

Article

Is Liturgy Art? Post-Secular Hybridity in João Madureira's *Missa de Pentecostes*

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Abstract

This article addresses recent critiques of secularisation as a linear explanatory model for religious change in European societies, proposing that contemporary artistic creation is a fertile site for observing new interrelations between the secular and the religious. Focusing on João Madureira's *Missa de Pentecostes* (2010), composed for the ensemble 'Sete Lágrimas' and part of a cultural project by the Roman Catholic community of 'Capela do Rato' (Lisbon), the study analyses how this work creatively reconfigures the traditional Mass form. By juxtaposing the Ordinary sections (e.g., Kyrie, Gloria) with the Proper sections (e.g., Introitus, Sequentia), which incorporate non-canonical Portuguese poetic texts, the composition creates a hybrid space in which ritual and artistic modes interact and mutually re-legitimise each other. Using a heterological interpretative framework inspired by Michel de Certeau, the article highlights the tensions and exchanges between ritual and aesthetic logics. The analysis draws on key theoretical concepts including Jean Rancière's notions of consensus and dissensus, Pierre Bourdieu's theory of ritual and habitus, Paul Ricoeur's philosophy of translation as hospitality, and Pierre Lévy's concept of universalism without totality. The findings suggest that Madureira's work enacts a process of poetic re-signification of religious memory, opening new possibilities for hybrid ritual–artistic practices. These practices transform ritual time-space into an interface that fosters plural and non-totalising forms of spiritual belonging.

Keywords: post-secularity; ritual aesthetics; liturgy; artistic hybridity; João Madureira; heterology



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1. Introduction: Problem and Method

This introductory section has two objectives: Firstly, to situate debates on the 'post-secular' at their point of origin, in order to define the major interpretative milestones relevant to understanding the use of the 'post-secular' category in artistic creation. Secondly, to outline the study's methodological design, which combines a conceptual review essay with a case study.¹

1.1. *The Religious and the Secular: Tensions and Mediations*

This study employs the category of 'post-secular' as a foundation to develop a comprehensive analysis of the tensions and interactions between artistic and religious agency. The term gained prominence in the period following 9/11, mainly through the work of Habermas ([Habermas 2008a](#), [2008b](#)), who sought to reconceptualise the European religious context by acknowledging the ongoing presence and public significance of religion in societies undergoing secularisation. Of relevance to this analysis is Habermas's focus on

the semantics of 'translation' in his theoretical framework. Habermas contends that the post-secular world is defined by the coexistence of secular and religious reasoning, which calls for the enhancement of 'social translation' skills. He stresses the importance of articulating religious arguments in language accessible to the public sphere, in keeping with his Theory of Communicative Action, which distinguishes between the pre-institutional domain of civil society, where religious discourse circulates freely, and the institutional domain of the state, governed by public reason. In addition to the traditional principle of 'separation,' Habermas asserts that religion possesses cognitive and moral value, contributing to discussions on justice, solidarity, and public ethics. Consequently, he proposes a political philosophy in which, within a democracy, religion should not be excluded from public deliberation, nor should the state abandon its neutrality. This approach ensures the equal inclusion of citizens regardless of religious affiliation or worldview.

José Casanova had anticipated this debate through the concept of 'public religion,' which places the discussion of secularisation within a pluralistic and global context, emphasising the importance of the comparative study of forms of public religion across multiple secularities and diverse contexts, rather than relying on a Eurocentric perspective focused on the privatisation of religion. In his thesis on de-privatisation, articulated in *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Casanova 1994, 2002), Casanova contends that religions actively emerge within the modern public sphere, challenging the secular-religious dichotomy and facilitating a post-secular era in which states and religious institutions negotiate pluralism in various global scenarios. This interpretative approach, which examines contextual secularisation, underscores that processes of modernisation do not necessarily exclude religion from the public arena (Moniz 2023; Morrison 2021; Furseth 2017; Kippenberg et al. 2013). Connolly extends this perspective by highlighting that public religion is particularly evident at the level of micropolitics, through multimodal practices that construct subjectivity and intersubjectivity. Micropolitics is expressed in religious communities, families, universities, corporations, trade unions, and both traditional and new media, each with its respective influences (Connolly 2011).

In *A Secular Age*, Charles Taylor provides a significant reinterpretation of secularisation and the emergence of the post-secular context (Taylor 2007). Rather than viewing secularity as a simple loss of religion, described as the 'theory of subtraction,' Taylor presents a 'history of construction,' in which Western societies transition from an enchanted era to an 'immanent frame.' Within this frame, religious belief becomes one possibility among several existential options. The secular age is thus characterised by a plurality of beliefs and lifestyles, as well as a transformation in the 'conditions of belief' whereby faith becomes a reflexive and optional choice. According to Taylor, public neutrality, rather than merely the separation of church and state, guarantees the equal expression of all worldviews. In alignment with Habermas, Taylor addresses the post-secular challenge of constructing pluralistic democracies that can accommodate religion without being governed by it.

The post-secular 'turn' cannot be understood without considering its internecine critiques (Bielik-Robson 2019; Kaltsas 2019), Talal Asad being one of the most influential voices on these critiques. In *Formations of the Secular*, Talal Asad offers a radical genealogical critique of Habermas and Taylor's theories, questioning the very legitimacy of the concept of 'post-secular' (Asad 2003). In his view, secularity is not a neutral or rational stage of modernity, but a historical and political formation inseparable from the colonial project and Western power dynamics. Far from representing a universal condition, the secular is a technique of government that produces boundaries between religion and politics, between public and private, and defines what is considered 'religious' according to Eurocentric parameters. Thus, Habermas's proposal to 'translate' religious language into secular reason, for Asad, would be an operation of power that imposes a single legitimate rationality and

marginalises alternative forms of knowledge. His criticism extends to theorists such as Casanova and Connolly, whom Asad associates with new forms of secularism that operate as a project of symbolic and epistemic domination. Instead of reintegrating religion into secular moulds, Asad proposes a 'decentred plurality' that deconstructs hegemonic modern narratives and paves the way for multiple rationalities and modes of existence. In his view, debates about 'faith and reason' in Europe lead to the question of who has the power to define the terms of that dialogue.

In this debate, Hans Joas critiques Max Weber's disenchantment paradigm as an overly linear and conceptually imprecise account of modern religious dynamics (Joas 2021b). By contrast with Ernst Troeltsch, whose approach allows for recurrent forms of sacralisation, Weber's framework remains oriented towards an inevitable narrative of loss (Joas 2021a). Joas advances an alternative centred on the enduring "power of the sacred," understood through ongoing processes of sacralisation, thereby aligning with post-secular perspectives that stress religion's continued vitality. Joas argues that Weber's notion of disenchantment (*Entzauberung*) conflates distinct processes into a single world-historical trajectory. Joas thus privileges analytical differentiation over wholesale rejection, offering a more adequate account of modern religious pluralism.

Staudigl's important critical review emphasises that the constellation of debates on the 'post-secular' repeatedly focuses on the foundations of politics (Staudigl 2020). In his view, the emergence of the post-secular age is a consequence of the transformation of the Westphalian paradigm and of the weakening of the nation-state in the face of globalisation, resulting in profound changes to the relationship between religion, politics and sovereignty. At the heart of this transformation is a critique of liberal secularism, understood not only as a principle of tolerance and freedom of conscience, but also as a device of power that shapes subjectivities, regulates acceptable religious practices, and defines the limits of what is 'spiritually legitimate.' Thus, secularism is not limited to the separation between the political and the religious. It is also a disciplinary mechanism that manufactures identities and controls forms of social life under the guise of neutrality and rationality. From this perspective, Staudigl links secularism to violence. He points out that the categories of 'religious violence' and 'rational violence of the state' are complementary. Secularism justifies the exercise of power and exclusion in the name of peace, security, and universal humanity. In doing so, it operates an 'economy of violence' that defines what legitimate religion is, and what should be marginalised. The post-secular constellation thus reveals an ambiguous tension. On the one hand, there is a need to manage threats posed by certain religious forms. On the other hand, there is a sense of emptiness and powerlessness in the face of neoliberal modernity, which dismantles traditional mechanisms of social cohesion.

The constellation of discourses on post-secularity, encompassing both its theses and antitheses, highlights the emergence of a hybrid field where the boundaries between the secular and the religious become unstable. The resulting tensions and exchanges are shaped by diverse logics that are clarified only within specific contexts. This perspective is valuable for analysing the interactions between various forms of artistic and religious agency, recognising the ambivalence inherent in modernity (Bauman 2007). Contemporary art re-enchants spheres once deemed disenchanted, mirroring Joas's sacralisation dynamics through rituals, wonder, and transcendence. Post-secular art blurs boundaries, invoking mystical experiences that resist Weberian rationalisation and align with Joas's view of ongoing ideal formations. Examples include participatory works that sacralise communal creativity, evidencing how religion permeates into aesthetic domains.

The relationships between aesthetics, art, and religion in modernity are complex and multifaceted. This study inverts Paul Thek's assertion that 'Art is Liturgy' (Kolumba Kunstmuseum 2013) and asks instead: 'Is Liturgy Art?' This reframing introduces new avenues

for scholarly inquiry, particularly into the liminal spaces where religious and secular domains intersect and where tension and exchange are evident. This study invites a relational reading of the Mass by framing the liturgy as a relational artwork whose meaning arises in co-presence with the faithful. In exploring this relationship, it is crucial to understand the bidirectional flow of agency between liturgy and music. As the liturgy informs and shapes the musical compositions used in its ceremonies, it is, in turn, influenced and reshaped by these musical expressions, prompting a reimagining of liturgical consciousness. To fully engage with this question, it is essential to interrogate the category of 'art' itself. What criteria are employed to determine if liturgy can be considered art? By explicitly defining what constitutes art, we may unsettle familiar boundaries and reveal hidden assumptions, inviting readers into this definitional labour, which may open renewed lines of inquiry—positioning both the congregation and the composer as co-producers can underscore the liminal spaces that will be explored. In this context, it is crucial to address the politics of participation. Who holds the power in these aesthetic performances? Who is likely to be marginalised or empowered by this reframing? These questions not only broaden the scope of the study but also add a critical dimension to our understanding of liturgical aesthetics, engaging a wider audience beyond theological specialists.

The musical artefact under consideration functions within a ritual sequence. Although the work emphasises the composer's craft, it is actualised within a ritual context. In the Roman Catholic Mass, this context is defined by a specific liturgical action: the Church, as a visible institution, worships God on behalf of all the faithful. Through this act, the Church presents itself as a 'mystery/sacrament' of unity and salvation. As articulated in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*: 'Rightly, then, the liturgy is considered as an exercise of the priestly office of Jesus Christ,' in which 'the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ performs the whole public worship, that is, by the Head and His members' (n. 7). The public character of the liturgy derives from its subject the Mystical Body of Christ. It serves both to glorify God and to sanctify people through tangible signs, under the authority of the Church.

This study investigates the tension and negotiation between the institutional logic of liturgy and the autonomy of the musical work within ritual, addressing both the universality of institutional action and the specificity of aesthetic mediation. To deepen our understanding of this tension, it is necessary to frame the concept of musical autonomy historically. The notion of the 'autonomous artwork' emerged primarily in the post-Enlightenment era, a time when art began to be valued for its own sake, independent of religious or social utility. This historical shift is crucial to understanding why musical autonomy might come into conflict with ritual norms. Tracing this development can shed light on what is at stake in this case study.

Hybridity is an important analytical framework in Cultural and Religious Studies. It helps interpret artistic works in which ritual-religious and aesthetic-spiritual elements are deeply intertwined. This approach resists reducing such works to either secular or sacred categories. Influenced by Homi Bhabha's postcolonial theory, hybridity views culture as emerging in 'third spaces' of ambivalence (Bhabha 1994; Kuortti and Nyman 2007). In these spaces, binary boundaries like sacred/profane or religious/secular dissolve through negotiation and mimicry. In post-secular contexts, this framework shows how contemporary art shifts boundaries. It fosters hybrid forms that challenge traditional separations and highlight the continued presence of religion in modernity (Cozma and Giorda 2025; Ivanov 2025).

