. It should, somehow, arrive on the final *G* more quickly. Interestingly, this involved descent coincides with

⁶ Envisaging the historical circumstances which led to melodic materials being shared across individual monophonic conductus compositions and manuscripts remains an area for further exploration. This work would ultimately complement hypotheses concerning the dating of the repertory; see, Thomas B. Payne, „Datable ‚Notre Dame‘ conductus: New historical observations on style and technique“, *Current Musicology* 64 (1988), 104–151. Payne proposes a particular development in the shaping of caudae of monophonic conductus dating from the 1190s.

⁷ For the complete text, see Anderson, *1pt Conductus*, XXI.

the final word *tenebris* whose proparoxytone stress pattern brings each of the eight-syllable lines of *Anglia planctus itera* to a close. In fact, this pattern with the marked pitch repetition of *aG-GF* in the middle seems to be one established method of expressing the final proparoxytone word of conductus compositions in F, as set out in Example 4:

Example 4 displays six staves of musical notation, each representing a different conductus composition. The staves are labeled K12, K10, K65, K70, K41, and K44. Each staff shows a melisma (a long, continuous note) for the final word of the composition. The lyrics are: K12: te - ne - bris.; K10: ve - ne - rit.; K65: il - lu - mi - na.; K70: hu - mi - li - a.; K41: pon - ti - fi - ci - o.; K44: spi - ri - tus.

The appearance in *Anglia planctus itera* of a closing gesture intimately linked to the articulation of a textual given and its equally notable absence from the melismatic endings of K23, K27 and *Quomodo cantabimus* raise an important question. Put bluntly, does the final phrase of *Anglia planctus itera* represent the texting and brief extension of a melismatic model, or are the final melismas of K23, K27 and *Quomodo cantabimus* the result of a process of removing text? And how far is a putative opposition between the texted and textless in this case at all meaningful?

The boundedness of the melody of the last line of *Anglia planctus itera* to its text arguably goes beyond the melodic shaping of its last proparoxytone word. As an exclamation (‘O dies plena tenebris!’), the line does not end with a final melisma; instead this is found at its beginning, adorning the word ‘o’. Judging by the previous lines of the conductus which begin with ‘o’, this frontloading of a melisma would appear to be a standard means of setting an exclamation in this composition. This suggests that it was not necessarily the ‘o’ of the final line that provoked a melisma *per se*. In other words, the resemblance of the melodic setting of the eight-syllable line ‘O dies plena tenebris’ to the final melismas of K23, K27, and *Quomodo cantabimus* may have had more to do with the finality of such a melodic gesture, rather than its status as a texted or textless entity. Of more immediate analytical significance, however, is the point in the melodic gesture at which the melisma

ends and the final seven syllables of the line begin. This occurs directly after the prominent *a* to *D* drop and is marked, in addition, by a vertical stroke; what follows melodically is stringently bound up with the needs of the text, namely, the declamation of the remaining seven syllables of the line with the proparoxytone stress on the last word.

This may appear a minuscule observation, but it gets to the heart of the pretensions – formulaic, improvisatory, texted or textless – of the concluding melodic segment shared by the musical examples discussed thus far. The vertical stroke which marks off the *a* to *D* fall and heralds the return of the text on the articulated *F* in *Anglia planctus itera* is found at precisely the same juncture in K27 and *Quomodo cantabimus* even though what follows is a continuation of the melisma. This coincidence demonstrates the nearness of the final melismas of these last two compositions to the potential of a text-bearing function. Their melodic behaviour is not so staggeringly different from that expected from similar melodies which are articulated by texts. As textless entities, they are clearly within the realm of the texted. Indeed, a language of three-dimensionality emphasising perspective, distance and space obviates the need for a rigid dichotomy between, or linear progression from the texted to the textless (or vice versa).⁸ Moreover, this does not prejudice the interpretation of certain notational signs on the parchment. This is of especial relevance for the vertical stroke which could be interpreted, in an automatic manner, as a *divisio sillabarum* and thus as substantive proof that final melismas were conceived primarily in textual (or mensural) terms.⁹ Rather, the medium of notation appears to have been a further means of inflecting an underlying formula.

There is, of course, a danger in making too categorical a case for the discrete identity of a formula which is then inflected in a variety of ways depending on the circumstances; namely, the more involved the inflection, the more tenuous the association with a basic compositional formula. This was particularly true for the final melisma of K23 which staked the strongest claim

⁸ The benefits of regarding the relationship between text and music from a three-dimensional perspective were clearly staked out by Andreas Haug at the Basler symposium on textlessness (see footnote 2).

