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Music Theory as Practice: Pedagogical Traditions between Naples and Paris in the 18th and 19th Centuries

Teoria musical como prática: tradições didáticas entre Nápoles e Paris nos séculos XVIII e XIX

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Abstract: For many years, Carl Dahlhaus's perspective dominated: after the eighteenth century, Italian music theory—apart from Giuseppe Tartini's speculative works and Padre Martini's scholarly writings—had no impact beyond "the Alps". However, this assertion is not supported by the extensive body of sources related to the teaching of musical composition of nineteenth century, particularly from France (*solfège*, *accompagnement*, *harmonie pratique*, *contrepoint*, and *marches harmoniques*). This article offers an overview of the teaching of practical counterpoint (*solfeggio*, *partimento*, and written counterpoint) in eighteenth-century Naples, and subsequently traces its influence on professional music education in nineteenth-century Paris — mainly at the *Conservatoire*, but also within the *Maîtrises*. Drawing on a variety of primary sources, we aim to demonstrate that what we now refer to as "theoretical disciplines" were in fact integral to the domain of practical music-making. Moreover, we argue that, despite the challenges such sources may present to modern scholars, their study can yield valuable insights for contemporary music pedagogy.

Keywords: Solfeggio. Partimento. Counterpoint. Marches harmoniques. Harmony.

Resumo: Durante muitos anos, prevaleceu a perspectiva de Carl Dahlhaus: após o século XVIII, a teoria musical italiana — excetuando-se os escritos especulativos de Giuseppe Tartini e os tratados eruditos do Padre Martini — não teria exercido impacto algum além dos Alpes. No entanto, tal afirmação não encontra respaldo no vasto corpo de fontes relacionadas ao ensino da composição musical no século XIX, sobretudo na França (*solfège*, *accompagnement*, *harmonie pratique*, *contrepoint* e *marches harmoniques*). Este artigo oferece uma visão geral do ensino do contraponto prático (solfejo, *partimento* e contraponto escrito) na Nápoles do século XVIII, e em seguida traça a sua influência na formação musical profissional da Paris do século XIX — principalmente no Conservatório, mas também nas

Maîtrises. A partir de uma variedade de fontes primárias, buscamos demonstrar que o que hoje denominamos "disciplinas teóricas" era, na realidade, parte integrante do domínio da prática musical. Além disso, argumentamos que, apesar dos desafios que tais fontes possam apresentar aos estudiosos contemporâneos, o seu estudo pode oferecer valiosas contribuições para a pedagogia musical atual.

Palavras-chave: Solfeggio. Partimento. Contraponto. Marches harmoniques. Harmonia.

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1. Introduction[1]

Until recently, Carl Dahlhaus's view prevailed that, from the eighteenth century onward, "no Italian theory of music was in a position to exert any influence beyond the Alps, with the exception of the speculative treatises of Giuseppe Tartini and the erudite writings of Padre Martini" (1984, p. 23). However, this assertion is not supported by the extensive body of sources related to the teaching of musical composition in the nineteenth century, particularly from France. What might have led such a musicologist to make this claim? To address this question, it is useful to first examine more specifically how the teaching of music theory occurred at the "professional" level — and to consider the possibility of rethinking the dichotomy between *theoria* and *praxis*.[2]

2. Naples and the First Conservatories

> After or alongside painting, Music is the art among the fine arts that most honors Italy, and particularly the city of Naples. It is above all because of Music that Naples is justly renowned: of all the cities of Italy, it is the most fertile in celebrated musicians; one could even say that it has produced more

[1] This study was financed in part by the Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior – Brasil (CAPES) – Finance Code 001.

[2] The present article is the English revised, expanded and updated version of the paper *Solfeggio, Partimento e Marches Harmoniques*. Initially presented in 2023 at the University of São Paulo during the *14th Encontro de Pesquisadores em Poética Musical dos Séculos XVI, XVII e XVIII* congress, the paper aimed to contribute with reflections on the main theme of that event – *Musica Practica in Early Music* – whose proceedings in Portuguese language are expected to be eventually published in the Revista 4'33''.

> [musicians] on its own than the rest of Italy—or even the whole Europe.[3] (Saint-Non 1781–86, p. 161)

With this declaration, Jean Claude Richard de Saint-Non opens the chapter on "célèbres musiciens napolitains" in his *Voyage pittoresque ou description des royaumes de Naples et de Sicilie* (1781–86). His favorable opinion of Neapolitan musical art was by no means exceptional, and similar praise can be found in numerous other travel accounts — not only by French authors but also by English ones. Beyond the charm that the "picturesque" character of Naples held for the foreign traveler, Neapolitan culture was widely disseminated and appreciated throughout the Italian peninsula and across Europe. This was especially true of its musical culture: as Saint-Non observed, the number of celebrated musicians trained in "*the city of Sirens*"[4] during the eighteenth century is truly extraordinary[5].

Among the reasons for this phenomenon, the foremost is the emergence and consolidation of four *conservatori* in the city.[6] The term *conservatorio*[7] arose in Naples at the end of the seventeenth century to designate charitable institutions affiliated with the Church that sheltered orphaned boys and provided instruction in music as a trade. From these institutions emerged not only highly renowned singers, but also composers—particularly of opera—and *maestri di cappella* who achieved success not only throughout Italy but across all of Europe.[8]

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[3] In the original: "*La Musique est après la Peinture, ou concurremment avec elle, celui de tous les beaux arts qui honore le plus l'Italie & particulièrement la ville de Naples. C'est sur-tout par la Musique que Naples est justement fameuse, c'est de toutes les villes d'Italie celle qui a été la plus féconde en Musicien célèbres, on peut dire encore qu'elle en a produit elle seule plus que tout le reste de l'Italie ou même que l'Europe entière.*"

[4] According to its founding myth, the origin of Naples traces back to the Greek siren Parthenope, whose body was said to have been carried by the sea to the Italian peninsula. For this reason, Neapolitans are still called Parthenopes to this day, and the city has often been referred to as the "City of Sirens." In the realm of legend, this was thought to explain Naples's gift for music.

[5] By way of example: Alessandro Scarlatti, Francesco Scarlatti, Domenico Scarlatti, Francesco Durante, Leonardo Leo, Domenico Cimarosa, Giovanni Paisiello, Niccolò Jommelli, Tommaso Traetta, Niccolò Piccinni, Antonio Sacchini, Saverio Mercadante, Vincenzo Bellini, Francesco Feo, Giovanni Battista Pergolesi, among others.