In Cultural Studies, hybridity challenges essentialist ideas of identity. It shows that identities are fluid and shaped by globalisation, migration, and colonial histories (García Canclini 1990). This is evident in diasporic literature and media. A specific example is the emergence of Caribbean identity, which developed from the colonial encounter between

European settlers and African slaves (Murdoch 2014). This intersection gave rise to Creole cultures, in which language, religion, and traditions blended into new forms that were distinct from their original components, illustrating the historical depth of hybridity. In Religious Studies, hybridity also applies to syncretic practices such as Afro-Christian blends and transnational spiritualities, where sacred rituals adapt to profane settings, such as urban environments and digital platforms. However, even within these syncretic spaces, marginal voices remain unheard. For instance, in Afro-Christian practices, the narratives of indigenous women might be eclipsed by dominant interpretations. Bringing such perspectives to the forefront complicates the narrative and reveals the power dynamics within hybridity. Post-secular theory expands on these perspectives. It sees the resurgence of religion as the creation of new hybrid forms, not as a return to the old sacred/profane divide. This process blurs clear boundaries through urban sacralisation, heritagisation, and transreligiosity.

Hybridity is especially visible in art that blends ritual–religious and aesthetic–spiritual features. This mix creates tensions that resist easy classification. Sacred spaces are often repurposed in visual communication. For example, Hopi tribal representations blend indigenous rituals with secular aesthetics to address cultural boundaries (Kemper 2012). Urban religious sites depicted in soap operas and installations show how places combine devotional practices with commercialised spirituality (Ayyildiz 2024; Thouki 2022). This results in experiences that are neither purely pious nor only a spectacle. Such works represent Bhabha’s idea of mimicry—these works seem sacred but also profane—and create new meanings through the interplay of embodiment, materiality, and transcendence. By inviting audience participation, these artworks facilitate a relational experience that transcends mere observation. Viewers become part of the cultural dialogue, engaging with the piece on a tactile and emotional level, thereby experiencing a transformation that aligns with contemporary art’s focus on relational aesthetics.

These artistic hybridities call for flexible methods in Religious Studies, which favour Deleuzian ideas of complexity over strict taxonomies (Tremlett 2023) to capture the reality of tangled lived experiences and establish the value of hybridity as a tool, not just a label. This is helpful in ascertaining how spiritual aesthetics can ritualise secular life in diverse societies without being entirely assimilated and also improve the examination of modes of modern art, such as bioethical art and digital liturgies, while confirming the role of art in changing boundaries in post-secular contexts (Tarabrin 2026; Jordan 2022; Baker and Dinham 2017).

The cartography of the “theoretical archipelagos” associated with post-secular society finds, within artistic mediations, a particularly fertile terrain for empirical testing and conceptual problematisation. Rather than merely reflecting stabilised configurations, artistic practices—especially when embedded in ritual contexts—operate as experimental dispositifs in which the categories of the “secular” and the “religious” are reconfigured *in fieri*. It is within this horizon that the analysis of João Madureira’s *Missa de Pentecostes* is situated, approached as a hybrid artefact which, within a regime of tensions and transactions, enables the probing of several central axes of the post-secular debate.² In this respect, the work demonstrates how artists mobilise religious narratives and systems of value not simply as cultural inheritance, but as active resources in the construction of a public ethics, while, at the micro-level, articulating multimodal practices that bring into relation creative subjectivity and the objectivity of religious memory.

This articulation, however, unfolds within a social context in which religious belief constitutes but one possibility among others for the attribution of meaning, thereby reshaping the conditions under which artistic creation and ritual tradition encounter one another. In this framework, post-secular forms of re-enchantment do not arise exclusively outside the

religious field, but may also emerge from within it, through processes of reinvention and the forging of new alliances. Post-secular art in ritual settings thus tends to blur established boundaries, invoking experiences of a mystical tonality that resist disciplinary attempts to regulate the limits of the “spiritually legitimate”, within an intersubjective plane where the autonomy of the artist and the agency of the ritual community intersect without collapsing into one another. It is precisely within this entanglement that hybridity acquires decisive heuristic value: rather than denoting a simple mixture, it allows for an understanding of how a spiritual aesthetics may affect a ritualisation of secular life without becoming fully assimilated to its logics.

1.2. Analysis of Discourses and Heterologies

It is relevant to examine, as part of this research itinerary, the effects of secularisation theories—and their correlates—on the field of socio-anthropology, which is closely related to the study of social facts. When the theory of secularisation itself becomes a theory of religion, the risks of its ‘over-interpretative’ power are recognisable. Albert Piette, at the turn of the 21st century, in his ‘ethnology of detail,’ criticised the hegemony of secularisation as an explanatory model, mainly because of what he considered its most harmful consequence: it promoted the distancing of social scientists from ‘religion en train de se faire’ (Piette 2006, 2022). To overcome this model, Piette therefore advocated ‘desacralizing’ three key categories: ritual, belief, and symbol. In his programme, ritual is reduced to a set of sequences of actions, embedded in a specific framework that regulates its unfolding and the subjective involvement of individuals. In the case of belief, priority is given to the act of believing, the act by which the individual’s cognitive and affective dispositions relate to each other through short sequences of actions and various modes of adherence. The symbol is seen as an object among several others, with a regulatory role in coordinating interactions and able to trigger a specific, non-necessary and non-generalised process of focalisation-evocation in individuals. Piette thus advocated a paradigm shift that promoted an ethnology free from culturalist imperatives. This new perspective would mean abandoning the pursuit of the cultural model implied in sequences of actions in favour of understanding the actions themselves. Ultimately, Piette’s project aspired to a different kind of ‘desacralization,’ one that affects the very concept of religion, an ambition clearly evident in his insistence, on the one hand, on the need for a socio-semantic analysis of what is understood by religion or what is perceived as a religious gesture or statement; and, on the other hand, on the need to start from the practices of which religion is a projection.

Thus, this epistemological proposal can be translated into a particular focus on forms of artistic agency and the meanings of aesthetic artefacts. This requires a methodology that analyses how the religious and the secular are mapped out in discourse. Regardless of theoretical discussions of boundaries (differentiation and transaction), actors across various fields mobilise these concepts to position themselves socially and to attribute meaning to their actions. This follows Stuckrad’s suggestion that discursive analysis deepens knowledge of the meanings attributed to the religious and the secular (Stuckrad 2003, 2010, 2013). Stuckrad has proposed, in several publications, a theoretical framework for the study of religion that assigns a central role to the category of discourse. This discursive perspective includes methodological contributions from the sociology of knowledge (van Dijk 2014; Keller et al. 2018) and recent historiographical approaches (Glavaš 2025), in critical dialogue with Berger and Luckmann’s foundational theories of the social construction of reality and knowledge. In this approach, what is perceived, experienced, felt and practiced is structurally linked to socially constructed, recognised and objectified forms of knowledge. This knowledge results from cultural responses to symbolic systems provided by the social environment, which are produced, legitimised, communicated and transformed

through discourse. Discourse analysis, informed by the sociology of knowledge, thus seeks to reconstruct the social processes of construction, objectification, communication and legitimisation of structures of meaning.

This framework is linked to the concept of the *dispositif*, or apparatus, introduced by Michel Foucault and later developed analytically, particularly by Agamben (Bussolini 2010). This concept goes beyond the simple analysis of discursive practices, incorporating non-discursive practices, materialisations, forms of tacit and implicit knowledge, and the relationships between these dimensions of social action. The apparatus is understood as the set of material, practical, social, cognitive and normative infrastructures within which discourses develop. Analysis of the apparatus examines how attributions of meaning contribute to the production of social reality. Discourses develop within cultural processes and apparatuses, around specific topics, but often incorporate elements from other discourses, giving rise to complex discursive nodes. These configurations highlight the difficulty of drawing clear boundaries between discourses. The links between discourses can be conceptualised in terms of intertextual and interdiscursive relations among utterances, texts, genres and discourses, as well as with extralinguistic social and sociological variables, the history of organisations or institutions, and situational frameworks (Wodak and Meyer 2016). Applied to the objective at hand, this perspective takes as its object of study the intertwining of religious and secular discourses that produces new meanings and realities in European societies.

Usually, this line of research has focused on institutions, organisations, and collective agencies. However, the complexity of agency in advanced modernity suggests that this scope warrants further expansion. Within aesthetic theory and the emerging field of artistic research, these discursive and narrativist insights are extended to works of art. Contemporary theorists describe art as part of wider discursive formations that articulate social imaginaries of power, identity, technology and ecology, rather than as an autonomous, self-referential sphere. Drawing on Rancière, many argue that art intervenes in the ‘distribution of the sensible’ (Yilmaz 2025): by reorganising what can be seen, said and felt; artworks displace dominant forms of perception and understanding and thus participate in the production of knowledge. From this perspective, exhibitions, performances and visual or sonic experiments function as research practices that probe social and political realities, making what is otherwise marginalised or unsayable in conventional discourses visible.

Michel de Certeau’s concept of heterology provides a critical framework for understanding discourses and artworks as inherently relational practices that confront and negotiate the ‘other’ that hegemonic knowledge systems seek to suppress or assimilate (Certeau 1986, 2005). Heterology designates the study of those marginal, silenced or unassimilable elements that disrupt the totalising claims of dominant discourses, such as historiography or scientific representation, revealing their foundational reliance on absence, loss and alterity. From this perspective, discourse does not produce a seamless totality but operates through a constitutive ‘gap’: it fills voids (the dead, the forgotten, the inassimilable) while depending on them for legitimacy, much as historiography enacts a ritual mourning that buries the past to construct the present. Certeau positions historiography among the ‘sciences of the other’ (heterologies), where the operation of the historian constructs an absent referent—the ‘other that no longer speaks’—through narrative strategies that obscure their own productive artifice. This aligns with the discursive turns in sociology of knowledge and historiography: discourses are not neutral mirrors of reality but tactical productions that poach from the heterogeneous, reconfiguring power relations by selectively incorporating or excluding the unrepresentable. Heterology thus radicalises discourse analysis by insisting on the ethical dimension of this encounter: knowledge emerges not from mastery over the other, but from an obligation to his irreducible difference, challenging

the Parmenidean illusion of unity perpetuated by Hegelian dialectics and Foucauldian archaeologies. Extending this to aesthetics, Certeau's heterology frames the artwork as a quintessentially heterological practice: it intervenes in the 'distribution of the sensible' by giving voice, or form, to the unsayable, the marginal and the tactical, akin to the mystic's 'white ecstasy. In artistic research, artworks become sites of *poiesis* that transform imposed cultural tools ('strategies') into resistant, transformative uses ('tactics'), producing situated knowledges through affective, material and relational processes that exceed propositional discourse (Certeau 1980). This resonates with Rancière's aesthetics and postcolonial epistemologies, in which art discloses the heterogeneous as a disruptive event rather than as mere representation, thereby enacting a 'fabulous criticism' that undermines disciplinary boundaries and invites collaborative inquiry into the other. Certeau's heterology thus bridges these fields, positing art and discourse as ethical operations that thrive on alterity rather than subjugating it (Buchanan 2000).

Within this framework, the selected perspectives prove analytically effective for the study of João Madureira's *Missa de Pentecostes* insofar as they jointly illuminate the interplay of mediation, perception, and enunciation at stake. Giorgio Agamben's notion of the *dispositif* enables the work to be understood as a strategic field in which practices, discourses, and regimes of regulation intersect to configure modes of experience and subjectivation, thereby revealing the co-implication of liturgical ritual and artistic creation in the production of meaning. Jacques Rancière's concept of the "distribution of the sensible" provides a lens through which to discern the reconfigurations of the visible, the audible, and the sayable that the work enacts, clarifying how it redistributes positions, capacities, and forms of participation within the ritual community. Finally, Michel de Certeau's heterological methodology renders perceptible the dynamics of appropriation, deviation, and re-inscription that traverse both compositional practice and reception, foregrounding a play of differences and alterities that resists any stabilising synthesis. Taken together, these approaches enable the work to be read as a site of active hybridity, in which the boundaries between the secular and the religious are not merely traversed but continuously reconfigured through situated practices and intersubjective relations.

