THE STATE OF THE ART

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A Renaissance in Music?

In the early 1470s, Johannes Tinctoris, chief musician at the royal court of Naples, published a music treatise entitled *Proportionale musices*.[1] Its contents are not of particular concern here—they are of interest mostly to specialists in fifteenth-century musical notation. But the prologue has deservedly become famous. Within fewer than 400 words of self-consciously humanist prose, Tinctoris managed to sketch nothing less than a universal history of music—reaching back as far as the days of Jubal and Pythagoras, citing some of the better-known Greek authorities, moving on quickly to Jesus Christ (whom Tinctoris hailed as the greatest musician of all time), enumerating the Church Fathers along with some of the more important medieval music theorists, only to arrive at what was transparently his true aim: to report on the state of the art of music in his own time. Now he was no longer in any particular hurry. With undisguised satisfaction, Tinctoris observed that the state of the art was good. In fact, it was astonishingly good. As he put it himself, music seemed to have become a 'new art':

> At this time, consequently, the potential of our [art of] music has undergone such a marvellous increase that it appears to be a new art, the well-spring of which new art, if I may so call it, is held to be among the English, among whom Dunstable stood forth as the leader. Contemporary with him in France were Dufay and Binchois, to whom directly succeeded those of today, Ockeghem, Busnoys, Regis, and Caron, who are the foremost in composition of all I have heard. Nor can the English, who are popularly said to jubilate while the French sing, bear comparison with them. For the French invent songs in the newest manner for the new times, while the English always use one and the same [manner of] composition, which is a sign of the poorest talent.[2]

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[1] Published in Johannes Tinctoris, *Opera theoretica*. Corpus scriptorum de musica 22, ed. Albert Seay, 2 vols. (Rome, 1975–78), 2a.

[2] Tinctoris, *Opera theoretica*, 2a: 10: 'Quo fit ut hac tempestate facultas nostrae musices tam mirabile susceperit incrementum quod ars nova esse videatur, cuius, ut ita dicam, novae artis fons et origo apud Anglicos quorum caput Dunstaple exstitit,

Five years later, in the prologue to another treatise on music, Tinctoris's enthusiasm does not seem to have diminished. On the contrary, so astonishing were the recent breakthroughs in the art of music that compositions older than forty years were scarcely even worth hearing anymore—at least in the opinion of those who had expert ears. This is how he put it, in the Prologue of his *Liber de arte contrapuncti* of 1477:

> And if it be permitted to report on things seen and heard, I have held in my hands at one time or another several ancient songs of unknown authorship that are called *apocrypha*, which are so foolishly, so stupidly composed that they much sooner offended the ears than pleased them. Nor (what cannot astonish me enough) does there exist anything that was composed more than forty years ago which is deemed, by those who are trained, to be worthy of the hearing.[3]

Musicologists have been very happy with these two commentaries. They seem to testify to a new period in the history of music, the precise beginning of which can be dated to the 1430s: that is, 1470s minus forty years. This makes it irresistibly close to the apparent beginning of another new age, in literature and the visual arts, known to us all as the Renaissance. For this reason, Tinctoris has become a crown witness for what music history textbooks, to this day, refer to as the Renaissance in music.

Still, it has remained a matter of debate—considerable debate, in fact—how firmly his comments actually support this. Do Tinctoris's words testify unambiguously to a Renaissance in music? Or is the idea of a Renaissance something we have to read into them? Has the idea perhaps served as a kind of interpretive lens, through which his words have seemed to take on that significance? As always, when

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fuisse perhibetur, et huic contemporanei fuerunt in Gallia Dufay et Binchois, quibus immediate successerunt moderni Okeghem, Busnois, Regis et Caron, omnium quos audiverim in compositione praestantissimi. Haec eis Anglici nunc, licet vulgariter iubilare, Gallici vero cantare dicantur, veniunt conferendi, illi etenim in dies novos cantus novissimae inveniunt, ac isti, quod miserrimi signum est ingenii, una semper et eadem compositione utuntur.' trans. after Rob C. Wegman, 'Johannes Tinctoris and the "New Art"', *Music & Letters* 84 (2003): 171–88, at 181–2, where this text is discussed in more detail.

[3] Tinctoris, *Opera theoretica*, vol. 2, 12: 'Et si visa auditaque referre liceat nonnulla vetusta carmina ignotae auctoritatis quae apocrypha dicuntur in manibus aliquando habui, adeo inepte, adeo insulse composita ut multo potius aures offendebant quam delectabant. Neque quod satis admirari nequeo quippiam compositum nisi citra annos quadraginta extat quod auditu dignum ab eruditis existimetur.' trans. and further discussion in R. C. Wegman, 'Johannes Tinctoris and the "New Art"', 173–4.

relatively brief texts are excerpted out of context and made to bear disproportionate historical weight, they may not stand close scrutiny. In recent years, scholars like Ronald Woodley, Reinhard Strohm, and myself, have scrutinised Tinctoris's comments from a variety of different angles.[4] Perhaps not surprisingly, there is no complete agreement even among ourselves as to precisely what the comments can be taken to mean. This is not the place to address all the aspects of this ongoing debate, but two critical issues are nevertheless worth pointing out.

First of all, it has proved exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to pinpoint the exact stylistic changes that Tinctoris must be referring to.[5] In a way that is surprising, for those changes should not be all that hard to detect. If music older than forty years was scarcely worth hearing by the 1470s, then the difference must be fairly obvious to the ear. To be sure, there has been some agreement among musicologists as to what the changes may have amounted to, and this tentative consensus may be illustrated with two musical examples. In the context of this printed version, I can unfortunately only supply scores, but recordings of the two pieces in question are readily available, and since the issue here is to do with hearing, the ideal comparison would be between the recordings rather than the scores.

The first musical example dates from around 1470, the time when Tinctoris was writing his first treatise. This is the Credo of Johannes Ockeghem's *Missa Ecce ancilla Domini* (Fig. 1). The second example dates from the 1420s, some forty-five to fifty years previously, and thus presumably not worth hearing by the 1470s. This is a Credo by Guillaume Dufay, written at a time when he had not yet been exposed to the music of John Dunstable and other English composers (Fig. 2).

What is the difference between these two examples? A few things are immediately noticeable. The piece from the 1420s has a much faster tempo, in fact it moves in an almost dance-like triple rhythm

