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Roads Taken and Not Taken in Medieval Music: The Case of False Counterpoint

We will probably never know what persuaded Franchino Gaffurio, the Milanese composer and music theorist, to include a chapter on so-called ‘false counterpoint’ in his treatise *Practica musicae* of 1496.¹ Not that the discussion as such is all that long. As can be seen in Figure 1, it takes up less than two pages in the original print, and it really is no more than an aside in Book Three, which is devoted to the art of counterpoint proper. But what is it doing there? What didactic purpose was it meant to serve? Consider Gaffurio’s definition of the practice, at the beginning of the chapter. ‘We speak of false counterpoint’, he says,

when two singers proceed together at the most dissonant of sounding intervals – such as major and minor second, the major and minor fourth, and the seventh and ninth [are] also of this kind – which are completely remote from all reason and nature in smooth harmony.

Falsum contrapunctum dicimus quum duo inuicem cantores procedunt per dissonas coniunctorum sonorum extremitates vt sunt secunda maior et minor: quarta item maior et minor: Atque septima et nona eiusmodi: quae ab omni penitus suavis harmoniae ratione et natura disiunctae sunt.

‘Remote from all reason and nature in harmony’: this is not an empty phrase. It means that false counterpoint stands apart from, is contrary to, or even violates the natural order of things. So why even acknowledge its existence in a treatise? One reason, it soon transpires, is that Gaffurio was personally familiar with a tradition of false counterpoint, and evidently relished the opportunity to tell his readers about it. Contrary to what one might expect, however, he was not thinking of the music of the Turks, or of other enemies of the faith who could not be presumed to know any better. What he had in mind was a peculiar way of singing plainchant, practised in

monasteries of the ancient and venerable Order of Ambrosians in Milan. Here is how Gaffurio proceeds:

Our Ambrosians use this in the solemn Vigils of Martyrs and in the chants of some Masses of the Dead, claiming that St Ambrose established this mournful singing for the Church to lament the shedding of the blood of the Holy Martyrs and the Judgement of the Dead. (God forbid!) However, I have never found that it was practised by that mellifluous Ambrose, who (as Guido says) labored marvelously for sweetness alone when he wrote down the chants of the church. Has it not been set down in writing that a tune in the second mode, and the fourth, and also in the sixth, is suitable for those who are sad and tearful? Wherefore it is preferable to believe that this kind of false counterpoint was introduced by men afflicted by spite at the art of music, being ignorant of it.

Hoc enim vtuntur Ambrosiani nostri in vigilijs solemnibus martirum et in nonnullis missae mortuorum canticis: Asserentes a diuo Ambrosio institutum: lugubrem quidem cantum: quo ecclesia deploret effusionem sanguinis sanctorum martirum: ac mortuorum suffragia (quod absit) Nusquam enim repperi ab ipso mellifluo Ambrosio celebratum: quippe qui (vt inquit Guido) quum ecclesiastica describeret cantica in sola dulcedine mirabiliter laborauit. non ne simplicem secundi et quarti atque sexti toni modulationem moestis et lacrimantibus congruere conscriptum est? Qua re a nonnullis potius introductum falsum huiusmodi contrapunctum existimari licet quos ignoratae musicae liuor oppressit.

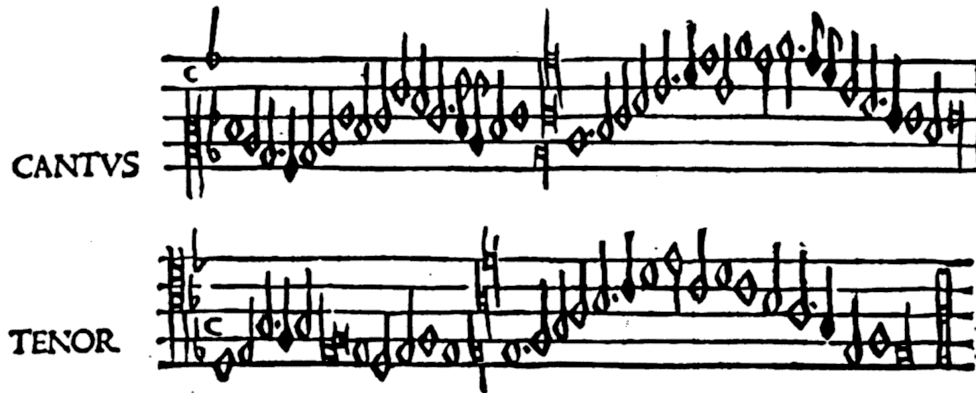
If Gaffurio had included this chapter merely for the sake of curiosity, then this is about as much as one might have expected him to say. And yet he clearly wants to tell his readers more than that. Gaffurio goes on to discuss the principles of false counterpoint, and as if that weren't bad enough, he even goes to the trouble of printing a musical example:

The manner of proceeding in this false counterpoint, which the Ambrosians call *sequens* [It. *seguito*], is as follows. One singer declaims the notes of the plainchant at a higher pitch; two or three others sing along in unison with each other, following beneath the notes of the chant, in turn at the second and fourth, in a certain order which I am ashamed to describe, since it is far removed from all reason in music.