2. Aesthetic Modernity, Religious Modernity

The process of consolidation of aesthetic modernity intersects, in various ways, with the dynamics of religious modernity. The consolidation of the modern aesthetic experience, as we understand it today, dates back to the 18th century and the advent of a decisive concept—namely, the concept of *disinterest*. Beauty ceased to be seen as an inherent quality of the object and became a subjective experience, dependent on the subject's pleasure in the form. Aesthetic judgement thus became based on disinterested pleasure: a free interplay between imagination and understanding which did not seek utility, and instead produced an 'endless purpose.' Kant established this distinction between the beautiful and the useful, contributing both to the autonomy of the aesthetic sphere and to the formation of an idealised subject, detached from himself and from any personal interest (Uzel 2004; Cheetham 2001; Chateau 1994; Abrams 1981). The aesthetic observer, freed from the demands of the world, becomes a purified being who gives himself entirely to the contemplation of form. Moreover, it is precisely in this gesture of renunciation that Kantian aesthetics paradoxically acquires a religious nuance. The disinterested attitude towards beauty resembles the devotional attitude towards the divine: an abandonment of oneself, an ascetic surrender. Aesthetic disinterest reproduces, in a new language, the logic of religious contemplation, the 'going out of oneself' that allows one to encounter the 'other' (Godoy Domínguez 2016, pp. 214–20; McRoberts 2004).

The analogy between aesthetics and religion becomes even more evident in Kant's treatment of the 'sublime' (Zuckert 2019). Confronted with the immensity of the world, the subject first experiences their insignificance and, soon after, the exhilarating feeling of their own rational and moral infinity. This perspective is close to what Rudolf Otto, already in the 20th century, will identify as the fundamental structure of the numinous experience: the tremendous and the fascinating that defines contact with the sacred. Kantian aesthetics, by proposing an experience that nullifies and enlarges the subject, thus rediscovers, in secular form, the core of religious experience (Murcia Serrano 2012). In Luc Ferry, we find one way this Kantian matrix has been received. The French thinker seeks to show that, with the advent of the modern world and the crisis of traditional hierarchies (religious, metaphysical and social), the aesthetic domain has become the privileged place for the experience of meaning and transcendence, replacing the role once played by religion. *Homo aestheticus* is someone who, in a democratic and secular context, finds in the feeling of beauty and the exercise of taste a form of reconciliation between the sensible and the spiritual, between the individual and the universal (Ferry 1990). Previously, Marcel Gauchet, identifying the 'remnants' of religion that remain in the structuring of subjectivity—even when the social dimensions of religion are eroded—interpreted the aesthetic experience as the continuation of the religious by other means (Gauchet 1985).

This approach is reflected in countless essays on 'the religion of beauty,' the result of the cultural itineraries of modernity: a movement in which aesthetics becomes the locus of meaning and transcendence in a disenchanted world. This shift has deep roots in Romanticism, in which art ceases to be a simple imitation of nature and becomes an inner revelation—that is, an expression of creative genius and immanent spiritual experience (Sheehan 2024; Abrams 1971). This mutation establishes a new secular theology of subjectivity, in which the artist assumes the symbolic function of mediator between the finite and the infinite. In the field of modern aesthetic theory, there has been abundant discourse on the autonomisation of art as a functional replacement for religious transcendence: by freeing itself from moral and metaphysical tutelage, art becomes an autonomous space of absolute value, where the meaning of the universal is reconfigured (Rochlitz 1994). Taylor, in his search for a genealogy of modern identity, showed how, since the Renaissance and the Reformation, the Western self has sought the source of value and meaning within subjectivity. One of the guiding threads of his analysis is the progressive replacement of theological transcendence by immanent forms of fulfilment—and aesthetics emerges as one of these forms. Art, expression and the feeling of beauty become experiences of moral and spiritual authenticity in a world where God no longer guarantees meaning. Thus, for Taylor, the 'religion of beauty' is one of the main modern alternatives to revealed religion: a spirituality of immanence, based on aesthetic experience and creative self-realisation (Taylor 1989). Perniola emphasised this genealogy, describing it as a ritual and religious survival, persistent in contemporary sensibility, where art is understood as the shadow and simulacrum of a transcendence that no longer has transcendence (Perniola 2000).

If a perspective on religious experience is based on interactions and emotional structures, as *pietas*, in accordance with the position of Georg Simmel, the reconfigurations of this experience can be even broader (Montemaggi 2017). Studies such as those by Pugmire show that even non-believers can experience religious music—such as Bach's *Mass in B minor*—in a similar way to believers. Both experience emotions of reverence, respect and interiority that transcend everyday life. In Pugmire's words, these are 'ultimate emotions' that touch the threshold of the transcendent (Pugmire 2007). From this perspective, the aesthetic experience maintains an affective and spiritual devotional structure. Thus, for example, in Mark Rothko's paintings, many viewers experience these works of art as a form of emancipated worship, devoid of figuration and explicit religious content. His paintings,

exhibited in separate, silent spaces, as found at the Rothko Chapel, invite introspection and silence, evoking reverence and interiority—they are ‘works of worship’ in the literal sense (Vega Esquerria 2010). Similarly, the contemporary practice of exhibiting non-explicitly religious art in religious spaces can be interpreted in the same vein. Religious architecture can function as a ‘resonance chamber’ for contemporary art, favouring the desired conditions for its enjoyment. Even when the artistic object does not mimic any religious narrative, its context imbues it with a spiritual aura, offering the public the possibility of an ‘extraordinary’ experience (Schumacher 2023; Deibl 2020).

These interpretative discourses are closely aligned with the movements of art’s spiritualisation. At their root, they present two distinct paths. On the one hand, there is Kandinsky’s internalised mysticism, which sees creation as an expression of ‘inner necessity’ (Kandinsky 2006). On the other hand, the rational path of the *De Stijl* movement, which proposes the ‘new Man’ as the source of an immanent spirituality (Mondrian 1974). In both cases, transcendence is absorbed by the human—the artist becomes the centre of the new aesthetic spirituality. This trend now presents itself as a pluriverse of achievements, difficult to compress into a univocal interpretative perspective. In this vein, Bill Viola revisits a healing function of art by exploring, in his video installations (e.g., *The Passions*, 2003)³, intense emotions such as pain and fear, proposing art as spiritual catharsis. In another way, Marina Abramović, in *The Artist is Present* (2012)⁴, transforms the silent encounter with the audience into a ritual experience: the artist’s motionless body becomes a sacred presence, generating huge queues of people seeking an almost mystical or thaumaturgical contact with her.

These interpretative approaches resist the classical thesis of the secularisation of art, described using the metaphor of the ‘loss of aura,’ championed by Walter Benjamin. Benjamin (2018) associated modernity with a process in which technology dissolved the unique and ritualistic character of the work of art—that is, its quality of ‘separate’ or sacred existence. However, more recent literature tends to interpret this process based on the semantics of requalification or displacement—either through processes of transformation in which religious signifiers acquire new meanings, or through the reorientation of religious memory in a spiritual and political direction, integrating the construction of modern civilities (Ramírez 2009; Brea 1991; Godoy Domínguez 2016, pp. 212–24).

Pop art, with Warhol’s *Marilyns* on a gold background, exemplifies this sacralisation of everyday life. Marilyn Monroe becomes a venerable figure, a ‘contemporary Virgin,’ not through multiplication that trivialises her, but through the reproduction that consecrates her (Fernández Gonzalo 2011). In this hermeneutic approach, one can find multiple examples of the reuse of religious and theological categories. Take, for example, the use of the concept of ‘transfiguration’ to give meaning to the moment when an ordinary object becomes a work of art. This very same analogy may also include the idea of ‘transubstantiation.’ As in the case of bread and wine in the Eucharistic rites of some Christian traditions, the artistic object acquires a presence that exceeds its sensible appearance (Danto 1996). Warhol’s *Brillo Boxes*, identical to supermarket packaging, become works of art only because they are given new meaning (Danto 2009). This hermeneutic perspective emphasises that this transfiguration mobilises an act of belief. As in the religious domain, the recognition of a work of art does not result from sensory evidence, but from belief: one must ‘believe’ that an everyday object is a work of art. Aesthetic faith and theological faith are similar in their inner disposition, which allows us to see the invisible (Castro 2005, 2022). These interpretative proposals do not aim to defend a pure continuity, or even an overlap, between contemporary art and religious experience. Instead, they highlight their points of contact and correlation in belief, revelation and transfiguration.

Bohlman (2016) analysed the role of music as a privileged space of articulation of the sacred, of identity, and of politics in contemporary Europe, a condition which is characterised by a post-secular condition. Bohlman is part of a recurring trend that aims to demonstrate that the post-secular does not correspond to a 'return' of religion to the public sphere, but rather a reconfiguration of the forms of the presence of the sacred, often mediated by cultural and aesthetic practices. In this context, music emerges as a central place of symbolic negotiation, where religious beliefs, historical memories, national affiliations and political conflicts intersect. Bohlman introduces the concept of the 'poetics of the sacred' to describe how music transforms religious content into shareable aesthetic experiences that can circulate beyond the institutional boundaries of religions. This poetics manifests itself both in explicitly religious repertoires (liturgical music and devotional songs) as well as in secular genres that incorporate references to religious and ritual memory.

In this sense, João Madureira's *Missa de Pentecostes* resists confinement within the modern ideal of the "separate work", understood as a regime of aesthetic autonomy grounded in a self-sufficient, self-referential sacrality detached from the social practices that render it meaningful. At the same time, it cannot be reduced to the postmodern imaginary of a free reuse of the religious symbolic stock, as though this constituted merely a repertoire available for citation, fragmentation, or pastiche. Rather, the work occupies an intermediate space in which the liturgical inheritance is neither enclosed nor instrumentalised, but reactivated as a living matrix of meaning, subject to processes of negotiation and re-inscription. It is precisely in this refusal of polarities—between autonomy and functionalisation, between closed sacrality and ludic appropriation—that the work asserts itself as an exemplary case of post-secular hybridity, disclosing modes of creation that sustain a dense, critical, and productive relation to the religious without relinquishing the complexity of their inscription within the contemporary world.

3. The New Visibility of Religion in the Artistic Field

Discourses on the visibility of religion in artistic productions employ diverse vocabularies. In any case, they favour forms of analysis that aim to propose a hermeneutics of the interactions between the religious and the secular. Within the framework of this essay's objectives, the intersections between ritual agency and artistic agency are of particular interest. This context makes it possible to situate João Madureira's work within a multimodal framework in which artistic productions emerge as sites of the post-secular 'in the making'.

3.1. New Visibilities Between the 'Return' and the 'Religious Turn'

Studies show that religious references abound in different geographical areas and artistic disciplines, reinforcing the current interest in 'visible religion' (Teixeira 2023). Various reviews and essays show how highly acclaimed creators have worked with explicitly religious themes and imagery in works commissioned to have a substantial public impact (Colonna 2023; Wijnia 2019; Quash et al. 2017; Zock 2008). Symposia and collective publications have noted a new generation of scholarship and creative works, as well as exhibitions, that document the resurgence of a religious and theological dimension in contemporary artistic productions (Bernier and Smith 2023; Hlavajova et al. 2009). This trend would thus go beyond a previous one that emphasised that, in contemporary art, only under the impulse of substitution, irony, ambiguity, and uncertainty could the religious be incorporated (Elkins 2004).

Recent literature summarises and organises the new visibility of religion into four horizons (J. A. Anderson 2025). Firstly, there is an anthropological horizon, resulting from correlations between religion and art in material culture, social imagination and cultural identity; these correlations allow religious imaginaries to operate in secular environments

as well. Secondly, there is the political horizon, where interactions between art and religion are observed in light of power dynamics; from this perspective, it is emphasised that the 'return' of religion in contemporary art can serve as a vehicle for political struggles to identify conditions of social visibility and determine public space. Thirdly, there is a spiritual horizon which includes practices and discourses about the potential of connections between art and religion to promote social, ecological, and spiritual awakening, filling the gaps left by the unfulfilled promises of secular modernity; this is the horizon in which religious references can emerge in a more emancipated way, or even in rupture with institutionalised religion. Fourthly, the last horizon, the theological one, includes a set of interests in the question of God, both implicitly and explicitly, as well as work on the narratives of the sacred books, in their sapiential, prophetic, or eschatological dimensions.⁵ This new visibility of religion has had a significant impact on the construction of a 'return narrative' or a 'religious turn' in Art Studies (Wijnia 2019, pp. 5–9).⁶

Some analyses focus on a religious shift in the artistic field. These often base their arguments on twilight readings of modernity. For example, David Martin described a return to religion and liturgy in 20th-century music. He saw this as a reaction to the violence of the two world wars and the Cold War that followed (Martin 2018). Martin identified this trend in composers such as Poulenc, Britten, Stravinsky, Messiaen, Schnittke, and Pärt:

It is as if the travails of the twentieth century with regard to dire experiences of utopias on earth have pushed composers back to an older template based on penitence and reconciliation embodied in the impersonal choreography of liturgy (Martin 2016, p. 655).

