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THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE BODY.
EXPERIENCING THE SPACE THROUGH
CREATIVE LISTENING, MULTIPART SINGING
AND COLLECTIVE MOVEMENTS

ABSTRACT

Il mio contributo si concentra sui discorsi, sulle dinamiche e sui modi di fare musica in una comunità 'diffusa' di cantanti provenienti da diversi luoghi d'Italia che si riuniscono per praticare canti polivocali della tradizione orale calabrese sotto la guida di una maestra di canto e in assenza di pubblico. Negli ultimi anni, tali incontri sono stati deliberatamente tenuti nelle aree interne e spopolate della Calabria. In queste situazioni musicali il canto a più parti, come pure le pratiche collettive di movimento e di ascolto sono condivise come esperienze quotidiane che generano comportamenti musicali, rafforzando e convalidando al contempo legami significativi tra partecipanti che orbitano attorno a una maestra di canto. Associando la pratica del canto a peculiari esercizi di ascolto, la maestra insegna come esplorare l'ambiente circostante; ogni partecipante, dal canto suo, trova il proprio modo di autodeterminarsi, imparando a coordinarsi con il resto del gruppo attraverso il movimento del corpo, sviluppando così una forte relazione con i propri compagni e compagne nonché con lo spazio/luogo temporaneamente abitato.

PAROLE CHIAVE Ecomusicologia, canto a più parti, corpo, spazio, corpi sonori, dimensioni dell'ascolto

SUMMARY

The article focuses on the music-making and discourses in a 'widespread' community of singers, coming from different places and social environments to perform Calabrian polyvocal songs under the guide of a singing master, and in the absence of an audience *stricto sensu*. In the past few years, these meetings have been deliberately held in Calabrian inland/depopulated areas and its evocative spaces. In these situations, multipart singing, collective moving, listening, and singing practices generate musical behaviours, strengthen, and validate significant relationships between all participants (mostly women) who gather to share daily experiences in short-term meetings. Blending the singing itself with a peculiar listening training, the singing master teaches how to explore the surroundings through 'singing perambulations'. In this environment, participants find their ways to affirm their very own presence and self-determination. At the same time, they learn how to coordinate with the rest of the group through the motion, creating strong interactions between themselves and the space/place temporary inhabited, and embodying the songs they sing as well.

KEYWORDS Ecomusicology, multipart singing, body motion, spaces, soundful bodies, listening dimensions



1. Introduction

Le voix gîte dans le silence du corps, comme fit le corps dans sa matrice.
Mais, au contraire du corps, elle y revient, à tout instant
s'abolissant comme parole et come son. (...)
Le souffle de la voix est créateur.¹

THIS article is based on singing occurrences in which creativity and negotiation in the music transmission take place within a temporary and widespread singing community of non-professional singers and attendees coming from different places and social environments that, since 2022, gather annually between June and July, and in December, in order to practice social singing in a few inner areas of Calabria region,² thanks to the guidance of the singing master Anna Maria Civico, and in the absence of an audience *stricto sensu*. As I will explain in the writing, the methods employed by Civico also refer to that of Jerzy Grotowsky, who in turn integrated some aspects related to traditional singing in his theatrical performance practice.

Through the «bimusicality»³ and the active participation, I have caught aspects of making music that cannot be deduced from the mere observation of the performance. Participants meet to perform «the archaic songs of the Mediterranean oral tradition» (i.e., Calabrian lullabies, love, and work songs; Arbëresh *vjersh*; hymns; Orthodox paraliturgical chants et al.), renewing their function in situations where both spaces and multipart (polyvocal) singing play a special role for them. In these contexts, features such as collective moving, listening, and singing practices generate musical behaviours, and they also strengthen, or validate, significant relationships between performers (mostly women) who share daily experiences in brief gatherings that occur in evocative spaces. During these short-term participatory assemblies, ideas and imaginaries surrounding the music are constantly explored, passed down and reshaped. By re-using traditional songs – blending the singing itself with a peculiar listening training – the master also teaches how to explore the surroundings through ‘singing perambulations’. However, in this environment, participants: find individual ways to affirm their very own presence and self-determination; learn how to coordinate with the rest of the group through the motion; create strong relations between themselves and the spaces/places they inhabit; and embody the songs they sing, reviving (and sometimes re-inventing) them. Singers/performers develop both vocal and bodily

1. «The voice lies in the silence of the body, as did the body in the womb. But, unlike the body, it returns to it at any time, abolishing itself as word and sound. (...) The breath of the voice is creator», cf. ZUMTHOR, *Introduction à la poésie orale*, p. 11.
2. Calabria is Italy's southern continental region. Although it is a heterogeneous, complex territory, in which, historically, diverse linguistic and cultural phenomena had converged, today it is one of the poorest regions, plagued by political corruption, unemployment, depopulation and economic problems.
3. HOOD, *The Challenge of "Bi-Musicality"*.

skills thanks to the directions provided by the expert who guides them directly into the very aim of the music they make, and the cultural fabric of the space they inhabit. Through multipart singing and bodily practices, participants become aware that the ‘space’ in which they are living is not merely evoked as a location, but as a phenomenon that occurs and ‘resounds’ because of their meaningful actions. Musical memory, bodily interaction, and spaces become keepers of shared experiences and, for some of the participants, a true way of life.⁴

2. Sounding and Singing Together

My contribution, both methodological and theoretical, examines a participative research experience that started in 2022 and continues to this day. The subject analysed is a community of singers that derive from different parts of Italy and meet regularly in different places throughout the peninsula to learn and perform multipart (polyvocal) songs of the Italian oral tradition, in general, and Calabrian, specifically. As a participant observer using the bimusicality method as I did in the past, I considered it essential to create a direct experience with this community by partaking in the very learning process just like any other member. The objective was to study and deepen my understanding of the cultural dynamics that underlie amongst these group singings. During my doctoral years, and through bimusicality, I have already had the opportunity to participate in some singing communities of the Sacred Harp movement;⁵ this method opened the path to a series of considerations and direct knowledge of musical phenomena that I would not have been able to experience and understand if I had not joined first hand, therefore, becoming part of the community itself. In fact, as Giuriati has already remarked:

The changed conditions of the contemporary world ‘oblige’ the ethnomusicologist to confront the applicative aspects of the discipline, while developing a network of relationships and a multiplicity of sphere of action, in an increasingly, close interaction with musicians and cultures with which he comes into contact. If, on the one hand, these dynamics constitute a difficulty and a ‘risk’ factor, they also represent a great potential for the development of what is, perhaps, the most beautiful and significant aspect of the ethnomusicologist’s ‘profession’, that is: interpersonal relationships, the exchange of information and experiences, the making of projects together with people who make music and love to make music.⁶

4. CLAYTON – LEANTE, *Embodiment in Music Performance*.
5. The Sacred Harp is a participatory Anglo-American tradition of multipart singing, currently performed in local and transnational communities scattered throughout the Western world, cf. DATTILO, *Changes and Chances*.
6. «Le trasformate condizioni del mondo contemporaneo ‘obbligano’ l’etnomusicologo a confrontarsi con gli aspetti applicativi della disciplina, sviluppando una rete di relazioni e una molteplicità di campi d’azione, in una interazione sempre più stretta con i musicisti e

This community is widespread because it is composed of individuals who gather periodically (each one's participation is strictly based on personal reasons), to share the exclusive experience of making music together. The group desires to learn songs without relying exclusively upon 'media' or secondary sources; furthermore, the occasion is useful in order to build strong bonds of friendship or strengthens pre-existing interpersonal relationships. Not all the singers live in the same place, nor have they grown up in the same cultural dimension or in contexts in which musical traditions are orally practiced and passed down. On the contrary, they meet and create new relationships with individuals with which they share a common understanding of values, ideas and ways of life.

I also define it as a temporary group: this community is not always constituted by the same participants, nor does each of them feel the responsibility to take part in every meeting. From time to time, new participants show up and integrate into the group. In all cases, since an intensive participation is a primary requirement, even the sporadic intervention of a participant leaves a 'tangible' mark on the community, affecting the sound outcomes. Furthermore, the group is also permeable since it is constituted by individuals capable to perceive the environment they are in and transform all information they get into another kind of knowledge. For instance, some participants reuse musical and sound elements of traditional songs, and its proxemic, as they are learned during the gatherings (peculiar aspects of traditional singing such as timbre, gestures, melodic contours), within other performative contexts (e.g. in the field of electronic music and theatrical performances).

In any case, and in many respects, this community is a 'sound group'⁷ and owes its very existence to the charismatic person of Anna Maria Civico, a singing teacher and performer grown up in Calabria, now living in Central Italy. For many years, she has been transmitting various repertoires of traditional songs of the Mediterranean throughout Italy and beyond, proposing numerous types of meetings for which, from time to time, she invites interested people to join in.⁸ The latest meetings, for various reasons and personal purposes, reach specific places, from Veneto to Calabria, designated by the

le culture con le quali viene a contatto. Se, da un lato, queste dinamiche costituiscono una difficoltà ed un fattore di 'rischio', esse costituiscono anche un grande potenziale di sviluppo di quello che è forse l'aspetto più bello e significativo del 'mestiere' dell'etnomusicologo: le relazioni interpersonali, lo scambio di informazioni ed esperienze, la realizzazione di progetti con persone che fanno e amano fare musica», cf. GIURIATI, *L'etnomusicologo*, p. 113.

7. «A "sound group" is a group of people who share a common musical language, together with common ideas about music and its uses. The membership of sound groups can coincide with the distribution of verbal languages and cultures, or it can transcend them», cf. BLACKING, *Music, Culture, and Experience*, p. 232.
8. Anna Maria Civico is an independent singer, performer, actress and researcher, with background in experimental theatre according to Jerzy Grotowski's methods, as taught by his assistants (such as Maud Robart, Jairo Questa and James Slowiak). In addition to the modalities described in this writing, she receives and hosts her students in her home «according to the Eastern cultures' manner» (Anna Maria Civico, private conversation, 15th June 2024).

teacher herself. In recent years, this empirical path has allowed for the formation of a permanent group that operates mostly in Venice, and which, during the year, regularly moves from place to place in Italy, just to sing. Since 2022, Anna Maria Civico carries out annual gatherings in Calabria, particularly in the small village of Belmonte Calabro, where every summer she organizes a workshop entitled *Cantare nei luoghi* (Singing in places), that usually lasts five to seven days and takes place in a former centenary monastery called *Ex Convento*, now a place devoted to artistic residencies.

The location choice, as we will see, is very important, if not fundamental, just as much as the proposal of the songs to be learned. In fact, participation in the workshops or other activities conceived by Anna Maria Civico includes the implementation of a musical training process in specific environments, such as dismissed monasteries or historical places, in which the community thoughts and practices of traditional songs are central actions as much as the thought and awareness of the space inhabited even just for some days. These actions are stimulated by the development of consciousness and respect towards these environments; one's own *corpo-voce-orecchio*⁹ (body-voice-ear); sounds (produced or heard); the space that one's own *corpo-voce-orecchio* occupies and that is in turn settled by the other participants. It is a form of ecomusicology that «considers the intersection of nonhuman sound worlds and human sound worlds, or the overlap of the physical and cultural environments as mediated through sound».¹⁰ Here, I am particularly interested in stressing how the awareness of the places can develop in time and spaces that are shared, also (if not especially) thanks to a series of exercises (such as listening to and recording environmental sounds while walking around the space) and body movements (see below § 7). These activities are thought as a propaedeutic action to individual and collective singing. The exercises, proposed by Anna Maria Civico, are carried out as part of two specific gatherings. The first, as I have already mentioned, is called *Cantare nei luoghi*, the second one is titled *Abitare il canto* (Inhabiting the singing), a further 'call' that Civico launches through private communications to specific people who have distinguished themselves during the *Cantare nei luoghi* workshops. In the first context, a small number of people (a dozen at most) share space and time of daily life marked by rigorous preparatory physical activities.¹¹ Being this training both a physical and a vocal experience, great concentration and constant endurance are necessary – as Scaldaferrri remarked, «the rhythm of the body supports the voice and its function is more effective than the musical

9. While the expression and concept of *corpo-voce-orecchio* have been developed, orally discussed and explored by Anna Maria Civico during various meetings, the ones related to *corpo-voce* can be found throughout CIVICO, *Un sentimento di benessere collettivo*.