Processus itaque falsi contrapuncti: quem Ambrosiani ipsi 'sequentem' vocant: est huiusmodi. Solus quidem cantor acutiore voce pronuntiat notulas cantus plani: duo vero aut tres succinunt vnico sono notulas ipsas cantus subsequentes in secundam et quartam vicisim certo ordine: quem quoniam ab omni modulationis ratione seiunctus est: me pudet describere.

Far removed from all reason in music? Then why talk about such singing in the first place? And why supply even more detail in the next sentence? Is

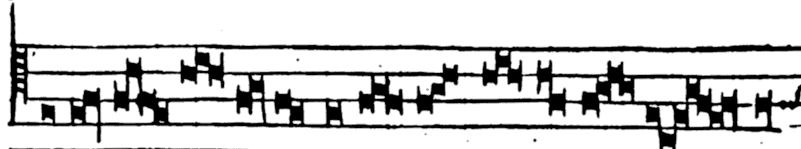
Fig. 1: Franchino Gaffurio, *Practica musice*, Book III, Milan 1496, sigs. ee iij^v–ee iiij^r.



De Falso contrapuncto. Caput quatuordecimum.

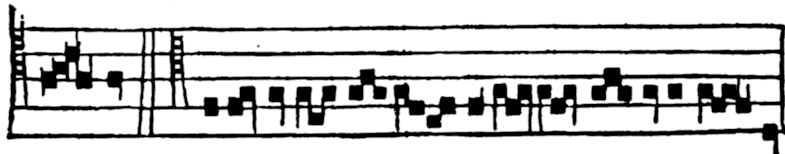
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 rum suffragia (quod absit) Nusq; enim repperi ab ipso mellifluo Ambrosio celebra-
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 dulationem mœstis & lacrimantibus congruere conscriptum est : Qua re a non-
 nullis potius introductum falsum huiusmodi contrapunctum existimari licet quos
 ignoratæ musicæ liuor oppressit . vt Guidonis ipsius sententia testatur . Multa
 autem vsurpantur nec tenentur regula . Quia tempore a multo delucuit musica :
 Dum inuidia & torpor cuncta tollunt studia . Processus itaq; falsi contra-
 puncti : quem Ambrosiani ipsi sequentem vocant : est huiusmodi . Solus qui-
 dem cantor acutiore voce pronuntiat notulas cantus plani : duo vero aut tres suc-
 cinunt vnico sono notulas ipsas cantus subsequentes in secundam & quartam
 vicisim certo ordine : quem quoniam ab omni modulationis ratione sciunctus
 est : me pudet describere . Quandoq; incipiunt huiusmodi succentum in vnisono

cum cantu plano procedentes inde per secundas & quartas ad finem usq: vel ad certam terminationem inquam unisonantes conueniunt. Plerunq; item in secundam vel in quartam incipiunt: In unisonum vero semper terminantur. Cuius processus hac notatur descriptione.



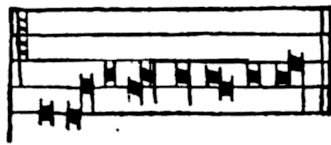
TENOR

De profun dis cla ma ui ad te do



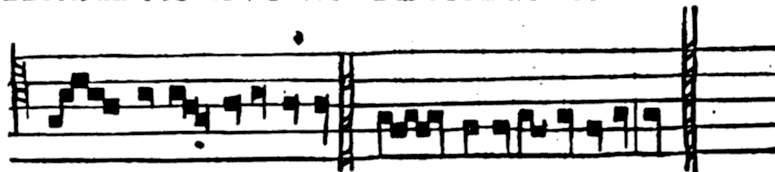
SVCCENTVS

mi ne De profun dis cla ma ui ad te



domi ne

LETANIE MORTVORVM DISCORDANTES.



Do mi ne mi se re re Do mi ne mi se re re

TENOR SVCCENTVS

cc iiij

Gaffurio really ashamed to describe the practice, as he professes? Here is how the theorist continues:

Sometimes they begin this countermelody in unison with the plainchant, proceeding from thence in seconds and fourths until the end, or until some point of closure at which it is appropriate for them to sound in unison. For the most part, however, they begin at the second or the fourth, though one always closes at the unison. Which manner of proceeding is notated in this example:

DISCORDANT LITANIES OF THE DEAD.