In the arts, this approach gains relevance insofar as it allows us to think about religion and the secular and their mutual intersections. Beckford highlighted the arts as fundamental to the post-secular, based on the idea of a 're-enchantment of culture.' According to him, contemporary artistic production is shifting from a strictly secular matrix toward the exploration of dimensions of enchantment and transcendence (Beckford 2012). This visibility takes shape in a policy of commissions led by religious and civil institutions, integrating artistic mediation into their commemorative programmes and communication strategies; these strategies may focus on places of worship or public spaces. Examples of this abound. Anish Kapoor's *Ascension* (2011) in San Giorgio Maggiore, Venice, presented in the context of the 54th International Art Exhibition—Venice Biennale, is of particular interest to this study. The installation was commissioned and organised by the Fondazione Giorgio Cini, in collaboration with Galleria Continua, which represented Kapoor⁷. In this case, Kapoor, of Indian origin, created an installation that explores transcultural religious elements—the continuous, ascending spiral of white smoke, oriented towards the central dome of the basilica, contrasted with the architectural materiality and evoked a reflective experience that, in dialogue with the different configurations of the biblical and Christian motif of the 'ascension,' opened itself up to multiple spiritual interpretations.

In a similar initiative, one of the most important international Catholic pilgrimage shrines, the Shrine of Fátima in Portugal, did not hesitate to commission a musical work from one of the most highly acclaimed contemporary composers—the British James MacMillan—to close the 2017 cycle of celebrations of the centenary of the events that were celebrated as the founding of the Shrine⁸. The work took the form of a cantata for orchestra, choir, and soloist, where the narrative explored the 'miracle of the sun,' an integral part of the founding narrative of the Shrine of Fátima⁹.

Museums have also invested in implementing similar devices. Some examples with a high impact include: *100 Artists see God*, at the Laguna Art Museum and the Institute of Contemporary Art, London (2004–2005)¹⁰; *Traces du Sacrée*, at the Centre Pompidou,

Paris (2008)¹¹; *Heilig Vuur*, at the Nieuwe Kerk, Amsterdam (2008)¹²; *The Problem of God*, at K21, Düsseldorf (2015–2016)¹³; *Heavenly Bodies: Fashion and the Catholic Imagination*, at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (2018)¹⁴; *Three ancient gods meet in London*, at the British Museum (2025)¹⁵. In a comparable literary initiative, a Portuguese publishing house developed a project to bring together prayer texts from around the world, requiring the service of several specialist translators, and thus turning the publication into an exemplary work of this kind in Portuguese (Carvalho and Mendonça 2006).

3.2. *The Interfaces Between the Secular and the Religious: Ritual Mise-en-Scène*

Within the methodology adopted in this essay, it is necessary to give voice to works of art to map the reconfigurations of the religious and the secular. Some religious manifestations, such as the *Via Crucis*, rooted in medieval Latin Christianity, have left indelible marks on the religious topography of societies. Arad's study examines the importance of practices and representations in European culture, highlighting their historical context and the role of visual media representing this sacred topography in pre-modern and modern societies (Arad 2022). Starting from the 18th-century practice of inscribing the stations of the *Via Dolorosa* in the topography of cities—as a processional narrative meditating on the passion and death of Jesus Christ—the research seeks an interpretative framework for the installation held in London in 2016, involving sacred and secular spaces, curated by Aaron Rosen, theologian at King's College, London (Plate 2016)¹⁶. This particular project could be classified as 'public theology,' since the Christian narrative, in its value and meaning, goes beyond the limits of Christian piety to reflect on existential and moral problems widely shared in today's societies. Arad analyses how the Stations project 'culturalises' religious content, making it socially legible in a secular environment¹⁷. In the case of these installations, the Way of the Cross is reinterpreted through central themes of contemporary Western debate (racial discrimination, police violence, injustice, colonialism, the Holocaust, wars), presenting itself as cultural heritage rather than a devotional imposition:

While the *Via Dolorosa's* premodern embodiments were created in a religious context and out of purely religious needs, the contemporary reformulation was conceived in a dynamic urban context, swinging back and forth between religious and secular traditions in terms of message, practice, and visual culture (Arad 2022, p. 223).

In approaches of this kind, Christian symbols can acquire flexible meanings, shared by believers and non-believers alike, reinforcing the relevance of art as a mediator in post-secular societies. The project thus reveals that the articulation between compassion, suffering, and empathy can constitute common ground for interreligious and intercultural dialogue, demonstrating the relevance of art in reflection on identity and values in the present. However, some scholars point to difficulties in discerning the boundary between the religious and the secular, insofar as the religious narrative ultimately seems to be translated into secular ideas—in the Habermasian sense of translation (Galen 2017). Nevertheless, based on Arad's study, the process is bidirectional, i.e., translation/conversion occurs in both directions. Thus, the aesthetic artefact can be seen as the mediator of correlations between the religious and the secular.

If, in the previous example, art takes on an explicit ethical and theological programme, in the next example, we are faced with the autonomisation of a ritual sequence, which itself becomes an aesthetic performative event. Evensong, an Anglican liturgical form that has become widespread in the Netherlands in recent decades, is seemingly part of a metamorphosis that warrants understanding. Its growing popularity led Hanna Rijken to examine how this practice was appropriated and reinterpreted outside the institutional framework of the Anglican Church, although often preserving the English language (Rijken

2018). According to Rijken, Evensongs in the Netherlands are mainly held in monumental churches, with choirs, where the singers are wearing ceremonial robes, and reproducing a complete liturgy in English: prayers and responses, psalms, readings, chants, and hymns. These celebrations, often with paid admission, attract large audiences and are events that oscillate between concert and (para)ecclesiastical performance:

The choral evensong rituals are sometimes organised as a worship, as a worship and concert at the same time, or as a concert. We can explain these different realisations by means of the merging systems. However, the rituals are multi-layered (Rijken 2018, p. 118).

In this process, what Catherine Bell has described as ‘ritualisation’ becomes visible; this is a practice which, once displaced from its original context, acquires new meanings by being marked through difference and contrast (Bell 2009). The meaningful centre of the work shifts from communal participation to the aesthetic experience afforded by the monumental space. Emphasis is placed on the sonic experience, on musical quality, and on the choir’s ceremonial choreographies, whose procession becomes a highly attractive moment. In this reconfigured form, Evensong no longer presents itself strictly as a liturgical rite. Rather, it is transformed into a musical ritual in which sonic and visual experiences become autonomous from their confessional referentiality.

This phenomenon may also be interpreted through Birgit Meyer’s perspectives on the aesthetics of religion, which highlight the relevance of religious materialities and the sensory dimensions of experience. In Meyer’s framework, such practices may signal the formation of ‘aesthetic communities’ (Meyer 2009; Grieser and Johnston 2017). Notably, the sacrality that emerges here does not stem primarily from confessional adherence; on the contrary, it arises from the aesthetic mediation produced by materiality (Gothic and Neo-Gothic buildings), the archaic tonalities of liturgical language, and musical performativity. Using a non-vernacular language—liturgical English with archaic resonances—further intensifies the experience of alterity, seemingly answering a contemporary search for aesthetic forms perceived as saturated with the sacred. In this context, Evensongs in the Netherlands exemplify ritual displacement and reconfiguration, as religious practices are reappropriated and turned into hybrid cultural experiences at the boundary between worship, concert, and identification rituals.

These hybrid forms, whether devotional or liturgical, may be understood as instances of civil ritual—urban liturgies that invite participants to engage in the *ars ludendi* (Klomp 2022). Although these liturgies are not ‘ecclesial,’ they may assume ritual forms that manifest the same ludic essence that animates liturgical practice in religious communities. From an emotional perspective, the configuration of such events can recast religion in terms of memory and nostalgia (Vogel et al. 2024). Despite varied contexts, all these expressions are rooted in the human capacity to transform everyday life, through play, into meaningful experience. Specifically, the Christian liturgical and devotional repertoire offers opportunities for contact with aspects of religious experience, yet always in ways bound to the ludic dimensions of social life, as Mirella Klomp emphasises:

Describing these urban liturgies in terms of ritual art is a way of appreciating liturgical rituals in secular settings; urban liturgies should not be seen as ‘derivatives’ of ‘the real thing’ (e.g., ‘ecclesial liturgy’), but, rather, as forms of play—just like the liturgy of the church. All spring from the same root, namely, the human capacity for play (Klomp 2022, p. 113).

In readings that emphasise diagnoses of secularisation, this shift in liturgical rivalry constitutes a link to internal secularisation, which shapes worship around the ideal of ‘participation.’ Here, rites move from being simply ‘received’ to being desired. Instead of

a fixed order, they now allow interventions that accommodate individual and contextual needs. Rituals thus reflect the effects of a subjective turn. From this view, the late modern ‘liturgical movement’—which influenced Roman Catholic liturgical reform after the Second Vatican Council—should not be seen just as a ‘return to the sources.’ It also internalised secular values of liberal democracies: ‘striving for active participation tends to result in worship like a forum’ (Rosenius 2024, p. 138). In this view, ritual comes mainly from local, biographical actions involving task distribution and shared meaning, while institutional and traditional aspects become secondary. Similarly, Kilde’s study of changing church architecture shows that, since the late nineteenth century, architectural design has increasingly used the auditorium model, blending influences from church and theatre (Kilde 2005). Ritual-liturgical spaces have shifted from a hierarchical layout (nave and chancel) to an open plan, demanding that ministers and priests are capable of representing qualities of the institution or tradition, and that these persons also have performative skills.

Artistic work exploring religious meanings may also adopt strategies that mobilise an interreligious imaginary. Bill Viola draws on symbolic references from diverse religious traditions—such as Zen Buddhism, Islamic Sufism, and Christian mysticism—to construct visual apparatuses oriented towards spiritual experience, in contrast with the sensory fugacity of contemporary life. The marked slowing down of movement is a recurring strategy used to reinforce this contrast. From this perspective, slowness functions as an ascetic form. His work focuses on universal human experiences, notably life, death, and suffering. Recurrent elements such as water, silence, and temporal deceleration function as symbolic and cognitive mediators, enabling the emergence of states of consciousness inaccessible within the accelerated regime of everyday life. In *Ascension* (2000)¹⁸, water acts as a medium for transformation and spiritual awakening, in a paradoxical process of rising through descent. It evokes Christian images of the Crucifixion and the ritual meanings of purification and rebirth found in many religions (López de Corral 2022, pp. 363–64).

The exploration of spiritual significance in a work of art may emphasise dimensions proper to ‘material religion.’ This term refers to ways physical objects, materials, and spaces are incorporated into religious meaning-making. Such emphasis is evident in practices that engage with the work’s materiality. In his 2013 exhibition entitled ‘Human Nature’ at Rockefeller Plaza in New York, Ugo Rondinone reaffirmed the importance of stone as a symbol in his practice¹⁹. The exhibition’s monumental stone figures evoked dolmens—large stone structures in ancient cultures, typically serving as tombs or monuments. According to the artist, he aimed to capture an ancestral human form by using what he calls the purest material: stone. Building upon this symbolic significance, he conceived of this material as an object of beauty and veneration. Its contemplation, he suggests, can induce states of trance and meditation, dissolving the boundaries between inner and outer worlds. Rondinone avoids excessive carving of the material. He believes that stone reveals its sacrality in its raw form. The act of faith that the stone inspired in him can be seen as derived from the stone’s beauty in its unrefined composition and its capacity to store and preserve time (J. A. Anderson 2025, M. Anderson 2020).