⁹ The term *divisio sillabarum* can be found in Johannes Garlandia: „Unde figura pausationis est signum vel tractus significans dimissionem soni factam in debita quantitate. Pausationum vel tractuum quaedam dicitur recta brevis, quaedam longa, quaedam finis punctorum, quaedam divisio modorum, quaedam divisio sillabarum, quaedam suspiratio ... Divisio sillabarum dicitur idem, sed accipitur in superiori parte. Suspiratio est apparentia pausationis sine existentia, et hoc est propositum, quia suspiratio potest fieri cum tractu vel sine ...“, in Erich Reimer, *Johannes de Garlandia: De mensurabili musica*. Kritische Edition mit Kommentar und Interpretation der Notationslehre, Wiesbaden 1972, (= Beihefte zum Archiv für Musikwissenschaft X), Teil 1, 66–67. The multiplicity of possible meanings of the vertical stroke – and the problems that presents for editors – are discussed by Mark Everist in his introduction to *Le Magnus Liber Organi de Notre Dame de Paris*, Vol. II, *Les Organa à deux voix pour l'Office du Manuscrit de Florence* ed. by Mark Everist, Monaco 2003, lxxiv, lxxxv–lxxxvi (esp. point 14). The appearance of the sign in connection with underlying formulas in monophonic conductus would represent a further use.

for a conscious attempt at melodic patterning and periodicity, that is, for a radicalised reconception of the formula. Indeed, the appearance of a regular ligature pattern in the notation (3+2+2 etc.) provides the clearest indication in the examples discussed thus far for mensural organisation. It might be tempting, therefore, to take up the considered elegance of Handschin's language and see in K23 evidence of emancipation, or freedom. The irony is that the concluding melisma of K23 –with its stepwise melodic motion, strategic unfolding of tonal space, and halfway hinge – distinctly resembles the melodic behaviour of the last, texted line of *Anglia planctus iterus*. Patterning was, evidently, not solely the preserve of the textless. Moreover, the importance of these two interlocking examples is that they furnish precious information concerning the perceived length of final melismas: the melisma of K23 fills much of the space, in texted terms, of a line of eight syllables with proparoxytone stress; it does not transgress the boundaries of the poetic line. Thus, even the most ostensibly liberated of the final melismas is, in a certain sense, bounded by texted expectations. This provides the final argument for not regarding the concluding melismas of K23, K27, and *Quomodo cantābimus* as genuinely melismatic outpourings of textlessness, but rather as expressions of a discrete melodic formula proximate to the norms of texted compositions.

*

Deploying the same heuristic approach, it is now possible to pass on to an investigation of the final melisma of *Quomodo cantābimus* as notated in W₁; this is laid out in Example 5 (see page 58) preceded by the closing gestures of K24, K8, K13, K68, and K46 which, again, all end on the final G:

The endings of K24 and K8 hardly require commentary; from the base of G, they fill out the tonal space, ascending and descending in conjunct motion, between *a* and *c* before coming to rest on the final. K8 utilizes repeated notes and vertical strokes; K 24 does not.

The same circling gesture is found at the very end of the far more expansive melisma of K13. It is preceded by a stepwise octave descent from high *g* to low *G* which itself is prepared by an ascent of a fourth from *d* to the pinnacle note, *g*. Taken together, these three elements – the rise of a fourth, octave descent, and circling gesture – furnish the prime materials from which the rest of the melisma is seemingly spun. Thus, the texted part of K13, as in *Quomodo cantābimus*, arguably ends with the conjunct descent *b^{mi}ag* after which a vertical stroke intervenes. The next five pitches provide a bridge from the *G* up to *d*, whereby prominence is accorded *b^{mi}*. This heralds the grand ascent to the top *g* from which the melody falls, pausing to re-iterate *d* as part of a two-note articulation coming to rest on *c*. The same idea is then taken up again immediately, leading to a two-note articulation which falls a step further to *b^{mi}*. Finally, the ascent to the high *g* is rewarded by a complete presentation of the octave down to the final. Vertical strokes clearly mark out each of these ascents to the high *g*, highlighting thereby their relatedness as expressions of the same musical idea. Moreover, viewed backwards from the

Example 5

Example 5 is a musical score consisting of six staves, each with a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a common time signature (C). The staves are labeled K24, K8, K13, K68, K46, and K25. The lyrics are: li - be - ras. mi - li - tat. de - i - pau - re - ri - o - pe - ul - ti o - num. The score includes various musical notations such as eighth notes, quarter notes, and half notes, as well as performance markings like 'ca.', 'bus.', and 'ra._'.

K24
li - be - ras.

K8
mi - li - tat.

K13
de - i - ca.

K68
pau - re - ri - bus.

K46
o - pe - ra._

K25
ul - ti o - num.