[6] On the history of the Neapolitan conservatories, see Florimo (1881–86); Giacomo (1924); and Sigismondo (2016).

[7] From the Italian *conservare*, meaning "to care for."

[8] In fact, the "export" of Neapolitan musicians even crossed the Atlantic, as in the case of Filippo Traetta (1777–1854), son of the celebrated composer Tommaso Traetta, who emigrated to

The fact is that in these *conservatori*, instruction followed the artisanal tradition of apprenticeship, yet in an institutionalized form.[9] Their curriculum[10], so to speak, was organized around three principal disciplines: *Solfeggio*, *Partimento*, and written Counterpoint[11].

The discipline of *solfeggio* was probably closer to present-day singing lessons than to what we now call "solfège". It nevertheless encompassed much of the initial musical training, addressing fundamental elements of music theory such as clef reading, hexachordal solmization, *canto fermo* (plainchant), and *canto figurato* (modern notation). In addition, melodic patterns were always sung within a harmonic context—that is, accompanied by a basso continuo—and later served to nourish the students' inventiveness in the subsequent disciplines of *partimento* and counterpoint, and in vocal improvised embellishments as well. The study of *solfeggio* was never neglected: evidence suggests that students were often required to devote at least three years to *solfeggio* before undertaking *partimento* (see Baragwanath 2020, p. 2). It is worth mentioning that the use of hexachordal solmization together to frequent vocalization probably helped students to recognize and embody melodic schemas,[12] typical from the galant style (Ex. 1).[13]

America and founded conservatories modeled on the Neapolitan system in the United States. On his life and activities as musician and teacher, see Sciannameo (2024).

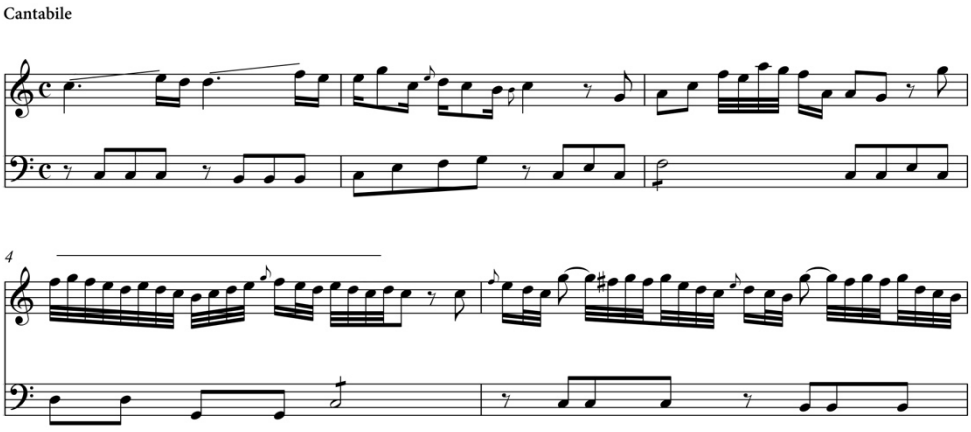
[9] The concept of "institutionalized apprenticeship" in the Neapolitan conservatories is discussed by Gjerdingen in *Child Composers in the Old Conservatories* (2020, chap. 5).

[10] For an integrated and systematic overview of the curriculum, see *Child Composers in the Old Conservatories* (Gjerdingen 2020).

[11] On *solfeggio*, see Baragwanath (2020). On *partimento*, see Sanguinetti (2012); and in Portuguese, see Alegre (2022b). On written counterpoint in Naples, see Tour (2015).

[12] Thanks to the publication of *The Solfeggio Tradition* (Baragwanath 2020), many elements of this once-forgotten art have been brought to light. However, there remains insufficient evidence to support a strong argument regarding the degree of vocalization applied in *solfeggio*. Apart from the rare, brief markings and lines indicating vocalization in *solfeggio* manuscripts, we lack concrete clues to determine whether a given note should or should not receive a syllable. It is possible that this question will never be resolved, since *solfeggio* training was deeply imbued with the oral component of the apprenticeship tradition.

[13] It is important to note that the thousands of handwritten sources of *solfeggi*—partially catalogued in the UUSolf database (Tour 2016)—do not constitute a homogeneous corpus. As Paolo Sullo (2017, p. 193) aptly observes, to define *solfeggio* as a single, uniform practice is likely a mistake. Evidence indicates that, alongside composed *solfeggi* by Neapolitan *maestri* for "musical initiation" and for the cultivation of taste and style, students themselves also composed



Example 1: Transcription of a *Solfeggio* (I-Nc 34.2.6/2, fol. 38v) by Leonardo Leo (Bars 1–5). The lines in bars 1 and 4 are in the manuscript tiny traits that indicate vocalization, meaning that only one syllable should be added to the notes — thus the opening phrase would be sung as *Do–Re–Mi*.

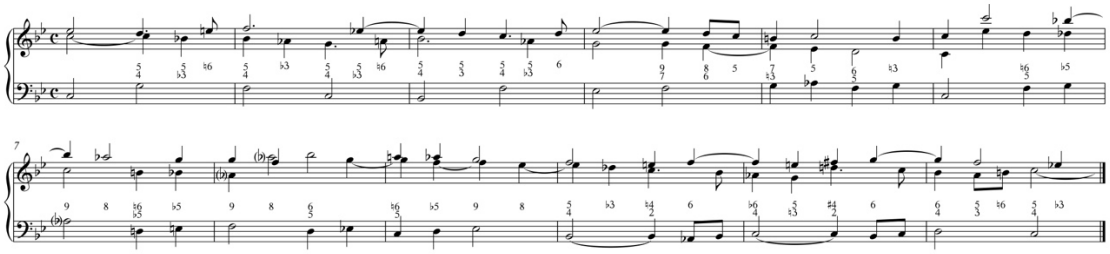
Partimento, in turn, was connected to the study of accompaniment—that is, basso continuo and "practical harmony"—at the keyboard: As Michele Ruta (1876, p. 2) perceptively observes, the study of *partimento* served to "educate the students' harmonic sensibility through the ear guided by the mind," and thus constituted a "sensitive study of harmony," providing students with the ability to "discern any harmonic combination".[14] The term *partimento* refers to bass lines, whether figured or unfigured[15], composed as exercises to be realized at the keyboard in such a way as to produce something resembling a complete composition (Ex. 2). To this end, students were required to learn certain prescriptive rules for accompanying an unfigured bass (not restricted to

two-part *solfeggi* in written counterpoint and composition classes (Ruta 1876, pp. 2–3). In this sense, *solfeggio* played a central role in the implicit learning of what we might today describe as a theory of form, though at the time it was understood as exercises in musical logic and rhetoric—encompassing a tacit theory of rhythmic-melodic phraseology and thematic development, as argued by contemporary commentator Michele Ruta (1877, p. 145).