In sum, the concept of translation—here a framework facilitating passage between religious and secular spheres—can prove effective. When not confined to the Habermasian proposal, translation is a bidirectional and relational process. It recurrently employs three main strategies: reformulation (the creation of new vocabularies derived from religious inheritances), a strategy of play (the playful and innovative use of religious symbols and languages in combinations that diverge from traditional contexts), and re-presentation (the placement of religious art and memory into new interpretative frameworks or contexts). As will become apparent, João Madureira’s work exceeds the reach of these interpretative approaches. It does not simply involve moving liturgical symbolism beyond the ritual

act, nor does it create an artistic installation that reworks religious meanings outside a ritual-communal syntax by repurposing ritual space-time. Similarly, it is not merely an allusive reappropriation of religious memory for extrinsic aims. Rather, the focus is on a musical work whose grammar and syntax are tightly bound to a ritual form. Within this framework, it introduces artefacts foreign to ritual language: the rite is aestheticised, and, in turn, the artistic object is ritualised. This tension and reciprocal exchange establishes a threshold, enabling a two-way translation between the religious and the secular.

4. João Madureira's 'Missa De Pentecostes': Celebrating Language

The work *Missa de Pentecostes* by João Madureira was originally written for the ensemble Sete Lágrimas and premiered on Pentecost Sunday, 23 May 2010 (Madureira 2011b), requiring two tenors, a theorbo, and a viola da gamba. The work formed an integral part of the project *Dialogue between Contemporary Art and the Sacred*, implemented by the Roman Catholic community of the Capela do Rato in Lisbon (Portugal), which also included the recording of a CD (Sete Lágrimas 2010). The work returned to the Capela do Rato on 9 June 2019.

In 2010, José Tolentino Mendonça was the priest responsible for the community's pastoral leadership. It is important to note that, beyond his ecclesiastical office, José Tolentino Mendonça is widely recognised as a poet and essayist within the international Portuguese-speaking community²⁰. While chaplain to the Capela do Rato community, he also served as Director of the National Secretariat for the Pastoral of Culture of the Portuguese Episcopal Conference (2004–2014). In an interview for the *Público* newspaper, he described the Capela do Rato community project: 'The chapel was a space of dialogue between faith and democracy, between Christian conscience and the causes of justice and peace, between liturgy and the search for new celebratory languages' (Marujo 2010). The Capela do Rato community is not a parish, but it remains a significant reference point in contemporary Portuguese Catholicism. It became known for experimenting with the reforms of the Second Vatican Council and had also emerged as a symbol of Catholic resistance to the dictatorial *Estado Novo* regime in Portugal (1933–1974)²¹.

João Madureira's work was designed as part of a ritual sequence. Therefore, it does not fit only in the archive of *musica da chiesa* or the category of *musica sacra*. Madureira's work reappropriates the musical form of the 'Mass,' a structure widely used in European art music. Unlike traditional Masses, his musical programme is not limited to the Ordinary (*Kyrie, Gloria, Sanctus, Agnus Dei*). It also draws from the Proper, including sections like the *Antiphona ad Introitum, Sequentia, Alleluia, Antiphona ad Offertorium, Postcommunio, and Dimissio*. For the composer, the Ordinary offers a way to explore musical memory. The Proper contains selected literary texts, most of which are not directly linked to the Roman Catholic ritual. If the Ordinary of the Mass lets the composer recall the rite, the Proper brings external texts into the ritual as a trope might do when inserted in the space of a cultural activity and the activity of a religious cult. This thereby creates tension and negotiation between the rite's religious context and the creative world of art.

This particular reading of Madureira's work avoids privileging art's spiritual emancipation or describing artistic creation mainly as spiritual agency—a view favoured by recent scholarship (Eikelboom and Newheiser 2025). Nor does it focus solely on debates about the nature of liturgical music in Roman Catholicism. There is commentary that highlights a 'spirituality of artistic service' and present Christian artistic creation as contributing to the 'common good' (Dodlek 2023); this civic dimension is not absent from Madureira's project:

From the outset, the idea of composing a Mass constitutes an opportunity to integrate our present musical-aesthetic experience into the reading of a sacred text. Moreover, this relationship has two meanings in one: we seek to bear witness

to what we feel in response to the text, while the text, at the same time, challenges us to establish an aesthetic discourse that refers to this place, to this time in which we live. For this reason, this project is important not only for religious experience *stricto sensu*, but also because it encompasses a broader cultural horizon, that of social and communal construction, in which the religious has a natural place. The composition of this Mass is therefore an open project, conceived to have a civic function (Madureira 2011b, pp. 221–22).

Within this perspective, artistic mediation is seen as a means of adapting religious imagery to contemporary cultural contexts. This mediatory approach aligns with current discussions on the educational and therapeutic value of the arts. Madureira's mediating stance originates outside the religious domain. This is because he aims to foster a dialogue between the independent sphere of contemporary artistic creation and the liturgical practices of Christian communities. João Madureira situates himself in 'contemporary music' rather than *musica sacra*. His professional community and intellectual debates lie within this latter context, which is where he aims to establish his position.

Quotation is fundamental to this work. Those who see quotation as conservative are mistaken. Instead, the work is guided by the audacity to unite diverse elements and confront techniques from different worlds. There is no self-imposed limit to using traditional materials, but a gesture that expands the usual space of contemporary music—a practice common to many authors today. This gesture seeks to create a musical space unafraid of aesthetic or academic prohibitions, and to reveal the work within its broader cultural context, rather than as an isolated, self-contained whole that can be classified as contemporary music (Madureira 2011a, p. 94).

The question of 'materials'—that which precedes creation—remains central in European contemporary art music (Bouscant et al. 2019). 'Quotation' and 'collage' allow composers to position themselves in relation to tradition. In Madureira's work, quotations from the Mass *Lux et origo* and Gregorian repertoire anchor the piece in the ritual tradition. The distinctiveness of ritual lies in the language it has 'received': Latin Christian ritual is not invention or self-production, but remembrance, though its relevance depends on change.

The end of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century saw numerous works resulting from the harmonisation of Gregorian chant. João Madureira's work does not belong to this lineage. When one listens to Madureira's treatment of the *Kyrie*, the substratum of memory from which it is composed is readily identifiable²². At the same time, its temporality and the subtle gestures it utilises make clear that what is being heard is contemporary music. The second tenor, theorbo, and viola da gamba intermittently double the line of the first tenor. At other moments, they approach the function of an *ison*. This technique found its foundation in Orthodox chant, especially in the post-Byzantine period (sixteenth–seventeenth centuries). It consists of the sustained presence of a pedal tone—an *axis mundi*, as it were—over which melodic movement unfolds. Madureira, however, transforms this technique into a micropolyphonic texture of minimal gestures: an ecology that seeks neither to disfigure the inherited material nor to yield to pure mimetic reproduction. Beyond ascetic resolutions in unison or modal consonance, the use of the major second as a place of repose is particularly significant. It functions as an image of an unresolved duality and maintains the language received from tradition in a condition of impermanence. Permanence, intermittence, and impermanence thus combine here within a variable geometry. This gives form to the composer's position, within the composition, before tradition.

The *Gloria* employs comparable techniques. The two tenors remain in constant interaction, engaging in a subtle play between unison and two-part homophony. Given the character of the Latin hymn, the syllabic declamation of the text mobilises greater accentuation and small gestures of crescendo and diminuendo. The theorbo provides brief melismatic inflexions in the form of short arpeggios at the end of each phrase—a gesture that may be compared to the illumination accompanying the serif of a letter in medieval manuscript illumination. The viola da gamba prolongs this effect by creating an axis of permanence and support for the melodic events unfolding in the voices.

The *Sanctus* presents similar processes, though even more focused on the vocal event. The theorbo falls silent. The viola da gamba resumes its role as a drone. The tenors maintain micropolyphonic interplay so subtle that, to a distracted listener, it may seem like simple monody. These processes are recombined in the *Agnus Dei*. Here, the composer reshapes the repetitive structure of this litany prayer to reflect contemporary liturgical practice. The three invocations of the litany are each repeated three times. This multiplicative effect accentuates the character of the litany and allows the composer to add nuanced variations to the material. The movement is thus only apparently repetitive. The supposed reiteration incorporates new micro-gestures, vocal or instrumental, which, in each cycle of repetition, add an almost echo-like quality, alluding to the material dimension of the space in which sound propagates.

In general terms, while respecting the liturgical sequence, these elements of the Ordinary of the Mass enter into dialogue with the Proper. The Proper refers to the elements that singularise the specific solemnity: Pentecost, the liturgy in which Catholics celebrate the ‘descent’ of the Holy Spirit. In Madureira’s programme, the antiphons and hymns prescribed by the *Missale Romanum* are replaced by literary texts from Portuguese poets: Author de Pascoaes (1877–1952), José Augusto Mourão (1947–2011), Maria Gabriela Llansol (1931–2008), Sophia de Mello Breyner Andresen (1919–2004), and Mário Cesariny (1923–2006). The contrast between the patrimonial approach to the texts of the Ordinary of the Mass and the use of literary texts to fill the Proper is deliberate:

The choice of poems followed the fundamental idea of creating a counterpoint to the liturgy present in the other movements. These poems, therefore, had to be markedly heterogeneous in relation to the Ordinary of the Mass. They are ‘worldly’ poems (Madureira 2011b, p. 224).

The *Antiphona ad Introitum* draws on excerpts from a poem by Pascoaes. In this poem, ‘wind’ functions as the central poetic sign, establishing a bridge with the Christian biblical texts prescribed in the lectionary for this liturgical solemnity. In Author de Pascoaes’s poetry, mysticism is expressed as an intimate and cosmic experience of revelation. Here, the visible is continually traversed by an invisible and spiritual presence. Wind, as the infinite flow of life—an immaterial, elusive, and transitory force that cannot be seen but can be felt—emerges as a sensible figure of the Absolute. It evokes the mystery that runs through both the world and the poetic subject’s consciousness.

It does not erupt spectacularly. Instead, it passes by, brushing against being, and awakening an emotion of wonder and metaphysical *saudade*. In Madureira’s reading, this mysticism becomes an ecstatic musical language. The vocal texture is essentially declamatory, drawing on the customary recitative technique of Roman liturgy. It is situated between chant and speech. The text rests on an essentially syllabic musical structure. As Fernandes (2011) notes, it ‘is transformed into musical material through its own phonetics, melodic contour, the flow of rhythm and breath, and through its framing within a sonic space [that is] subtly or more incisively enriched by the interventions of the viola da gamba and the theorbo.’ The objectivity of vocal declamation enters into dialogue with the viola

da gamba's disruptive gestures. This seeks a synaesthetic translation of the wind's impulse. Ultimately, it resolves into the repose of almost an *amen* at the conclusion:

I felt a mysterious wind pass by
 In a profound and cosmic whirl.
 It took me in its arms, and longingly
 I went, and the Spirit of the World I saw²³.

The Roman Catholic Pentecost liturgy retains the practice of preceding the acclamation of the Gospel text with a hymn (*Sequentia*). João Madureira replaces the prescribed text with a hymn by José Augusto Mourão. Among the poets selected by the composer, Mourão is the only one who wrote liturgical poetry. He occupies a singular position within Portuguese culture. He is a priest of the Order of Preachers and a recognised academic in semiotics. He developed a sustained practice of composing liturgical poetry. This work, however, was never taken up by mainstream Portuguese Catholic culture or practice. Nor did it undergo any form of institutional 'canonisation.' Although traces of his texts can be found in the liturgies of monastic communities or in other similar reserved contexts, it is rare to encounter them within the Catholic parish system in Portugal. Turning to the musical aspect, the declamatory character favoured by the composer is, in this case, concentrated on a vocal homophonic structure based upon a single consonance—the interval of the perfect fifth:

come, defender of the poor
 come, murmuring [sign of the] voice
 that moves the world

come, witness of pain
 and of anguish nameless
 come, life's true force²⁴

The acclamation preceding the proclamation of the Gospel, derived from a Hebrew word of praise (*Alleluia*), constitutes a singular moment in this musical work. The tightly woven, canonically structured movement, involving the voices and the viola da gamba, generates enormous, unresolved tension. The process evokes the *catena di sospensioni* of the Baroque era. However, as the suspension is never resolved, the effect is the perception of a shifting sonorous cluster, from its launch (*arsis*) to its repose (*thesis*). The theorbo articulates a repetitive ascending figure. The acclamation is not histrionic; it is a 'concentrate of praise'—within this process of concentration lies the entire energy of the feast, without it resolving into the ostentation of fervour.