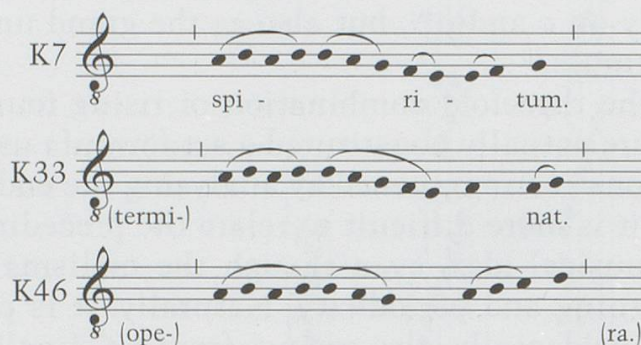
final octave descent, the first and second flights upwards can be understood as toying with expectations so that the octave run downwards can be heard not only as the fulfilment of the opening up of the tonal space by the half-closes respectively on *c* and *b^{mi}*, but also as the grand unveiling of the basic compositional formula.¹⁰

To argue that the threefold combination of rising fourth, octave descent, and circling gesture actually constituted a set formula used to conclude conductus compositions is strengthened by analysing the end of K68. In contrast, however, to K13, it is more difficult to relate the preceding melodic material to this guiding musical idea, even though the melisma itself dazzles with its melodic patterning and periodicity. Naturally, it is possible to view the melisma (which, incidentally, also springs from a *G* final) as being more timorous in attaining the heights. The bridge passage *b^{mi}-cd-d* connecting the first and fifth degrees of the *G*-octave does not act as a springboard up to the high *g*, but turns back in on itself. Whether one can hear the *dcb^{mi}a* descent as a deliberately truncated version of the full octave run is debatable; in any case, the circling around *a*, pre-emptive of the final circling gesture, creates an expectation for the final. This is swiftly provided by the consequent phrase. A coda-like phrase then privileges the countersonority *fac* before the melody comes to rest, again, on the final *G*. That the melody then unexpectedly jumps directly on to the seventh *f* does, in fact, suggest that the bridge passage *b^{mi}-cd-d* had exhausted its usefulness and could only be brought in inversion (*d-dcb^{mi}*) and transposition (*f-fed*). In other words, it now appears as if the final melisma of K68 is a spinning out not of the final octave descent and concomitant gestures, but rather of the simple bridge passage. From this perspective, it could be understood as a constituent part of a discrete closing formula

As a constituent element of a closing formula or additional option, the bridge passage does not seemingly occur in its functional position at the beginning of the closing melisma of K46. Instead, a different sonority is preferred consisting of *c-de-e*. Thereafter, the climactic high *g* is not stated clearly, but rather wrapped up in a five-note figure followed immediately by a descending four-note group which comes to rest on *a*. The bridge passage then does occur at its standard pitch leading, after a vertical stroke, to a statement of the wrap-around figure and descending four-note group now transposed down a tone. In this way, the opening of the melisma appears to be a feint which creates the expectation of further melodic unfolding by means of transposed repetitions of patterned material. This does, in fact, occur as the wrap-around figure descends even further to *F*, marking out thereby the countersonority (*cb^{mi}agf*). To understand the melodic material between this *F* and the final

¹⁰ The conductus *Sol oritur sydere* forms one of the compositions analysed in Susan Rankin, „Some medieval songs“, *Early Music* 31 (2003), 326–344. In her close reading which proceeds forwards (and not backwards, as here), she, too, remarks on the directedness of the melodic movement towards *G*.

d-*g* ascent, it is briefly necessary to look at the ending of K7, as presented in Example 6:



The first two note-groups of this melodic segment are identical in K7 and K46. They end differently, with K7 deploying the minimal chiastic figure *FE-EF* – already observed at the end of *Quomodo cantabimus* in the version transmitted by F – and K46, alternatively, reaching upwards with an ascent of a fourth from *a*-*d*.¹¹ Theoretically, therefore, it would have been possible to bring K46 to a close by introducing the chiastic figure after the first two note groups. For some reason, that was considered inadequate and the melisma concludes with the full statement of the octave descent and circling gesture. That this climax was, as it were, pre-programmed is also evident in melodic divergence between K46 and K7: the *a*-*d* ascent in K46 pre-empts, of course, the final *d*-*g* rise up to climactic high *g* which is repeated with crystal clarity, banishing the patterned subterfuge of the wrap-around figure at the beginning of the melisma.

After these brief analyses, understanding the musical behaviour of the final melisma of *Quomodo cantabimus* as notated in *W*₁ is relatively straightforward. All constituent parts of this second closing formula – the bridge passage, the rise of the fourth, the octave descent, and the circling gesture – are present. However, at certain critical moments they are transformed. The oscillation between the high *f* and *g*, the incomplete octave run ending on *a*, and the subsequent figure which gives prominence to the interval *b*^{mi}-*f* mark out the individuality of this melisma over against its counterparts. Again, the danger arises of such transformations so radically altering the discrete features of a

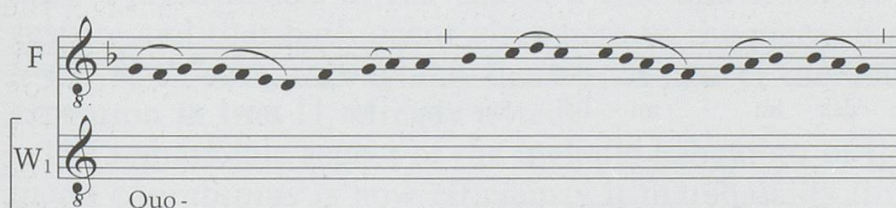
¹¹ Susan Rankin reads the very end of *Eclipsim passus tociens* (K33) with a *b*^{fa}, see Rankin „Some medieval songs“, 334–337. Her arguments for doing so are strong; the question simply being whether this very last melodic segment – marked out by vertical strokes – was understood as a standard closing figure, thereby not requiring notational alteration. Payne, „Datable ‚Notre Dame‘ Conductus“, 128, presents a synoptic table gleaned from opening and closing melismas containing this figure but does not comment on the various notated accidentals or the transmission situation.