[14] In the original: "*Il Partimento è lo studio sensibile dell'Armonia fatto sopra un strumento poliplettrio, nello scopo di educare il sentimento armonico degli student per mezzo dell'udito regolato della mente, e di rendere così capace il loro criterio di giudicare qualunque combinazione armonica.*"

[15] Peter van Tour (Cotumacci 2024, preface) also proposes the label *"underfigured"* to designate a type of pedagogical *partimento* that includes only a few figures, sometimes incomplete (for instance, missing accidentals). The purpose of this practice was not to provide a fully determined realization, but rather to give the student only a minimal clue, forcing him to rely on his knowledge and judgment in order to decide how best to complete the realization.

verticalized 4-part style, but rather in "corellian" 3-part contrapuntal style[16]), such as the basic axioms for the preparation and resolution of dissonances, scale accompaniments—including the *regola dell'ottava*—and accompaniments for sequences (known as *moti del basso*, that is, "bass motions").



Example 2: Transcription of a written-out 3-part style realization of a partimento by Stanislao Mattei (US-RicS. Ms. 57a, fol. 3r)

Finally, students could advance to the study of written counterpoint. At this stage, they would in fact revisit all that they had already learned in the study of *partimento*, but now with a focus on polyphonic musical *writing*, the ultimate goal usually being mastery of the art of the fugue. In this respect, the prescriptions of the discipline remained normative—much like those of *partimento*—and were grounded in the imitation of models rather than in the rationalization of principles. This approach enabled the acquisition of musical language in a manner akin to that of a native tongue, in which one learns to speak by imitating what is heard, and only much later reflects on grammar and writing.

It is very difficult today to understand how to realize *partimenti* — or at least to be sure on how students did in Neapolitan schools — owing to the absence of the dimension once provided by oral tradition, since this was an ephemeral, *ex-tempore* (improvised) practice that was almost certainly demonstrated during lessons[17]. In the case of written counterpoint, however, we

[16] Giovanni Battista Martini's *Libro per accompagnare* (2020) contains indications of Archangelo Corelli's trio sonatas as models for the realization of the figured bass. Likewise, original partimenti realized by Stanislao Mattei (US-RicS. Ms. 57a) provide excellent examples of strictly three-voice polyphonic realizations (Ex. 2). Nevertheless, it is important to note that the number of voices in the realization of a *partimento* was never strict: it could vary within a single piece according to the artistic effects sought, shifting between two, three, four, or even more voices, as can be observed in *partimenti* written in the style of concertos.

[17] For an educated guess on how a partimento lesson could look like in the 18th century, see Alegre; Videira (2021).

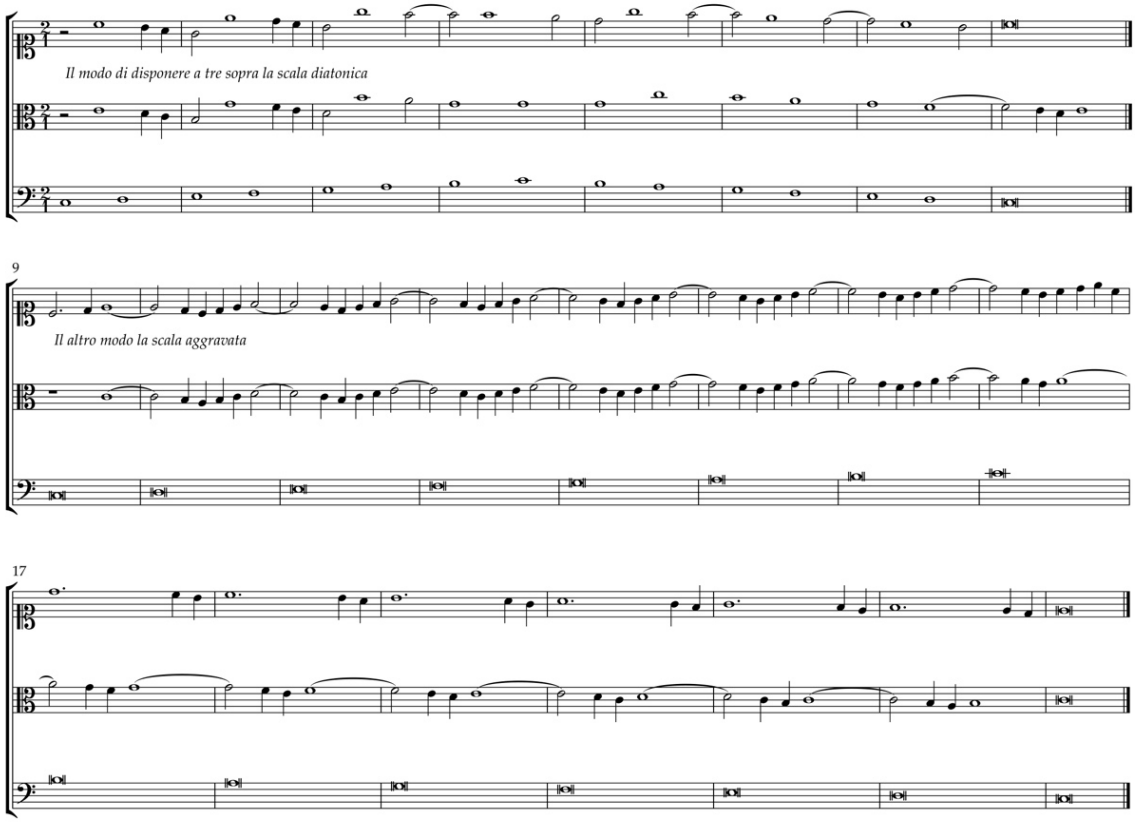
can rely on other written sources, whose rhetorical dynamic of prescription, exemplification, and emulation operates in much the same way.[18]

A good example of this can be found in Nicola Sala's (1713–1801) *Regole del Contrappunto Pratico* [Rules of Practical Counterpoint] (1794). In the preface to this imposing volume—remarkable both for its physical dimensions and its number of pages—Sala states that he had devised a work broad in scope and capable of being useful to both beginners and experienced musicians. Nevertheless, a modern reader may be surprised to find that there are virtually no pages of verbal text; instead, the work consists almost entirely of musical examples to be studied as prescriptive models, with no purely speculative theory (Ex. 3).