10. ALLEN *et al.*, *Sustainability and Sound*, p. 6.

11. Previous titles of this workshop were *Cantare nel paesaggio* (Singing in the landscape) in 2021, and *Cantare nei luoghi è fare radici* (Singing in places is making roots) in 2022.

sounds produced by instruments».¹² As a pupil of Maud Robart,¹³ who was in turn Jerzy Grotowski's assistant, Anna Maria Civico refers to the Polish theatre director's methods and, like him, she also requires absolute rigor in the development of practices she proposes from time to time.¹⁴ This applies both to the form of collective workshops, and in the context of pure singing happenings. The rigor required does not imply that those who participate, collaborate, and work together must have solid, previous performing experiences, but they must possess a great will and sense of respect towards the music proposed by the masters. Anna Maria explains this choice very explicitly:

Firstly, Maud Robart began collaborating with Grotowski in Poland, and then in Italy, from 1986 to 1993, at the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards in Pontedera. Maud Robart's syncretism and her ability to understand and collaborate with an innovative and modern mind such as Grotowski's (who knew very well the contexts and bio-psycho-social structures in oral traditions) has led to the foundations and affirmation of a precise approach to the transmission of techniques for performers that we define as singing practice, voice and integrated movement. (...) Robart's work, as well as Grotowski's, involved a total and reciprocal dedication of the actors, during those moments emerged interpersonal and intersubjective relationships of great depth (...) a fundamental part of my training took place with Grotowski's assistant teachers (Jairo Questa and James Slowiak) and with Robart herself (...).¹⁵

Civico transmits the songs in such a way as to recall contexts and situations to be thought and envisioned by herself and by her students. For each of the activities – whether they are musical, para-musical, or extra-musical

12. SCALDAFERRI, *Il canto dei passi*, p. 118: «Il ritmo del corpo si trova infatti a svolgere una funzione di supporto alla voce (...) probabilmente superiore a quello svolto dai suoni dell'accompagnamento strumentale».
13. Maud Robart is a Haitian singer and performer. She was collaborator of Jerzy Grotowski from 1978 to 1993. «All of Grotowski's most important theoretical texts of the 1980–1990s – from *Theatre of Sources* (1979–82) and “Tu es le fils de quelqu'un” (You Are Someone's Son; 1986) (1997: 252–70, 294–305), to the afterword to Richards's book that we started with ([1993] 1995a) and Grotowski's 1997–1998 lectures at the Collège de France – show traces of Haitian ritual and performative traditions, discovered with and thanks to Maud Robart», cf. DE MARINIS – VITTORI, *Maud Robart*, p. 116.
14. Cf. LENDRA, *Bali and Grotowski*.
15. Maud Robart iniziò a collaborare con Grotowski prima in Polonia e poi in Italia dal 1986 al 1993 al Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards di Pontedera. Il sincretismo di Maud Robart e la sua capacità di comprendere e collaborare con una mente innovativa e moderna come quella di Grotowski (che dal lato suo conosceva molto bene i contesti e le strutture bio-psico-sociali delle culture di tradizione orale) ha condotto a creare le basi e all'affermarsi di un preciso approccio alla trasmissione di tecniche per i performer e che nel nostro ambito definiamo *pratica di canto, voce e movimento integrato*. (...) Il lavoro della Robart, così come quello di Grotowski, comportavano per gli attuanti una dedizione totale e reciproca, all'interno della quale emergevano momenti di relazione interpersonale e intersoggettiva di grande profondità (...) una parte fondante della mia formazione si è svolta con maestri assistenti di Grotowski (Jairo Questa e James Slowiak) e con la stessa Robart, cf. CIVICO, *Un sentimento di benessere collettivo*, pp. 38–39.

ones – that start in the morning and last until the late evening, attention, and the ability to memorize both simple and complex sounds and movements is required. Moreover, participants practice silence and night vigils which are crucial moments in the process of musical transmission as they predispose the group and the individual to the creation of suitable conditions for expressing themselves in a collective way. Nevertheless, they constitute a moment of individual/collective reasoning and absorption of what has been done up to that moment. These conditions also depend on the individual accuracy brought into play, and on the quality of participants' actions during the gathering: the discipline contributes to the creation, and constant maintenance, of a rigorous environment in which everyone receives and gives back something to the others as well as to the environment itself. In most cases, participants manage to maintain this attitude that characterizes all the moments of meeting and collective learning; in other cases, it happens that someone who takes part only once will never return or has no interest at all in 'constructing' that kind of atmosphere. The master, on the contrary, works so that everyone can maintain high concentration on what has been done, acting with commitment, attention, and mutual care.

In all situations, Anna Maria Civico plays a special and dual-purpose role: on the one hand, she is a master and guide, with all the characteristics of an ascetic teacher capable of infusing discipline. On the other hand, she represents the 'trigger' for a series of music happenings formalized in singing gatherings such as *Abitare il canto*, where the teacher-performer is openly present and active in the singing community not as a master, but as a participant.

3. Singing as an Ecological Practice

In his essay *Ear Cleaning* (1967), Raymond Murray Schafer pointed out that in a world full of different types of sounds, the ones that most frequently escape are the most obvious. 'Ear cleaning' focuses on those specific sounds. Once the listener has recorded them, and after listening to them carefully, he/she can take a step forward, and start analysing what was heard.¹⁶ The environment where we live can become a place in which one can carry out listening exercises on an individual and collective level, paying attention to sound phenomena, their evolution over time, and the way in which they change us as human beings. This attention can turn into the awareness of the qualities and quantities of sounds, and the consciousness about the kind of influence these sounds may have on the relationships we establish, as persons, in a given environment. From this perspective, music – understood as a set of 'humanly-organized' sounds – turns out to be a possible expressive horizon, but not the only one.