particular formula that to posit an underlying identity is too one-dimensional.¹² It would privilege structural depth over surface elaboration; the generic over the individualistic. And the sheer length of this latter set of closing melismas provides ample space for individual artistry. There can be no doubt that greater opportunities existed in these cases for melodic patterning, transposed repetitions, contrasting the main sonority with the countersonority, exploring periodicity, and playing with expectations. Moreover, text did not act as a hindrance to such experimentation; in their textlessness, these melismas are genuinely and redolently musical in their ambitions.¹³ Thus, whilst they could be considered in functional terms of, for example, modal closure – and none of the concluding melismas with the g–G octave run occurs within the context of *b^{fa}* pieces – their genericism ultimately lies in their distance from the melodic behaviour of texted forms.

★

The divergent concluding melismas were only one part of the conundrum posed by Handschin, the second being the relative stability of the transmission in F and W₁ of the texted part of *Quomodo cantabimus*, an individual poetic composition by Philip the Chancellor. A thoroughgoing comparison of the two respective redactions is, however, hampered by a lacuna in W₁; the now missing portions of the manuscript included the opening melisma and first four lines of the conductus. Another principal difference between the redactions is that F transmits after the first strophe with musical notation two further unnotated strophes in a smaller script with abbreviations whereas W₁ presents only one notated strophe.

As Example 7 illustrates, the melodic differences between the common texted portions of *Quomodo cantabimus* in F and W₁ are nowhere near the degree of variation found in their concluding melismas.



¹² „Discrete features“ alludes to the concept of the „discreta facies“ deployed by Guido of Arezzo to describe the differences between modes and taken up, in a more specific sense, to distinguish between psalm formulas or *differentiae*; see, *Anonymi de modorum formulis et tonarius*, ed. by Clyde W. Brouckett (= *Corpus scriptorum de musica* 37), [n.p.] 1997, 79.

¹³ The longer melisma with g–G octave run does not appear to have a texted or semi-texted parallel. One possible candidate, interestingly, would be Perotin’s *Beata viscera* (K14). However, in this case there is no bridge passage or rise of a fourth; the octave run (already heard once at the beginning of the refrain) is prolonged and extended downwards to F, leading to the final a–c circling figure which is, indeed, texted to the word *puerperium*.

1/2

F

W₁

8

mo - do can - ta - bi - mus Sub in - i - qua le - ge?

A'

3/4

F

W₁

8

O - ves quid at - ten - di - mus? Lu - pus est in gre - ge.

5/6

F

W₁

8

De - ci - sis pan - ni - cu - lis Nos - tris of - fert o - cu - lis

7/8

F

W₁

8

lhe - sus in - con - su - ti - lis Tu - ni - ce scis - su - ram

B

9/10

F

W₁

8

Su - am iu - dex hu - mi - lis Sus - ti - net pres - su - ram.

A

F

W₁

8

O

A

11/12

F

W₁

8

quan - do dis - cu - ti - et Spe - lun - cam lat - ro - num?

B

13/14

F

W₁

8 Quam tre - men - dus ve - ni - et De - us ul - ti - o -

ascent 5th drop chiastic figure

num.

bridge passage approach octave run circling gesture + A

num.

Repeated pitches, flexibility in the use of plicas, and the occasional neighbour note constitute the prime differences between the two versions. These do not disturb the broadly syllabic delivery of the conductus nor the workings of its melodic behaviour. Further noteworthy differences are the shortened form of the middle melisma in W₁ and its setting of the word 'inconsutilis' in line 7 which simply appears to be a shifting of the textual underlay one syllable earlier and leads to a compensation at the end of the line in the form of the repeated and plicated *E*. Again, these do not seem to challenge the essential stability of the melody. Finally, there are two instances of accidentals notated in the body of the conductus in W₁ which are not found in F. A *b^{fa}* sign in line 11 is cancelled out by a *b^{mi}* directly afterwards in line 12. Since this *b^{mi}* occurs prominently at the end of a line and leads on to a *b^{mi}-c-d* opening gesture and that both occur elsewhere in the piece, it can be presumed that *b^{mi}* is to be sung throughout the texted part of the conductus (with the one exception in line 11, already noted).