It may thus be said that *solfeggio*, *partimento*, and written counterpoint together constituted, in Naples, the study of practical counterpoint, working in an integrated manner to develop musical memories (*schemata*[19]) through the prescriptive study of patterns and models. Consequently, the study of these disciplines—and of musical composition more broadly—belonged to the domain of *practical music*.

[18] In addition to published sources or teachers' manuscripts, it is worth noting that the study of student's notebooks from the conservatories has proven highly valuable for research on the realization of *partimenti* and counterpoint. This type of source was extensively examined by Peter van Tour (2015).

[19] For the concept of *schemata*, see Gjerdingen (1988; 2007; and 2020).



Example 3: Transcription of counterpoint dispositions examples for the accompaniment of the ascending and descending scale from Nicola Sala's *Regole del Contrappunto Pratico* (1794, vol. 2, p. 12)

3. Paris, Between Revolution and Tradition

Nicola Sala's rules remain almost entirely unknown to most musicians today, except for those engaged in the study of *partimenti*. This is due not only to the general neglect of Neapolitan theory throughout the twentieth century, but also to the extreme rarity of the book itself: although it was printed under the auspices of the Neapolitan crown and enjoyed considerable prestige, its printing plates were burned during the Napoleonic invasion of Naples – for the shame and displeasure of French commentators such as Alexander Choron. Nevertheless, at least four copies have survived, one of which is held in Paris, and, surprisingly, one at Brazilian National Library in Rio de Janeiro. This fact *per se* is certainly a sign of Neapolitan music theory influence not only beyond the Alps, but also beyond the Atlantic Ocean.

Curiously, it was precisely in the post-revolutionary republican period that the internationally famous *Conservatoire de Paris* was founded. Its inauguration is often regarded as a break with the eighteenth-century tradition of musical education, and the institution remains famous and influential to this day. As a result, it is common to encounter the idea that this school inaugurated the modern teaching of music—an approach that, in certain respects, is thought to persist even now in conservatories, and sometimes in universities, around the world. But how, in fact, was music teaching—more specifically, the teaching of composition and music theory—actually carried out in Paris? And were so many paradigms truly overturned with the founding of the Paris Conservatoire?[20]

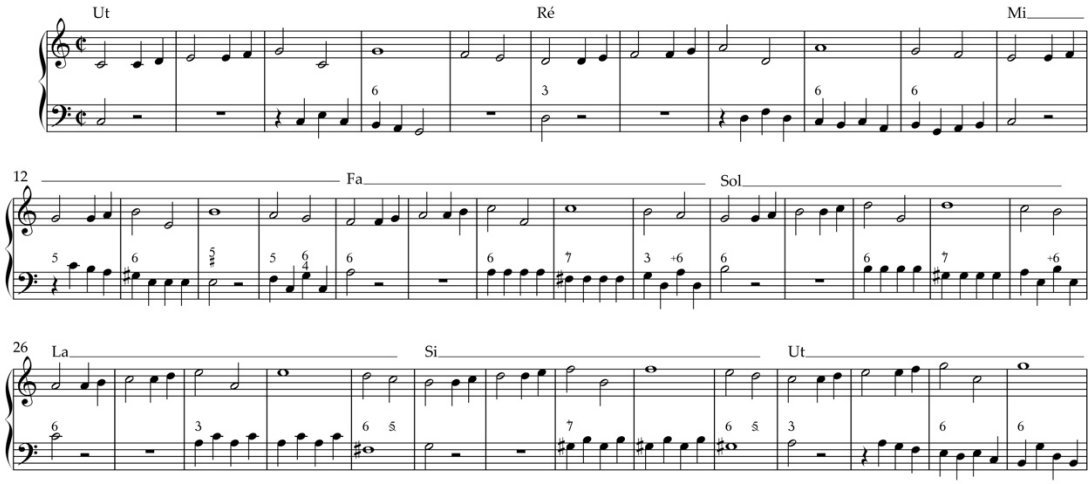
Around 1840, Joseph Zimmerman (1785–1853) published in Paris a remarkable three-volume work entitled *Encyclopédie du Pianiste Compositeur* [Encyclopedia of the Pianist-Composer][21]. Zimmerman was a highly significant figure in Parisian musical life: a resident of the *quartier* La Nouvelle Athènes, he was both neighbor and friend to Frédéric Chopin (1811–1849), and the host of one of the city's most frequented salons. At the Paris Conservatoire, Zimmerman served as professor of piano for generations of virtuoso pianists and renowned composers, including Charles-Valentin Alkan (1813–1888), Charles Gounod (1818–1893), César Franck (1822–1890), George Bizet (1838–1875), among others. In the preface to his *Encyclopédie*, Zimmerman (1840, vol. 1, pp. II–III) states that, above all, a student aspiring to become a pianist and composer should devote themselves to the practice of *solfège*. Indeed, it is now known that musical initiation through *solfège* was a prerequisite for enrolling in other disciplines at the Conservatoire (Masci 2023, p. 77), making it easy to draw a parallel with the Neapolitan curricular sequence. Moreover, it is already well known that Italian *solfeggi* were often used, many of which had been published in France since the late eighteenth century—such as the *Solfèges d'Italie* (Bèche; Levesque 1772) and other collections, including those later edited by Alexandre Choron.

Although *solfège* lessons in Paris were taught using the fixed-Do system—rather than Italian hexachordal solmization—the general characteristics of *solfège*

[20] My aim here is to emphasize eighteenth-century continuities in the nineteenth-century pedagogical tradition; therefore, I will not address how the disciplinary organization of the Parisian curriculum might be understood through a Foucauldian lens as a "modern institution producing knowledge." On this subject, see Masci (2023).

[21] For an overview of this work, see Teriete (2020).

collections are quite similar to their Italian counterparts. They usually consist of accompanied two-part pieces (whether in a melodic aria style or in an imitative style) and sometimes progress from simple, unadorned contrapuntal patterns to more embellished ones, suggesting that considerable vocalization was employed to emphasize melodic structures (Ex. 4).[22]



Example 4: Transcription of *Solfège* n .37 (bars 1–39) from *Principes Élémentaires de Musique* (Catel; Riguel 1816, vol. 1, p. 23)]

In the third volume of Zimmerman's *Encyclopédie*, concise "treatises" are presented on all the elements a pianist would require in order to perfect themselves in the art of composition—from harmony, basso continuo, and advice on the improvisation of preludes, through counterpoint and fugue, and culminating in orchestral and vocal score (*partition*), instrumentation and accompaniment—following, moreover, a sequence in some respects similar to that found in Naples. It is noteworthy that Zimmerman includes fugues as *exemplars* for coping and studying, in the same manner as in Nicola Sala's *Regole* of counterpoint; indeed, Sala's work is explicitly cited as a source for the study of reading and transposing vocal fugues at the keyboard[23] (Zimmerman 1840,

[22] An example of such sources is the *Principes Élémentaires de Musique* (Catel; Riguel 1816), which presents dozens of *solfèges* on the scale, in which the principal notes are emphasized by a written syllable.