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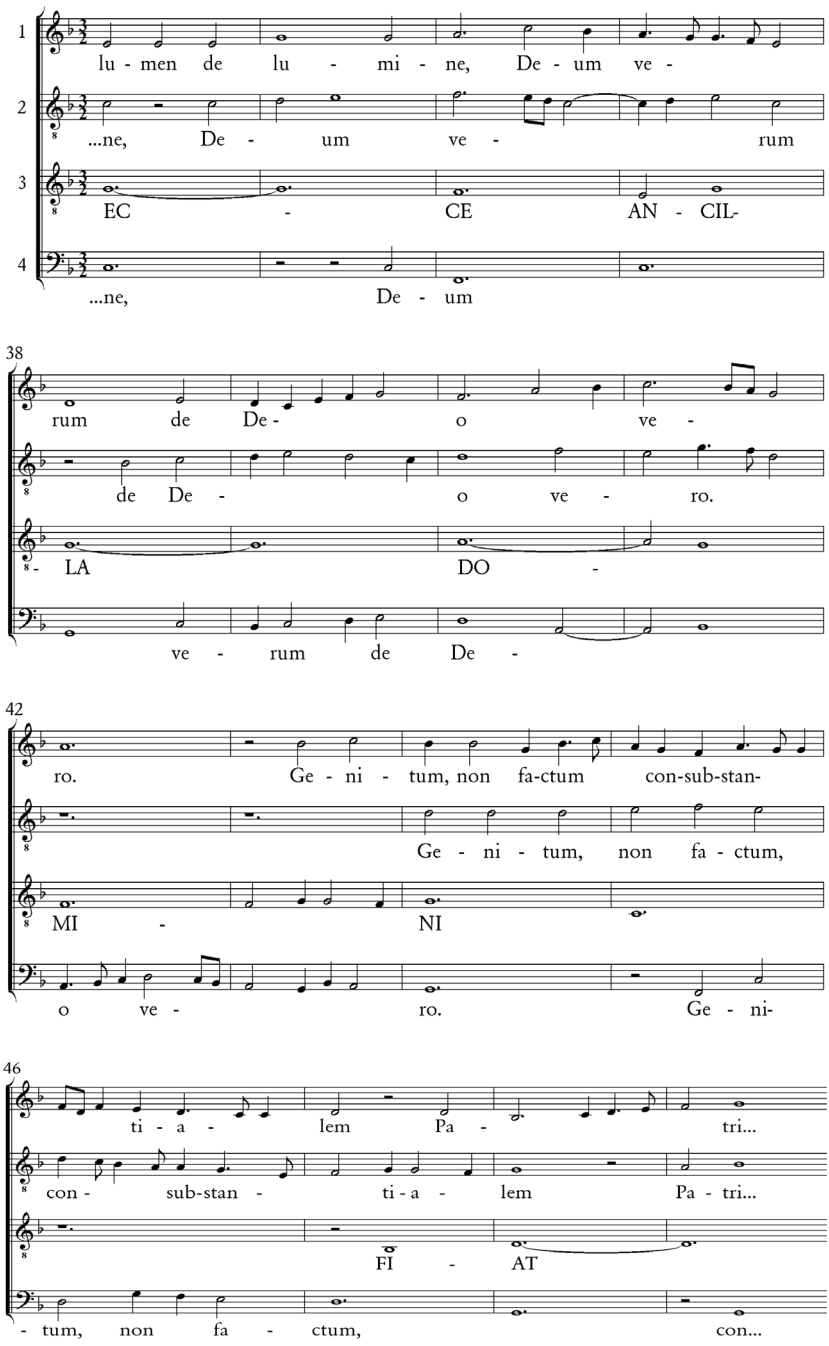
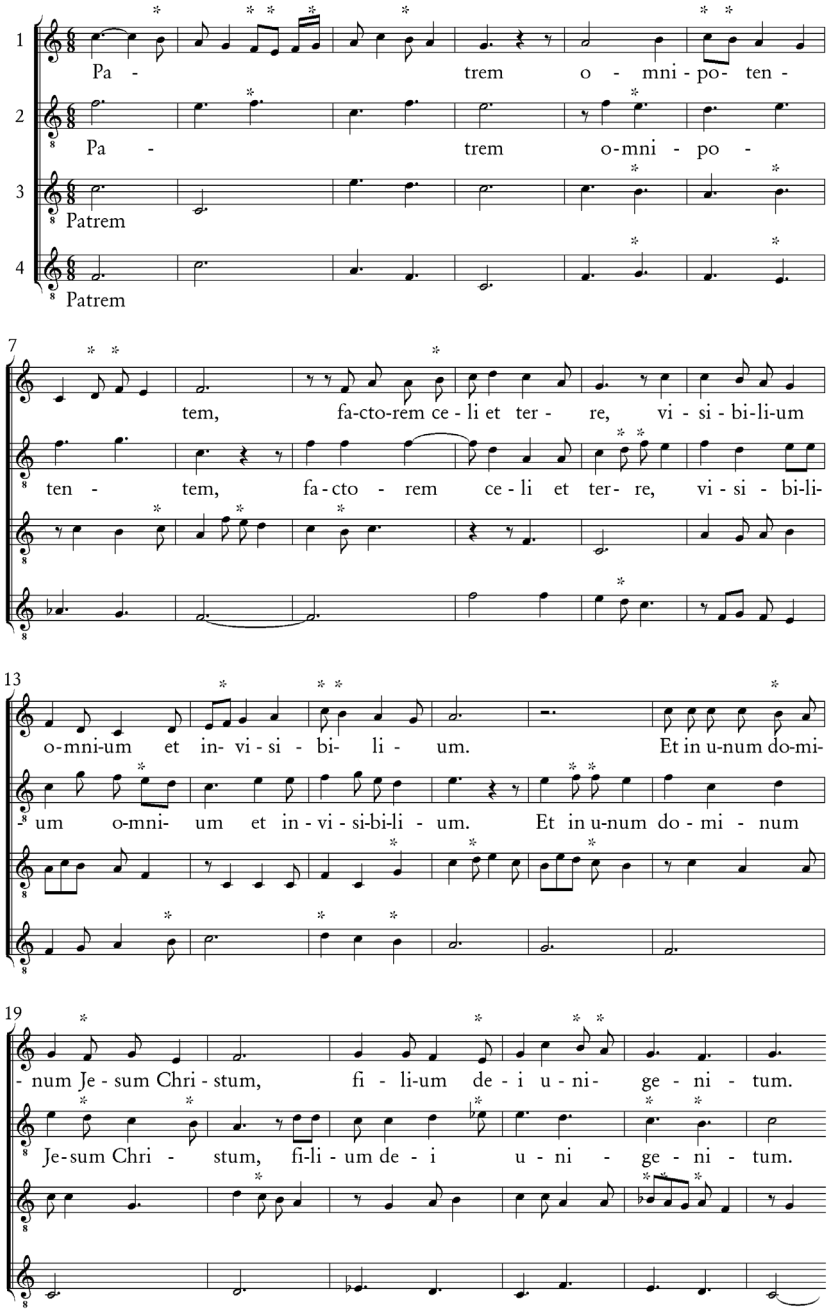
[4] Ronald Woodley, 'Renaissance Music Theory as Literature: On Reading the *Proportionale Musices* of Iohannes Tinctoris', *Renaissance Studies* 1 (1987): 209–20; Reinhard Strohm, 'Music, Humanism, and the Idea of a "Rebirth" of the Arts', in *Music as Concept and Practice in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. Reinhard Strohm and Bonnie J. Blackburn, New Oxford History of Music, vol. 3.i. (Oxford, 2001), 346–405; R. C. Wegman, 'Johannes Tinctoris and the "New Art"'. See also Jessie Ann Owens, 'Music Historiography and the Definition of "Renaissance"', *Notes* 47 (1990): 305–30.

[5] This, for example, is the outcome of Philip R. Kaye's exhaustive study *The "Contenance angloise" in Perspective: A Study of Consonance and Dissonance in Continental Music, C. 1380–1440* (New York, 1989).



1. Johannes Ockeghem, *Missa Ecce ancilla Domini* (c.1470), Credo, bars 34–49. After Johannes Ockeghem, *Collected Works*, ed. Dragan Plamenac, 3 vols., (Philadelphia, 1947–92), 1:88. No ficta has been provided.



2. Guillaume Dufay, excerpt from Credo (1420s). After Guillaume Dufay, *Opera omnia*, ed. Heinrich Besseler, 7 vols., Corpus Mensurabilis Musicae 1 (Rome, 1947–49), 4:35–6. Asterisks indicate dissonances. No ficta has been provided.

that is typical of music composed in the decades around 1400. The example from around 1470, on the other hand, has such a slow pace that one can barely hear the underlying pulse at all, let alone distinguish between duple or triple rhythm.[6] Why is this difference in tempo important? It has to do with consonance and dissonance. In music that moves fast, dissonant clashes between voices are so brief and fleeting that there is no need to avoid them fastidiously. By later standards, in fact, the piece from the 1420 is generously, almost recklessly, seasoned with dissonant spice (marked by the asterisks in Fig. 2). In music that moves at a much slower pace, on the other hand, those same dissonances would be much more prolonged, and as a consequence they would end up sounding quite awkward. In the example from around 1470, therefore, dissonance is either avoided at all costs, or at least handled with great care.

The question, of course, is whether this difference is so dramatic that we can use it to define a whole new age in the history of music; and, if we can, whether that definition is consistent with the spirit of the Renaissance in art and literature, however we may choose to define that.

To judge from my own experiences in the undergraduate classroom, it takes a while for students to hear the difference, and even longer to appreciate what might have been its significance for contemporary musicians. Yet this brings us to the second point. Tinctoris says that the difference between worth hearing and not worth hearing, between older than forty years and more recently composed, was perceived by those who had *expert ears* (*aures eruditae*).[7] In other words, not everybody could hear it. This proves that the change was not just a matter of composition, something that we can demonstrate objectively in a score alone. It was also a matter of listening, of listening in a new way. Maybe ways of listening changed along with ways of composing. Perhaps expert listeners became so acutely sensitive to dissonance that

[6] The fundamental difference here is to do with what the German musicologist Heinrich Besseler once described as '*der neue Stromrhythmus*,' literally, 'the new flow-rhythm.' cf. Heinrich Besseler, *Bourdon und Fauxbourdon: Studien zum Ursprung der niederländischen Musik* (Leipzig, 1950, repr. 1974).