The remarkable aspect of the melodic behaviour of the texted part of *Quomodo cantabimus* is how efficiently it marshals its limited resources in the service of both textual givens and artistic *varietas*. Only eight pitches in the octave *D-d* (or nine, if *b* is differentiated) are initially required to sketch the apocalyptic coming of the God of Vengeance.¹⁴ The following table provides a digest of the poetic and musical structure of the composition:

¹⁴ A working translation of the first strophe of *Quomodo cantabimus*, adapted from Anderson, *1pt Conductus*, XLI, and Cosart, *Monophonic Tropes*, xxv, is as follows: „How shall we sing/ Under an unjust law?/O sheep, what are you waiting for?/The wolf is already amongst the flock./In ripped rags, Jesus offers in front of our very eyes/The rending of his seamless garment./The humble judge endures/His own humiliation./O when shall he break up/This den of thieves?/How awful will he be/When the God of Vengeance comes.“

line	Length	poetic rhyme	concluding pitch	musical rhyme
1	7pp	a	<i>D</i>	
2	6p	b	<i>a</i>	A'
3	7pp	a	<i>F</i>	
4	6p	b	<i>G</i>	
5	7pp	c	<i>a</i>	
6	7pp	c	<i>a</i>	
7	7pp	c	<i>E</i>	
8	6p	d	<i>b^{mi}</i>	B
9	7pp	c	<i>a</i>	
10	6p	d	<i>G</i>	A
11	7pp	e	<i>a</i>	
12	6p	f	<i>b^{mi}</i>	B
13	7pp	e	<i>D</i>	
14	6p	f	<i>G</i>	A

One immediate expression of *varietas* lies in the fact that six different pitches are deployed as endings of poetic lines (and, if plicas are included, this differentiation extends further still). In fact, the pitch *G* is only used on three occasions which tellingly overlap with changes in the poetic rhyme scheme so that the fourteen lines of text can be divided into sections consisting of four, six, and four lines respectively. In addition, this subdivision incorporates the metrical extension of the second section where the alternation of 7pp+6p lines is broken by a string of 7pp lines. Obviously, the relative prominence accorded a wide variety of individual pitches challenges a concept of modality where the hierarchical organisation of pitches functionally within a tonal space is more pronounced. Nevertheless, the repeated appearance at critical points of the poetic structure of an *f-a-c* chain followed by a descent to *G* (or *a* in the first instance) creates an impression of countersonority and principal sonority; this is represented by musical rhyme A which, in its undashed form, is preceded on both occasions by a pair of lines ending on *b^{mi}*, or musical rhyme B.

This tendency to pair lines also comes to the fore when examining how they begin melodically. Lines 3, 7, and 13 all begin syllabically with stepwise motion upwards, either from *b^{mi}* or *a*, up to *d*. A contrasting procedure is found at the beginning of lines 5 and 9, namely, repeated pitches that then descend. Moreover, whereas lines 3/4, 7/8 and 13/14 all cover the space of an octave from *d-D* (albeit with different melodic endings), lines 5/6 and 9/10 work within the smaller range of the fifth *F-c*. Of interest, also, is the gradual quickening of the octave descents from *d-D* in the course of the composition: in lines 3/4 this takes one-and-a-half lines, in 7/8 a line and a note, and in 13/14 only a single 7pp line (to the extent that line 13 could be seen as a contraction of the same gesture in lines 3/4).

The apparent diversity in the choice of pitches for line endings – or, indeed, the ambiguity of those line endings themselves – reflects, in the first instance, the set of textual givens peculiar to *Quomodo cantabimus*.¹⁵ The conductus begins with not one, but two questions which centre, with contained urgency, around the impossibility of vocal expression whilst subjugated under an unjust law and the attendant paralysis arising from this state. This explains both the lack of closure at musical rhyme A' and the *F* at the end of the following 7pp line: only when it is trenchantly clear that the wolf is already amongst the flock does the 6p line, as the first definitive statement, lead starkly to *G*. The next section consisting of six lines divides into two syntactical units: Jesus presenting the rending of his seamless garment before our very eyes and the forbearing humiliation of the humble judge. One might have expected an articulation on *G* at the end of each of these units and whilst that is true of the latter, the former ends with a rising $gg(a)-b^{mi}$ figure, or musical rhyme B. This rhyme is then found at the end of lines 11/12 although here the text poses the question, again in expectant terms, of when he shall cast out the thieves from their den. In other words, the *mi*-function of the *b* within a *G*-mode (emphasised by an added *mi*-sign in *W*₁) comes into its own as a question mark in a way that a b^{fa} in a transposed *D*-mode would not. This, in turn, highlights the previous use of musical rhyme B at 'scissuram' which cannot be interpreted as a question. It could be that the same instability in the pitch b^{mi} was put to a different effect, namely, the ripping or rending of Christ's garment. The advent, however, of the God of Vengeance over the last two lines of text definitively leads to closure on *G*. Indeed, it is precisely this eschatological moment of truth, putting all the wrongs of the previous lines right, which might explain the gradual accelerating of the presentation of the *d-D* octave run in the course of the strophe.

