

## *Ars contrapunct<i> secundum Philippum de Vitriaco*

Incipit introductio contrapunct<i>.

Prologus.

Volentibus introduci in artem contrapuncti, id est nota contra notam, quamplurima prenotanda sunt. Et primo et principaliter notandum quod omnes note monocordi vocantur aliquo istorum sex nominum, scilicet: ut, re, mi, fa, sol, la.

Ad evidentiam ergo totius musicae, tam cantus mensurabilis quam immensurabilis, primo videndum est quot sunt species ejus, que sunt preambula, et que sunt necessaria ad demonstrationem et intelligentiam omnis cantus.

Tredecim igitur sunt species cantus sive discantus, nec plures nec pauciores que debito modo rationem numeri tenent. Et iste tredecim species loquuntur de numero relato ad sonos proportionatos, quia, sicut dicit Guido, sapientissimus musicae magister, ita est de illis qui sine arte canunt, sicut de illis hominibus litteratis qui nunquam litteras didicerunt. Item dicit Guido: Vulgares cantores in vanum laborant qui differentiam unius toni vel semitonii discernere nesciunt; tamen ipsi in cantando negligentes, et divinam et secularem scripturam plene et perfecte cognoscere potuissent.

Tractatus primus.

Caput primum. De tredecim speciebus.

Secundum etiam predictum Guidonem sapientissimum, in arte musicae excellentissimum, et secundum magistrum Johannem de Gallandia, quondam in studio Parisino expertissimum atque probatissimum, ac etiam secundum Boetium et secundum plures alios magistros, tredecim sunt species quibus utimur in omni tam cantu mensurahili quam immensurabili et non plures nec pauciores. scilicet: unisonus, tonus, semitonium, dyptonus, semidytonus, dyatessaron, tritonus et dyapente, tonus cum dyapente, semitonium cum dyapente, dytonus cum dyapente, semidytonus cum dyapente et dyapason. Et sicut

## *The Art of Counterpoint According to Philippe de Vitry*

*trans. Rob C. Wegman*

Here begins the introduction in counterpoint.

Prologue.

For those wishing to be introduced in the art of counterpoint (that is, note against note), many things are to be afore-noted. And firstly and principally it should be noted that all the notes of the monochord are called by one of these six names, to wit, ut, re, mi, fa, sol, la.

For a clear understanding of all music, measurable song as well as unmeasurable, therefore, we must first consider how many are its species, which [of them] have preeminence, and which are necessary for the demonstration and understanding of all song.

There are, then, thirteen species of chant or discant, neither more nor fewer, which carry the ratio of number in the proper way. And those thirteen species are expressive of number in regard to proportioned sounds, for as that most learned magister of music Guido says, it is the same with those who sing without science as it is with studious men who have never acquired literacy. Also, Guido says: popular singers who are unable to tell the difference between a tone and semitone are laboring in vain; yet those who are ignorant in singing might [still] be able to learn both divine and worldly scripture fully and perfectly.

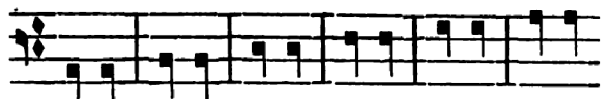
First treatise.

First chapter. Concerning the thirteen species.

According to the aforesaid Guido, [who is] most learned and most outstanding in the art of music, and according to Magister Johannes de Garlandia, in his day the most experienced and esteemed man in the Parisian school, and also according to Boethius, and according to many other magisters, there are thirteen species which we use in all song, measurable as well as unmeasurable, neither more nor fewer, namely: unison, whole tone, semitone, ditone, semiditone, diatessaron, tritone and diapente, tone plus diapente, semitone plus diapente, ditone plus diapente, semiditone plus diapente, and diapason. And just as there is addition and

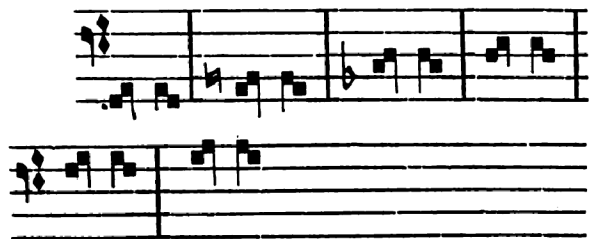
additio et compositio fit speciei dyapente, ita additio et compositio fit speciei dyapason.