The *Antiphona ad Offertorium* brings to this Mass one of the most original and enigmatic writers of contemporary Portuguese literature, Maria Gabriela Llansol. Llansol's mystical writing is not organised around a hierarchical transcendence, but manifests as a practice of radical listening and attention to the living. The quotation evokes an ethic of 'following' that refers to an immanent mysticism, in which meaning emerges from a sensitive relation with the world rather than from its transcendence. It is thus a dogma-free mysticism, in which the act of writing merges with the act of reading the world, listening to its multiple voices, and allowing oneself to be guided by an intensity that cannot be explained, only followed. In the Latin Christian ritual, the offertory is often presented as a moment when the altar receives the 'mundane' offerings of the community. This mundanity is strongly present in Llansol's text. The composer reads the text as a contemplation of the world. Ecstatic consonances reappear, represented by the interval of a perfect fifth; the tenors' voices listen to and 'follow' one another within a highly transparent polyphonic structure designed to highlight every detail of the textual material:

_____ pick up the threads
 that in the waves you see
 pick every animal voice you hear
 follow the glow that traces swift circles on sand
 and write²⁵

In the *Postcommunio* moment, the composer invokes one of the most recognised poets in contemporary Portuguese society, Sophia de Mello Breyner Andresen. In her poetry, traces of a search for the origin, or the original purity of things, frequently emerge. In the poem selected by the composer, this search manifests itself as a movement of poetic asceticism: a rejection of the ‘unreal,’ understood as the artificial, disorderly, or noisy elements of the world, and an aspiration towards a primordial, luminous, and ordering source. Sophia de Mello Breyner Andresen’s mysticism is expressed through an ethic of fidelity to an original order of being.

In this moment of the ritual-liturgical sequence, Madureira concentrates the declamatory vocal gesture almost exclusively within a movement structured around the interval of the major second, underlined by the viola da gamba and supported by the ethereal transparency of the theorbo’s harmonic sounds:

Someday, I will break down all bridges
 That link my whole live being
 To a bustling world, unreal,
 And calmly, I will head upstream to its sources.²⁶

In the final gesture of the Mass, the *Dimissio*, the composer works with a lapidary poem by Mário Cesariny. Cesariny’s poetry is characterised by a tension between Surrealist rupture and a spiritual quest that does not adhere to codified religious systems, but rather to an ethic of desire, openness, and interior experience. In the selected poem, this spiritual dimension is manifested through a conception of love as an inaugural gesture, a path of becoming, and an exercise in detachment. The road that ‘begins’ evokes an original movement, prior to any goal, in which to love entails trusting what is indeterminate, accepting risk, and exposing oneself to the other. In this way, the spiritual in Cesariny is not translated as a promise of future redemption, but as an intensification of the present—a radical fidelity to lived experience. Madureira revisits some initial gestures, suggesting a recapitulatory intention. However, this is not a cadence to ‘close’ the work. It is not a conclusion. Rather, it is a new beginning, both in its poetic idea and in the musical syntax.

The final musical gesture is clearly suspensive, unfinished. The movement of the vocal lines now concentrates on a consonance less used in the Proper of the Mass—the interval of a third, both major and minor. The voices are organised into a polyphony based on reiteration, supported by highly idiomatic instrumental gestures: *arpeggios* in the theorbo and gestures grounded in the viola da gamba’s *scordatura*. The poem itself is brief and intense:

Love as the road begins²⁷

In broad terms, this compositional project aligns with a theological programme that prioritises exploring how human experience can be correlated with a Christian message. Thus, Madureira’s approach can be placed within a post-confessional conception of Christianity (Diotalleivi 2017, pp. 111–74).

This *assemblage* of different kinds of texts, which can mean different things to each listener, serves as a record of life: by taking religious texts out of their usual meanings and giving them a broader way to express ideas, and, in turn, showing

the spiritual side of texts that are not about religion. Seen this way, being religious is part of any text that expresses the basic human urge to learn and question the world. People are religious because they allow themselves to wonder about what they usually accept (Madureira 2019).

From this view, João Madureira's work acts like a workshop for finding new kinds of social creativity that do not fit neatly into simple ideas about what is religious and what is not. Here, the composer works as a go-between, making something that cannot be labelled as either, but instead stays in between, connecting the two.

5. An Archipelago of Interpretations

In this essay's framework, this final section outlines five interpretative territories: ritual 'de-habitation,' dissensus, linguistic hospitality, heterology, and universality without totality. Though discontinuous, these territories create an archipelago of correlations that clarifies the specific qualities of hybrid cultural practices, a feature of post-secular contexts. As observed above, the Ordinary of the Mass, within João Madureira's compositional programme, gives form to the desire to inhabit tradition. The recourse to materials drawn from what is known as Gregorian chant favours ritual order as an instrument for creating unity from shared memory. It should be noted that, for certain Roman Catholic subcultures, the existence of a unitary ritual chant would symbolically amount to the recovery of a single language, 'before Babel.' This, however, is not the composer's perspective.

If we return to the Indo-European root *dhe*, ritual signifies 'to place creatively, to bring into existence, rather than simply to leave an object on the ground' (Benveniste 1989, p. 102). The composer's approach to the substratum of received ritual chant can thus be interpreted not within a logic of authorised reproduction, but rather as a creative operation that employs the authorial resources made explicit in the previous section. The ascetic microstructures—polyphonic or homophonic—emerging from the relationships between the two tenors, the theorbo, and the viola da gamba are devices intended to preserve what the composer considers essential to that memory. To some extent, they evoke specific technical requirements in early medieval music, thereby reinforcing the dimension of ritual (Ferreira 2012).

From Madureira's perspective, using Latin in a vernacular ritual-liturgical context introduces a form of Brechtian estrangement. The composer often explores this quality in his music (Madureira 2019). At the same time, he notes that the patrimonial use of Latin stands in tension with the poetic universe that constructs the Proper of the Mass. The language of 'confrontation' allows an interpretation in which the composer presents himself as a mediator—without dissolving the tension—between Latin liturgical heritage and a poetic voice marked by authorial logic and rooted in a vernacular linguistic culture:

'This Mass seeks to revisit the heritage of religious music by confronting it with other cultural and experiential sites. For this reason, I returned to the Gregorian tradition, with its proper Latin, seeking to confront it with poetic texts'. (Madureira 2011b, pp. 222–23)

Musical work on literary sources that are foreign to the liturgical text produces a double effect. The first is 'de-canonisation.' These literary choices do not have the usual liturgical authorisation. Instead, they come from the composer's aesthetic exploration of the ritual programme, highlighting his creative individuality. A second effect can be noted of ritual 'de-habitation.' João Madureira's musical work exists in a ritual context that politically structures the Roman Catholic field. Following Jean-Paul Willaime's Weberian-inspired ideal-typical classification, this field aligns with an institutional-ritual model of truth management (Willaime 1992, pp. 25–29). Here, managing institutional capital

drives political action, and ritual serves as the primary regulatory tool. Ritual aggregates, differentiates, consecrates, authorises, and determines who may speak. Thus, institutional means validate the content of what is said, even before it is spoken.

Bourdieu, in his reflections on the efficacy of ritual discourse, examined the link between the discursive fact and the social fact (Bourdieu 1982, pp. 93–101). Critiquing Austin's focus on the illocutionary force of expressions, he replaced the 'force' of words with their 'social conditions' of use. Authority lies not in the words themselves but in the speaker's position. Catholic habitus is constructed through attention to these social conditions of enunciation. This aspect is key to understanding the tension in João Madureira's work within the Roman Catholic ritual habitat. The result can be seen as a process that shatters the liturgical utterance as a unified body, especially by summoning voices from outside that body (Rodrigues 2010).

The introduction of an autonomous, non-canonised poetic repertoire into the Proper of the Mass asserts a discontinuity before the 'Catholic' character of ritual ordering. Its efficacy, however, depends on its authorised condition, since the musical work does not present itself as an exercise in surreptitiousness, but rather as integrated into an 'authorised' project of dialogue between the Catholic community and the arts. In this context, such authorisation is local and ensures acceptability, as the intention is not to establish a new, universally recognised, 'Catholic' standard.

Moving beyond a strictly Bourdieusian perspective, and taking into account the vast commentary on questions of this matter, the content of what is communicated does matter. The rupture partially introduced by the literary–musical programme is eloquent and paradoxically generates a ritual 'de-habitation.' Yet the dimension of tension was not dissolved in the performance, since the 'extraordinary' character of the event was safeguarded by the figure of the priest presiding over the community—a protagonist endowed with considerable cultural prestige who, at the time, coordinated the 'pastoral of culture' sector of the Portuguese Episcopal Conference. Bourdieu thus returns as a reminder: it is the capacity to incorporate, with virtuosity, the *habitus* of a field that enables one to play with the elasticity of its boundaries.

The choice of a literary programme for the Proper of the Mass, set in tension with the patrimonial logic of the Ordinary, highlights the qualities of the aesthetic field itself. Using Rancière's words, this is the 'aesthetic regime of the arts.' In this regime, many meanings may coexist, even in conflict. This view is especially strong when looking at Jacques Rancière's ideas about regimes of the 'distribution of the sensible' (Rancière 1995; Yilmaz 2025). For the French philosopher, the regime of 'consensus' is not a deliberative agreement. It is a regime of surveillance that defines the distribution of the sensible. It shapes what is seen, said, and thought in a shared space. It decides what language is recognised as legitimate and pushes other speech into the realm of noise. As a precise political category, this concept positions itself to interpret post-democratic societies where consensus articulates experts in government and modalities of technocratic management in a context of economic-liberal hegemony. Politics becomes the management of interests, turning conflicts into technical matters or issues of security. It thereby renders persons invisible whose speech is not recognised as a political intervention.

By contrast, 'dissensus' (*mésentente*) designates the political experience of rupture with this consensual order, understood not as a simple divergence of opinions, but as a dispute over what is at stake in the discussion itself. Dissensus entails the de-identification of subjects from the roles assigned to them (for example, 'worker,' 'migrant,' 'spectator') and the reconfiguration of the distribution of the sensible through the introduction of new subjects and objects of enunciation, rendering visible and audible what had previously been invisible or inaudible. At this point, Rancière's thesis enters the aesthetic field. The

‘distribution of the sensible’ is both political and aesthetic, because it shapes perception, visibility, and shared experience. Aesthetics is political, not by chance, but by its very nature (Rancière 2004, pp. 31–63). In the aesthetic regime of art, it is not only the theme of a work that matters. What matters is how it rearranges the sensible world: shifting lines between art and life, between those allowed to speak and those who are not, between what gets noticed and what is ignored.

Artistic, literary, pedagogical, or performance practices can act as ways to create dissensus. They do this by disrupting dominant perceptions and opening up ‘spaces of dissensus.’ In these spaces, ‘other’ voices become audible, and bodies or gestures that were hidden now appear in the shared arena. Rancière’s critique of consensus democracies translates, in the field of aesthetics, into a critique of consensual uses of art that confirm the dominant distribution of the sensible rather than disturbing it, whether that be when art is instrumentalised as a mere illustration of already recognised identities or when confined to a specialised space. By insisting on the ever-renewed possibility of interrupting the consensual order by subjects who previously had neither place nor voice, Rancière suggests that art participates in democracy precisely when it intensifies this possibility of sensible dispute, destabilising what is recognised as evidence of what exists, what is visible and what is sayable. Aesthetics, as something far from being separate from politics, becomes a privileged space for experimenting with new configurations of the sensible, where equality can be found between voices even if they are in a form that is fragile, precarious, and subject to dispute. It is at this crossroads, between the sharing of the sensible, litigation, and in the creation of common worlds, that Rancière’s articulations of consensus, dissensus, and aesthetics reach the point of their greatest theoretical density.