Having probed the ways in which a differentiated melodic material articulates the textual givens of *Quomodo cantabimus*, the focus can now, finally, switch to the role the melismatic sections play within the whole. The three textless segments (the first, of course, missing from *W*₁ as part of the lacuna) are positioned at the very beginning and very end of the strophe, and after the first ten lines of text. Whilst the outer melismas do not interfere with the working out of the music-text relationship in the body of the composition, the status of the mid-melisma is not immediately clear and this is highlighted by the alternative melodic redactions in *F* and *W*₁.

The opening melisma (as presented in *F*) stands out from what follows it in numerous ways to the extent that it could be considered in an entirely different melodic language. This is not simply a matter of there being a b^{fa} sign at the beginning of the stave which determines the tonal nexus of the

¹⁵ In particular, the textual givens of the first strophe since it is common (despite the lacuna) to both *F* and *W*₁.

subsequent melisma.¹⁶ More significantly, approaches to and departures from specific pitches as well as individual gestures are seemingly alien to the rest of the conductus. For example, the half-close on *a* is shaped in a way unlike any other articulation on this pitch in the course of the piece. Likewise, the clear staking out of the tonal space *c*–*F* by means of a descent in stepwise motion does not reoccur. And the run up and down from *G* to *b*^{fa} before the second vertical stroke stands in contrast to the gestural sweep of musical rhyme A. The opening melisma, therefore, is clearly contrastive. The difficulty is that it cannot be considered entirely extrinsic to the composition as a whole, possibly even in the sense of a later addition. Stripping out the melismatic section marked by the first two vertical strokes would leave a broadly syllabic setting of the word *quomodo* occurring on the pitches *FF(E)*–*F*–*G*, that is, a melodic opening not beginning on the final. Indeed, a third vertical stroke then intervenes; the only time this notational sign appears in the middle of a line of poetic text. Thus, two different signals seem to be sent out by the presentation of the opening of *Quomodo cantabimus* in F. On the one hand, the vertical strokes seemingly indicate a periodic *apertum-clausum* structure whereby the first phrase ends on *a* and the second on *G*. Moreover, the proportions of this periodicity would seem broadly to anticipate the two-line structuring of the melodic setting of this particular poetic text. On the other, the first three strokes suggest the opening manoeuvre actually concludes on the final *G* at the end of *quomodo*, especially as the *FF(E)*–*F*–*G* melody seems related to the minimal chiastic figure *FE*–*EF*–*G* – a concluding gesture – with which the setting of the conductus in F closes. Again, the question arises concerning the nature of genuine textlessness and is sharpened in this case by the contrastive character of the melisma. This latter aspect arguably draws the periodicity of the opening into the realm of the inherently musical – periodicity could also have been expressed within the musical language of the rest of the composition – but it equally highlights the interrogative import of the word *quomodo*. And even if a contrastive opening melisma is not reserved in the tenth fascicle of F solely for *Quomodo cantabimus*, it does set up a unique frame of reference for the trajectory of the composition.

If the opening melisma was contrastive, the mid-melisma of *Quomodo cantabimus* in both F and W₁ is confirmatory: following a swoop down of a fourth from *G* to *D*, the *F*–*a*–*c* countersonority is deployed which subsequently runs down in conjunct motion to the final *G* (extended in the version in F by a torculus figure on *ab*^{mi}*a* and then the final). This so closely resembles musical rhyme A that it could be almost be considered a spontaneous me-

¹⁶ There is no reason to suggest that this was an isolated initium or melodic quotation or, indeed, a case of local colouring. For a general discussion of this *b*^{mi}/*b*^{fa} problem, see, Leo Schrade, „Political compositions in French music of the 12th and 13th centuries“, *Annales musicologiques* i (1953), esp. 41–55, and Rankin, „Some medieval songs“, *passim*.

lodic affirmation of the ending of line 10 at (*susti*)*net pressuram*.¹⁷ From this perspective, the short melisma would round off and underscore the irregular section of the conductus text which consisted of six, rather than four lines of text. Yet the melisma itself is attached to the word ,o‘, heralding a further question (,O quando discutiet/Speluncam latronum?‘) which would suggest that it acted as a beginning, not an ending. One wonders whether this discrepancy also furnished problems for the compilers of F and W₁ themselves. In F, the melodic parallel to musical rhyme A is masked by the somewhat unconvincing appearance of the torculus figure. And the notator of W₁ entered the only *b^{fa}*-sign of his version at this point, possibly signalling the change in tone to the eschatologically interrogative. Moreover, it is interesting to note that the supposedly more liberated compiler of W₁ offers the shorter version of the mid-melisma, creating thereby a tighter melodic parallel to the preceding line.

The final melismas of *Quomodo cantabimus* in F and W₁ have already been identified as inflections of basic underlying formulas; the question, naturally, being what influenced this process of inflection. The sudden return in F to the tonal space of *F–b^{fa}* after the very last cadence on *G* initially seems like a jolt, confirmed by the dramatic drop from *a* to *D*. But the minimal chiastic figure *FE–EF–G* concluding the melisma actually takes up the ending of line 4, the first clear cadence of the text proper with its admonition that the wolf is already amongst the flock. In other words, the final melisma places the entire text of the first strophe within the realm of a clear, imposing statement, rather than of interrogatives or premonitions. The conspicuous absence of melodic patterning or periodicity in the melisma adds to this quality of clarity and its length – approximately one line of poetic text – further roots it within texted behaviour. And by not stepping out of these bounds, it provides a seamless transition back to a presentation of strophes two and three, creating thereby a cyclical form which connects endings to beginnings.

