Notation as Mode of Thinking

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Concept: Wolfgang Fuhrmann and Katelijne Schiltz

Significant Invariance

Jane Alden (Wesleyan University)

The notational consistencies across the corpus of Loire Valley Chansonniers are striking. Close similarities in readings attest to the proximity of certain composers, and also hints at the location of the 'Dijon Scribe'. Given the extensive role he played in three of these manuscripts, and the presence of Ockeghem and Busnoys at St Martin, it seems likely that this scribe was based Tours.

The weighing of significant and insignificant variants informs consideration of the role of the performer, relative to the composer, and the identity of the piece itself. This process applies directly to the analysis of 20th-century graphic scores. I trace commonalities in the study of 15th- and 20th-century notational exemplars, in relation to a hypothetical original, whether through textual criticism or youtube performances, as a way of understanding what the piece is, and where it is found.

White as a Color Value in Medieval Musical Notation

Graeme Boone (Ohio State University)

Study of the origins of 'white' or 'void' notation leads to a consideration of the color white itself. It turns out that 'white' is something of a battlefield in early 15th-century thought, waged on the ground of a fast-moving notational practice that has escaped the control of the theorists. Study of some 500 notated sources, and of all known theoretical sources, datable to between 1300 and 1500 gives us a good sense of the terrain on which void and then white notation emerged, both theoretically and practically. The reality of this terrain differs in significant respects from current models of notational evolution, and the emergence of 'whiteness' is one (but only one) key element of that difference.

Choirbooks and Partbooks: Different Formats, Different Affordances

Julie E. Cumming (McGill University)

An "affordance" is a feature of an object or an environment that invites a certain mode of use: a chair affords sitting. Different affordances require different kinds of behaviour and cognition in individuals and in groups. Inspired by Evelyn Tribble's *Cognition in the Globe* (2011), a study of Elizabethan theatrical practices, I will look at the affordances of different formats for sixteenth-century music. Choirbooks – used by professional church musicians – encourage ensemble awareness, as the singers stand together looking at the same book, while page turns function as rehearsal letters, making it relatively easy for a singer to get back in if lost in a public performance. Partbooks – associated with amateur

musicians – force the singer to concentrate on his or her own part, irrespective of the others. I will spell out how different musical formats therefore require and enable different skillsets and different ways of thinking in music.

Musicians motets and musicians' motets in the Late Middle Ages: Notation, Self-reflexion and Social Identity

Wolfgang Fuhrmann (Universität Wien)

From the mid-14th century onwards there is a tendency to self-reference in compositions: aspects of the compositional craft or musico-literary poetics are thematized, situations of making music or musicians/composers as a group are addressed. I consider such works as "self-reflexive", distinguishing, however, between "explicit" self-reflexion - where craft, poetics, musicians are mentioned in the text - and "implicit" self-reflexion - where the musical structure itself refers to compositional tools or music-theoretical concepts. An important (though not the only) feature of such 'implicit' self-reflexion is the use of notational special effects.

In this lecture, I will concentrate mostly on motets of the Ars subtilior, then outlining the consequences for our understanding of later music. The motet around 1400 is a genre which manipulates series of pitches (*color*) and series of durations (*talea*). Sometimes composers make use of what Margaret Bent has called "homographic notation", that is, the varying *taleae* result from interpreting the same sequence of note-signs under different mensurations.

I will focus on two pieces from the Chantilly codex which are excellent examples for homographic notation. *Alma polis religio/Axe poli cum artica*, ascribed to "J. de Porta", is an "explicit" self-reflexive motet in that it praises the musical competence of a group of Augustinian friars, all mentioned by name. We may therefore call it a "musicians motet": a motet mentioning musicians. But is also "implicit" by developing a "complex proportion between the lengths of the 2 *colores* […] due to the ingenious use of dots of double significance",[1] and therefore presupposes and celebrates at the same time the technical competence of its specialized performers. We may therefore call it a "musicians' motet", a motet bearing special meaning for and only for musicians.

By contrast, the anonymous motet *Inter densas deserti/Imbribus irriguis/„Admirabile est nomen tuum"* does not mention music or musicians, having been composed in honor of Gaston Fébus (1331–1391), Count of Foix. Nevertheless, it can be considered as a virtuoso "performance" in homographic notation, putting to use no less than eight rhythmically divergent readings of the same sequence of note-signs. Moreover, the "cantus firmus" can be understood as a hexachord (or *deductio*) starting on *b mollis*, that is, a transposition or *coniuncta*. (The Parisian Anonymous [ca. 1375] described the *coniuncta* as an "intellectualis transposicio", and its use as a pitch-set may be interpreted as further enhancing the adulation of Gaston as prudent and educated ruler.)