16. Cf. SCHAFER, *Ear Cleaning*.

As I previously mentioned, each participant within the meeting context, chooses to gather in specific places, therefore giving those spaces a new meaning through the creation of peculiar, expressive practices which in turn represent the main experience. By doing so, individuals re-shape their own identity.¹⁷ The desire to move around in order to discover new territories is driven by the will to create alternative times and spaces, in opposition to the ordinary ones, with the awareness that these spaces and times represent the primary context (pretext, and possibility) to meet ‘the other’ and to build social relationships *ex novo*. The centrality of spatial awareness is also questioned by ethnomusicologists to understand how the representation of places through music and sounds has radically changed. As Jeff Titon has pointed out:

Ethnomusicologists (...) always were interested in people’s beliefs about music, other beings (physical and spiritual), and the environment, but they approached such topics from an anthropocentric perspective. Ecomusicology (the study of music, sound, nature, culture, and the environment in a time of environmental crisis) more explicitly opens our subject from people making music to beings making sound— that is, to the soundings of all beings.¹⁸

Within Anna Maria Civico’s singing community – whose members get together to reconvert spaces and places – each identity and the surroundings, are constantly questioned; dialogue, listening and social singing are conceived as a restitution to the environment, even if it is inhabited just for a short time. In the same way, participants are enriched by the space itself: their musical and ‘organised sound’ outcomes can depend on how they relate to specific environmental structures and elements (since silence between all the activities has been set as a general rule by the singing master, I deduced this aspect from their own short observation while sharing time and space with all of them). At the core of the listening exercises and reproduction, in terms of vocal expression, of environmental sounds (which are practiced in the first days of *Cantare nei luoghi*, especially in the early morning), participants are aided by the master in order to gain gradual consciousness of the relationship that can exist between one’s own ‘vocality’ and someone’s other voice and ‘presence’ in a space.¹⁹ This relationship appears evident when participants start to become aware of their own voice as a physical manifestation and of their own bodies as they experience the surrounding. During all meetings, Anna Maria Civico explains how the space (perceived as environment, i.e. a set of related elements that manifest themselves to the eyes, ears, touch, etc.) can become, conceptually and tangibly, an extension of one own *corpo-voce-orecchio* instrument.

17. LEFEBVRE, *The Production of Space*.

18. TITON, *The Expressive Culture*, p. 104.

19. See <https://youtu.be/7rORce98w-s?si=Rev2BffQ4qGA3Trf>, «Sound practice during the singing gathering and workshop titled *Cantare nei Luoghi*». Place: Ex Convento, Belmonte Calabro (Province of Cosenza, Calabria, Italy). Date: July 29th 2023. Participants: Fausto Caricato, Stefano Cuzzocrea, Delia Dattilo, Beatrice Di Fonzo, Elisabetta Falanga, Giovanni Paladini, Serena Sinopoli, Barbara Spagnolo. Video: Nanni Spina.

One of these exercises involves taking a barefoot walk in the inhabited space, and a physical approximation to some sound sources in an attempt to replicate the traits of those sounds (timbres and ‘tunes’ of a stream, a domestic or wild animal, the wind, someone’s breath and so on and so forth), while trying to grasp their changes over time (i.e. depending on circumstances, whether if the day is now more humid than it was in the morning, or if it is drier in the later hours of the morning and early afternoon; if there is heat or coolness that affects the sound signals) (Figures 1-3). The sounds that are sought are then recorded in a notebook, which is the only medium allowed during the seven days of the workshop. Subsequently, they are ‘presented’ by each participant in the main space of the collective work. The practice of listening, reproducing, and re-elaborating environmental sounds is combined with the practice of body motion, both in outdoor and indoor spaces. In turn, the research of external sounds is combined with an observation of ‘smaller’ sounds in an indoor space. These exercises alternate with further organized outdoor movements. All these actions are preliminary and essential to get prepared for the first singing lesson. Then the master transmits a few traditional songs, first by singing them in their entirety, then one fragment at a time. Gradually, the master draws all of the listeners’ attention to specific melodic or melismatic passages: only after that, each one repeats the tune of a verse, or the entire stanza. In the end, it is sung together with the other companions. The individual *and* collective singing of a verse can last even more than two hours.

4. Becoming a ‘Creative Listener’

A few months before the meeting, the master shares some sound recordings of the songs, so that all participants can be acquainted on the repertoire. The practice of listening to sound documents is useful and has to be done (or can be done) right before the starting of the lab, with the aim to get in touch with the ‘symbolic and evocative’ dimensions of the singing, while during the encounters this practice can’t take place by no means. As Nicola Scaldaferrri has already explained, voices in field recordings are not just decontextualized presence, but

new object that suggests and allows interpretative paths for the scholar. At the same time, it also becomes an object of use for the community of reference, with a plurality of symbolic and evocative functions, which in recent years have been experiencing new momentum, also thanks to actions focused on the recovery of historical recordings that are repurposed specifically in the name of identitarian and aesthetical values.²⁰

20. «La voce registrata durante una ricerca sul campo non è solo una voce disincarnata e (decon)testualizzata; essa diventa un nuovo oggetto che suggerisce e consente percorsi interpretativi per lo studioso. Nello stesso tempo diventa anche oggetto di fruizione per la comunità di riferimento, con una pluralità di funzioni simboliche ed evocative, che negli



Figure 1. Participants during a listening exercise in the garden and its surrounding. Anna Maria Civico (on the left). Place: Ex Convento, Belmonte Calabro (Province of Cosenza, Calabria, Southern Italy). Date: June 28th 2023. Author: Nanni Spina



Figure 2. Participants walking around during the listening exercise in the garden (Serena Sinopoli, Fausto Caricato, in the front; Delia Dattilo, Giovanni Paladini, in the background). Place: Ex Convento, Belmonte Calabro (Province of Cosenza, Calabria, Southern Italy). Date: June 28th 2023. Author: Nanni Spina

ultimi anni stanno conoscendo nuovo slancio, anche grazie ad azioni mirate al recupero di registrazioni storiche che vengono rifunzionalizzate spesso in nome di valori estetici ed identitari. Tutto ciò rappresenta un terreno di riflessione col quale cimentarsi, sia in relazione a registrazioni compiute in passato che per quanto riguarda le indagini odierne», cf. SCALDAFERRI, *Voce, corpo, tecnologie*, p. 4.