This perspective enables the identification of a way to interpret a significant part of the commentary discussed. The desire for tradition to encounter other voices—or, in the composer’s own words, for the musical work to transcribe the Catholic solemnity of Pentecost into the register of a feast of language, alluding to the ‘miracle of translation’ that structures the canonical Christian narrative—are traces of a positioning that introduces the art of dissensus into ritual ‘consensus’ through the voice of an ‘other’ literature, heterogeneous in relation to ritual jargon. João Madureira’s compositional work thus presents itself as a site of mediation between the religious and the secular spheres, not by assimilation, but by preserving the heterological force of those voices that inhabit the space beyond the boundary instituted by ritual habitus. The creative tension revealed by the compositional programme is transcribed, in the composer’s own words, into the language of paradox:

This *Missa de Pentecostes* is made up of numbers that are frankly diverse from one another. However, it is also made of a superimposition of languages that dare to comment on one another. It is a Mass of medieval contemporaneity and of atonal tonalism. It is a place of encounter. Furthermore, it is a work that assumes itself to be simultaneously a fragment and a unified whole. A work that embraces its ‘linguistic’ heterogeneity while at the same time reflecting a unifying creative impulse. A Mass in which the presence of quotation allowed for the constitution of an ‘Open Work,’ non-hierarchisable and characterised by multilinearity—thus allowing, from the outset, the subversion of any chronological sequence—and assuming the plurality of our aesthetic present. (Madureira 2011a, p. 95)

From this standpoint, Michel de Certeau’s heterological lens may shed light on this point (Certeau 1986, 2005). Heterology broadly refers to the study of the ‘other’—those marginalised or silenced by major narratives of modernity. This method seeks to shift attention away from dominant subjects and institutions, making room for ways of knowing that is built on what is excluded or overlooked. The heterological method highlights the

discursive conditions that keep certain people or practices invisible. It is an approach that focuses on fragments, breaks, and the spaces in between within society.

This heterological project first took shape in Certeau's studies of Christian mysticism (Watanabe 2024). He described mystical literature not as a doctrine or an isolated individual experience, but as a topography of 'humiliated places'—decaying convents, converted Jews, women, and the illiterate—where marginal voices, associated with the body, madness, or song, subvert the hegemonic discourses of dominant rationalities. Certeau's heterology maps these fissures, showing how mysticism operates tactically through self-effacement to enunciate an ineffable absence, thereby transforming absence into a disruptive social practice. This reading is continuous with Certeau's attention to ordinary practices and to the 'invention of the everyday,' in which the 'ordinary individual' tactically reappropriates devices and codes imposed by the strategies of power (Certeau 1980). Heterology thus describes modes of enunciation that do not coincide with hegemonic discourses, operating instead as arts of deviation that introduce fissures into established systems of meaning.

João Madureira's work may be understood as heterological, since his compositional programme opens new possibilities for the inscription of the 'other.' Here, the 'other' refers not to a socially marginal voice but rather a 'worldly' voice, external to the religious canon. Defining qualities of the work—its fragmentary, intertextual, and polyphonic structure—help keep the rite open to heterological discourse. As a result, the work may be read as a 'dismembered Mass' composed of fragments, a characteristic that endows it with both aesthetic and ethical contemporaneity (Rodrigues 2010; Barrento 2010, pp. 61–64).

Paul Ricœur's theory of translation as hospitality emerges from the experience of the impossibility of a perfect equivalence between languages and, at the same time, from the ethical decision to sustain the desire to translate despite this structural failure. This hermeneutical matrix may be transposed into the dialogue between religious ritual and the aesthetic regime of the arts, provided that both rite and artwork are understood as symbolic 'languages' that welcome one another without absorption or fusion. Plural spaces require translational competences. In this way, a fourth territory is added to this interpretative archipelago. In the present case, the composer may be seen as a translator (Laverdure 2022).

Habermas, in his theory of the post-secular, emphasised the development of translational competences so that religious worldviews might be shared in the public sphere. However, his conception of translation overlooks bidirectionality; it focuses primarily on translating religious arguments into a common idiom. In contrast, Ricœur's theory of translation as hospitality addresses this problem more effectively. Born out of the experience that perfect equivalence between languages is impossible, and of the ethical decision to pursue translation nonetheless, Ricœur's approach is distinct. In *Sur la traduction* (Ricœur 2003), he describes translation as a practice that oscillates between two poles: the dream of transparency (the ideal of total equivalence) and the clear awareness that every translation is, in some sense, a 'betrayal.' The translator operates within the space between the 'impossible' (a complete equivalence of meaning) and the 'difficult' (the challenging task of bringing different linguistic worlds together). Here, the translator adopts a dynamic fidelity, accepting losses and shifts, while rejecting both total relativism and the dogma of absolute untranslatability (Simonotti 2022). Within this context, Ricœur introduces the metaphor of 'linguistic hospitality': translation welcomes the other's language into one's own, balancing the joy of inhabiting the foreign idiom with the satisfaction of hosting the foreign word at home, without erasing its strangeness (Dreyer 2011).

This linguistic hospitality has, in Ricœur, clearly an ethical and political scope: it becomes a paradigm for a relation to alterity in which inevitable asymmetry does not turn into a logic of domination. To translate is to accept that there is no neutral metalanguage and no sovereign language; each language—and, by analogy, each tradition, each form

of life—is simultaneously finite and exceeded, called upon to expose itself to the other in an exchange in which both sides lose and gain something. It is from here that relevance can be found in readings that see in the notion of ‘linguistic hospitality’ a model for intercultural and interreligious dialogue; rather than seeking an abstract standard code, the task is to learn to dwell provisionally in the language of the other and to reconfigure one’s own without renouncing one’s memory or demanding that the other renounce theirs. Transposed to the religious domain, this logic of hospitality allows religions to be conceived as multilingual formations—languages, narratives, rites, gestures, architectures—that translate one another without any singular one becoming the normative language of the others. Some authors, explicitly engaging Ricœur, suggest that linguistic hospitality offers a model for thinking the relative ‘translatability’ of religions among themselves, against the theses of total transparency or absolute incommensurability (Moyaert 2008). At this level, translation is no longer merely interlingual, but inter-ritual and inter-symbolic: it involves the passage of narrative schemes, images, bodily practices, and temporal forms between different universes of meaning, where they are always at risk of appropriation, yet with the possibility of reciprocal enrichment.

Shifting focus to the intersection between religious ritual and the arts, the metaphor of translation as hospitality proves fruitful, especially when combined with Rancière’s notion of the ‘aesthetic regime’ of the arts—understood to be the modern mode of distributing the sensible, where the boundaries between high art, popular art, and ritual uses become porous. Within this aesthetic regime, many contemporary artistic apparatuses—installations, performances, sound environments, participatory experiences—adopt ritual motifs (processionality, repetition, codified gesture, silence, chant) without simply repeating institutional liturgy. Instead, they create hybrid zones where the religious is translated into an aesthetic key, and art, in turn, is ritualised. Ricœur’s theory sees these hybrid zones not as mere secularisation or the unilateral aestheticization of the religious, but as an asymmetrical translation where the ritual ‘source text’ finds a form of hospitality within the artistic ‘target text.’ For example, an artwork that incorporates liturgical motifs acts like a target language hosting a foreign guest: on the one hand, it must reconfigure its own syntax (exhibition dispositif, temporality of reception, relationship between spectator and the artwork) to accommodate the ritual gesture; on the other hand, it transforms the rite by embedding it in the logic of the aesthetic regime where contemplation, critical reflexivity, and formal autonomy carry significant weight. The result is not just the ‘illustration’ of religious content, but a double displacement: the ritual loses exclusive ties to the religious community and opens itself up to a broader civic participation; art transcends individual enjoyment and reopens the dimension of collective action in time.

Hospitality, however, is neither neutral nor free of conflict. Ricœur insists that every act of translation entails a moment of ‘betrayal,’ and the ethics of hospitality consists of assuming this risk without disguising it. When applied to the meeting of liturgical ritual and art, this means recognising inevitable losses. The dogmatic and communal rootedness of some rites cannot be fully transposed into the exhibition or performative space. Conversely, the critical autonomy of art may be strained when it approaches devotional dispositifs too closely, risking reduction to catechetical or decorative illustration. The theoretical task, inspired by Ricœur, is not to erase these asymmetries but to describe them as the ‘cost’ of maintaining an open space of translation between two regimes of meaning that resist totalising synthesis. Thus, the theory of translation as hospitality offers resources for articulating, with greater nuance, the post-secular debate about intersections between the religious and artistic spheres. Instead of posing a choice between the ‘sacralisation’ of art and the ‘aestheticization’ of religion, Ricœur’s metaphor invites a discussion on asymmetrical translations, where each side accepts being displaced by the other’s presence

without renouncing its own history. The incompleteness of translation—what remains untranslatable—becomes the site of spiritual and aesthetic creativity. In this sense, imagining the dialogue between religious ritual and the aesthetic regime of the arts through the hospitality of translation allows for the recognition, at the heart of hybrid practices, of not just a play of quotations, but of a genuine ethical exercise in symbolic coexistence, where alterity is welcomed non-violently—though never completely without risk.

The fifth interpretative territory addresses universality. Madureira's compositional programme opens ritual language to poetic 'otherness,' which reconfigures its universality. The ritual language is no longer exclusive to initiates or institutions. This is clear when the *Missa de Pentecostes* is performed in concert²⁸. This analytical axis reframes the issue of translation through Habermas's post-secular perspective. If the religious worldview is translated into another language, which language is used? Habermas's theory assumes that this language corresponds to the universality of communicative reason. For interpreting João Madureira's work in its ritual-liturgical setting, Pierre Lévy's concept of 'universality without totality' is especially relevant (Lévy 1994, 1997).

This concept lies at the core of Lévy's reflection on cyberculture: knowledge that is distributed and the new modalities of collective intelligibility emerging in contexts of networks. It is a theoretical proposal that seeks to respond to a classic tension of late modernity: how does one think about the universal without resorting to totalising, homogeneous or normative forms of unification. The universal is no longer conceived of as an overarching synthesis, but rather as an open horizon of communication, translation and circulation of meaning, produced through the interaction of irreducible singularities. Lévy argues that the universality characteristic of network societies does not result from the imposition of a centre, a canon, or a dominant symbolic system, but from the interoperability of local perspectives, situated knowledges, and plural forms of expression (Lévy 1994, 1997). Universality is thus processual and relational: it emerges from the possibility of each singularity entering into relation with all others, without this relation requiring the dissolution of differences. It is in this sense that Lévy speaks of a universal 'without totality': universal because it is potentially accessible to all, non-totalising because it renounces being restrained within the figure of a completed whole. Accordingly, universality ceases to coincide with the modern idea of an identical truth content that is valid everywhere. It comes closer to a 'concrete universal,' arising from the intensification of interdependencies and the circulation of signs, without producing an absolute normative centre (Lévy 2000).

The 'fragmentary' quality that Madureira claims for his work—that is, its deliberate composition from incomplete or disparate elements—has a particular affinity with Lévy's conceptual framework:

It is a fragmentary work that does not lament its condition; it is a whole that does not rely on a genetic identity of materials to guarantee its truth. It is a work that refuses academicism and does not seek to restore or reintegrate, but to retrieve, re-encounter and re-listen, without fearing any aesthetic prohibitions. The aim is to engage with tradition in a dimension in which the weight of its memory is not present; in turn, the contemporary gaze upon this tradition—light in relation to memory—is likewise not constrained by aesthetic imperatives that are equally heavy. (Madureira 2011b, p. 224)

At the level of correlations between religious ritual and the aesthetic regime of the arts, Lévy's perspective opens up the possibility of considering this territory as a network of partial translations, borrowings, hybridisations and interferences, without projecting either the absorption of ritual by art or the complete sacralisation of art as a 'new religion.' As has been noted, since Romanticism, the 'religion of art' has configured a paradigm in which an artwork is invested with a theological function, presenting itself as ecstatic knowledge that

reveals transcendent truths, within a logic of sacralisation in which the aesthetic tends to occupy the place of the religious cult. Contemporary criticism of this paradigm converges with Lévy in rejecting the conversion of art into a spiritual totality that absorbs and replaces the religious, thereby giving rise to an aesthetic-theological monism (Schaeffer 1994).

This formulation is beneficial for thinking about the dialogue among ritual, liturgical art, and the secular sphere. Madureira's Mass does not embody a normative liturgical art; nor is it anchored in a regime of truth incommensurable with shared public languages. If 'catholicity,' rather than delineating a boundary of adhesion to a dogmatic content, is defined as symbolic circulation, then ritual art may reach the public sphere not as a bearer of absolute truth but as an open *dispositif* of meaning, capable of generating multiple interpretations, a sharing of the sensible, and communicable experiences beyond strict dogmatic boundaries. Madureira's decision to exclude the *Credo* from his programme allows for at least two readings. The composer himself notes that he wished to give voice to the assembled faithful (Madureira 2011b, p. 223)—a condition not possible in a concert setting. Alternatively, within this interpretative framework, one may hypothesise a conscious or unconscious avoidance, since the *Credo* most explicitly carries a dogmatic content and, in its complexity, is less open to the dialogues and displacements the composer seeks to promote.