Prima species, videlicet unisonus, est quaecumque plures note vel voces invicem collocantur in eadem linea vel spatio. Secundum discantum unisonus habet fieri, quando discantus et cantus in eadem linea vel spatio conveniunt; et dicitur unisonus ab unus, una, unum, et sonus, quasi unus et equalis sonus, sine ulla variatione, ut hic patet exemplum:



De secunda specie.

Secunda species est tonus qui, secundum Guidonem, diffinitur sic: tonus est spatii magnitudo plenum et perfectum sonum emittens. Secundum autem Boetium diffinitur sic: tonus est coherentia duarum vocum plenam et integram elevationem reddens seu depositionem sine aliquo intervallo; et dicitur tonus a tonando vel a sonando, quia integre tonat vel sonat, id est integrum tonum vel sonum facit in animo audientis, et figuratur sic: ut re, re mi, fa sol, sol la, ascendendo, et converso descendendo, ut hic per exemplum in gravibus acutis et superacutis patet:

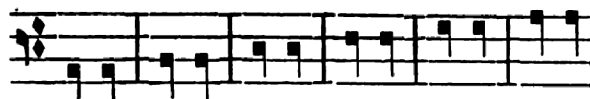


De tertia specie.

Tertia species est semitonium, et est conjunctio duarum vocum semiplenam elevationem reddens atque depositionem sine aliquo intervallo. Et dicitur semitonium, non a semis quod est dimidium, sed a semis quod est imperfectum, ut ait Boetius, quia due voces non

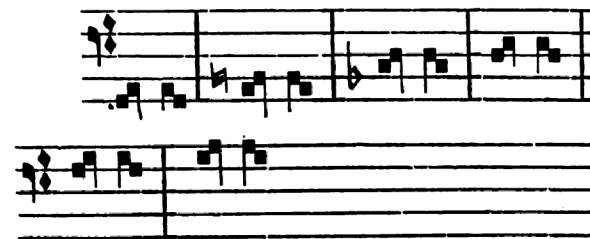
composition of the species of diapente, so it there addition and composition of the species of diapason.

The first species, that is, the unison, is manifest whenever several notes or pitches are placed next to one another on the same line or space. In discant the unison occurs when the discantus and the chant meet on the same line or space; and it is called unison after *unus*, *una*, *unum*, and *sonus*, as it were one and equal sound, without any discrepancy, as is apparent in the example here:



Concerning the second species.

The second species is the tone which according to Guido is defined thus: the tone is the magnitude of a space emitting a full and complete sound. However, according Boethius it is defined thus: the tone is the coherence of two steps rendering a full and whole upward or downward move without any interval; and it is called tone after *tonandus* or *sonandus*, because it intones or sounds wholly, that is, it makes a whole tone or sound in the mind of the listener, and it is expressed thus: ut-re, re-mi, fa-sol, and sol-la ascending, and the reverse descending, as is apparent here in the example, in low, high, and more than high [letters]:



Concerning the third species.

The third species is the semitone, and it is a joining together of two steps that produces a half-full upward or downward move, without any interval. And it is called semitone, not after *semis* meaning half, but after *semis* meaning imperfect, as says Boethius, because the two steps are not producing a full

plenum tonum faciunt et figuratur uno modo tantum, scilicet: mi fa, ascendendo et e converso descendendo, ut hic patet in gravibus acutis et superacutis:



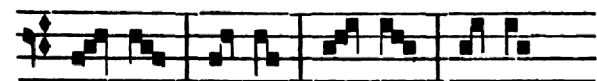
De quarta specie.