Quandoque incipiunt huiusmodi succentum in vnisono cum cantu plano procedentes inde per secundas et quartas ad finem usque: vel ad certam terminationem inquam vnisonantes conueniunt. Plerunque item in secundam vel in quartam incipiunt: In vnisonum vero semper terminantur. Cuius processus hac notatur descriptione.

LETANIE MORTVORVM DISCORDANTES.

Fig. 2: Transcription of Gaffurio's music example.

The image shows a musical transcription of a litany. It consists of three staves of music, each with a bass clef and a common time signature. The notes are written in a style that uses many parallel intervals, particularly fourths and seconds, which are described in the text as 'discordant'. The lyrics are written below the notes: 'De pro - fun - dis cla - ma - ui ad te do - mi - ne. Do - mi - ne mi - se - re - re.'

Gaffurio tells us that the Ambrosian monks claimed great authority for this kind of singing, alleging that it had been instituted by no one less than St Ambrose himself, more than eleven centuries previously. Certainly we can tell from the sound alone that this must be a tradition going back far in time. The frequent parallel fourths, for example, recall the organum described in *Musica enchiriadis* of the late ninth century. Just as in that treatise, moreover, the third is not acknowledged as a usable interval – though perhaps that doesn't tell us much. For one is at a loss to explain the parallel seconds in Ambrosian false counterpoint. No theorist could ever have rationalized a practice like this, which patently violated the very foundations of music. One can only imagine that such singing goes back to oral

traditions. Traditions of this kind have survived in various regions in Europe, as for example in the two-part folksongs recorded on the island of Krk in Croatia.²

If parallel seconds and fourths are incompatible with the medieval theory of consonance, it doesn't mean that they cannot be rationalized in other ways. For the Croatians, for example, this kind of singing seeks to evoke the sound of bells – an instrument whose sound is indeed known for the complexity of its constituent frequencies. Similarly, the two transcriptions provided by Gaffurio show a consistent practice from which a number of clear rules can be deduced. These rules, which must of course remain hypothetical, and are based only on the small sample he provides, can be summarized as follows:

1. Available intervals of counterpoint are unison, second, and fourth, but not the third or fifth.
2. Parallel motion may be in either seconds or fourths, but never unisons. The *succentus* may shift from motion in parallel seconds to motion in parallel fourths, and *vice versa*, when one or more of the following rules apply:
3. The counterpoint may only move in parallel seconds so long as the plainchant proceeds in stepwise motion, but must switch to parallel fourths whenever there is a leap in the plainchant.
4. Upward leaps in the plainchant call for either the progression fourth-fourth or second-fourth. Downward leaps call for the progression fourth-fourth or fourth-second, or (very rarely) fourth-unison.
5. The *succentus* must sing in parallel fourths when the plainchant rises a third or more above the note on which it started.
6. Every melodic peak in the plainchant calls for a fourth in the *succentus*.
7. Every melodic low point in the plainchant calls for a second in the *succentus* – or (very rarely) a unison, but not unless the plainchant proceeds to leap up from the low point.

To verify these rules I simply applied them to the plainchant melody *De profundis* (see fig. 2), and did indeed arrive at a counterpoint that was identical to the one printed by Gaffurio, except in two places where the rules left scope for variation. So it is not hard to conjecture how other plainchants might have sounded if treated in this fashion. Figure 3 shows the Gregorian Responsory *Hei mihi Domine* from the Office of the Dead, with several passages in false counterpoint.

Fig. 3: Matins Responsory *Hei mihi Domine* from the Office of the Dead (LU 1791–1792), with *sequens* according to the rules inferred from the musical example provided by Franchinus Gaffurio.

He - i mi - hi! * Do - mi - ne,
 qui - a pec - ca - vi ni - mis in vi - ta me - a.
 Quid fa - ci - am mi - - - ser? u - - - bi fu - - - gi - am,
 ni - si ad te De - us me - - - us? *
 Mi - se - re - re me - - - i, dum ve - ne - ris
 in no - vis - si - mo di - - - e. V. A - ni - ma me - a
 tur - ba - ta est val - - - de, sed tu Do - mi - ne,
 suc - - - cur - re e - - - i. *

Sixty years ago, Jacques Handschin discovered a fifteenth-century treatise from the vicinity of Milan that appears to teach the very practice described by Gaffurio.³ The only difference is that the anonymous theorist calls it *sequitus*, not *sequens*, although that could still be taken to mean the same thing: ‘following’ or ‘the following’. Italian monks may have called it *seguito*. I have printed the text of the treatise in Appendix 1, along with a very tentative translation. Handschin reported that the writing in the manuscript was barely legible, and parts of the transcription appear to make no sense whatsoever. Yet the anonymous theorist was clearly talking about the same thing as Gaffurio: a type of polyphony in which the counterpoint essentially alternates between parallel seconds and parallel fourths.