[7] For the significance of the concept of *eruditio* in Tinctoris's *Liber de arte contrapuncti*, see R. C. Wegman, 'Tinctoris and the "New Art"', and Wegman, 'Johannes Tinctoris and the Art of Listening', in *Studies on Renaissance Music*, ed. Pieter Bergé and Marc Delaere (Leuven, forthcoming).

an older piece would have sounded intolerably discordant to them, or, as Tinctoris put it, stupidly and ineptly composed.

Obviously, once we start talking about ways of listening, one opens a whole new can of worms. Just as art historians like Michael Baxendall have addressed the historicity of seeing—the period eye—and literary historians the history of reading, musicologists have been greatly occupied with the history of listening—the period ear.[8] But perhaps the issue need not be so complicated after all. Figures 1 and 2 have one thing in common: they both observe the rules of counterpoint. Counterpoint had originated as one of many polyphonic musical languages in the thirteenth century, but in the course of the fourteenth it became the world language in music—so much so that by the fifteenth century 'music' and 'counterpoint' were all but synonymous. So whatever happened in the 1430s, it cannot have been a fundamental change, since the basic language of music—counterpoint—remained the same. Certainly Tinctoris was exaggerating when he said that music seemed to have become a 'new art.' The only thing that could have changed was the *handling* of counterpoint, not the rules of counterpoint itself. This suggests that the change was really one of musical fashion, of musical taste, and the emphasis on listening seems to confirm that.

So this is what the problem comes down to. When we read Tinctoris's comments through a Renaissance lens, they seem to testify compellingly to a new age in music history. But when we try to translate those same comments into tangible musical terms, it is hard to be sure if we are dealing with anything more than a new musical fashion. So the obvious question is: why should we apply a Renaissance lens at all? In using it, are we doing interpretive violence to this text? How would Tinctoris's words have impressed us if we had not applied that lens?

As it happens, there are other texts from the late Middle Ages that seem to testify to dramatic changes in the art of music. Yet these have attracted much less attention from musicologists, largely, I think, because there was no ready-made lens with which to magnify their perceived historical significance. Here is an example from a text known as the Limburg Chronicle, written in the second half of the fourteenth century. Its author is Tilemann Elhen von Wolfhagen, town secretary

[8] See, for example, the special issues 'Music as Heard', *Musical Quarterly* 82 (1998): 427–691, and 'Listening Practice', *Early Music* 25 (1997): 591–714.

of the city of Limburg on the Lahn, in Western Germany. In the year 1360, Wolfhagen includes an entry that reads as follows:

> Item, in this same year the styles and poems changed in German songs. Up to now songs had been sung long, with five or six measures, and the masters are [currently] making new songs with three measures. Things changed also with regard to trumpet and shawm playing, and music progressed, and had never been as good as it has now become. For he who was known, five or six years ago, as a good shawm player throughout the whole country, is not worth a fly now.[9]

If one wanted to define a historical period called 'post-plague Europe', which in music history would actually make a lot of sense, then this might have been a very welcome document indeed, coming a mere twelve years after the first outbreak of the Black Death. As things stand, however, we really don't know what to do with this text—except to suppose that it must be something to do with performance practice, or with unwritten traditions of music making. Had the entry been dated seventy years later, then the Renaissance lens would have turned it into another key text for the history of music. But now, as far as musicology is concerned, Wolfhagen is, and remains, an obscure German chronicler.

The Renaissance lens is not only arbitrary, however; it is also one-dimensional. It allows us to perceive only one question: was there a musical Renaissance or not? Yet authors like Tinctoris or the Limburg Chronicler did not comment on the state of the art in order to supply us with the evidence we need to break music history up into manageable chunks. They had their own agendas, and unless we find out what they were, we may well become the prisoners of our prima facie readings.

Here is an example of a fifteenth-century writer whose agenda is relatively straightforward to establish, since he—or rather, a literary

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[9] Tilemann Elhen von Wolfhagen, *Die Limburger Chronik des Tilemann Elhen von Wolfhagen*, ed. Gottfried Zedler (Limburg a.d. Lahn, 1930), 36: 'Item in disem selben jare vurwandelten sich dictamina unde gedichte in Duschen lidern. Want man bit her lider lange gesongen hat mit funf oder ses gesetzen, da machent dy meister nu lider mit dren gesetzen. Auch hat ez sich also vurwandelt mit den pyffen unde pyffenspel unde hat uffgestegen in der museken, unde ny also gut waren bit her, als nu in ist anegegangen. Dan wer vur fund oder ses jaren eyn gut pyffer was geheißen in dem ganzen lande, der endauc itzunt nit eyne flyge.' More on this text from c.1400 and its historical significance in Rob C. Wegman, 'The Minstrel School in the Late Middle Ages', *Historic Brass Society Journal* 14 (2002): 11–30.

character he created—comments on music in the context of a much longer argument. The author is the second crown witness for a musical Renaissance, the French poet Martin le Franc, and the excerpt comes from his massive poem in five books entitled *Le champion des dames*, written in the early 1440s. It has become famous because it seems to tie in wonderfully with the remarks by Tinctoris:

> Not long ago, Tapissier, Carmen, and Cesaris sang so well that they astonished all Paris, and all those who came to visit them. But never did they sing discant of such exquisite euphony (as those who were with them have told me) as Guillaume Dufay and Binchois.
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> For they have a new practice of making bright consonance, in music loud and soft, in *fainte*, in *pause*, and in *muance*. And they have taken on the English manner, and have followed Dunstable, wherefore a marvellous delight renders their singing joyous and distinguished.[10]

This is a text whose meaning may seem transparent when we read it through a Renaissance lens, but takes on quite a different meaning when we allow it to speak to us on other terms. If we do the latter, it quickly turns out that Le Franc's agenda is not just inconsistent with the idea of a Renaissance in music, but flatly contradicts it. For the allegorical character who is speaking here, Franc Vouloir, cites music, along with warfare, tapestry, and manuscript illumination,

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[10] Martin Le Franc, *Le champion des dames* (c.1441–3), vv. 16,257–16,272:

'Tapissier, Carmen, Cesaris
N'a pas long temps si bien chanterent
Qu'ilz esbahirent tout Paris
Et tous ceulx qui les frequenterent.
Mais onques jour ne deschanterent
En melodie de tel chois,
Ce m'ont dit ceulx qui les hanterent,
Que Guillaume du Fay et Binchois.

Car ilz ont nouvelle pratique
De faire frisque concordance
En haulte et en basse musique,
En fainte, en pause, et en muance.
Et ont prins de la contenance
Angloise et ensuÿ Dunstable,
Pour quoy merveilleuse plaisance
Rend leur chant joyeux et notable.'

Le Franc, *Le champion des dames*, ed. Robert Deschaux, 5 vols. (Paris, 1999), vol. 4, 67–9. Trans. after Rob C. Wegman, 'New Music for a World Grown Old: Martin Le Franc and the "Contenance angloise"', *Acta musicologica* 75 (2003): 201–41, at 240–1, where the text is analysed at more length.

as examples to demonstrate that the end of time must be near. No rebirth, no new lease on culture. The point about these and other arts is that they have been brought to such a level of perfection, have come so close to the realisation of their inherent potential, that it is impossible to see much, if any, scope for future development. Nature and art have all but completed their predestined course. This, along with several other arguments, suggests that human history is about to reach the fullness of time. This argument, this agenda, must certainly colour Martin le Franc's commentary. After all, if music cannot be claimed to have made truly marvellous advances, it would follow that the end of time was still some way off, and hence that we could all breathe a bit more easily. Given the nature of his argument, then, Le Franc was bound to exaggerate.

So it is natural to wonder: what was Tinctoris's agenda, and what was the agenda of our German chronicler, Wolfhagen? Why should a writer wish to report on the state of the art, and why should he want to view recent developments from an historical perspective? In our own time, we may sometimes feel that our fields have witnessed dramatic advances. But what sort of agenda could bring us to say, for example, that articles and books older than forty years are scarcely worth reading? I can think of only one remotely plausible context, and that is the 'grant proposal'. You do not win over potentially hostile referees unless you paint a truly upbeat picture of the current state of scholarship. Introductions to monographs are another good example. You do not win over potentially indifferent readers unless you present your particular topic as one of the most exciting new areas in scholarship.

There appears to be a common thread running through all of this. Two musical excerpts, played in direct succession, cannot tell us the whole story, because the difference may depend crucially on how we hear them. Two textual excerpts, read in direct juxtaposition, cannot tell us the whole story, because their meaning depends critically on the particular lens through which we choose to read them. This is one reason why Tinctoris's comments have invited so much debate.