Figure 3. Participants walking around during the listening exercise in the garden (Elisabetta Falanga, Stefano Cuzzocrea, in the front; Serena Sinopoli, Fausto Caricato in the background). Place: Ex Convento, Belmonte Calabro (Province of Cosenza, Calabria, Southern Italy). Date: June 28th 2023. Author: Nanni Spina

As I mentioned earlier, during these residential labs, the master places particular emphasis on the ‘absolute’ oral dimension by transmitting and performing solo and polyvocal songs. On the second day of the workshop, I asked her if I could read the lyrics of one of the songs in order to memorize them. She replied that this was not an important aspect at all, at that moment, and that it was essential to enter into the fabric of the song itself. She advised that this could be done by listening and constantly repeating the melody by trying to remember and imitate the voice’s texture and ‘graininess’. She suggested, in addition, that I should keep the lyrics in mind as they are experienced in a dimension which is strongly connected to music that is listened to, and only then repeated, performed, recreated, and varied: this was especially true in a predominantly illiterate society as the one found in Calabria during the pre-industrial era (and up until the 80s of the past century). During that time, no one would ever think of transcribing the words to learn them by heart, disconnecting them from the very act of listening/singing/moving together with someone else. This requirement, which is truly so important to the singing master, is not a ‘retromania’,²¹ but rather it represents the ‘urgency’ to recover a mnemonic ability, or even, an awareness of one’s own body and a consciousness of its proximity to spaces and individuals, in certain environments. In this context, memory and awareness of the spaces are closely connected to a particular type of affection toward places which is also established through the singing itself. The idea is that when these songs used to be part of a collective culture, the dimension of listening was at such a level that people could learn them without any other type of mediation than direct hearing, sighting,

21. REYNOLDS, *Retromania*.

and physical approximation between themselves and those who performed and transmitted the songs. In this respect, Anna Maria Civico's individual and collective work, from sound production to the singing, embraces the idea of 'proximity' which in my opinion is strongly connected to the concept of 'sonic metaphor', as introduced and debated by Elizabeth Ursic:

Sonic metaphors are created with pitch, rhythm, and sound. While most metaphors rely on the eyes to process written text and visual art, sonic metaphors are processed through the ears and offer different pathways for cognition. Sonic metaphors have been underutilized in theology and they offer potential for exploring theological concepts that can be challenging to comprehend through textual or visual means. These metaphors are particularly applicable for developing ecofeminist theology because sound and music connect our bodies with nature in illuminating ways.²²

The attention to sound qualities permeates the entire experience of music making and producing sounds («the place of the voice is intertwined with the voice of the place»),²³ which is put at the very centre of all these actions carried out during a meeting as well as – optimistically – in other moments of life. In these contexts, collective singing is consequential to the listening itself. While learning the songs, the participants explore the potential of their own phonatory apparatus and relate to the environment in which they stand. In the same way, they identify with the idea they have come up with, regarding a given song, therefore with 'sonic' and 'bodily' materials (a mix of melodies, rhythms, movements, and timbres) that become part of a collective imagery. Listening, therefore, is a primary practice for which great concentration is required on the part of the participant: «we must ask why apparently general musical abilities should be restricted to a chosen few in societies supposed to be culturally more advanced (...) we neither give the 'creative listener' his due as a musical human being nor recognize his importance in the survival of music».²⁴

5. To Sing/Move/Listen in Places

Cantare nei luoghi is a meeting perceived as a spiritual retreat in a secular sense. The people involved are guided throughout a sound-journey that lasts a week or so. It starts each day at 7 am and ends at around 10 pm. The participants get to know each other by staying together the whole time while sharing every moment of the day. As I have previously written, constant concentration is needed within the atmosphere that is recreated, intentionally. What is also required is the ability to move around or be engaged in intense physical activ-

22. URSIC, *Sonic Metaphors*, p. 247.

23. FELD, *Acustemologia*, p. 44.

24. BLACKING, *How Musical Is Man?*, p. 4.

ities. For the entire duration of the workshop, all attendees live, cook and eat together, share bedrooms, and, from time to time, help the local associations in extramusical activities concerning the space/place that is temporary inhabited by the singing group.

If on the one hand they don't belong to the same social and cultural background, on the other hand, these experiences enable and aid bonds to develop which generally reinforce and provide continuity to the community, by leaving a trace in the singing itself. In these contexts, polyvocality – which is strongly connected to the ability of a group to coordinate within the space – engages not only the voice, but also the body through a range of movements. In this way, the participants get to know both the acoustic and visual relations in the space they inhabit – whether they are in the position of being listeners, performer or witnesses of what is happening in situations where there is no 'audience' in a strict sense. In these listening dimensions, individuals build their own community of sounds and songs related to the places in which they perform, while also spending quality time together. The singing of microtonal tunes in outdoor spaces, with tight voices as they are heard in Calabrian *canti a stisa* or *canti all'aria* (meaning: songs to be sung in the open air) becomes part of an individual training process through which one gets to know both spaces and sounds (whether the latter be human or not), learning how to balance one's voice 'occurrence' in respect to the quality of someone else's personal presence in the space. In communities such as these, the act of singing and moving together becomes a way to express, being part of a situation where everybody (including the master) is learning, with awareness. The vocal style in the repertoire of Calabrian *canti a stisa* is also called *a gola stretta* (meaning: with a tight throat). Its performance requests the total involvement of the *corpo-voce-orecchio*: the soundful bodies while they are performing.²⁵ Moreover, since, as active participants, performers are situated in their own body, the singing itself is a way to affirm self-determination, empowered/confirmed by the strength of the group through the multipart singing. Calabrian traditional songs allow this self-determination since they very often present multipart-part structures in which the second part sings a matching tune that joins and interconnects with the soloist's, empowering his/her very 'presence'.

In Anna Maria Civico's community, all participants give continuity to what she often defines as 'the echo of our ancestors that talk to us through their songs'.²⁶ The singers answer that echo by throwing back a sort of 'collective claim' to space, in order to bring back aurality and listening practices in contemporary everyday life. One of the three Calabrian songs proposed for the meeting held in the summer of 2023, is not by chance a *canto all'aria*, which was also transmitted through a sound recording made by Walther Hennig, presumably in the early 50s.²⁷ The work was published in a collection

25. MACCHIARELLA, *Multipart Music*.

26. This statement was made during the meeting *Cantare nei luoghi* (27 June-July 2022), Belmonte Calabro (Province of Cosenza).

27. I could not find consistent information on Walther Hennig's biography, other than in the online database Discogs, where it is stated that Walther Theodor Hermann Albert Hennig

entitled *Folk Songs of Italy* (Folkways Records 1954), under the title of *Aria Nova*.²⁸ It is a love song which is sung by a main female voice and a second male counterpart voice – they are both accompanied by the *organetto*. It is also known as *Lu garofalu d'amuri* (The Carnation of Love) and is still pretty much widespread in the Reventino area.²⁹ Although there is a recorded version to which each of the participants including the teacher herself referred to before the gathering, the transmission of the song took place orally during the *Cantare nei luoghi* workshop.