The vital observation concerning the alternative closing melismas to *Quomodo cantabimus* in F and W₁ is that the compiler of W₁ had access to the shorter underlying formula since he copied it at the end of the very next monophonic conductus in the manuscript, *Ve mundo* (K27).¹⁸ Nevertheless, he rejected its use for *Quomodo cantabimus*. Instead, he took the prevalence of the opening *b^{mi}–c–d* figure within the body of the conductus (lines 3, 7, 13) as the impetus to present an alternative concluding formula. He achieved this by reinterpreting this figure as the bridge passage for the extended melismatic formula

¹⁷ For the various uses – anticipatory or confirmatory – of melismatic insertions within large-scale compositions and their use in performance, see, Lori A. Kruckenberg, „Neumatizing the sequence: special performances of sequences in the central Middle Ages“, *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 59 (2006), 243–317.

¹⁸ The melisma for *Ve mundo* (K27) is presented in Example 2. Handschin, „Zur Frage“, also considered this conductus as revealing „improvisatorische Freiheit“, in its melismatic sections. However, the redactions of its final melismas in F and W₁ (if not the intermediate ones) do not demonstrate a great divergence. This explains the focus on *Quomodo cantabimus* in this study.

encompassing the octave run from *g*–*G*. This manoeuvre provides the final intensification of the *d*–*D* descent which had accelerated within the course of the conductus. With its extended length and ambitus, the melisma bursts out of the bounds of its texted environment and the compiler of *W*₁ was arguably aware of this: the teetering between the high *f* and *g* emphasises the upper range of the melody and the truncating of the octave run sets up a prolonged and developed presentation of the *f*–*a*–*c* countersonority, via the highlighting of the prominent pitch *b*^{mi}, which marked out musical rhyme *A*. The form of conductus is, therefore, not cyclical, but powerfully linear. It raises its eyes to the coming of the God of Vengeance and it is hard to imagine that further strophes, even if they were not entered in *W*₁, followed.

★

From the viewpoint of the monophonic Parisian conductus of the thirteenth century, there is no need to neutralise the term improvisation from its connotations or reclaim it, but simply to ask how it could be meaningful in this specific context.¹⁹ In the case of *Quomodo cantabimus* as notated in *F* and *W*₁, one closing formula is substituted for another. Judging how often such substitutions occurred is hampered by the lacuna in *W*₁ and only three surviving concordances for the monophonic conductus.²⁰ That a substitution took place suggests, however, that the compiler of *W*₁ was conversant with a range of performing traditions broader than those surviving in the extant manuscript. In other words, it is likely that the lacuna contained monophonic

¹⁹ For classic studies on this subject, see Leo Treitler, *With voice and pen: coming to know medieval song and how it was made*, New York 2003, esp. „Medieval Improvisation“, 1–38, and „Written Music and Oral Music: Improvisation in Medieval Performance“, 39–67. One possible reason why „improvisation“ remains a relatively clean sheet with respect to the Parisian monophonic conductus could lie in the unremitting focus of scholars on attempts to decipher a mensural interpretation of the notation, rather than homing in on the melodic behaviour of the compositions (Steiner, *Some monophonic Latin songs*, undertook her study before the paradigm shift in chant studies arising from articles by Treitler from the mid-1970s onwards). For the ultimate redundancy of the term „improvisation“ in interpreting early medieval repertoires, see the contribution by Andreas Haug in this volume, 25–33.

²⁰ Here, again, the question of other musical concordances comes into focus. For the extirpation of melismas as part of a process of „fauvelisation“, see, Wulf Arlt, „Jehannot de Lescurel and the Function of Musical Language in the Roman de Fauvel as Presented in BN fr. 146“ in *Fauvel studies: allegory, chronicle, music, and image in Paris*, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, MS français 146 ed. by Margaret Bent and Andrew Wathey, Oxford 1998, 25–34; Lorenz Welker, „Polyphonic Reworkings of Notre-Dame Conductûs in BN fr. 146: *Mundus a mundicia* and *Quare fremuerunt*“ in *Fauvel Studies*, 615–636; and Susan Rankin, „The divine truth of scripture: chant in the Roman de Fauvel“, *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 47 (1994), 203–243.

conductus which ended with the basic underlying formula consisting of the g–G octave run.²¹

Another facet of improvisation in this context, in addition to substitution, would be the tailoring of formulas according to their textual and melodic environment. In both F and W₁, the closing melismas of *Quomodo cantabimus* are not verbatim quotations of formulas but are rather inflected to draw on, react to, contrast with or highlight the musical and textual material of the individual conductus. The overall results in this case – and, again, the sample is small – could not be more different with F shaping a cyclical form and W₁ preferring a linear trajectory.