Yet, if such qualifications are to be made, how are we ever going to have a musical Renaissance? Can we even say that there was one? The concept of the Renaissance is a borrowing from art history, and, if the truth be told, it fits the history of music only very awkwardly. As musicologists are only too well aware, there could have been no rebirth of the music of Antiquity, no attempt to revive it, since nobody in the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries had any idea of what it had sounded

like. It is true that a conscious attempt to fashion music after ancient ideals was to be made much later, around 1600, with the invention of monody. But this is not because people then had any clearer idea of what ancient music had sounded like. It is just that they, unlike musicians of the early fifteenth century, felt an acute sense of *loss* whenever they read ancient Greek descriptions of the power of music, a sense that the music of their own time had fallen far short of this ideal, and urgently needed to be restored.

Those same descriptions had been known throughout the Middle Ages, without ever provoking a similar sense of loss. People valued and appreciated their own music; why else, indeed, would they want to listen to it? When a performance evoked vehement responses in the listener, this only seemed to bear out ancient reports of music's power to move the affections. There was thus a sense of continuity with the past: music was music, after all, and what the ancients had said about the art applied equally well to the present. Without a sense of loss, without a perceived rupture in that continuity, it is difficult to formulate the need for a rebirth, and no fifteenth-century writer ever spoke of music in such terms.

Why then do modern scholars identify a period in music history called the Renaissance? They do this by longstanding tradition, going back to the late nineteenth century. After the appearance of Burckhardt's *Kultur der Renaissance in Italien*, in 1860, it was simply inconceivable that the art of music should not have partaken in this momentous cultural transformation—even though it was hard to be sure when, exactly, it had started to do so. At first, proposals ranged from the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries, but music historians finally settled on the 1430s, which has remained the accepted starting date to the present day.[11] It all seems pretty arbitrary.

Panofsky's Renaissance

As musicologists we have learned to live with these problems. We use the word 'Renaissance' as a necessary evil in our undergraduate classrooms and survey course textbooks, but otherwise we avoid it. Tacitly we assume that the problems must be peculiar to music history alone.

[11] See esp. Andrew Kirkman, 'The Invention of the Cyclic Mass', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 54 (2001): 1–47.

At least, we tend to think, art history and literary history can make a plausible claim for a Renaissance. It is not until one turns to a book like Erwin Panofsky's *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art*, that it emerges that we are not, in fact, alone: other disciplines are coping with the very same problems. This is not because Panofsky successfully tackled those problems, or even identified and discussed them, but because his study is symptomatic of them.

When I first read Panofsky's book as an undergraduate, some twenty-five years ago, I looked upon the author as one of those giants who roamed the earth in those days, and was awed by the breathtaking erudition and the sense of confident authority to which a scholar of his stature was entitled. But when I reread the book for the conference from which this volume has sprung, my response was quite different. As I followed the thread of Panofsky's argument, I began to feel vaguely troubled by some of his statements, and this sense of unease soon turned into irritation, and in the end, downright annoyance. What was the problem?

As is well known, Panofsky set out to answer two central questions in his book. First, was the Italian Renaissance real, did it really happen? Second, was it fundamentally different from previous historical episodes that might also be called Renaissances? To both these questions his answer was a firm yes.

Now to make a similar case in musicology, to arrive at the same answers to these two questions, would obviously be an impossible task, for the reasons I have outlined in the first part of this paper. Yet it is evident throughout Panofsky's book that the task was not all that much easier for him. In fact, given the problems that haunt his enquiry I can only wonder why he undertook it in the first place. Why these two questions? What was so important about them in particular? Had someone else perhaps raised them, but concluded the opposite?

From Panofsky's own study it is hard to tell. One of its frustrating features is the author's persistent refusal to mention any scholar by name in the main text: they are all reduced to the relative invisibility of the footnotes—the small print. Another of its frustrating features is Panofsky's reluctance to represent authors by anything more than brief quotations, one-liners taken out of context. Typically he will write, for example, 'it has been stated,' 'we read,' or 'there are those who hold,' and then follows a sentence, or part of a sentence which he will proceed to comment on, usually disapprovingly. One must go to the footnotes to find out who actually said what. Not that the

reader is encouraged to consult the original publications. For the sentences quoted by Panofsky are typically made to look so incautious, so overstated, and so ill-considered as to discredit the poor authors who wrote them. All this is bound to leave the reader with one overriding impression: that when Panofsky embarked on his enquiry, the issue of the Renaissance was drowning in a cacophony of conflicting and confused views. Mindless historians had left the field in an intolerable state of chaos, into which he was forced to intervene. Firmly distancing himself from those other historians, he embarked on an enquiry of his own, on his terms, to settle the matter once and for all.

It is when one actually follows up the bibliographical references, reads the articles and studies the arguments that this impression turns out to be quite deceptive. These were, in fact, responsible historians, experts in their fields, who had made excellent points that deserved to be represented fairly in Panofsky's study. Who were they? They were the medievalists who had questioned the concept of the Renaissance in what has become known as the 'Revolt of the Medievalists'.[12] If Panofsky singled out any one of them as the ringleader, it was undoubtedly Lynn Thorndike, author of the massive eight-volume *History of Magic and Experimental Science*. Thorndike is the one scholar whose admittedly scathing article on the Renaissance, entitled 'Renaissance or Prenaissance?' was most often made to look foolish and ill-considered.[13] Just one example, among many, to illustrate the sort of thing that frustrated me about Panofsky's handling of Thorndike and other scholars:

> Curiously enough, even those who refuse to recognize the Renaissance as a period *sui generis* and *sui iuris* tend to accept it as such wherever an occasion arises to disparage it (much as a government may vilify or threaten a regime to which it has refused recognition). "The Middle Ages loved variety; the Renaissance, uniformity." [Footnote: Thorndike, op. cit., p. 71.] In extolling what they admire at the expense of what they have shown not to exist, the authors of statements like this unwittingly pay tribute to the very period the historicity of which they deny, and to the very humanists whose . . . ambitions they strive to refute.[14]

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[12] Wallace K. Ferguson, *The Renaissance in Historical Perspective: Five Centuries of Interpretation* (Boston, 1948), 329–85.

[13] Lynn Thorndike, 'Renaissance or Prenaissance?', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 4 (1943): 65–74.

[14] E. Panofsky, *Renaissance*, 8.

This was really unnecessary. It is perfectly obvious from Thorndike's article that when he wrote 'the Renaissance [loved] uniformity,' he meant 'the Renaissance, as understood by those who propagate the term.' Panofsky seizes upon one unguarded comment to ridicule a scholar whose numerous carefully reasoned points he prefers to ignore.[15] But why, and to what end?

Although I cannot prove it, I suspect that it was Thorndike's article that had provoked Panofsky's wrath, and that persuaded him to write his own study as a corrective. When one reads Thorndike, and then returns to Panofsky's first chapter, it is obvious that the latter was preoccupied with it all the time. For example, the following remark, on p. 39, leaves one wondering if Panofsky was responding to some other scholar, to whom he conceded a minor point before reaffirming his own position, even though there is no footnote to tell us who this might have been:

> It is quite true that a few bishops and professors climbed mountains long before Petrarch's "epoch-making" ascent of Mont Ventoux; but it is equally true that he was the first to describe his experience in a manner which, depending on whether you like him or not, may be praised as full of sentiment or condemned as sentimental.[16]

As it turns out, the scholar not mentioned by Panofsky was Thorndike, who—responding in his turn to Burckhardt—had remarked the following in his essay on the Renaissance:

> As a matter of fact, Jean Buridan, the Parisian schoolman, had visited [Mont Ventoux] between 1316 and 1334, had given details as to its altitude, and had waxed enthusiastic as to the Cevennes. So that all Petrarch's account [of his ascent] proves is his capacity for story-telling and sentimental ability to make a mountain out of a molehill.[17]

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[15] One of the points ignored by Panofsky is worth mentioning, since it bears directly on his attempt to prove the reality of the Renaissance by invoking contemporary reports on revivals of literature and the visual arts after long periods of supposed neglect. Thorndike notes: 'In the fifth volume of *A History of Magic and Experimental Science* I have given various examples of this notion of a resuscitation of liberal studies becoming stereotyped and being extended to the most inappropriate fields, such as astronomy, chiromancy, physiognomy, anatomy, magic, astrology, and mathematics.' L. Thorndike, 'Renaissance or Prenaissance?', 67.

[16] E. Panofsky, *Renaissance*, 39.