Unfortunately, apart from the report by Gaffurio, and the treatise discovered by Handschin, we know absolutely nothing about this fascinating tradition. All other evidence for it has disappeared without a trace. One feels a bit like New Testament scholars working on lost gospels found in the Egyptian desert – traces of a tradition that wasn't supposed to exist, since it was considered inimical to canonical truth. Certainly one of the most unshakeable truths in medieval music theory was the definition of consonance. A considerable amount of ideological effort was needed to protect this cornerstone of Western music making, for the definition itself was far from secure. Ten years ago, David Cohen showed that while the theory of consonance was an impressive intellectual achievement, it could only be purchased at the cost of theoretical inconsistency.⁴ This created a problem that would come back to haunt later theorists. And Klaus-Jürgen Sachs has demonstrated that the understanding of consonance and dissonance was never stable, but steadily eroded in the course of the Middle Ages.⁵ By the late fifteenth century, a theorist like Tinctoris had to admit that a consonance, objectively defined, does not necessarily make for a pleasing musical sound, and that the subjective experience of musical sweetness may depend on many other things.⁶ Those who wanted to preserve pure mathematical consistency in the understanding of consonance and dissonance were fighting a losing battle.

Yet often in history it is the losing battles that are fought with greatest determination, and this is true in many ways of the West's enduring warfare against the hordes of invading dissonances. The vehement disgust that Gaffurio expressed at Ambrosian false counterpoint is a good example. For him, such music was not supposed to exist. Indeed, he regarded it almost as an insult to St Ambrose to attribute its invention to this most holy man. That makes it all the more curious that he was keen to talk about it, and indeed wanted his readers to know what it sounded like.

In a way we, today, are still footsoldiers in this warfare. Consider the following example: two parts from a *Gloria* in the Foligno fragment. It is likely that there was once a third part, now lost. However, no additional part could have done anything to mitigate the dissonant clashes between the two voices we do have. Here is the music as transcribed by Nino Pirrotta:

Fig. 4: *Gloria*, possibly fragmentary and corrupt, in the Foligno fragment, transcription after Nino Pirrotta, 'Church Polyphony apropos of a New Fragment at Foligno', in *Studies in Music History: Essays for Oliver Strunk*, ed. Harry Powers, Princeton, 1968, pp. 113–126.

The image displays a musical score for a Gloria, identified as the Foligno fragment. It consists of four systems of two staves each. The top staff is the vocal line, and the bottom staff is the lute accompaniment. The lyrics are written below the vocal line. The music is in a 3/2 time signature. The lyrics are: "Et in ter - ra pax ho - mi - ni - bus bo - ne vo - lun - ta - tis. Laud - da - mus te. Be - ne - di - ci - mus te. Ad - o - ra - mus te. Glo - ri - fi - ca - mus te." The score shows a complex counterpoint between the two parts, with the lute accompaniment often moving in parallel motion with the vocal line.

Music of this kind is not supposed to exist in the Western tradition, and when we encounter it, we go out of our way to deny the possibility of its existence. Pirrotta wondered for a while if the parts actually even belonged together, though he concluded in the end that they did. But that forced him to explain the piece away on other grounds: either the composer had no skill or experience in counterpoint (even though he was clearly quite adept at mensural notation – the more difficult of the two skills to master), or the piece had suffered from corruption at the hands of careless scribes. One possibility, however, must be kept at bay at all cost, since it is too ridiculous for words: that people actually enjoyed this kind of music, and consciously set out to compose it.

In the case of the Foligno fragment it's hard to decide one way or another, but Appendix 2 presents a two-part song in which there is virtually no room for doubt. It is called *Parce Christe*, and it survives intact in the

Piae cantiones of 1582.⁷ On the face of it, this piece looks as if an ethnomusicologist had transcribed a song in heterophony, that is, a song in which one or more variants of the same tune are sung simultaneously. In the first two bars, for example, the two voices are identical, and there are similar passages later on. Elsewhere, however, the voices diverge in ways that make no apparent sense, involving every possible interval, and sometimes moving in parallel seconds or fourths. Unlike the Ambrosian false counterpoint, however, this is not a piece from which I am able to infer any consistent principles or rules. There is an air of randomness about the duet that would seem consistent with a practice like heterophony.