Through its musical and literary programme, the *Missa de Pentecostes* can integrate a wide range of cultural translations. In this framework, what becomes universalised is the human experience it invokes: the body, time, repetition, memory, finitude, and symbolised transcendence. Universality without totality thus allows for the consideration of a public presence of liturgical art that cannot be confused with proselytism nor with secularising neutralisation; instead, it is a symbolic offering available for plural appropriation. This polysemic perspective does not contradict the idea that *Missa de Pentecostes* 'inhabits tradition'. The composer proceeds from a non-normative conception of tradition without reducing it to folklore. In João Madureira's compositional practice, tradition does not operate as a closed, prescriptive framework guaranteeing continuity or doctrinal coherence; rather, it functions as a historically sedimented yet critically reactivatable matrix of meanings. To 'inhabit tradition', in this sense, is not to reproduce it normatively, but to engage it hermeneutically—through processes of selection, displacement, and reconfiguration that preserve its symbolic density while opening it to new interpretative horizons. It is precisely this critical-hermeneutic stance that enables the work to occupy a median, hybrid space: by remaining structurally and grammatically anchored in a ritual form, it sustains its intelligibility within a given tradition, while simultaneously suspending any claim to exclusive validity. Consequently, the work can be received as a 'symbolic offering' not because it dissolves its traditional grounding, but because it rearticulates that grounding as an open *dispositif* of meaning, capable of sustaining plural appropriations across differentiated regimes of belief, perception, and cultural belonging. It is important not to lose sight of the fact that the Catholic liturgical reform following the Second Vatican Council brought about a significant transformation in the traditional semiotics of immutability, leading to an inevitable destabilisation of the 'Catholic' universe of meaning, particularly in its relation to 'truth.' Changes in the sphere of verbal communication within the post-conciliar liturgical ritual contributed to the emergence of multiple interpretations and expressions of faith, favouring the affirmation of 'post-Catholicisms,' in Dekert's terms (Dekert 2022).

This approach aligns with Alain Badiou's concept of 'tangential universality' (Badiou 1997, 2006). For Badiou, the universal emerges from an event—a singular rupture that cannot be deduced from the existing order, yet claims validity for all. Universality, as Badiou sees it, touches subjects 'tangentially,' never fully coinciding with the whole social world. Tangential universality is not realised by generalising, but by a singular truth

traversing different contexts without being absorbed. When applied to ritual art and the public sphere, tangential universality allows liturgical art to be seen as an aesthetic-symbolic event that addresses the secular space without dissolving into it. From this view, ritual art becomes universal not by adapting to the public sphere's norms, but through the unique force of its form, producing meaning that touches subjects within and beyond the believing community. Thus, Madureira's work cannot simply be seen as the secularisation of Catholic ritual or as religion returning to the secular sphere. Tangential universality lets us see liturgical art as an aesthetic-symbolic event, irreducible to reproducing a ritual habitus, which addresses the secular space without dissolving into it.

6. Conclusions

After an extensive bibliographical review on the visibility of religion in the contemporary artistic field, João Madureira's musical work *Missa de Pentecostes* emerged as a privileged laboratory for observing interactions between the religious and the secular. *Missa de Pentecostes* was not approached as an isolated musical work. Instead, it served as a heuristic device for observing contemporary reconfigurations: a space of experimentation where ritual language, theological imagination, artistic form, and secular aesthetic intervention intersect, without reducing one to the other. The work breaks from a self-referential liturgical tradition. However, it also resists interpretation through a linear, teleological model of secularisation. *Missa de Pentecostes* reveals a field of tensions, transactions, and mediations that mark the social dynamics often described as 'post-secular.'

From a methodological perspective, this analysis examines a cultural 'fragment'—a singular project at the intersection of liturgical ritual and artistic performance. The fragmentary nature of the work, which resists totalisation, reveals how meanings are produced, moved, and translated across institutional, symbolic, and experiential boundaries. Rather than replacing the whole, the fragment exposes underlying processes. This clarification highlights how agencies interact to build shared symbolic spaces.

Missa de Pentecostes shows that liturgical ritual can include diverse voices while remaining anchored in tradition. Artistic practice can also dialogue with religious forms, without using or absorbing them into a sacralised aesthetic. What emerges is not a simple, one-way translation of a religious idiom into public communication, nor merely the replacement of religion by art. Instead, a network of partial translations, overlays and frictions appears. The religious and the secular are not fixed domains but relational regimes, shaped and reshaped by concrete practices.

This analysis enabled insight into religious and secular agency in action—as an 'Open Work.' *Missa de Pentecostes*, as both an artistic and a liturgical event, enabled the testing of a broad theoretical framework grounded in situated creative processes, shaped by aesthetic decisions, institutional constraints and ethical positioning. The fragmentary structure of the work, its intertextuality and its refusal of dogmatic closure function not only as stylistic traits, but also as indicators of broader cultural dynamics, in which meaning circulates without being anchored in a single centre of authority—as is characteristic of the aesthetic regime of the arts.

Future research would benefit from articulating this hermeneutic approach with the results of ethnographic research programmes. Attention to how performers, communities of the faithful, and other secular publics appropriate such works would allow for a deeper understanding of how these hybrid configurations are experienced, negotiated, and contested. The study of reception, embodied participation, and local impacts would enable a fuller grasp of the intersections between religious experience and artistic expressivity as they reconfigure meanings, beliefs, and modes of belonging.

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Notes

- ¹ For a comprehensive review of the concept of ‘post-secular’ and a broad overview of the discussion, see the following seminal works: Calhoun (2011); Gorski et al. (2012); Burchardt et al. (2015); Stavo-Debaugue (2024); Sajir and Ruiz Andrés (2025).
- ² João Madureira’s musical language is characterised by a critically integrative logic that mediates between tradition and experimentation, eschewing both modernist rupture and postmodern collage in favour of a relational poetics linking materials, historical strata, and compositional systems. Informed by a post-spectral sensibility—evident in its attention to the materiality, harmonic organisation, and perceptual unfolding of sound—his writing remains open to the incorporation of tonal, modal, and historically derived elements, not as acts of citation but as components within an articulated network of signification. This orientation yields a pronounced intertextual dimension and a nuanced management of heterogeneous layers, often anchored in religious references whose symbolic density is both preserved and reconfigured. His musical idiom thus emerges as a dynamic field of productive tensions, in which timbral exploration, formal construction, and semantic resonance converge within a compositional practice that privileges relation, mediation, and interpretative openness. For a brief biography of the composer: <https://portfolios.esml.ipl.pt/compositores-as/58-joao-madureira> (accessed on 2 December 2025).
- ³ <https://www.studiointernational.com/bill-viola-the-passions>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GQuSYsFMMt4>, accessed on 2 December 2025.
- ⁴ <https://www.moma.org/audio/playlist/243/3133>, accessed on 2 December 2025.
- ⁵ In this sense, curatorial work can be interpreted as a modality of theological practice, not aimed at doctrinally disciplining or regulating experience, but rather as opening pathways for personal and collective questioning (Siedell 2023).
- ⁶ The category of ‘return’ has been discussed from different disciplinary perspectives, fostering multiple conceptual intersections. In its most recent versions, the category aims, with varying nuances, to interpret problems similar to those that the category ‘reenchantment’ seeks to convey (Imran and Leng 2025; Svenungsson 2020; Chabbert 2021; Gorski et al. 2012).
- ⁷ https://www.galleriacontinua.com/assets/website_attachment/KAPOOR-Ascension-EN.pdf, accessed on 2 December 2025.
- ⁸ <https://www.boosey.com/cr/music/James-MacMillan-The-Sun-Danced/100385>, accessed on 2 December 2025.
- ⁹ The work was later recorded according to the strategies of the editors at MacMillan, which were acting independently from the religious institution that had commissioned the piece: James MacMillan, Symphony No. 5; *The Sun Danced*, Mary Bevan, The Sixteen, Genesis Sixteen, Britten Sinfonia, conducted by Harry Christophers, Coro COR16179, 2020.
- ¹⁰ <https://lagunaartmuseum.org/100-artists-see-god>, accessed on 2 December 2025.
- ¹¹ <https://www.centrepompidou.fr/fr/programme/agenda/evenement/cdqqopo>, accessed on 2 December 2025.
- ¹² <https://stedelijk.nl/nl/tentoonstellingen/stedelijk-museum-te-gast-in-de-nieuwe-kerk-heilig-vuur>, accessed on 2 December 2025.
- ¹³ <https://www.kunstsammlung.de/en/exhibitions/the-problem-of-god-EN/>, accessed on 2 December 2025.
- ¹⁴ <https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2018/heavenly-bodies>, accessed on 2 December 2025.
- ¹⁵ <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/mumbai/three-ancient-gods-meet-in-london-with-a-little-help-from-mumbai/articleshow/121063551.cms>, accessed on 2 December 2025.
- ¹⁶ Rosen collaborated with artist Terry Duffy as co-curator, transforming the concept into a travelling urban exhibition. In 2017 and 2018, theologian Catriona Laing joined Rosen as co-curator to develop similar installations in Washington, D.C. (2017) and New York City (Manhattan, 2018). In subsequent years, comparable projects were realised in Amsterdam (2019) and Deventer (2020), where curatorial responsibilities were delegated to local curators.
- ¹⁷ This type of intervention can also be associated with the *Fourth Plinth* project, developed by the Greater London Authority. The sculpture, created for Trafalgar Square in London by Mark Wallinger, draws on the imagery of the *Ecce Homo*—one of the most significant visual motifs in the Christian iconographic tradition—in order to inscribe an ethical and political message into

- the urban fabric (Koestlé-Cate 2017)—https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/mgla140518-1933_-_attachment.pdf, accessed on 12 December 2025.
- ¹⁸ <https://www.thewadsworth.org/bill-viola-ascension/>, accessed on 8 December 2025.
- ¹⁹ <http://ugorondinone.com/exhibition/human-nature/>, accessed on 8 December 2025.
- ²⁰ The list of awards and honours are a testament to his social impact: https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jos%C3%A9_Tolentino_de_Mendon%C3%A7a, accessed on 13 April 2026. A brief biographical summary may be found here: <https://www.acad-ciencias.pt/eng/scholars/jose-tolentino-de-mendonca/>, accessed on 13 April 2026.
- ²¹ The event known as the ‘Capela do Rato Vigil,’ in late 1972, took place within a political context shaped by Pope Paul VI’s stance on peace and the right of nations to self-determination, by growing opposition to the Portuguese Colonial War, and by the intensification of political engagement among specific Catholic sectors. In 1967, Paul VI designated 1 January as the World Day of Peace. From 1968 onwards, the prayer vigil for peace held at the Church of São Domingos in Lisbon emerged as a significant point of reference. The resurgence of deliberative meetings concerning the Colonial War at the Capela do Rato in Lisbon further exacerbated existing tensions. On 31 December, the eve of 1 January 1973, in the context of the announcement of a ‘fast’ in support of peace, police forces infiltrated the Capela do Rato in order to arrest the participants.
- ²² The various movements of João Madureira’s *Missa de Pentecostes* are accessible through a playlist on his YouTube channel, presented in video score format: https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLQdsNWjMasEqNnF1iHLCegKpWn6z_1y1u&si=6A1zxxU0hnleecl9, accessed on 24 November 2025.
- ²³ Excerpt translated by Richard Zenith, https://www.poetryinternational.com/en/poets-poems/poems/poem/103-5000_WIND-OF-THE-SPIRIT#lang-en, accessed on 13 April 2026.
- ²⁴ Excerpt translated by Peter Stilwell for this publication.
- ²⁵ Translated by Peter Stilwell for this publication.
- ²⁶ See note 24 above.
- ²⁷ See note 25 above.
- ²⁸ The work was performed in concert at the Centro Cultural de Belém (Lisbon), by the ensemble Sete Lágrimas, on 26 February 2012.

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