[23] This underscores the relevance of Nicola Sala in nineteenth-century Paris. It is worth noting that Sala's rules form a substantial part of the core of *Principes de Composition des Écoles d'Italie* (1808), published by Alexandre Choron in the French city. Zimmerman, however, suggests practicing the transposition of fugues found in the "treatises of Sala, Cherubini, Fétis, Reicha, etc." (1840, vol. 2, p. 64). This makes it plausible that Zimmerman was referring to the original

vol. 2, p. 64). Another Neapolitan author praised in the *Encyclopédie* is Fedele Fenaroli (1730–1818), whose *partimenti*, according to Zimmerman, should be practiced during the study of basso continuo (Zimmerman 1840, vol. 3, p. 18).

Fenaroli was certainly the most studied author of *partimenti* in the nineteenth century, with a complete bilingual edition of his rules and *partimenti* published in Paris under the direction of Emanuele Imbimbo (Fenaroli 1814). Fenaroli's reception was highly positive; years later, François Fétis (1784–1871) remarked that this translation had "finally completed the means of instruction for both written harmony and *ex-tempore* accompaniment" (1827, p. 562).[24] It is noteworthy that the term *partimento*, which in the eighteenth century was restricted to Naples—not even in Bologna was it commonly used[25]—appears ubiquitously in nineteenth-century French treatises and methods on harmony, counterpoint, and accompaniment.[26] This underscores an influence that was not generically Italian but specifically Neapolitan.

It is important to note that, unlike many methods commissioned by the Conservatoire, most of the Italian-derived material published in France during the first decades of the nineteenth century was not primarily intended for use in that institution, but rather in the *Maîtrises*: the leading editor and disseminator of theory derived from *partimenti* and *solfeggi* was undoubtedly Alexandre Choron (1771–1834), who spearheaded the development of the *Maîtrises* curriculum. These schools of music, affiliated with the Church, had been closed

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publication of the *Regole* and, given its rarity, possibly to the copy preserved to this day in Paris. For a more complete understanding of Sala's reception in France, see Skamletz (2021) and Meidhof (2021).

[24] In the original: "*La publication d'une traduction de l'ouvrage de Fenaroli (Regole per i principianti), avec les partimenti, a enfin complété les moyens d'instruction, soit pour l'harmonie écrite, soit pour l'accompagnament*."

[25] The pedagogical tradition of Giovanni Battista Martini (1706–1784) in Bologna, and of his disciples Stanislao Mattei (1750–1825) and Luigi Antonio Sabbatini (1732–1809)—the latter of whom settled in Padua—is very similar to the Neapolitan one, with extensive use of *partimenti*, although these were usually referred to simply as *bassi* (basses). Much of the didactic work of these authors was also exported beyond the Alps, as in the case of Sabbatini's *solfeggi* edited by Choron (Sabbatini 181–), Mattei's *partimenti* edited by Hiller in Germany (Hiller 1899), and the inclusion of these authors' works in *Principes de Composition des Écoles d'Italie* (Choron 1808).

[26] The influence that Parisian training exerted in other countries explain why the term partimento can be found in early 20th century sources in countries, such as Savino de Benedicts' harmony treatise written and published in Brazil in 1920.

during the Revolution but were reopened somewhat later, owing to widespread skepticism regarding the Paris Conservatoire's ability to train lyric composers to the same standard as their Italian counterparts—a doubt fueled both by the institution's military origins[27] (as the former *École gratuite de la Garde Nationale*) and by the scandal surrounding the first opera it had commissioned[28].

Nevertheless, the pedagogy of what we now call music theory within the Paris Conservatoire was also imbued with *italianità* ("Italianate characteristics"), as should already be evident from the earlier citations of Fétis and Zimmerman—both professors at that institution. Still, it may be appropriate to say that one of the most significant Italian influences on Parisian music theory was the dissemination of *marches d'harmonie*—the French counterpart to *moti del basso*. Their study consisted in the prescription of accompaniments for sequential bass movements, which were exemplified and often realized in *disposizioni*[29]. Zimmerman considered them useful for improvisation, recommending that they be memorized and describing them as harmonic–contrapuntal progressions that have no single author but "belong to everyone"[30] (Zimmerman 1840, p. 18). Although *disposizioni* manuscripts containing such movements were extremely widespread in Naples, one of the most complete collections was in fact compiled in Paris by Luigi Cherubini (1760–1842), an Italian composer who settled in France and served as both professor and director of the Conservatoire. Initially

[27] The Paris Conservatoire emerged after the French Revolution through the merger of the *École Royale de Chant* and the *École gratuite de la Garde Nationale*. In its early years, therefore, it still placed a strong emphasis on music intended for civic events and on the teaching of wind instruments.

[28] As part of the restructuring of the Conservatoire at the turn of the eighteenth to the nineteenth century, Charles-Simon Catel was commissioned to produce the opera *Sémiramis*, with the aim of demonstrating the "new" institution's ability to train opera composers, as well as a treatise on harmony (to be discussed later). The controversies, power struggles, and history surrounding these productions have been thoroughly examined by Michel Masci (2023).

[29] To clarify this term: *disposizione* in Naples referred to open-score writing, generally vocal, as opposed to *intavolatura*, which denoted the two-staff notation typical of harpsichord music and, later, piano music. In France, open-score writing—whether vocal or orchestral—was generally referred to as *partition*.

[30] "Harmonic progressions [*marches d'harmonie*] are sequences of chords that belong to everyone; they are regarded as ready-made formulas that anyone may employ without hesitation. They are extremely useful for preluding." *[Les progressions harmoniques sont des séries d'accords appartenant à tout le monde, elles sont considérées comme des formules toutes faites que chacun emploie sans scrupule ; elles sont d'un excellent usage pour préluder]* (Zimmerman 1840, p. 18).

circulated in manuscript, this collection was published posthumously and sold to the general public as the "harmonists' *vade mecum*" (Cherubini 1847, p. 1).