Yet there is one crucial difference. Heterophony is a modern Western term, and it reflects a peculiarly Western outlook. I'm reminded of the famous (and obviously apocryphal) story of the ethnomusicologist who asked an informant to sing such-and-such a song for him, so he could transcribe it. Next day he wanted to make sure his transcription was accurate, so he asked the informant to sing the song one more time. The informant gladly obliged, but now, several of the words were sung to different pitches. Faced with the apparent inconsistency, the ethnomusicologist couldn't help asking: 'Is this some variant version that somebody else has taught you? Because it sure doesn't sound like you did it yesterday.' Whereupon the informant replies: 'No, this is the song you asked me to sing, the one I sang for you yesterday. Why do you ask?' The point being, of course, that the West has traditionally had a very narrow conception of what constitutes 'the same song'. What we call heterophony is in many cases simply a collective performance of the same song, not a class of music distinct from monophony. *Parce Christe* looks just like the tune in that story: it is as if the same ethnomusicologist had recorded the same song on different days. Their simultaneous performance must create odd sounds at irregular places: we may call that heterophony, or even false counterpoint, but that may well not be how the song was conceived.

Except that this happens not to be our transcription, and hence that the problem is not of our making. It is the composer himself, or at least the original notator, who actually conceived and wrote out two different tunes, and presented them as such: *prima vox* and *altera vox*. If this had been genuine heterophony, then obviously he would have needed to notate only one melody, and could have left the rest to performers. Instead, this piece is written down in such a way as to ensure the dissonant clashes, indeed to conceive them as dissonant intervals – as if they were positive musical

effects in their own right, rather than inessential variants that did not affect the identity of the tune.

Yet precisely because the dissonances seem intentional, this is music that isn't supposed to exist. Almost any alternative explanation is to be preferred over the one conclusion that is staring us in the face: that such music not only existed, but was appreciated and recorded as a tradition in its own right. That is a tough conclusion to swallow, and there is a whole list of alternative explanations that we must rule out before we can accept it. Did the two parts really belong together? Was the second part really composed as a counterpoint to the first? Did the composer even know what he was doing? Might the transmission perhaps be corrupt? Or did the printer screw things up?

We would not be the first to respond this way. When *Piae cantiones* was republished in 1625, more than forty years after the first print, the editor included only the first part of *Parce Christe*, marked '1' in Appendix 2, and left out the other.⁸ At the end he added a comment saying that he hadn't been able to find the second part in the old print. This is patently untrue, of course, for *Parce Christe* was originally printed as a two-part song. And yet the editor was not telling a lie. True, he did find another part in the first edition, the one labeled '2' in Appendix 2. Yet the awkward dissonances proved that this couldn't possibly be the second part as the composer had intended it. It was that second part, the one intended by the composer, that he couldn't find, though he was certain it had to have existed. So he decided to print only the first part, and to present *Parce Christe* as a monophonic tune. Thereby he effectively erased the last trace of the otherwise unknown tradition that spawned this extraordinary and tantalizing piece.

How does all this tie in with gains and losses in music history, with roads taken and not taken, with options retained and forfeited? For the West, obviously, there have been immeasurable gains, both intellectual and musical, in the distinction between consonance and dissonance. Yet by declaring certain sounds to be unusable, we have effectively pronounced the death sentence on traditions that never acknowledged any such distinction, and appreciated both types of sounds with equal relish. This is true of Ambrosian counterpoint. It is not as if the monks had at some point decided knowingly to sing dissonances, and perversely to avoid all consonance – a kind of deliberate inversion like on the Feast of Fools. Rather, this tradition must date from a time when seconds and fourths were nothing special. They

were sounds distinct from others only in one respect: they possessed a peculiar quality that seemed to make them especially suitable for sadness and mourning. Evidently that quality was considered a positive one, not necessarily at odds, or in conflict, with the sound quality of the fifth, or of the octave. It was to be capitalized on in Ambrosian singing, just as the sound of consonance is capitalized on in regular counterpoint. Under other circumstances this tradition, now lost, might well have been brought to great heights of artistic sophistication. But that is an option we have forfeited long ago. Gaffurio was unable to understand or appreciate *sequens* as anything other than false counterpoint, music defined by falsehood. Others didn't even talk about it. Certainly it is unlikely that the tradition would have survived the Council of Trent.

Yet from what perspective is this a loss? Let's go back to the theme of this symposium: gains and losses in music history. In one sense I take this theme to mark a reaction against the kind of historiography in which there is nothing but gain in music history, in which every historical outcome is a success by definition. Plainly it would be refreshing to take fuller account of the losses that must inevitably accompany those apparent gains. Yet there is also a potential danger here. The danger is that we try to revalue every loss as something that would have been a gain if only history had taken a different course. How sad that false counterpoint had to go. Once again we would have a historiography with nothing but gain, wherever we looked. There simply would be no way that anyone in history could ever have made a wrong choice.