Quarta species est dytonus, et est conjunctio trium vocum et dispositio duorum tonorum sine aliquo semitonio, et dicitur dytonus a *dya* quod est duo, et tonus, id est duo toni integri, et figurantur duobus modis, scilicet: ut mi et fa la, ascendendo, et e converso descendendo. Et alio nomine vocatur tertia perfecta, ut hic inferius invenitur in gravibus, acutis et superacutis:



De quinta specie.

Quinta species est semiditonus, et est conjunctio trium vocum, et dispositio toni cum semitonio; et sic in principio vel in fine semitonium cum tono apponitur, et ideo duobus modis figuratur, scilicet: re fa et mi sol, ascendendo, et e converso descendendo; et dicitur non a *semis* quod est dimidium, sed a *semis* quod est imperfectum, id est dytonus imperfectus. Et alio nomine vocatur tertia imperfecta, ut in hoc exemplo:



tone, and it is expressed in only one way, namely: mi-fa ascending and the reverse descending, as is apparent here in low, high, and more than high [letters]:



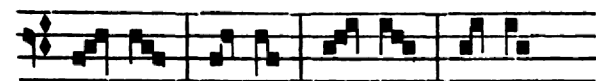
Concerning the fourth species.

The fourth species is the ditone, and it is a joining together of three steps and an arranging of two tones without any semitone, and it is called ditone after *dya* which means two, and *tonus*, that is two whole tones, and they are expressed in two ways, namely: ut-mi and fa-la ascending, and the reverse descending. And by another name it is called perfect third, as is found here below, in low, high, and more than high [letters]:



Concerning the fifth species.

The fifth species is the semiditone, and it is a joining together of three steps, and an arranging of a tone with a semitone; and thus a semitone is added to the tone either at the beginning or at the end, and therefore it is expressed in two ways, namely: re-fa and mi-sol ascending, and the reverse descending; and it is called not after *semis* meaning half, but after *semis* meaning imperfect, that is, imperfect ditone. And by another name it is called an imperfect third, as in this example:



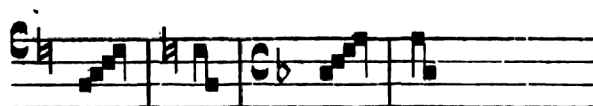
### De sexta specie.

Sexta species est dyatessaron, et est conjunctio quatuor vocum et dispositio duorum tonorum cum additione unius semitonii in principio vel in medio vel in fine, et figuratur tribus modis, id est: ut fa, re sol, mi la, ascendendo, et e converso descendendo, probabiliter vel operabiliter; et dicitur a *dya* quod est de, et *tetros* quod est quatuor, id est species ex quatuor vocibus constans, ut hic inferius gravibus, acutis et superacutis litteris patet:



### De septima specie.

Septima species est tritonus, et est conjunctio quatuor vocum et dispositio trium tonorum sine aliquo semitono, et dicitur tritonus a *tris* quod est tres, et *tonus*, id est de tribus tonis constans, ut hic inferius gravibus, acutis et superacutis patet:



### De octava specie.

Octava species est dyapente, et est conjunctio quinque vocum et dispositio trium tonorum cum semitono aut in principio, aut in medio duobus modis aut in fine, et sic quatuor modis efficitur, scilicet: ut sol, re la, mi mi, et fa fa, ascendendo, et e converso descendendo; et dicitur dyapente a *dya* quod est de, et *pente* quod est quinque, id est de quinque vocibus constans. Alio modo vocatur quinta perfecta major, ut hic:

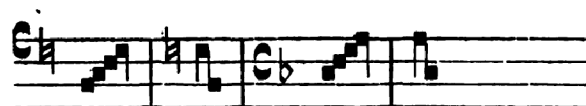
### Concerning the sixth species.