The *marches d'harmonie* represent not only a theoretical–practical influence—that is, in the manner of studying counterpoint and harmony—but these sequential patterns also lay at the heart of theoretical–speculative debates and played an important role in defining and establishing the discipline of harmony at the Paris Conservatoire. At the turn of the eighteenth to the nineteenth century, a harmony treatise was commissioned with the aim of unifying and guiding the teaching of this discipline,[31] since up to that point each professor had taught according to his own premises. This had given rise to a sharp division of opinion between those who adhered to the tradition stemming from Jean-Philippe Rameau's fundamental-bass theory and those aligned with basso continuo and *partimento*—as exemplified by Jean-Joseph Rodolphe and Honoré Langlé, respectively. In the end, it was Charles-Simon Catel's treatise (1802) that was chosen by the judging commission, as it was deemed capable of attempting to reconcile both sides—something, to some extent, irreconcilable.

> Catel's presentation of these four basic elements – natural harmony, artificial harmony, cadences and *marches* – represent a middle ground between Rodolphe's fundamental bass and Langlé's figured bass approaches […] The harmonic theory here then is mixed, at times organizing the presentation of elements in terms of chord roots and cadence types like Rodolphe, while at other moments presenting elements according to intervals, sonorities, and sequences, similar to Langlé. […] the indication by Méhul and Cherubini that Catel's text collected all that had been debated by the commission suggests that the precise combination of elements enumerated by Catel reflects those aspects of the competing texts upon which the commission could agree. […] Catel's text suggests the nature of the compromise struck by the commission, particularly in regard to Rameau's theories of fundamental bass. (Masci 2023, pp. 34–36)

Nevertheless, it is evident that Catel "minimized the role of Rameau's theories while drawing on contemporary accompaniment, thorough bass, and Italian *partimento* manuals" (Masci 2023, p. 17). His treatise should be regarded

[31] The attempt to standardize teaching methods was part of a nationalist desire for the newly created Conservatoire to surpass its Neapolitan and Venetian counterparts. In this new institution, students would not be solely underprivileged orphans, and instruction would not be subject to the personal "stamp" of each individual teacher (Masci 2023, p. 20). In Naples, by contrast, the rivalry between the school of Leonardo Leo and that of Francesco Durante became quite well known.

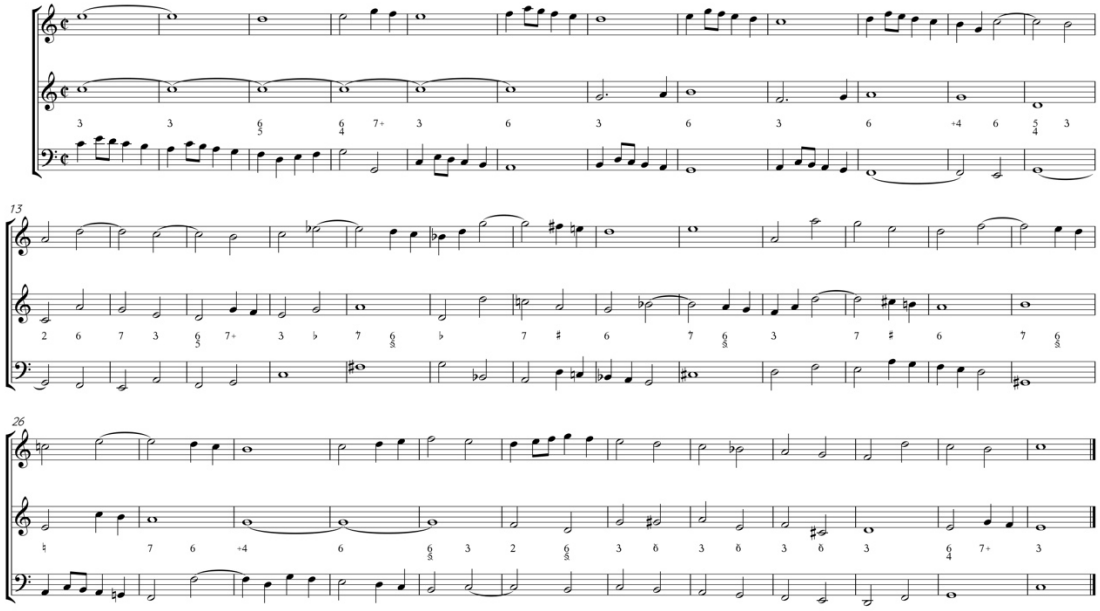
as theoretical, although it contains little verbal text, and may be understood as a catalogue of elements to be addressed in the harmony courses at the Conservatoire. To grasp how these elements were actually taught in practice, it is necessary to consult other sources.

It is worth noting that the principal criticism of Rameau during this period was not directed at the *basse fondamentale* itself, nor at the concept of chord inversion, but rather at his theory of harmonic succession. In the view of musicians such as Choron, Fétis, and Catel, this theory sanctioned progressions that were never used, while rejecting others that were in common use and have its origin precisely at counterpoint patterns of the *marches harmoniques*. Furthermore, by considering "harmony in isolation," Rameau was thought to draw false conclusions regarding the origin of certain dissonant chords, which in fact arose from melodic procedures.

As with the study of eighteenth-century Neapolitan sources, the examination of student notebooks from the former conservatories helps to clarify how accompaniment and *harmonie pratique* were actually studied. For this reason, Michel Masci (2023) based his research on the notebook (F-Pn Ms.8303) of Aimé Leborne (1797–1866)—produced during lessons at Henri Berton's (1767–1844) class —to shed light on how Catel's "elements" were studied in practice. Furthermore, this research also revealed that the deductive order of chords set out in the treatise was not always followed to the letter, with actual practice favoring an ordering still more inclined toward the position of Rameau's detractors.