I will argue that self-reflexive compositions are a sign of a heightened self-consciousness of musicians and especially of poet-composers around 1400, a self-consciousness

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[1] Frank Ll. Harrison, Commentary in: *Polyphonic Music of the 14th Century* 5, 199.

constituted by their common musical training and comparable social position. Exploring the ambiguities of mensural notation, using the hexachord as cantus firmus and generally writing music about and for musicians did not, however, die out with the advent of the so-called "Renaissance", and we may even speculate that the self-reflexive traits outlined above returned with a vengeance around 1500. But there are also notable differences, which I will explore in due course.

Simple Lessons? Compositional Virtuosity and Professional Identity in Music about Music
Jane Hatter (McGill University)

Why did so many prominent composers from the late fifteenth century use basic concepts of music theory as fundamental organizational principles for polyphonic Masses, motets, and other vocal compositions? Labeling these works didactic or even pedagogical overlooks the fact that these pieces would have been too difficult for beginning singers learning the supposed "lessons" that they teach. I argue that easily identifiable elements of basic music theory actually made these pieces attractive to humanistically educated non-professionals. Striking visual elements of the notations of these pieces provided a catalyst for discussion, allowing amateur and professional alike to recognize the composers' expertise and the composition as a skillfully made object. Looking at parallels between the professionalization of music and the visual arts, I show how musicians manipulated the simple tools of music to create virtuosic compositions that advertised their individual professional profiles to an elite group of other musicians and knowledgeable patrons.

Notation and Transformation – Musical Riddles in the Renaissance
Katelijne Schiltz (Universität Regensburg)

Like literary riddles, musical riddles play with ambiguity: nothing is what it looks like, and the notation has more than one meaning. As I intend to show, transformation is a key concept when dealing with musical riddles. The performer can be prompted to change the reading direction (in the horizontal or vertical sense), to drop, pick out, substitute or add notes because of rhythmic and/or melodic reasons, to treat the note values in hierarchical order etc.—the number of transformations is indeed vast. In many cases, the written music is changed beyond recognition. To put it differently, the notation and the solution are intrinsically linked on a conceptual level, but drift apart in performance. I will focus on technical, practical, socio-historical and aesthetic aspects of musical riddling in a period that produced some of the most sophisticated puzzles.

Transformative Notational Processes in Late Medieval Music: The Intellectual Context of the *Missa L'Ardant desir*
Jason Stoessel (University of New England)

Students of late medieval music are familiar with many of the ways in which composers and scribes employed musical notation to symbolise extramusical concepts and ideas. Coloration could signal musical quotations or a play on a sung text. Unusual note shapes could serve as icons for a particular aesthetic like that of the so-called *ars subtilior* or, as I have recently proposed, as musical "signatures" by which performers might have identified a composer of an otherwise anonymous work. With geometrically laid out parts (previously dismissed pejoratively as *Augenmusik*) scribes responded to the texts of some works and composers sought to show how to perform their songs. Yet mensural notation, or more accurately mensural notation's conceptual framework, also played an important role in shaping late medieval musical structures. Anna Maria Busse Berger argues that Ars nova notes, the mensural system (mensuration, alteration, imperfection and coloration), and proportions provided composers and performers with flexible visual and conceptual tools for creating motets based upon isorhythmic or homographic tenors *in mente*. In this paper, I look beyond the motet repertoire to examples from the late fourteenth and fifteenth century in which written instructions (canons) or sung texts produced long-term transformations of a real or putative notational archetype. Just as certain music theorists proposed an ontological chain between written notes and their sounding form in the fourteenth century, I argue that the intersection of mensural notation and various transformative processes produced large-scale structural referents to socio-cultural and religious ideas. In particular, I postulate that the *Missa L'Ardant desir*, which provides one of the earliest and most comprehensive examples of the long-term transformation of a homographic tenor in the polyphonic mass, served as a musical analogue to Nicholas de Cusa's redemptive theology centred on the incommensurability of humankind's imperfect comprehension of the infinite and the infinite nature of God's perfect divinity. Yet further notational symbolism in the *Missa L'Ardant desir* accentuated not the necessity of Christ's incarnation for reconciling humankind with an infinite and unknowable God, but the redemptive power of the gift of baptism. In this sense, the *Missa L'Ardant desir* does not represent a conceptual leap towards modernity but an affirmation of late medieval Christian beliefs through Cusanus's brilliant theological program.

Together Apart: The different cultural orientations of French versus Italian notation of the late Middle Ages
Dorit Tanay (Tel Aviv University)

It is well known that Italian and French Rhythmic notation of the late Middle Ages shared concepts and note-shapes, while differing in their principle of coherence and the conventions they manifest as written musical languages. In my paper I will explain the difference and similarity between the two systems by situating each in its salient cultural and social context and by exploring the interaction between the two cultures since the late 12th century and throughout the long 13th century. Special emphasis will be given to the history of teaching Latin grammar and rhetoric.