Why does this danger exist? I think the reason is this. As music historians we don't like the idea that there are musical traditions for which there is no place under the sun. It's our job to recover them from oblivion, from the dustheap of history. We like to have it both ways: we want the real gains, and the gains that might have been, but were lost. Where are the genuine losses? Can we even bring ourselves to face them? A genuine loss in history is not something that has accidentally slipped through our fingers, like we lose the car keys or a lottery ticket. That, I think, is clear from the example of false counterpoint. A genuine loss is something that we positively want to lose, something that must be stamped out, something whose very existence is intolerable, something that wouldn't have existed in a perfect world – because it is a corruption, an aberration, of the world as we feel it ought to be.

A world that cannot embrace such a thing is necessarily defined by its exclusion. Such exclusion is not a one-time event: it requires continuous effort. We have seen Gaffurio make that effort when he spoke of false counterpoint, and went out of his way to express his disgust. And perhaps we still make that effort today when we try to explain away a piece like *Parce Christe*. This very effort is what keeps the thing alive: what must be excluded is necessarily what we must talk about, again and again. Gaffurio condemns false counterpoint only in order that he can safely say more about it. In doing so he sends out a conflicting message: if dissonances were truly so intolerable, so unbearably harsh on the ear, there would have been no reason for theorists to keep talking about them, since everybody would have avoided them anyway. We don't need to pass laws against eating rotten fish, because its stench alone would make any sane person recoil. Yet dissonances are different. They do need to be proscribed. For there is a hidden appeal in them, for the simple reason that they don't actually offend the ear, not if you allow them to work their magic. The very definition of dissonance is arbitrary, as the course of music history only confirms. That is why a war on dissonance must be fought with such extraordinary determination. It is a losing battle, because the enemy is us.

The West has all but abandoned that battle in the twentieth century, and to our ears false counterpoint may seem relatively tame. We have no particular investment in using thirds or fifths over fourths or sevenths, or the other way round. We can enjoy them all in the right place at the right time. All things can be gains if you look at it right. This attitude of tolerance may be commendable, but it carries a danger: the danger of indifference. If false counterpoint, on its own terms, is just as good as true counterpoint, then why should we care particularly for one or the other? How could we ever understand that they were once opposed like truth and falsehood, and that one of them just had to go? We cannot have it both ways.

To return to the example of the Gnostic gospels: we cannot appreciate the significance of the four canonical Gospels to early Christians if we cannot understand why they hated the Gnostic gospels so much. The two sets of texts simply are incompatible, like matter and anti-matter. A similar situation obtains in fifteenth-century music: we will never be able to appreciate consonant vocal sonority with the intensity that people did in this period, because we cannot bring ourselves to hate false counterpoint with equal intensity. That is our limitation. Vehement dislike of certain kinds of music may well be a sign of an extremely keen musical sensibility, just as

much as vehement passion for other kinds of music would be. In our all-inclusiveness we may take pride in our ability to appreciate the false counterpoint that the contemporaries of Gaffurio just wanted to disappear. But the more we try to gain in this way, the more those gains are diminished by an inherent and unavoidable loss. At the end of the day, the books always end up neatly balanced, and gains and losses are written off against one another, as history continues to unfold on its never-ending course.

NOTES

- ¹ For this and what follows, see Franchino Gaffurio, *Practica musice*, Milan 1496, Book III, ch. xiv: ‘De falso contrapuncto’ (sigs. ee iij^v–ee iiij^r).
- ² Examples of two-part singing in parallel seconds, recorded on the island of Krk in Croatia by Wolfgang and Dagmar Laade, can be heard on the LP *The Diaphonic Music of the Island Krk, Yugoslavia* (Folkways FE 4060, 1975).
- ³ Jacques Handschin, ‘Aus der alten Musiktheorie III. Zur Ambrosianischen Mehrstimmigkeit’, *Acta musicologica* 15 (1943), pp. 2–23, 5–6.
- ⁴ David E. Cohen, ‘Metaphysics, Ideology, Discipline: Consonance, Dissonance, and the Foundations of Western Polyphony’, *Theoria: Historical Aspects of Music Theory* 7 (1994), pp. 1–85.
- ⁵ Klaus-Jürgen Sachs, ‘Boethius and the Judgement of the Ears: A Hidden Challenge in Medieval and Renaissance Music’, in *The Second Sense: Studies in Hearing and Musical Judgement from Antiquity to the Seventeenth Century*, ed. Charles Burnett, Michael Fend and Penelope Gouk, London 1991, pp. 169–198.
- ⁶ More on this in Rob C. Wegman, ‘Sense and Sensibility in Late-Medieval Music: Thoughts on Aesthetics and “Authenticity”’, *Early Music* 23 (1995), pp. 298–312, and id., ‘Johannes Tinctoris and the Art of Listening’, forthcoming.
- ⁷ More on this extraordinary setting in Timo Mäkinen, ‘Piae cantiones: Über Geschichte und Zusammensetzung der Liedersammlung’, *Studia musicologica* 9 (1967), pp. 371–394, 392–393.
- ⁸ “Quia altera vox hujus cantilenae non fuit inventa in exemplari veteri [*i.e.* the 1582 edition], idcirco in hac nova editione adjici non potuit, si quis ergo eam disiderat haut gravatim aliunde petat”. Mäkinen, ‘Piae cantiones’ (note 7), p. 393.