Leborne received an exceptionally intensive training in written harmony: over a period of nine months, he attended three lessons per week, and at each lesson he was given new *basse donnée* (literally "given basses," equivalent to *partimenti*), which he was generally required to realize first in three voices and only afterwards in four. Altogether, this amounted to 150 lessons. The content of each exercise followed a progressive order, beginning with the chords of "natural harmony" prescribed by Catel, and later extending to all the possibilities of "artificial harmony." What is particularly striking, however, is that the succession of chords always appeared in a contextualized setting, with an emphasis on the contrapuntal patterns characteristic of the style. In other words, each lesson was structured around specific bass motions (*marches harmoniques*) that supported typical voice-leading conductions and generated the studied

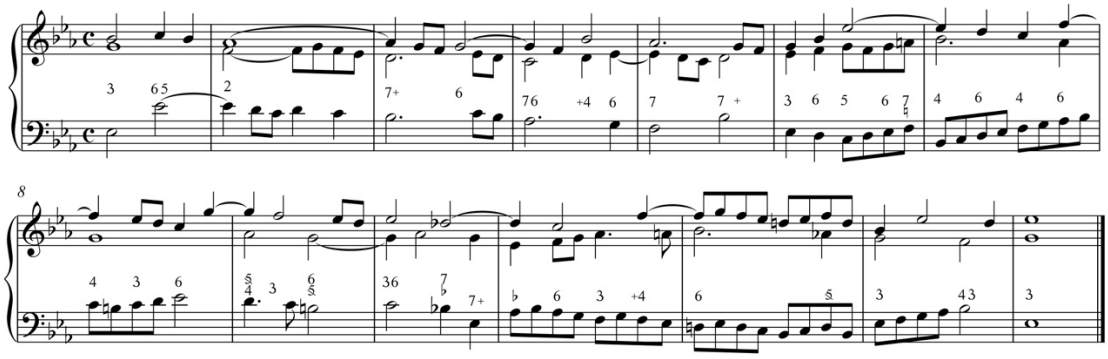
harmonies (Ex. 5). Thus, it may be said that students learned contrapuntal placements in much the same way one acquires the structures of a native spoken language. In addition, this approach quickly enabled students to realize unfigured basses, in a manner very similar to what occurred in Neapolitan *partimento* training.



Example 5: Transcription of Leborne's realization of a *basse donnée* (F-Pn Ms.8303, p. 79) made during his 69th lesson in written harmony at Paris Conservatoire on 12 April 1813.

Many scholars have argued that, unlike in Naples, the practice of *partimento* in France was confined to the teaching of written harmony in a predominantly vertical realization. However, a closer examination of the sources suggests that the situation may be somewhat more complex. François Fétis (1827, p. 562), for example, states that *partimento* was realized both in written form and at the keyboard, and in his *Méthode Élémentaire et abrégée d'Harmonie et d'Accompagnement* (1823) he describes and illustrates two types of realization: a verticalized one (*accompagnement plaquée*), and another more melodic and ornamented (*accompagnement figurée*), the latter characterized by a prevailing three-voice texture, as shown in his musical example (Fétis 1823, p. 21). The "figured accompaniment" is, therefore, a realization of *partimenti* very similar to that practiced in Naples, capable of resulting in a true musical composition (Ex. 6). It is also worth noting that the predominant use of three voices was not limited to the "solo" accompaniment of *partimenti*, but was also applied to the

accompaniment of *solfèges*, as attested by Zimmerman both in his *Encyclopédie* (Zimmerman 1840, p. 18) and in his basso continuo manual intended for the professors of the Conservatoire (Zimmerman 18--, p. 7).[32] These striking similarities to the Italian *partimento* realization approach are not limited to style, but also carry theoretical implications. Catel (1802, p. 68) himself states that, in realizing a figured bass, it is sometimes sufficient to avoid writing a fourth voice, since the purest harmony is formed out of three parts.



Example 6: Transcription of a written partimento realization made by Fétis (1823, p. 23) to exemplify the style of *accompagnement figurée*.

Catel's treatise remained for decades the guiding reference for the discipline within the Conservatoire[33]; even when new speculative theories were developed in an attempt to explain the innovations then in vogue in mid-nineteenth-century compositions, these were only marginally, and often reluctantly, incorporated into treatises on *harmonie pratique*. For this reason, the so-called "theoretical–practical" treatises typical of the second half of the

[32] The predominance of three-voice accompaniment stems from more than one reason. One is that it reduces the likelihood of contrapuntal errors, while also reflecting the eighteenth-century view that the three-voice disposition is the most fundamental of all, the fourth voice often being unnecessary as it merely doubles a note of the chord. Moreover, playing only three voices at the keyboard affords the fingers greater freedom to execute diminutions and, consequently, to produce a realization more akin to a written composition. In Zimmerman's words: "I recommend accompanying in three parts rather than four; because, with fewer doubled parts, the chances of producing parallel octaves will be less frequent, and, besides, the fingers—being less engaged in holding chords—will be able to move more easily to add a few passing notes or imitations, which give elegance and interest to the harmony" (Zimmerman 1840, p. 18).

[33] For an extensive study of the historical, sociological, and theoretical–practical context of the formation of the discipline of harmony at the Paris Conservatoire in the nineteenth century, see *Charles-Simon Catel's Treatise on Harmony: And the Disciplining of Harmony at the Early Paris Conservatory* (Masci 2023).

nineteenth century began to emerge. These works often employed strategies of graphic design and page layout to distinguish what was deemed essential to practice from that which belonged purely to speculative theory, and vice versa.[34]

Purely speculative theory in France during this period was aimed at a new amateur middle class, but it had little influence on pedagogy within the Paris Conservatoire. Fétis, for instance, was a staunch defender of Catel in the 1820s, but gradually became more critical as he developed his own speculative theory of tonality, which he published serially in his self-authored music journal[35]—a genre of writing that no longer exists today. The consumption of such literature was linked to the historical music concerts also promoted by Fétis, which enabled the new intellectual and bourgeois public to appreciate and judge the repertoire heard *a priori* (Masci 2023, chap. 7). Nevertheless, when teaching music theory to talented young students and aspiring composers, Fétis continued to employ the traditional, prescriptive methods of instruction, as he himself made explicit:

> For a long time now I have no longer given lessons in harmony; but, on occasion, when I have encountered gifted natures, I have wished to provide them with a complete education, and almost always fifteen days have been enough for me to teach them all of harmony considered as a science. As for practice, which can only be acquired through exercise, I directed them to work at the piano on *partimenti*, and immediately set them to [written] counterpoint.[36] (Fétis 1853, p. 251)