The sixth species is the diatessaron, and it is a joining together of four steps and an arranging of two tones with one semitone added at the beginning, or in the middle, or at the end, and it is expressed in three ways, that is: ut-fa, re-sol, mi-la ascending, and the reverse descending, demonstrably or operably; and it is called after *dya* which means from, and *tetros* which means four, that is, a species consisting of four steps, as is apparent here below, in low, high, and more than high letters:



### Concerning the seventh species.

The seventh species is the tritone, and it is a joining together of four steps and an arranging of three tones without any semitone, and it is called tritone after *tris* which means three, and *tonus*, that is: consisting of three tones, as is apparent here below, in low, high, and more than high [letters]:



### Concerning the eighth species.

The eighth species is the diapente, and it is a joining together of five steps and an arranging of three tones with a semitone either at the beginning, or in the middle in two ways, or at the end, and thus it is made in four ways, namely: ut-sol, re-la, mi-mi, and fa-fa ascending, and the reverse descending; and it is called diapente after *dya* which means from, and *pente* which means five, that is: consisting of five steps. In another way it is called a perfect a perfect major fifth, as here:



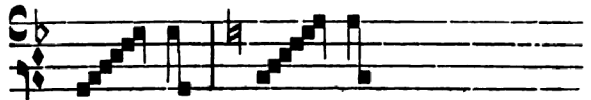
De nona specie.

Nona species est tonus cum dyapente, et est conjunctio sex vocum et dispositio quatuor tonorum cum semitono; et alio nomine vocatur sexta perfecta, ut hic:



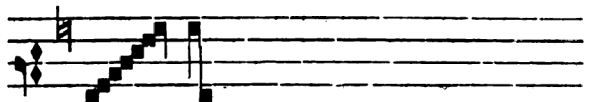
De decima specie.

Decima species est semitonium cum dyapente, et est conjunctio sex vocum et dispositio trium tonorum cum duobus semitoniis; et alio nomine vocatur sexta imperfecta, ut hic patet:



De undecima specie.

Undecima species est ditonus cum dyapente, et est species conjuncta ex septem vocibus et ex quinque tonis cum uno semitono, ut hic patet exemplum:



De duodecima specie.

Duodecima species est termitonium vel semiditonus cum dyapente, et est species conjuncta ex septem vocibus et ex quatuor tonis cum duobus semitoniis, ut hic patet:



Concerning the ninth species.

The ninth species is the tone plus diapente, and it is a joining together of six pitches and an arranging of four tones with a semitone; and by another name it is called the perfect sixth, as here:



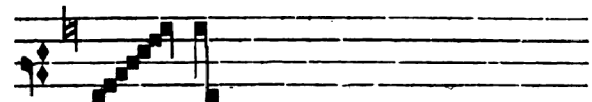
Concerning the tenth species.

The tenth species is the semitone plus diapente, and it is a joining together of six steps and an arranging of three tones with two semitones; and by another name it is called the imperfect sixth, as is apparent here:



Concerning the eleventh species.

The eleventh species is the ditone plus diapente, and it is a species made by joining together seven steps and five tones plus one semitone, as is apparent in this example:



Concerning the twelfth species.

The twelfth species is the termitone or semiditone plus diapente, and it is a species made by joining together seven steps and four tones with two semitones, as is apparent here:



De tertia decima specie.

Tertia decima species et ultima est dyapason, et est conjunctio octo vocum et dispositio quinque tonorum et duobus semitoniiis, et non equivalent unisono; et dicitur dyapason a *dya* quod est de, et *pason* quod est totum, quia in se continet omnes alias species suprascriptas seu voces. Et sic de quacumque littera simili manus que clavis est, usque ad aliam litteram similem in figura. Dicitur autem dyapason vel octava quod idem est, sicut hic patet per exemplum:



Expliciunt omnes species necessarie cantus et utiles omnibus musicis introducentibus. Nunc videndum est de ficta musica, que instrumentis musicalibus est necessaria et specialiter in organis.

Tractatus secundus.

Caput primum.

Est ficta musica quando de tono facimus semitonium, et e converso de semitono tonum. Omnis enim tonus est divisibilis in duo semitonia, et per consequens signa semitonia designantia in omnibus tonis possunt applicari. Signum enim, ut dicit sapiens signator, cor hominis letificat. Ubi igitur invenimus *b* rotundum, dicimus istam vocem *fa*, et ubi invenimus [*sqb*] quadratum, dicimus illam vocem *mi*; et sic tonus in semitonium deducendo de necessitate est, et e converso, hic ut rationabiliter et probabiliter per exemplum patet:

Concerning the thirteenth species.