Singing a song like this in a group can imply the simplification or reduction of melodic lines. This is due mainly to the fact that each member of the choir relies on the presence of the other voices and tends to ‘flatten’ some very complex and melismatic passages of the soloist performance. The example of *Lu garofalu d'amuri* is important, in this sense, because in that case it was evident how some of the melisma heard in the reference model were excluded in the very performance. In addition to the simplification of pitches, there has been a common convergence towards the regularization of durations. In my experience throughout field research amongst singing communities, I have already noticed this phenomenon. However, the singing of *Lu garofalu d'amuri*, which has an extremely rich melodic contour, would be very hard to perform otherwise in a polyvocal context. The result would be unclear, if not downright unintelligible. For this reason, Civico pushed each participant to perform the song independently in order to avoid simplification and suggested to each subject to remain adherent to the model as much as possible. This was to be followed both from a strictly melodic sense, and even more so, from a timbre viewpoint: «the *canti all'aria* must be sung with a narrow voice (*a voca stretta*), but to sing in that way, and to approach that musical world, a simple workshop is not enough. It is absolutely necessary to practice every day, and for a long, long time», says the singing master.³⁰ However, for a multipart singing performance that came to be, and developed in such a short time, it was necessary to memorize the ‘dry’ melodic line and the text – in collective learning contexts. In the absence of other sound resources, one begins to learn by imitating those around him/her, or by observing and imitating the teacher.

was a German recording engineer, founder and owner of Tondiest Hamburg, a recording studio located in Hamburg (Germany), see <https://www.discogs.com/it/artist/4653689>. His work was mentioned in PORTER, *Reviewed Work(s): Italia*.

28. In the liner notes, the editor simply wrote: «ARIA NOVA. ('Aria of the Bride'). Recorded in the region of Nicastro, Calabria. Two singers from Nicastro, with organetto accompaniment. An old love song, the words of which appear to be a mixture of old Greek, Italian, and some Turkish», cf. HENNIG, *Folk Songs*, p. 2.
29. The Reventino is a mountain massif and cultural area located in the narrowest part of central Calabria. Some solo versions of this song, whose style is also called ‘a la petrajan-cara’; circulate also through the web, as the one performed by the singer and accordionist Alessio Bressi, see <https://youtu.be/usUao5CpIzQ?feature=shared>
30. Conversation with Anna Maria Civico, July, 1st 2023.

*A chistu locu*³¹ and *Nu giornu spassiggiava*³² – two other songs deriving from the Calabrian tradition, which were taught during the workshop in the summer of 2023 – were both taken from Antonello Ricci's field recordings that took place respectively in San Martino d'Acri and Torano Castello, in 1984.³³ *A chistu locu* is a Calabrian *canto all'aria* found in many variants and recorded a few times during the last forty years.³⁴ It was defined by Antonello Ricci as part of a group of songs called *a voca regolare* (sung through a regular voice).

The position of the body during singing also seems to be related to the sound emission. By holding the trunk slightly bent forward, the singer pushes the voice forward. Often, he puts his hand next to his mouth (cf. fig. 1) to better direct the song or correct the intonation of the voice. In vocal polyphony groups,

31. Namely 'In this place', see <https://youtu.be/lbjLD8Buy4o?si=L8ugivCVc6Fy-05d>. Version of *A Chistu Locu* as sung by Anna Maria Civico. Place: Belmonte Calabro (Province of Cosenza, Calabria, Italy) Date: July 1st 2023 Participants: Fausto Caricato, Stefano Cuzzocrea, Delia Dattilo, Beatrice Di Fonzo, Elisabetta Falanga, Giovanni Paladini, Serena Sinopoli, Barbara Spagnolo. Video: Nanni Spina.
32. Namely 'One day I was walking', also called *Rosa bella di mammata*, see <https://youtu.be/PfE6-xf860o?si=GjeM6HojqKPktAJX>. 'Version of *Rosa Bella di Mammata* as taught by Anna Maria Civico. Place: Belmonte Calabro (Province of Cosenza, Calabria, Italy) Date: July 1st 2023 Participants: Fausto Caricato, Stefano Cuzzocrea, Delia Dattilo, Beatrice Di Fonzo, Elisabetta Falanga, Giovanni Paladini, Serena Sinopoli, Barbara Spagnolo. Video: Nanni Spina.
33. Antonello Ricci is full professor of Anthropology of Music at the University of Rome "La Sapienza". Since the early 1980s he had conducted extended field research in Calabria, together with his colleague ethnomusicologist Roberta Tucci. Cf. RICCI, *Quelques aspect du chant*, p. 8: «Le répertoire enregistré dans ces deux villages est en grande partie constitué de chants appelés all'aria. Ils représentent le noyau central du répertoire, aussi bien à cause de l'intérêt musical qu'ils suscitent que par leur nouveauté dans le cadre des recherches ethnomusicologiques italiennes, par rapport aux répertoires calabrais connus jusqu'à présent. Les chants all'aria de Torano et de Sartano constituent un répertoire de polyphonie vocale quasi exclusivement féminin, qui était généralement exécuté durant les travaux agricoles. Il s'agit d'un répertoire spécialisé, qui prévoit des rôles musicaux bien définis: une voix soliste et des voix d'accompagnement. Les groupes féminins qui les exécutent peuvent être considérés comme ayant un niveau professionnel, si l'on tient compte de la considération dont ils jouissent. Souvent, par le passé, les chanteuses solistes étaient choisies pour travailler à la campagne justement en fonction de leurs qualités vocales».
34. The song was initially transcribed by Raffaele Lombardi Satriani in the early 20th century, and then recorded by Antonello Ricci and Roberta Tucci during the summer of 1980, in S. Martino di Acri (Province of Cosenza, Calabria). *A chistu locu 'n c'haiu cantat'ancori* was sung in the style called *a strofette*, cf. RICCI – TUCCI, *I "canti"*, p. 121; «accompanied by the *chitarra battente*. *A strofette* indicates a mode of performance in which two voices alternate in the song according to a fixed scheme: the first voice expounds the strophe (*stanza*), the second takes it up again and concludes it (*la voca*, he turns it). (...) Typical of a *strofette song* is the practice of adding extraneous elements in the basic stanza; called *votature*, *votate*, *vocate*, or *girate*, they interrupt both the first and the second voice in various ways (...) lengthening the stanza. As they are improvised during the singing, they are never the same from performance to performance (...)», cf. RICCI – TUCCI, *I "canti"*, pp. 96-97.