ABSTRACT

There are isolated traces of polyphonic traditions in medieval Europe that involved prominent use of dissonance, and whose rules seem not to have been premised on a hard and fast distinction between consonance and dissonance. These traces include the so-called 'false counterpoint' described by Franchino Gaffurio in 1496 (a tradition codified also in an imperfectly preserved Milanese treatise from the fifteenth century), fragmentary compositions from the *Ars nova* whose composers seem to have relished dissonance to an unusual degree, and the extraordinary two-part song *Parce Christe* in the *Piae cantiones* printed in 1582. The odds against the survival of these traces are considerable, because there have been longstanding cultural pressures to erase them. Insofar as we are dealing with lost traditions, therefore, the 'loss' has not been accidental. The West has positively wanted to lose these traditions, and has defined its gains, to some degree, in terms of those losses. This raises the question whether gains and losses might not be mutually (and necessarily) interdependent. To put it differently: to recover a loss might be to forego the very gain it had made possible.

APPENDIX 1

Treatise *Si aliquis vult scire sequitum* (15th c.). After Jacques Handschin, ‘Aus der alten Musiktheorie’ (note 3), pp. 5–6.

¹ Ratio sequitus est ista.

² Si aliquis vult scire sequitum, oportet se scire sex rationes, videlicet: (1) [scire] bene cantum firmum, et (2) cognoscere si cantus ascendit vel descendit, et (3) scire quid est concordantia, et (4) quid est discordantia, et (5) quid est consonantia, et (6) scire si sequitus debet incipere in voce, vel in secunda, vel in quarta, vel in quinta, quia sequitus non est nisi secunda [vel] quarta aliqua vice quinta.

³ Nota quid est diffinitio rationis stre [?]. ⁴ Videlicet quando duo cantatores cantant simul in eadem voce et [est] concordantia et sterri [?]. ⁵ Cantatores qui cantant, unus stet firmus in una nota, videlicet in *ut* vel in aliis notis, et alius cantator precedat, unam notam vel quartam vel quintam supra socium, videlicet *re* super *ut* et est secunda et discordantia, et *fa* supra *ut* est quarta et est similiter discordantia, et *sol* supra *ut* est quinta et est consonantia.

⁶ Item ille qui facit sequitum debet incipere semper in voce si cantus ascendit tertiam, videlicet *ut-mi*, vel quintam, videlicet *re-la*, similiter in voce. ⁷ Et si descendit de secunda, videlicet *re-ut* vel *la-[sol]*, debet semper incipere in quartam.

⁸ Item debet semper incipere in secundam si cantus ascendit, videlicet *ut-re-mi-fa-sol*, et debet secundare per secundam usque subtus *sol*, et subtus *mi* quando cantus ascendit *ut-re-mi-fa-sol*, et subtus *re* quando cantus ascendit *ut-re-mi-fa*.

⁹ Et omnes alie note que descendunt, videlicet *la-sol-fa-mi-re-ut* vel per alium modum, semper debet descendere per quartam usque subtus *re*, quia postea debet venire in voce cum socio, quia sic finitur semper cantus.

¹⁰ Versus.

¹¹ Ex una sursum tertia infra.

¹² Ex una infra tertia sursum.

¹³ Ex tertia sursum una infra.

¹⁴ Ex tertia infra una sursum.

¹⁵ Ex quarta sursum tene par.

¹⁶ Ex quarta infra tene par.

¹⁷ Ex quinta sursum una sursum.

¹⁸ Ex quinta infra una infra.

¹⁹ Ex sexta sursum tertia sursum.