To state that improvisation with regard to these closing melismas combines the functional with the aesthetic may appear a tautology. They are surely functional in that they specifically bring a composition to a close (to the extent that an ‘opening cauda’ could, at best, be considered a terminological shorthand).²² And their aesthetic dimension articulates and inflects form in an individualistic manner. However, it would not be correct to regard a composition such as *Quomodo cantabimus* as solely displaying an ‘extreme individuality’ and thus as divorced from formulaic conventions.²³ If the tautological is to be avoided, the closing melismas could respectively be viewed as realisations of a musical idea, or actualisations of a compositional matrix; a matrix which arguably bled back into the instantaneity of any one musical performance.²⁴ Moreover, this blend of the functional and the aesthetic would seem to have been a concern of writers in the latter half of the thirteenth century. Johannes Grocheio is at pains to note that the melodic shaping of the *neuma* formulas can be varied within certain boundaries so as to make them more ‘subtle’

²¹ Robert Falck broadly calculates the number of monophonic conductus missing in the lacuna in W₁; the suggestion that the notator of this manuscript was conversant with the basic underlying formula of the octave g–G run now provides further information about the possible identity of these missing compositions; see, Robert Falck, *The Notre Dame conductus: a study of the repertory*, Henryville 1981, 121.

²² For ‘opening caudae’, see Payne, ‘Datable ‘Notre Dame’ conductus’, 126, and analogous formulations (‘cauda introductive’, ‘caudae initiales’) in Rillon-Marne, *Philippe le Chancelier*, 127 and 185, albeit within the context of a rhetorical analysis of the overall form of certain conductus.

²³ See, Rankin, ‘Some medieval songs’, 342. Moreover, with the alternative melismatic endings of the conductus in the two principal manuscripts, the question arises where that individuality should reside (composer, performer, notator?).

²⁴ The concept of the ‘matrix’ was developed in several writings by Leo Treitler, see, for example, Leo Treitler, ‘Observations on the Transmission of Some Aquitanian Tropes’ in *With voice and pen*, 252–297.

and more ,beautiful'.²⁵ And Anonymous IV sees in the artistic formulation of caudae the difference between a ,bonus organista' and ,minores cantores' (although, admittedly, he is most probably referring to polyphonic forms).²⁶

Function and form are not the only aspects of the closing melismas of *Quomodo cantabimus* in F and W₁ pertinent to improvisation. The melismas are, of course, without text. Thus, however relevant processes of substitution and individual tailoring are in accounting for the melodic difference between the two versions, they do not, in essence, bring the quality of textlessness into focus. As has already been noted, the closing melisma in F is far closer to the behavioural norms of melodies bound to textual declamation. In W₁, however, the melisma ultimately shears away from the text, leaving the linearity of form behind, to revel in the medium of pure, precarious melodiousness. It strains and staggers to the apex of the ambitus, thwarts expectations of length based on the poetic line, confounds the manuscript transmission, and bursts out of space on the parchment of W₁ into the margins. Herein lies the achievement of genuine textlessness. But it is almost impossible not to see this action as somehow related to the ripping, rending, schism, casting out and off of the conductus text. Thus, Handschin's comment about ,improvisatorische Freiheit' can be denuded of its inverted commas. Improvisatory practices, as narrowly defined here, were at play in the composition of *Quomodo cantabimus* as presented in F and W₁. And there certainly was freedom, if only of an eschatological kind.

²⁵ For the quotation (with facsimile editions), see, Ernst Rohloff, *Die Quellenhandschriften zum Musiktraktat des Johannes de Grocheio*, Leipzig 1972, 160: „Cantus autem iste post psalmos decantatur. Et aliquoties neupma additur, puta post psalmos evangelistas. Est autem neupma quasi cauda vel exitus sequens ad antiphonam, quemadmodum in viella post cantum coronatum vel stantipedem exitus, quem modum viellatores appellant ... Et quamquam ista sint neupmata ut plurimum, possent tamen forte subtiliora et pulchriora fieri, etiam inspiciendo ad latitudinem cuiuslibet toni.“

²⁶ Despite alternative interpretations of the passage, it is interesting to note the explicit link between the appearance of caudae and the proficiency of performers; see, Fritz Reckow, *Der Musiktraktat des Anonymous 4*, Wiesbaden 1967, (= Beihefte zum Archiv für Musikwissenschaft IV), Teil 1, 82, „Tertium volumen est de conductis triplicibus caudas habentibus sicut Salvatoris hodie et Relegendur ab area et similia, in quibus continentur puncta finalia organi in fine versuum et in quibusdam non, quos bonus organista perfecte scire tenetur. Est et aliud volumen de duplicibus conductis habentibus caudas ut Ave Maria antiquum in duplo et Pater noster commiserans vel Hac in die reg[e] nato, in quo continentur nomina plurium conductorum, et similia. Est et quintum volumen de quadruplicibus et triplicibus et duplicibus sine caudis, quod solebat esse multum in usu inter minores cantores, et similia.“