the disposition of the people is also a function of the success of the singing. Often, they are arranged in a circle, the better to achieve the perfect fusion of voices (cf. fig. 2), called in the dialect *accùordu* (chord) when, as the singers say, only one voice is heard.³⁵

6. The Heart of Sounds: Listening and Singing in Sotterra's Underground Church

By re-using music materials and combining the singing itself with peculiar listening training, Anna Maria Civico teaches how to explore the surroundings using one's own ears and phonatory apparatus. We come to know that through multipart singing, people express their cultural behaviours and build significant relationships among themselves and with the place in which this shared experience occurs. In contexts like these, the singing also becomes an environmental action, especially if preceded by listening practices. Individuals become aware of the space and place by exploring sound features, and eventually express this awareness through both listening practices and social music. On June 29th 2023, the group that met for the *Cantare nei luoghi* workshop, moved from the Ex Convento of Belmonte Calabro (Province of Cosenza, Calabria) – where the workshop took place until July 2nd 2023 – to the ancient Church of Sotterra (Paola, Province of Cosenza). This location is a sacred, Byzantine building dated between the eighth and tenth century AD. The church, which is currently underground, is also made up of acoustic vases called *echeia*.³⁶ The community, including myself as participant, gathered in the small hypogeum carrying out a sound exploration that lasted for more than three hours. In the beginning, we were all invited by the master to move around, with our eyes closed in search of sound sources (whether they be coming from the environment or from the presence of other participants, such as footsteps, breath and else). Subsequently, each one went to look out for a set of a few sounds while exploring every corner of the underground church. The first part of this exploration ended up with a collective improvisation: once two, or maximum three sounds had been chosen and identified by all, as a result of the first part of this exploration, participants made a mimesis by performing (reiterating and merging) them in various ways. In the second

35. RICCI, *Quelques aspect du chant*, p. 2: «La position du corps pendant le chant semble elle aussi liée à l'émission sonore. En tenant son buste légèrement plié en avant, le chanteur imprime à la voix une poussée en avant. Souvent, il met sa main à côté de sa bouche [] pour mieux diriger le chant ou corriger l'intonation de la voix. Dans les groupes de polyphonie vocale, la disposition des personnes est, elle aussi, fonction de la bonne réussite du chant. Souvent, elles se disposent en cercle, pour mieux parvenir à la fusion parfaite des voix (cf. fig. 2), dite, en dialecte *accùordu* (accord) quand, comme le disent les chanteurs, on n'entend qu'une seule voix».

36. CUTERI – DI FEDE, *Echeia. Alcune considerazioni*.



Figure 4. Participants at *Cantare nei luoghi* in search of their own ‘ear-point’; Anna Maria Civico in the front; in the background (from left to right) Stefano Cuzzocrea, Giovanni Paladini, Serena Sinopoli, Delia Dattilo, Fausto Caricato, Elisabetta Falanga, Barbara Spagnolo). Place: Sotterra’s Church, Paola (Province of Cosenza, Calabria, Southern Italy). Date: June 30th 2023. Author: Nanni Spina



Figure 5. Multipart singing near the altar (from left to right: Delia Dattilo, Stefano Cuzzocrea, Barbara Spagnolo, Beatrice Di Fonzo, Serena Sinopoli). Place: Sotterra’s Church, Paola (Province of Cosenza, Calabria, Southern Italy). Date: June 30th 2023. Author: Nanni Spina

part, the master gradually tried to approach each one accompanying all participants, one by one, towards the altar of the underground church. As we all reached the centre, we gradually heard and felt the very ‘presence’ of the other companions, as our eyes were still wide shut. Within a few minutes, each one found him/herself next to another performer, ‘tuning’ his/her own sounds to the one of the persons nearby (Figures 4-6).



Figure 6. Giovanni Paladini, Beatrice Di Fonzo and Anna Maria Civico singing by the altar. Sotterra's Church, Paola (Province of Cosenza, Calabria, Southern Italy). Date: June 30th 2023. Author: Nanni Spina

7. Moving in Spaces/Taming the Body

During the residential session of *Cantare nei luoghi*, each day was marked by a series of body movement and vocal exercises. As I previously specified, vocal emission and listening exercises were not thought of as something detached from the body movement. Right before the singing practice, there were actions to be carried out in absolute silence and, among these, a series of movements that took their cue from the Sun Salutation. The series of movement, as part of this first morning session, occurred shortly after waking up, at around 7 a.m.: in this specific case, the environment made a huge impact, as the entire session was held outdoors, in a vast semi-overgrown garden. The exercises consisted of a series of actions to be performed counterclockwise following the orientation from East to West. Therefore, all participants started by turning their gazes and their own body towards the rising sun, doing push-ups on their knees, and rising on their toes with their arms aligned with the axis of their bodies. This movement was followed by a forward stretch of the body and a backward movement of the leg (right or left) – the body and leg were perpendicular to the other leg which remained firm and firmly planted on the ground (participants were strictly barefoot). This first action was then alternated with a second movement, which followed the same East-West sequence (Figure 7). This practice was defined by Grotowski as ‘primary position’.³⁷

37. For a full account on this practice see LENDRA, *Bali and Grotowski*. Lendra was a performer and assistant to Jerzy Grotowski, also involved in his Objective Drama Project (1983-1986) carried out for the Department of Drama at the University of California-Irvine (UCI). This research, conceived as an extension of Grotowski's previous work in the Theatre of Sources, «(...) was concerned with those elements of the ancient rituals of various world cultures which have a precise and therefore objective impact on participants quite



Figure 7. Participants practicing morning exercises in Ex Convento's garden. Place: Ex Convento, Belmonte Calabro (Province of Cosenza, Calabria, Southern Italy). Date: July 1st 2023. Author: Nanni Spina

