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VARIANTS OF ELOQUENCE IN THE
RENAISSANCE MADRIGAL

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IN DISCO

Early seventeenth-century Italian vocal music and the popular music style of disco seem unlikely candidates for a comparison. The social and cultural environments, the quality of the lyrics, the functions and nature of the singing voices appear to be too distinct to offer any common ground. Despite these differences, the medium of the singing voice, its epistemologies and the framing of subjectivity merit attention as potential sites at which a close reading of deep time relations, in the spirit of the Variantology project, could be carried out.

Given that the early madrigal witnessed complex and competing semantic strategies, and given that the singing voice was a technology that mediated between body and soul, between the material and immaterial realms,¹ the transcendent momentum of disco tracks such as Donna Summer's "Love to Love You Baby" (produced in 1975) and "I Feel Love" (1977) become accessible and transparent in a very striking way.

Disregarding chronological, poetic, and stylistic boundaries, one may suggest that unorthodox juxtapositions such as these help to capture the *cultures of eloquence* represented by the madrigal and by disco tracks. While the singing voice lent mobility and flexibility to early modern subjectivity, it provided access to a new, technologically informed eloquence in the age of disco. Whereas the former set out to leave its emblematic profile behind in the discovery of a new, affective interiority, the latter evokes nature and technology to forge late capitalist hedonism and desire. Disco music's eloquence arises out of the interplay of specific vocal articulations with simulating tech-

1 Gary Tomlinson, *Metaphysical Song* (Princeton, 1999).