The thirteenth and last species is the diapason, and it is a joining together of eight steps and an arranging of five tones and two semitones, and they are not equivalent to the unison; and it is called diapason after *dya* which means from, and *pason* which means all, because it contains within itself all other above-written species or pitches. And thus from any like letter of the hand, which is a key, up to another like letter in the figure. It is however called diapason or eighth, which means the same thing, as is apparent here in an example:

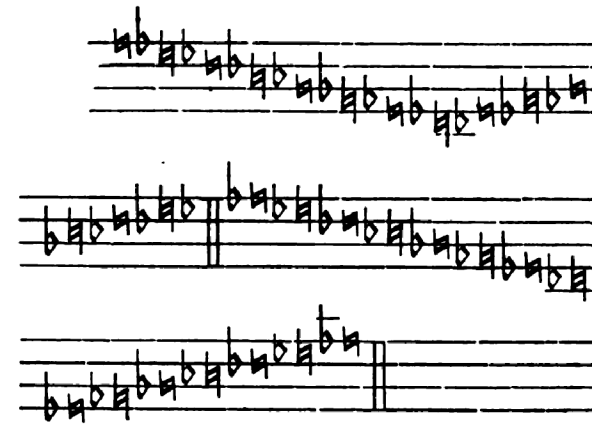
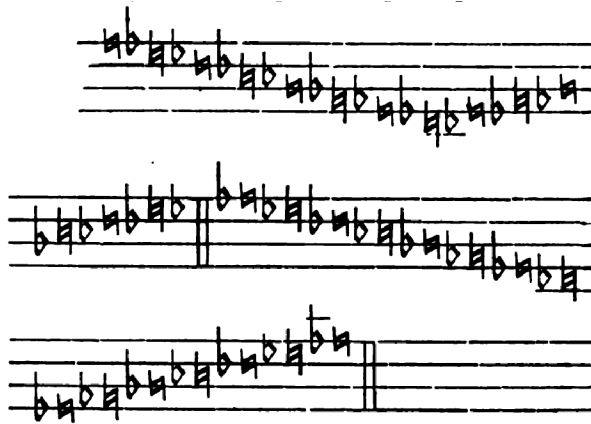


Here end all the necessary species of song [that are] useful for the introducing of all musicians. Now we must consider feigned music, which is necessary for musical instruments and especially in organa.

Second treatise.

First chapter.

Music is feigned when we turn a tone into a semitone, and conversely a semitone into a tone. For every tone can be divided into two semitones, and signs denoting semitones can consequently be applied to all tones. For a sign, as the learned signer says, makes the human heart joyful. So where we find round *b*, we call that step *fa*, and where we find square *b* we call that step *mi*; and thereby it is necessary for the tone to be led down into a semitone, and the other way round, as is rationally and demonstrably apparent here in the example:



Tractatus tertius.

Third treatise.

Capitulum primum. Repetitio predictorum.

First chapter. Repetition of the things said before.

Modo dicendum est quomodo et qualiter iste species supradicte ordinari debeant in contrapuncto, id est nota contra notam. Prenotandum quod quando cantus ascendit, discantus debet descendere; et hec est regula generalis semper observanda, nisi per species imperfectas, sive aliis rationibus evitetur. Considerandum, ut superius dictum est, quomodo et qualiter sunt tredecim species, et non plures nec pauciores, secundum doctores prelibatos ac etiam secundum Magistrum Octonem, in hac scientia quondam expertissimum. Tamen alii Magistri adjungunt istas quatuor species, videlicet decimam, duodecimam, tertiam decimam, et quintam decimam. Sunt tamen ad bene esse et ad voluntatem, quia considerare debemus quod sicut unisonus, tanquam primum fundamentum omnium tredecim specierum, que habent fieri in octo vocibus per gradus ascendentes vel descendentes computando usque ad dyapente et dyapason, simili modo considerandum est, sicut se habet unisonus ad tertiam, sic se habet octava ad decimam; et sicut se habet unisonus ad quintam, sic se habet octava ad duodecimam, et sicut se habet unisonus ad sextam, sic se habet octava ad tertiam decimam, et sicut se habet unisonus ad octavam, sic se habet unisonus ad quintam decimam vel ad duplicem octavam, et e converso.