²⁰ Due notae aequales, si eris ad octavam, descende quartam gradatim; si eris ad quintam, ascende quartam; et sic de omnibus notis. ²¹ Omnes ejus notae quae ascendunt aequales vel II (?), omnes notae quae descendunt volunt quartam; et hoc non moveatur.

¹ This is the theory of *sequitus*.

² If one wishes to know *sequitus*, one must know six principles, to wit: (1) good [knowledge of] the plainchant, and the ability (2) to tell whether the chant moves up or down, and (3) to know what is a concordance, and (4) what is a discordant sound, and (5) what is a consonance, and (6) to know whether the *sequitus* must begin in unison, or at the second, or at the fourth, or at the fifth [?], since *sequitus* is nothing but the second [or] fourth [sung] in some manner in place of the fifth.

³ Note the definition of [the intervals]. ⁴ That is, when two singers sing simultaneously at the same pitch, it is a concordance and [...]. ⁵ And [when] the singers are singing, let one stand firm in one note, for example in *ut* or in other notes, and let another singer lead above his companion at a second or a fourth or fifth, that is, (1) *re* upon *ut*, then it is a second and a discordant sound, and (2) *fa* upon *ut*, then it is a fourth and similarly a discordant sound, and (3) *sol* upon *ut*, then it is a fifth and a consonance.

⁶ Also, he who fashions the *sequitus* must always begin in unison when the chant leaps up by a third, for example *ut-mi*, or by a fifth, for example *re-la*, then also in unison. ⁷ And when [the chant] descends by a second, for example *re-ut* or *la-sol*, then he must always begin at the fourth.

⁸ Also, he must always begin at the second when the plainchant rises, for example *ut-re-mi-fa-sol*, and must follow underneath in seconds until [he is] below *sol*, and below *mi* when the chant rises *ut-re-mi-fa-sol*, and below *re* when the chant rises *ut-re-mi-fa* [?].

⁹ And for all other descending notes, for example *la-sol-fa-mi-re-ut* or in some other way, he must always descend in fourths until below *re*, for after that he must come together in unison with his companion, for that is how the chant is always concluded.

¹⁰ Rhyme.

¹¹ Up by one, down a third.

¹² Down by one, up a third.

¹³ Up a third, down by one.

¹⁴ Down a third, up by one.

¹⁵ Up a fourth, you stay put.

¹⁶ Down a fourth, you stay put.

¹⁷ Up a fifth, one step up.

¹⁸ Down a fifth, one step down.

¹⁹ Up a sixth, up a third.

²⁰ Two chant notes at the same pitch: if you shall be at the octave, move down stepwise by a fourth; if you shall be at the fifth, rise by a fourth; and thus for all notes. ²¹ All of its ascending notes: either stay put or at the second. All descending notes want the fourth; and let this not be moved.

APPENDIX 2

Two-part song *Parce Christe spes reorum*. After *Piae cantiones ecclesiasticae et scholasticae veterum episcoporum*, ed. Theodoricus Petri, Greifswald 1582, sigs. I4^r-I7^r.

1

Par - ce Christ-e spes re - o-
lu - cun - da - re glo-ri - a:

8

rum poe-ni-ten-ti ser - vu - lo,
re - is ve-na ve - ni - ae,

15

i-psum sol-vens a su - o - rum de-lict-o-rum vin - cu - lo, ij.
Ie-su Chri-ste, coe-cis vi - a, fons et da-tor gra - ti - ae ij.

22

po-tes e - nim quant-um ve - lis: er-go par - ce
huc in-ten-de, con - des-cen - de pi - js quae-so

29

Do-mi - ne. ij. Adquid nam-que te fi-de-lis, si ca-re-ret cri -
pre-ci - bus. ij. ac fa - ve - to vul-tu lae-to me-is sup-pli - can -

36

mi - ne, in-vo-ca-ret? nec tu fo- res. ij. tant-o dig-nus
 ti - bus, fi - li gra- te, De- i Na- te. ij. Pa- tris qui te

44

so- li - o. ij. ni fu- is- sent
 fe- ce - rat ij. Nunc Na- tu - ra

52

pec- ca- to- res et pa- trum trans- gres- si - o. ij. ij.
 su - a iu- ra mu- ta - re stu - pe - rat ij. ij.

59

Et si poe- nam cul- pa pos - cit, cul- pam de- let gra- ti - a, ij.
 Chri- ste fra- ter tu - a ma - ter vir- go vi- ri ne- sci- a ij.

66

cum sit ma - ior qui ig - nos - cit quam is cui sit ve - ni - a.
 Stel - la So - lem pa - rit pro - lem Cu - ius e - rat fi - li - a.

71

ij.
 ij.