[17] L. Thorndike, 'Renaissance or Prenaissance?', 72.

Here, as in several other passages, it is hard to escape the feeling that Panofsky took the issue to be a personal one, and carefully laced his narrative with barbs that were meant for Thorndike in particular.

More importantly, the two central questions Panofsky sought to answer in his study correspond directly with two principal objections raised by Thorndike. The latter had argued that the Renaissance was not even real, that it was merely an idea, a fiction, one that could change its shape in response to criticism.[18] Panofsky, in response, devoted his first chapter to refuting just that objection.[19] Thorndike, like many other medievalists, had made the point that engagement with classical legacies can be witnessed throughout the later Middle Ages. Panofsky, in response, devoted the remaining chapters to proving that the Italian Renaissance was unique, and fundamentally different from any apparent renaissance that had preceded it. For all his attempts to reduce the medievalists to near invisibility, Panofsky's study was in fact an essay written on their terms, an attempt to refute their objections.

This aim was not an easy task. Consider the question: was the Renaissance real? Some scholars might well respond with a counter-question: should it have been? The Renaissance, they might argue, is a hypothesis, a coherent interpretation of the past. It is meant to *account* for evidence, not to be proved or disproved by it. Is that a reason to do away with the term? Not necessarily, for everything historians say and argue is, at the end of the day, hypothesis. So the objection is really an objection against historical interpretation in general, not against the Renaissance in particular.

Yet this was not Panofsky's response: he set out to prove the reality, the factuality, of the Renaissance. His first chapter offers an exhaustive review of contemporary testimonies about advances made in literature and the visual arts, dramatic upsurges after centuries of decline. Yet near the end of the chapter Panofsky admits that the evidence is perhaps not conclusive, since, after all, these various witnesses may well have been wrong. So how else to prove that the Renaissance was real?

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[18] 'But what is the use of questioning the Renaissance? No one has ever proved its existence; no one has really tried to. So often as one phase of it or conception of it is disproved, or is shown to be equally characteristic of the preceding period, its defenders take up a new position and are just as happy, just as enthusiastic, just as complacent as ever.' L. Thorndike, 'Renaissance or Prenaissance?', 74.

[19] 'There is a growing tendency, not so much to revise as to eliminate the concept of the Renaissance—to contest not only its uniqueness but its very existence.' E. Panofsky, *Renaissance*, 7.

This was the moment for which he had kept an ace up his sleeve. Of the nearly 160 illustrations appended at the end of Panofsky's study, the first five provide examples of architectural styles. These are images of, respectively, the Pantheon in Rome, the Church of Our Lady at Trèves, Palladio's Villa Rotonda, the interior of Leon Battista Alberti's S. Andrea in Mantua, and the interior of the Church of St. Sebald in Nuremberg. Referring to these five images, Panofsky settled the whole issue in three sentences:

> When we compare the Pantheon of ca. 125 AD with, on the one hand, Our Lady's Church at Trèves of ca. 1250 AD (one of the very few major central-plan buildings produced by the Gothic age) and, on the other, Palladio's Villa Rotonda of ca. 1550 AD (Figs. 1–3), we cannot help agreeing with the author of the letter to Leo X who felt that, though the interval of time was longer, the buildings of his age were closer to those from the time of the Roman emperors than to those from "the times of the Goths": all differences notwithstanding, the Villa Rotonda has more in common with the Pantheon than either of these two structures has in common with Our Lady's at Trèves, and this in spite of the fact that only about three hundred years had passed between Our Lady's at Trèves and the Villa Rotonda, whereas more than eleven hundred had passed between the Pantheon and Our Lady's.
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> Something rather decisive, then, must have happened between 1250 and 1550. And when we consider two structures erected during this interval in the same decade but on different sides of the Alps—Alberti's Sant'Andrea at Mantua, begun in 1472 (Fig. 4), and the choir of St. Sebaldus at Nuremberg, completed in that very year (Fig. 5)—we strongly suspect that this decisive thing must have happened in the fifteenth century and on Italian soil.[20]

It is hard to believe one's eyes. One cannot begin to point out the questions raised by this way of settling an argument. First of all, is the method not dangerously vulnerable to manipulation? If five pictures is all it takes, as it apparently does for Panofsky, one can always select them in such a way as to prove just about any point. Thorndike, for his part, wisely refrained from responding with five pictures of his own.

Second, is it fair to invoke a comparison between the Pantheon and the Villa Rotonda, when the latter was consciously modelled on the former? Besides, given the fact that the first is a temple for all the gods, and the other a private residence for a mere mortal, does this comparison not exemplify the very principle of disjunction that Panofsky

[20] E. Panofsky, *Renaissance*, 39–40.

sees as typical of the renascences preceding the Renaissance? Aren't we facing here the same problem that music historians must deal with, namely, that comparisons between artefacts or texts cannot tell us the whole story, if we do not take into account ways of seeing, hearing, or reading them?

Here as elsewhere, it is hard not to feel that critical issues are resolved simply by assertion. There is another example on p. 90. Panofsky has just explained his famous 'principle of disjunction,' the disjunction being that between classical and Christian elements in works of art predating the Italian Renaissance. He has gone to some lengths to show that all apparent exceptions to this principle—that is, medieval artworks in which there appears to be *no* disjunction—can be accounted for by special circumstances. Indeed, he comes close to suggesting that there are no exceptions at all. Summing up, therefore, he concludes: 'where certain cases…still seem to defy interpretation, the fault is apt to lie with the limitations of our knowledge and ingenuity in applying the 'law of disjunction' rather than with the 'law of disjunction' as such.'

To which I cannot help but respond: why? The principle of disjunction is an hypothesis, one that, in the context of Panofsky's book, still awaits corroboration. Why is this hypothesis important, and why should we wish to see it corroborated? After all, it is not especially useful as an interpretive tool: it cannot help us to make better sense of individual works of art, or discriminate between artists or styles. On the contrary, the principle is one of broad historical categorisation, it doesn't distinguish, but lump together. It is somewhat like a lowest common denominator, or as Panofsky preferred to put it, a law: a fundamental law of culture that must be seen to apply, without exception, to centuries of medieval art. Now why would such a law be important, or even interesting? The answer is obvious: because it helps Panofsky to define what was to be truly new and unique about the Italian Renaissance. The latter period, as he sees it, tended to be more respectful of the original integrity of classical artworks, less inclined to borrow isolated elements and mix them together with incompatible ideas and materials.

How does one corroborate this principle of disjunction? Panofsky's answer is: by demonstrating, through interpretation, how it manifests itself in individual works of art. Presumably it's up to us, the readers, to decide if his interpretations are persuasive or not, and to accept or reject the principle accordingly. Yet Panofsky turns the situation

around. When the principle appears to be contradicted by the evidence—or so he advises us in the sentence just quoted—the fault is apt to lie with the interpretation rather with the principle as such. In other words, the principle is true, regardless of whether or not interpretation can be seen to confirm it. What Panofsky is in effect telling us is to make a leap of faith: accept the principle *a priori*, and dismiss all apparent exceptions as due to faulty interpretation.

To which, again, I can only respond: why? Why *should* this be a matter of faith? An argument that is truly persuasive shouldn't have to make such demands on the reader. In fact it could afford to do the opposite, that is, be totally frank and forthcoming about the room for disagreement. Yet Panofsky closes off that room, simply by asserting his authority. The central claim of his book, that there is a fundamental distinction between *the* Renaissance and preceding renascences, rests upon the principle of disjunction, which rests in turn, at least in cases of doubt, upon our willingness to accept it on faith. That, I'm afraid, is a leap I'm disinclined to make.

One last example. Near the end of his first chapter, Panofsky makes the following remark:

> It is perhaps no accident that the factuality of the Italian Renaissance has been most vigorously questioned by those who are not obliged to take a professional interest in the aesthetic aspects of civilization—historians of economic and social developments, political and religious situations and, *most particularly*, natural science—but only exceptionally by students of literature, and hardly ever by historians of art.[21]

As a musicologist, fortunately, I can claim to take a professional interest in the aesthetic aspects of civilisation, so I do not need to take offence at this comment. But even as a musicologist I find it hard not to read the comment as a polite way (well, just barely) of saying: shut up until you know what you're talking about. What Panofsky does not acknowledge is the problem that these scholars are confronted with: that of a sweeping historical interpretation, the idea of a Renaissance, for which they have found little or no convincing evidence in their own fields. His suggestion to them, apparently, is to leave the mat-

[21] E. Panofsky, *Renaissance*, 38. Italics mine. With the revealing insertion 'most particularly,' Panofsky makes it quite clear that he was thinking of the author of the *History of Magic and Experimental Science*, Lynn Thorndike.

ter to art historians, whose interpretation is more valid than that of anyone else.