Now we must speak about how and in what fashion those abovesaid species must be arranged in counterpoint, that is, note against note. But it is to be afore-noted that when the chant ascends, the discantus must descend; and this is a general rule to be always observed, except when it may be avoided in imperfect species, or for other reasons. One must consider, as said above, that there are thirteen species, and neither more nor fewer, according to the aforesaid teachers and also according Magister Otto, in his day a most experienced man in this science. However, other magisters add those [other] four species, namely: tenth, twelfth, thirteenth, and fifteenth. But these are for convenience and [to be used] at will, because we must consider that just as the unison—being somewhat like a first foundation of all thirteen species which occur in eight steps in ascending or descending degrees, reckoning up to diapente and diapason—in the same way it is to be considered, that just as the unison relates to the third, thus the octave relates to the tenth, and just as the unison relates to the fifth, thus the octave relates to the twelfth, and just as the unison relates to the sixth, thus the octave relates to the thirteenth, and just as the unison relates to the octave, thus the octave relates to the fifteenth or double octave, and the other way round.

Istarum autem specierum tres sunt perfecte, scilicet unisonus, quinta et octava vel dyapente et dyapason. Et dicuntur perfecte, quia perfectum et integrum sonum important auribus audientium; et cum ipsis omnibus discantus debet incipere ac finire; et nequaquam istarum specierum perfectarum debent sequi unam post aliam in discantu, in diversis lineis vel spatiis, id est quod duo unisoni, vel due quinte, vel due octave, nec due alie species perfecte sequi debent unam post aliam; sed bene in una linea vel spatio, ubi plures note reperiuntur. Due autem diverse species imperfecte aut tres aut etiam quatuor sequuntur unam post aliam, si necesse fuerit

Quatuor autem predictarum specierum sunt imperfecte, scilicet ditonus, alio nomine tertia perfecta; tonus cum dyapente, alio nomine sexta perfecta; semiditonus, alio nomine tertia imperfecta; et semotonium cum dyapente, alio nomine sexta imperfecta. Et dicuntur imperfecte, quia non tam perfectum sonum reddunt vel important, ut species perfecte, quia interponuntur speciebus perfectis in compositione.

Alie vero sex species, videlicet tonus, semitonium, dyatessaron, tritonus, ditonus cum dyapente, et semiditonus cum dyapente sunt discordantes. Et propter earum discordantiam ipsis non utimur in contrapuncto, sed bene eis utimur in cantu fractibili in minoribus notis, ut quando semibrevis vel tempus in pluribus notis dividitur, id est in tribus partibus; tunc una illarum trium partium potest esse in specie discordanti.

Ulterius notandum est quod nullo modo debemus ascendere neque descendere in discantu cum tenore cum speciebus perfectis, dummodo cantus ascendat de gradu ad gradum vel descendat. Si quis fecerit, falsum erit et contra artem; sed bene cum speciebus imperfectis ascendere vel descendere poterimus, ut dictum est.

Ulterius notandum est quod quando cantus ascendit vel descendit per quinque voces, et aliqui magistri dicunt per quatuor voces, et hoc necessitate cogente, tunc poterimus ascendere vel cum tenore in discantu cum specie perfecta per unam vocem tantum, et non per plures. Si autem per sex voces aut per septem, tunc possumus ascendere vel descendere in discantu cum tenore in specie perfecta per duas voces tantum.