4. Conclusion

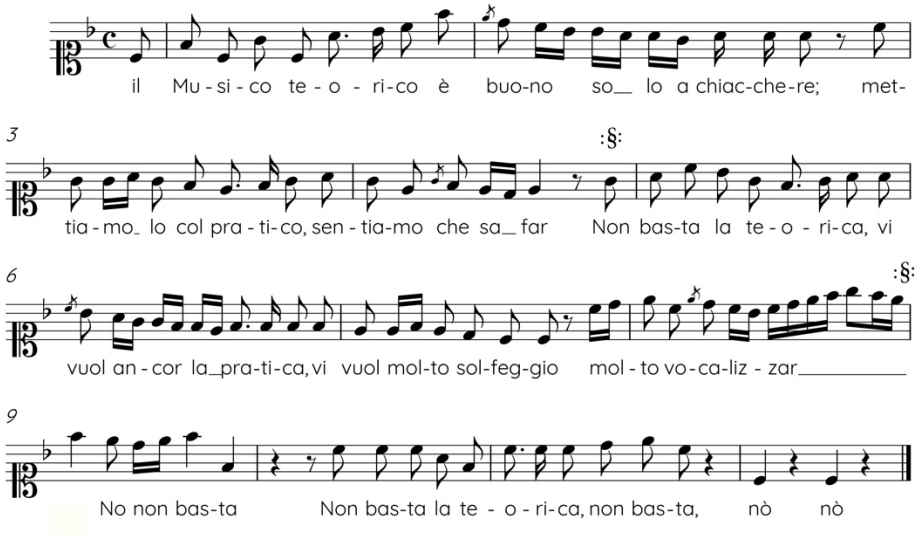
> "*The theoretical musician is good only for chatting; let's place him beside the practical musician and listen what he can actually do. Theory alone is not enough—*

[34] On this subject, see Masci (2023, chap. 7).

[35] The *Revue Musicale*, which can be consulted at the following link: https://ripm.org/?page=JournalInfo&ABB=RMU (accessed 29 September 2023).

[36] In the original: "*Depuis longtemps je ne donne plus de leçons d'harmonie ; mais, par exception, lorsque j'ai trouvé d'heureuses natures, j'ai voulu faire leur éducation complète, et presque toujours quinze jours pour m'ont suffi pour leur enseigner toute l'harmonie considérée comme science. A l'égard de la pratique, qui ne s'acquiert que par l'exercice, je leur indiquais le travail à faire au piano sur les partimenti, et je les mettais immédiatement au contre-point.*"

there must also be practice; there must be much solfeggio, much vocalizing. Theory alone is not enough, no, no."[37]



Example 7: Transcription of Luigi Antonio Sabattini's solfeggio-canon. The *signum congruentia* in bars 4 and 8 indicates the *comes* entries.

Given the vast corpus of theoretical–practical sources on harmony, counterpoint, and accompaniment—of which only a small fraction has been presented in this article[38]—in which there is a clear Italian influence, particularly Neapolitan and Bolognese, we may return to the question that motivated this study: Why would a renowned musicologist such as Carl Dahlhaus have stated, a few decades ago, that only the "speculative treatises of Tartini" and the "erudite writings of Padre Martini" were able to exert influence "beyond the Alps"?

A first argument might lie in the fact that Dahlhaus perhaps placed emphasis on the *speculative* sources, thereby immediately excluding the entire

[37] Text of a solfeggio in the form of a three-part canon by Luigi Antonio Sabbatini (1789, p. 36), intended to be sung by groups of young students (Ex. 7). In the original: "*Il Musico teorico è buono solo a chiachere, mettiamolo col pratico, sentiamo che sa far. Non basta la teorica, vi vuole anche la pratica vi vuol molto solfeggio, molto vocalizar. No basta, non basta la teorica, non basta, no, no.*"

[38] It should be noted that I was neither the first to write on this subject nor did I intend to exhaust it. Without doubt, the influence of the Neapolitan theoretical–practical tradition in other countries during the nineteenth century—principally France, but also Germany—has been the focus of research by several authors over the past decade. For further study, see Cafiero (2007); Diergarten (2011); Gjerdingen (2020); Menke (2021); Curtice (2021); Giovani (2021); Skamletz (2021); Meidhof (2021); Masci (2023); and Carlisi (2023).

tradition of *harmonie pratique* (accompaniment), practical counterpoint, and *partimenti* from the concept of "theory." This argument, however, is weak, since Dahlhaus himself had identified before three distinct categories within Western music theory: regulative, speculative, and analytical.[39] Moreover, from a speculative standpoint, the theories linked to the *partimenti* tradition directly influenced Catel's treatise and those of his successors.

The second point concerns the use of the adjective *erudite.* This suggests that Dahlhaus was not referring to Martini's rich materials on accompaniment, such as the *Libro per accompagnare* (Martini 2020), even though this was precisely the material used in the training of high-level composers. The terminology also reflects a characteristic perspective that gained strength in the twentieth century, one that split theory from practice, placing the former in an elevated (and thus "erudite") position in relation to the latter (mundane).

Thirdly, there is the very formation of the concept and cult of classical music, which created and favored a predominantly Germanic canon—not only of repertoire but also of theory—a discussion that would certainly go beyond the scope of this article.

Fourthly, and no less importantly, the incompleteness of sources tied to the oral tradition poses serious challenges to musicology. How should we approach laconic sources in which there are often more musical examples to be realized than verbalized theory? In this regard, the positivism that shaped *Musikwissenschaft* in the past century favored prolix, scientistic sources—such as Rameau's treatises or the German theoretical works of the late nineteenth century—over practical treatises like Sala's *Regole*, *partimento* and solfeggio manuscripts, or even Catel's *Traité*. Moreover, I would like to emphasize that traditional musicological methodologies for the study of historical treatises are not always sufficient to understand this type of raw source, where the oral dimension is missing. For this reason, practical approaches typical of *artistic*

[39] According to Thomas Christensen (2007, p. 11): "Simply put, speculative theory concerns an 'ontological contemplation' of musical essences and materials, their basis in number and acoustics. […] 'Regulative', according to Dahlhaus, constitutes the broad realm of 'practical' and 'poetical' writings that instructed students on the rudiments and syntactic rules of music. Finally, a third, more critical tradition arose in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries […] that can be roughly grouped within the locution of 'music analysis'. Here the concern is with the intensive study and contemplation of musical masterworks as models for compositional study and aesthetic appreciation."

research, such as *reenactment*, can be especially useful to the modern scholar. In fact, some of my conclusions about Catel's methodology only came to light when I used Leborne's notebook to teach harmony to a student, emulating not only the lessons themselves but also the regularity of three weekly classes, as was the case in 1812–13.

Finally, I would like to emphasize that the study of historical methodologies for teaching music theory calls into question the very dichotomy between "theory and practice," "thinking and doing," so prevalent in today's institutions of higher education. Is such a division truly useful to the music student? Understanding theoretical disciplines as forms of practical music fosters greater integration among different kinds of knowledge and may also explain the absence of aural skills as a separate discipline in the former conservatories of Naples and Paris.[40]

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