Panofsky's comment seems symptomatic of a deeper problem. His idea of the Renaissance was so elastic that it could be blown up at will to comprise an entire civilisation, yet could just as quickly be deflated to the narrow sphere of competence of the art historian. This problem is particularly evident in Panofsky's first chapter. Near the end of that chapter, he sums up his argument as follows:

> From the fourteenth through the sixteenth century, then, and from one end of Europe to the other, the men of the Renaissance were convinced that the period in which they lived was a "new age" as sharply different from the medieval past as the medieval past had been from classical antiquity and marked by a concerted effort to revise the culture of the latter.[22]

It is a statement of breathtaking historical scope, characterising a whole civilisation rather than just the art and literature it produced. Yet if this is meant to sum up the results of the first chapter, then one thing is certain: it cannot be based on anything other than exclusively art historical evidence. An example of that evidence is the following quotation from Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini, Pope Pius II, invoked by Panofsky on p. 16:

> Pictures produced two hundred years ago were not refined, as we can see, by any art; what was written at that time is equally crude, inept, unpolished. After Petrarch, letters re-emerged; after Giotto, the hands of the painters were raised once more. Now we can see that both these arts have reached perfection.

Judging from this one example, the men of the Renaissance may have been convinced that painting, sculpture, literature, or architecture had markedly improved after long periods of decline. Yet it is far from obvious that they, like Panofsky, would have read the state of the world from the state of the art. Piccolomini was a prolific writer, who was preoccupied with a broad range of issues, and it is not hard to guess how he would have responded to the question: what, in your view, is the current state of the world? His first thought, conceivably, would not have been about art or literature, but about the condition of the Church—the state in which Christ would find it at the sec-

[22] E. Panofsky, *Renaissance*, 38.

ond coming. As for the dawning of a new age, Piccolomini would not have questioned the received truth, on the authority of St. Augustine, that Christ's first coming had ushered in the sixth and final age of the world, a world that was by now weary and decrepit with old age.[23] Once again, Panofsky's study is symptomatic of the very problem faced by musicologists, namely, that it is dangerous to take texts like these at face value without looking into the agendas of those who wrote them.

It is time to move on to the third part of this paper. All I would say in conclusion is this: whatever it is we need to do about 'the problem' of the Renaissance, Panofsky's book is of limited help. Its aim, at bottom, is to win the reader's support in a campaign against the medievalists, by means that are not always perfectly straightforward. It is a sobering thought that in the twelve years between its first publication in the *Kenyon Review* and its final appearance as a monograph, it never once occurred to him to reconsider his argument and to remedy its weaknesses. His study is a missed opportunity and, for a scholar of his formidable intellect, a tragic failure.

The State of the Art

I'd like to return once more to Tileman Elhen von Wolfhagen, author of the late fourteenth-century Limburg Chronicle, because his text is so utterly fascinating and yet so little known. Wolfhagen mentions the art of painting only once, but when he does, he gives us several interesting clues that may help us understand what he writes about music elsewhere. Here is one of his entries for the year 1380:

> At this time there was a painter at Cologne named Wilhelm. He was the best painter in the German countries, as esteemed by the masters, for he painted every human of every appearance, as though it were living.[24]

The painter has been identified as Wilhelm von Herle, a prominent artist known to have been resident at Cologne from 1358 to 1378. One

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[23] cf. George Boas, *Primitivism and Related Ideas in the Middle Ages* (Baltimore and London, 1948); James M. Dean, *The World Grown Old in Later Medieval Literature* (Cambridge, MA, 1997).

[24] *Limburger Chronik*, 65: 'Item in diser zit was ein meler zu Collen, der hiß Wilhelm. Der was der beste meler in Duschen landen, als he wart geachtet von den meistern, want he malte eynen iglichen menschen von aller gestalt, als hette ez gelebet.'

of the art works associated with this man, or at least with his school, is the famous *Klarenalter* in Cologne Cathedral.[25] By modern standards, it is hard to see this altarpiece as especially lifelike or realistic: in one of the panels, the *Flight into Egypt*, the Virgin appears as an elongated, shapeless, somewhat pillar-like figure, not realistically proportioned, with head inclined and arms held in a somewhat theatrical gesture—as though the entire tableau were a scene on stage, rather than the depiction of a historical event.

Still, there are many different ways in which works of art can seem real, lifelike, or true to nature. As we have seen, artefacts, by themselves, do not always tell us the whole story: we also need to take into account ways of seeing them. Focusing just on the Virgin, what someone like Wolfhagen would have seen was her face, her gestures, her general bearing, and her clothes. Face, gestures, and bearing belong to the medieval art of physiognomy, and clothes to the art of dress. Wolfhagen has much to tell us about both—and this in turn provides vital clues to what he says about music.

Whenever Wolfhagen had seen major historical actors with his own eyes, he attempted to be lifelike and realistic in his own way, by giving us complete descriptions of their physiognomy, from head to toe. It is apparent from these descriptions that he was well-acquainted with the medieval art of physiognomy, and that he subscribed to its fundamental premise: that the outward appearance of an individual expresses his or her inner character. Here, for example, is a man he clearly admires for his nobility and strength of character:

> Item, now you shall learn the physiognomy and the appearance of Lord Kuno [of Falkenstein, Archbishop and Elector of Trier], for I have often seen him and experienced him in his nature and in many of his manners. He was a dignified man, strong in body, great in personhood, and excellent in all parts. And he had a large head with luxuriant, wide, brown curls, a broad face with well-rounded cheeks, a sharp manly aspect, a modest mouth with lips that were not too full; the nose was broad, with ample nostrils, the middle of his nose was down-pointing, with a large chin and with a high forehead, and he had also a large breast, and red under his eyes, and he stood on his legs like a lion, and had a benevolent demeanour toward his friends, and when he was angered, then his

[25] For a reproduction, see Tancred Borenius, 'The Gothic Wall Paintings of the Rhineland', *Burlington Magazine* 61 (1932): 218–4, at 221.

> cheeks would become round and full, which made him look dignified and wise, and not evil-disposed…[26]

We can tell from this description how a fourteenth-century artist should have depicted Kuno of Falkenstein in order for him to appear to be lifelike. It would be quite interesting to compare Wolfhagen's account with the representation of Kuno of Falkenstein in the latter's funeral monument in the parish church of Kirchzarten, near Freiburg in Breisgau.

It was our chronicler's good fortune to have also seen, in person, a truly wicked man, shortly before his execution at Utrecht in 1398: he was boiled alive and then taken out of the water quickly enough to be decapitated while still conscious. This man was a fake suffragan named Jacob, who had falsely ordained thousands of priests, and thereby caused them to administer sacraments that turned out, after his unmasking, not to have been sacraments at all. A very grave crime that could only have been perpetrated by a man of the most evil character. His physical appearance really gave it all away, as we can tell from the following entry in the year 1386:

> Also you shall learn his appearance and his physiognomy, for I have often seen him. He was a gaunt man, of average height, brown under the eyes, with an elongated face, a long, sharp, pointy nose, and his cheeks were in some measure reddish, and he moved his body and his head up and down in great pride…[27]

These descriptions were lifelike and realistic in the sense that they were true not just to physical appearance but, more importantly, to charac-

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[26] *Limburger Chronik*, 38–9: 'Item nu saltu wißen phyzonomyen unde gestalt hern Conen vurgenant, want ich in dicke gesehen unde geprufet han in sime wesen unde in mancher syner manirunge. He was eyn herlich stark man von lybe unde wol gepersoniret unde groß von allem gelune, unde hatte eyn groß heubt mit eyme struben wydem brunen krulle, eyn breit antlitze mit pußenden backen, ein scharp menlich gesichte, eynen bescheyden mont mit glefsen etzlicher maße dicke; dy nase was breit, mit gerumenden naselochern, dy nase was ime mitten nider gedrucket; mit eyme großen kynne unde mit eyner hohen styrne, unde hatte auch eyn groß brost unde rodelfare under sinen augen, unde stont uff synen beynen als ein lewe, unde hatte gutliche geberde gen synen frunden, unde wanne daz he zornig was, so pußeden und floderten ime sine backen unde stonden ime herlichen unde wislichen unde nit obel…'

[27] Ibid., 69: 'Auch so saltu wißen syne gestalt unde sine phyzonomyen, want ich in dicke gesehen han. He was ein ran man von obener lenge, brun under den augen mit eyme langen antlitze, mit eyner langer gescherpter spitzer nasen, unde sine wangen waren etzlicher maße rodelfare, unde ruchte synen lyp unde heubt uff unde nider in großer hoffart…'

ter, to inner disposition: they were coherent readings rather than enumerations of isolated traits. Reading faces, gestures, and bearing was not a matter of neutral observation, but involved a moral judgement. So what was lifelike about the Virgin, in a painting like the *Klarenalter* at Cologne, was less her anatomy *per se*, than the fact that she was recognizably the person Wolfhagen would have known her to be in his devotions.