Three of those species are perfect, namely the unison, and the fifth and octave, or diapente and diapason. And they are called perfect because they carry a perfect and complete sound to the ears of the listeners; and discant must begin and end with all of them; and never must one of those perfect species follow another in discant on different lines or spaces, that is, two unisons, or two fifths, or two octaves, neither must two other perfect species follow one after the other; but it is fine on one line or space where several notes are found. But two different imperfect species, or three, or even four, [may] follow one after the other, if it shall be necessary.

But four of the aforesaid species are imperfect, namely, the ditone, also named perfect third; the tone plus diapente, also named perfect sixth; the semiditone, also named imperfect third; and the semitone plus diapente, also named imperfect sixth. And they are called imperfect because they do not render or carry such a perfect sound as the perfect species, because they are inserted between perfect species in the arranging [of species].

The other six species, however, namely, the tone, semitone, dyatessaron, tritone, ditone plus diapente, and semiditone plus diapente are discordant. And we do not use them in counterpoint because of their discordant sound. But we [may] well use them in the smaller notes in fracturable song, as when the semibreve or tempus is divided into several notes, that is, into three parts; then one of those three parts can be in a discordant species.

Moreover it is to be noted that in discant we must not in any way ascend or descend in perfect species along with the tenor, at least so long as the chant ascends or descends from step to step. If someone shall do this, he shall be wrong and [acting] against the art; but we shall be perfectly able to ascend or descend in imperfect species, as already said.

Furthermore, it is to be noted that when the chant ascends or descends by five steps (and some magisters say by four steps), and this is being compelled by necessity, then we shall be able to ascend in the discantus with a perfect species along with the tenor, but only for one step, and not by more. However, if by six steps or by seven, then we can ascend or descend in the discantus with a perfect species with the tenor for only two steps.



Si autem cantus ascendit vel descendit per octo voces, tunc possumus ascendere vel descendere in discantu cum tenore cum specie perfecta per duas voces aut tres et non plures. Prenotando quod unisonus requirit tertiam, tertia quintam, quinta sextam, sexta octavam; et ista regula non fallit, quod semper post sextam debeat sequi octava, quia regula est generalis quod semper post sextam sequitur octavam, et quandoque post unisonum sequitur quinta, sexta octavam, et e converso post tertiam aliquando sequitur sexta vel octava et e converso; post quintam sequitur unaqueque species, et hoc secundum diversus ascensus et descensus cantuum. Prenotando quod cum speciebus imperfectis possumus ascendere vel descendere ad libitum, et sicut species se habent ascendendo, sic se habent et e converso descendendo. Et sicut se habet unisonus ad octavam, sic se habet octava ad duplicem octavam. Prenotando quod quando due tertie vel tres ordinantur, cantu ascendente, tunc sequitur immediate unisonus. Si autem ordinantur due tertie, tres, quatuor vel plures cantu descendente, sequitur immediate quinta; et eadem regula sive modus observatur in speciebus venientibus ab octava usque ad duplicem octavam, ut sepius dictum est.

Et hec dicta de contrapuncto ad presens sufficiant. Explicit ars contrapuncti secundum Philippum de Vitriaco.

However, if the chant ascends or descends by eight steps, then we can ascend or descend in the discantus with the tenor with a perfect species for two or three steps and no more—afore-noting that the unison seeks the third, the third the fifth, the fifth the sixth, the sixth the octave; and that rule does not fail, [namely] that the sixth should always be followed by an octave, and sometimes the fifth follows the unison, the sixth the octave, and the other way round, after the third sometimes follows the sixth or octave and the other way round, after the fifth follows any old species, and this according to the different ascents and descents of chants—afore-noting that we can ascend or descend at pleasure with imperfect species, and just as the species relate while ascending, thus conversely they relate descending. And just as the unison relates to the octave, thus the octave relates to the double octave—afore-noting that when two or three thirds are being arranged, while the chant ascends, then the unison follows immediately after that. But if two, three, four, or more thirds are arranged while the chant descends, then the fifth follows immediately after that; and the same rule or procedure is observed in species coming from the octave up to the double octave, as has been said several times.

And let these statements about counterpoint suffice for now. Here ends the art of counterpoint according to Philippe de Vitry.