The polish director also spoke about traditional singing, and more specifically about ritual chants, explaining how the discovery of their 'vibratory' qualities was necessary to understand the gap between them and the concept of 'melody' that belongs to Western culture – for which: «one understands, for example, the melody as a succession of notes, a notation of notes (...) But, even if it is absolutely necessary to be precise in the melody in order to discover the vibratory qualities, the melody is not the same as the vibratory qualities».³⁸ He also offered his own interpretation of the meaning of traditional singing, specifying how in most of the oral traditional cultures the very existence of singing neither can be separated from the performer, nor should it be considered (Eurocentrically) as the result of actions that have to do with 'techniques' and 'aesthetics'. If anything, it should be seen as the result of impulses and actions.³⁹

It's always the song-body, it's never the song dissociated from the impulses of life that run through the body; in the song of tradition, it is no longer a question of the position of the body or the manipulation of the breath, but of the impulses and the little actions. Because the impulses which run in the body are exactly that which carries the song.⁴⁰

apart from solely theological or symbolic significance. Mr. Grotowski's intention is to isolate and study such elements of performative movements, dances, songs, incantations, structures of language, rhythms and uses of space. Those elements are sought by means of a distillation process from the complex through the simple and through the separation of elements one from the other (Cohen 1984)», cf. WOLFORD, *Subjective Reflections*, p. 165.

38. GROTOWSKI, *From the Theatre Company*, p. 11.

39. For a wider discussion on Grotowski's theory of 'impulse' see GROTOWSKI, *Poor Theatre*.

40. Cf. GROTOWSKI, *From the Theatre Company*, p. 128.

Anna Maria Civico and the members of her community think of how natural environments influence vocal emission, posture, movements: the *corpo-voce-orecchio* system. By ‘merging’ the body, voice, and ear experience (a sort of *gestalt*), simultaneous elements such as movement, singing and sonorous vocal emission coexist both in the ‘larger landscape’ of the body and in the microcosm of the smallest perceptible variations, performed with the voice and acted out with the body.⁴¹ The first part of the morning session continued in the deconsecrated and unadorned church, adjacent to the Ex Convento. Here, we were involved in carrying out further movement practices, called ‘exercises of proximity’. Through this training, we were able to explore our own bodily dimension in the relationship with the place, space, and among all the participants. One of these exercises consisted in making large, rhythmic movements all together, along the area of the church and, then gradually, occupying an increasingly smaller area: first a half of the whole space, then a quarter, until our personal space was reduced to such a minuscule spot where each participant, little by little, was able to equally move and produce sounds without bumping into the other ones (see Figures 8 and 9). As in Grotowski’s practices, also in this case:

The work itself was very rigorous. It required not only physical dexterity and stamina but also mental perseverance. Grotowski imposed un-compromising discipline. There were many requirements that we had to observe. Grotowski prescribed some rules which were difficult to perform, in the same way he chose participants, chose to work in nature, and isolated the essential elements of ancient performative rituals. In addition to all these, he proposed to work long hours. Most of the time we worked between five and six days a week. Each exercise would last approximately two hours or longer depending on the development of the action. Our sessions, which usually began in the early evening, often extended for eight hours, sometimes through the entire night.⁴²

8. Topography of the Selves/Final Remark

In groups of this sort, historical and acoustic features of spaces are held in high regard as entities that ‘participate’ in the creation of sounds. Since listeners also make music in their own way, listening practices represent political and ecological actions involving the whole ‘sound body’ in multimodal processes through which each participant affirms her/his/their own identity.⁴³ Singers who meet informally to learn traditional songs by ear rely on

41. For an overview on ‘corporeally mediated interactions with music’ see LEMAN *et al.*, *What Is Embodied*.

42. LENDRA, *Bali and Grotowski*, p. 115.

43. LIPARI, *Listening, Thinking, Being*.



Figure 8. Collective body movements in the dismissed church of Ex Convento. Place: Ex Convento, Belmonte Calabro (Province of Cosenza, Calabria, Southern Italy). Date: July 1st 2023. Author: Nanni Spina



Figure 9. Body movements in the dismissed church of Ex Convento. Place: Ex Convento, Belmonte Calabro (Province of Cosenza, Calabria, Southern Italy). Date: July 1st 2023. Author: Nanni Spina

a musical corpus that is perceived to be a relic of their own past. In these situations, participatory practices represent a social process through which one gets to know or reimagines places and realities far beyond regular auditory perceptions. Through 'multimodal' listening participants become creative and competent in reconstructing their own sonic experiences and developing new representations of themselves.⁴⁴ Transversal cultural practices, im-

44. CERASO, *(Re)Educating the Senses*.

plemented during these meetings, partly take up what researchers in World Soundscape Project proposed in the Seventies: the drafting of sound maps, on a medium or in one's own mind or even, as in this case, through the voice and one's own body, to mark and note the experience of sound events; in fact, they can both be observed from a viewpoint and a listening point.⁴⁵ In any case, in my opinion, this has little to do with the idea of sound landscapes. These practices go deeper, to the extent that those who immerse themselves in a landscape become protagonists. They aren't just simply observers of what is happening. In specific places, all singers linger, listen to, see and relate different phenomena, establishing deep relationships with those spaces, on both a personal and collective level. These practices partly take up the situationist spirit but go beyond it. The people who partake, surpass it by bringing all of the crucial thoughts that closely concern our lives to the performance: women's body and self-determination, alternative wisdom, relationship with (and response to) social and ecological change, questions concerning the extent of which the act of getting together and periodically singing speaks of different practices and ways of thinking, and questions on how much of what people do in topical moments affects personal choices that they make on a daily basis. Not by chance, many participants are individuals who choose to put into practice models of economic, spiritual, and expressive autonomy, each in their own way. Similarly, they try as much as possible to avoid being dependent on pre-existing social superstructures. By transforming the spaces, they bring their own system of values within them, and share said values with those who happen to be participating *at that moment*. Therefore, these actions represent the urgency, and need of expression through music and body movement, with the aim to restore senses and meanings of an environment that people see (and desire) even if just for a few days. Over time, those spaces remain the repositories of memories and situations that are built *hic et nunc* and primarily linked to sound-musical experiences. In this way, traditional songs – especially those no longer sung in communities once defined as traditional – keep on resonating in communal spaces, continuing their journey through the voices and bodies of the people who listened to that distant echo, grasping its traits, and adopting it into the fabric of their own lives.

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45. Cf. *World Soundscape Project 1972 and 1977*. Raymond Murray Schafer was the head of research team.

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