One could say the same about dress. The important point about dress was not the particular shape or colour of this or that garment, but whether it was fitting and appropriate to the person who is wearing it, his or her status in society. The key criterion, in other words, was decorum. Wolfhagen was even more keenly interested in dress than he was in physiognomy. There are numerous entries in his chronicle in which he reports that in such-and-such a year the fashion was such for women, such for men, such for nobility, and such for servants. This alone makes his chronicle an invaluable source for historians of dress, though I think it's still waiting to be utilised by them. In 1380, Wolfhagen reports a dramatic advance in the art of tailoring:

> During this time the fashion in clothing changed as well; he who used to be a master tailor had become, within one year, an apprentice, as one may find further on.[28]

Interestingly, the year 1380 coincides exactly with the beginning of what historians of dress have called the International Gothic Fashion (c.1380–1420).[29] Yet it is apparent from a more detailed entry, later in the same decade, that Wolfhagen was not interested in dress purely for its own sake, and was not writing merely to satisfy our curiosity. He did have an agenda. The central purpose of his entry, as it turns out, was not to record history, but to instruct. Future generations, he anticipated, would look upon these changing fashions as so many signs of pride and moral degradation, and his chronicle might perhaps help posterity to draw lessons from this. This is what we can tell from the following entry in 1389:

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[28] Ibid., 65: 'Item in diser zit wart der snet von den kleidern vurwandelt also, wer huwer ein meister was von dem snede, der wart ober eyn jar ein knecht, als man daz hernach wol beschreben findet.'

[29] Cf. Margaret Scott, *History of Dress Series: Late Gothic Europe, 1400–1500* (London, 1980), 77–105.

> During these same years ladies, damsels, and men, noble as well as common, took to wearing robes, girdled around the waist (which girdles were called *dusinge*), and men wore them both long and short, according to their pleasure, and they fashioned long, wide sleeves on them, reaching partly down to the ground. Item, you, young man, who are yet to be born more than a hundred years from now, you must know that this present age has adopted this dress and these ways of clothing not out of coarseness, nor out of frivolousness, but has invented and made this fashion and these clothes out of great pride—even though one finds that there were such [sorts of] clothes four hundred years ago, as one can see in the old foundations and churches, where one finds stone [carvings] and statues dressed in this way…[30]

Comments like these help to explain why so many towns in the late fourteenth century sought to impose, and continually update, sumptuary laws, in order to ensure that townsfolk would dress properly according to their social position.

In sum, what we can tell from these and other entries in the Limburg Chronicle is that the world, as it manifests itself to the eyes, is charged with moral significance, whether in dress or in human physiognomy. This is what made the image of the Virgin in altarpieces so lifelike: in a world of false appearances, in a world turned out of joint by rapidly changing dress fashions, and corrupted by the cardinal sin of pride, she at least was portrayed exactly as she was, a paragon of virtue.

There is a close resemblance between Wolfhagen's comment about advances in tailoring, in 1380, and advances in the art of music, in 1360. Both tailors and trumpeters, he says, suddenly found that their previous skills no longer amounted to anything. This is not a coincidence. Just as Wolfhagen describes in detail the particular dress fashions for this or that year, he also records, year after year, what new songs were current, quoting their texts, though unfortunately not recording their tunes.[31] 'Item, around the same time,' he reports for example in

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[30] *Limburger Chronik*, 70–1: 'Item in disen selben geziden gingen frauwen, jungfrauwen unde manne, edile unde unedile, mit tapparten unde hatten dy mitten gegordet, dy gortel hiß man dusinge, unde dy manne drugen sy lange unde korz, wy sy wolden, unde machten daran lange große wyde stuchen endeiles uff dy erden. Item du junger man, der noch sal geboren werden ober hondert jar, du salt wißen, daz dise kleidunge unde manironge der kleider dise genwortige wernt nit an sich genomen hant von grobeheit noch von heiterkeit, dan sy disen snet unde kleider von großer hoffart gefonden unde gemachet hant. Wy wol man findet, daz dise kleidunge vur vir hondert jaren auch etzlicher maße gewest ist, als man wol sehet an den alden stiften unde kirchen, da man findet solche steyne unde bilde gekleidet…'

[31] R. C. Wegman, 'The Minstrel School in the Late Middle Ages', 11–30.

1350, 'one sang a new song in the German lands, which was played on shawms and trumpets everywhere, and which made everyone joyful: *Wyßet wer den synen y vurkoys*…'[32] Other new songs are mentioned in 1350, 1356, 1357, 1359, 1360, 1361, 1363, 1365, 1367, 1374, 1379, and 1380.[33] Nearly all the songs are said to have been played on shawms and trumpets, as well as sung by the people. One song, *Ach rynes wyp von guder art* of 1350, is said specifically to be 'a good song, both tune and words.'[34] Wolfhagen underlines repeatedly that the songs were popular 'throughout the whole of Germany' (1350), 'in all these lands' (1357), 'everywhere' (1361). Despite their popularity, however, only one of the songs is known to us from other sources; the others would appear to have circulated only through oral transmission.

In the case of music as well as in dress, there is a moral dimension to Wolfhagen's reports. In the fourteenth century, 'new songs' were anything but morally unambiguous.[35] Certainly they were popular throughout the land, just as dress fashions were popular. But just as city councils imposed sumptuary legislation to curb extravagant garments, preachers repeatedly warned against the dangers of lasciviousness in song and dance. The fourteenth century has left us a quite a few sermons against dancing; and 'new songs,' typically, are mentioned here in one breath with dance music. In this period, there is nothing inherently positive about innovation, about a sudden change in taste, whether in music or in dress. On the contrary: such changes indicate that values are continually in flux, that nothing in this world is certain. So it is in line with Wolfhagen's aim to instruct posterity that he should represent these changes as much more sudden and dramatic than they may have been in reality. It also explains his awareness that future generations will look with amazement at the deplorable state of the world in his time.

All this ties in directly with what we know of the late fourteenth century in general: that writers in this period did not cease to complain

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[32] 'Item in der selben zijt sang man eyn nuwe lit in Duschen landen, das war gar gemeine zu pyffen unde zu trompen unde zur aller freude: *Wyßet, wer den synen y vurkoys / unde ane alle scholt getruwen frunt virliß, / der wirt vil gerne sigeloys. / Getruwen frunt den ensal niman laßen, / want man vurgelden daz nit enkan*.' *Limburger Chronik*, 36.

[33] *Limburger Chronik*, 25, 25–6, 33, 34, 35, 36, 39, 41, 43, 44, 54, 60–1, 64, and 65.

[34] *Limburger Chronik*, 26; for the next sentence, see ibid., 26, 34, and 39.

[35] On this issue in general, see Walter Salmen, 'Das gemachte 'Neue Lied' im Spätmittelalter', in *Handbuch des Volksliedes*, 2 vols. (Munich, 1973–5), vol. 2, 407–20.

against the times, that people felt themselves to be caught up in an uncertain and unstable world, in which the only permanent values were those taught by the church. We find this awareness, for example, in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*: the English language is unstable and impermanent, and is likely to be almost unrecognisable in a thousand years. The author cannot even be sure that his own book will survive the vicissitudes of linguistic change:

[Book II] Ye knowe ek that in forme of speche is chaunge
Withinne a thousand yeer, and wordes tho
That hadden pris, now wonder nyce and straunge
Us thinketh hem, and yet thei spake hem so,
And speede as wel in love as men now do;
Ek for to wynnen love in sondry ages,
In sondry londes, sondry ben usages…

[Book V] And for there is so gret diversite
In Englissh and in writyng of oure tonge,
So prey I God that non myswrite the [i.e. the book],
Ne the mysmetre for defaute of tonge;
And red wherso thow be, or elles songe,
That thow be understonde, God I biseche…[36]

We find this same future-oriented awareness in music history, in a mid-fourteenth-century treatise on music written by Johannes Boen, a Dutchman who had studied at the University of Oxford. As we can see in the following passages from his treatise *De musica* of c.1355, he expects the future to bring many innovations in music that can scarcely even be imagined at the present time. He is struck with amazement that even neighboring countries, like England and Holland, have utterly different musical tastes. Nothing is universally agreed, nothing is fixed, nothing is permanent:

> For many new and unheard of things may become possible according to the diversity of times and countries, such as, perhaps, the performance of the comma and of three minor semitones, and many similar things which, although not heard as of yet, may perhaps, after the passing of time, be heard in the future by means of new instruments and vocal abilities—just as there was not such subtlety in singing before Pythagoras as is the custom in our present times, nor do we produce the same rhythms in song as do the English, the French, or the Lombards.

[36] Geoffrey Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, II, 22–8 and V, 1,793–1,798. cf. Morton W. Bloomfield, 'Chaucer's Sense of History', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 51 (1952): 301–13, at 308–9.

> For different countries demand different ways of singing, as I've heard in this experience, when I attended the schools at Oxford in England (a country separated from the County of Holland, my birthplace, only by the sea): that laymen there, and clerics, and old men, youths, and just about everybody loved thirds and sixths so fondly that I've seen them invoke these alone, as though in reverent prayer, in preference to octaves and fifths. Vehemently astonished, I've not ceased to wonder at such a difference in nature, and in so nearby a country.[37]

Our German chronicler Wolfhagen was not the only fourteenth-century author to perceive a direct connection between music and dress, or to invoke these arts to illustrate the moral degradation of the world. The following text, from the *Bouc van der wraken* (c.1346) by Antwerp author Jan van Boendale, makes the same point that was to be made ninety years later by Martin le Franc, one of those two crown witnesses for the musical Renaissance: the end of the world is near, and if you want to know why, you need only look at what's going on in the arts. Boendale vehemently inveighs against the shameful dress fashions of his time, and moves on, almost in one breath, to music:

> Of the perversion of the world. Chapter 105.
>
> Our Lord Jesus Christ says, 'tis no delusion, that nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and that there shall be earthquakes, in truth, all over the earth's dominion [*Mark* 13: 8]. One reads here as well, in truth, that when brother fights against brother, and the child rises up against the father [*Mark* 13: 12], and when honour and justice and the fear of God have been abandoned, and the just man is left alone, and everyone pursues his pleasure, that this is when will approach those perilous Last Days of which I've spoken before, [those days] that

[37] After Wolf Frobenius, *Johannes Boens Musica und seine Konsonanzenlehre* (Stuttgart, 1971), 45–6 and 76; available online at http://www.chmtl.indiana.edu/tml/14th/BOENMUS_TEXT.html (accessed 11 Sept. 2007): 'Nam secundum diversitatem temporis et regionum multa nova et inaudita poterunt suboriri, sicut forte pronuntiatio commatis et trium semitoniorum minorum ac multorum similium, que, licet hactenus non audita sunt, forte tractu temporis per nova instrumenta et vocum habilitates posterius audientur, sicut nec ante Pitagoram fuit tanta subtilitas in cantu, quanta hodiernis temporibus est in usu, nec talem nos, qualem Anglici, Gallici vel Lumbardi in cantu facimus fracturam.

Diverse namque regiones diversos cantus exigunt, ut in hoc experimento—dum scolas Oxonienses in Anglia colui, quam regionem a Comitatu Hollandie, loco mee nativitatis, solum mare discriminat—audito, quod layci ibidem et clerici, senes, iuvenes et indifferenter omnes tertiis et sextis tantam atribuebant affectionem quodque, duplis et quintis postpositis, ipsas solas invocantes quasi adorare videbam; vehementer attonitus de tam vicine regionis diversa natura continue ammirabar.'

every man should rightly dread. Mark now, and decide if that time has presently arrived…

Men wear their clothes short, even up to their privy parts. Women wear their clothes long, and have them pressed tightly around the body, so that one can easily see the shape of their shameful parts, with which they lead men into loose folly. They're quick to open their mouths for them, and expect them to do likewise. In former days, women used to keep themselves strictly covered. You remember, I'm sure, that a woman would not have put her husband's hat on her own head, so great was her sense of shame then.

In the same way as this, the sweetness of music has been turned much into discord, as one may now hear every day; for those who bring most discord are the ones who can sing the best. In this way, as one here may learn, one can see all things being perverted nowadays: it's a sign, to speak the truth, that Doomsday is approaching.[38]

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[38] Jan van Boendale, *Bouc van der wraken* (c.1346), II, 370–403 and 453–83:

'Vander verkeertheyt der werelt.
C. V.

Onse here Jhesus Cristus seyt, sonder waen,
Het sal volc jeghen volc opstaen,
Ende oec riken jeghen rike,
Ende het selen in ertrike
Erdbevinghen sijn voer waer.
Oec leestmen hier voer waer:
Alse broeder jeghen broeder vecht,
Ende tkint jeghen den vader recht,
Ende ere ende gherechticheyt
Ende Gods vresen sijn af gheleyt,
Ende alsmen scalcheyt wijsheyt mect
Ende die gherechtige achter stect,
Ende elc siet op sijn gheniet,
Dan so naect, des seker sijt,
Die anxtelike leste tijt,
Daer ic vore af hebbe gheseyt,
Die elc mensche wel duchten mach.
Nu merct ende wilt gomen
Of dese tijt nu es comen…

Die manne draghen cledere mede
Cort tote hare scamelhede;
Vrouwen draghen cledre lanc,
Daer si in sijn ghepranct,
Datment daer dore merct ghereyt
Die vorme herre schamelheyt,
Daer si die manne mede leyden
Te gheloesder loesheyden.
Si tonen hen die kele ghereet
Ende willen des sijn ghemeet.

This example alone suggests that Martin le Franc, in the 1440s, was not actually testifying to a new age in music history, let alone a Renaissance, but perpetuating a venerable tradition of social critique going back to the early fourteenth century: the complaint against the times, and the warning that the Last Judgement is imminent.[39]

As I think will be obvious at this point, novelty and innovation were profoundly ambivalent notions in the late fourteenth century, inasmuch as they served to destabilise any sense of abiding value. But in what direction did music tend to innovate, and what exactly was the problem about that? The answer is suggested by the remarks of my fellow Dutchman Johannes Boen, when he speculated that the future might bring minute divisions of the tone and semitone that were as yet inaudible and unheard-of. The direction was that of ever more minute distinctions, of ever finer discriminations; in a word, of ever greater subtlety. Subtlety not only with regard to tuning, as Johannes Boen anticipated, but especially with regard to rhythmic divisions, the breaking up of notes into ever smaller fractions, to the point of being virtually un-performable.

Ecclesiastical commentators in the fourteenth century, including no one less than Pope John XXII himself, vehemently condemned such rhythmic subtleties when they were introduced in church music—

Die vrouwen in ouden daghen
Hen nauwe te decken plaghen.
Mi ghedenct wel, dat ghijt wet,
Dat een vrouwe niet en had gheset
Op hare hoet haers mans caproen,
So groet was hare scamelheyt doen.

Also oec in deser ghelike
Es die soetheyt der musike
Sere ghekeert in discort,
Alsmen daghelijx nu hoert;
Want die meest discorts bringhen,
Dat sijn die ghene die best singhen.
Aldus, alsic hier mach leren,
Sietmen alle dinc verkeren;
Dats een teken, sonder saghen,
Dat het naect den doemsdaghe.'

After F. A. Snellaert, ed., *Nederlandsche gedichten uit de veertiende eeuw* (Brussels, 1869), 370–3.

[39] See, for example, Joseph R. Keller, 'The Triumph of Vice: A Formal Approach to the Medieval Complaint Against the Times', *Annuale Medievale* 10 (1969): 120–37; Thomas J. Elliott, 'Middle English Complaints Against the Times: To Contemn the World or To Reform It?', *Annuale Medievale* 14 (1974): 22–34.

though they were powerless to stop such vanities in the liturgy.[40] In secular music, on the other hand, such rhythmic subtleties were rapidly being pushed to extremes. The ballade *Or voit tout en aventure*, by a composer named Guido (1370s), is a good example of a composition that is not only full of quirky and erratic rhythmic effects, but whose sinuous, restless melodic lines, taken together, give the music an eccentric, almost bizarre quality.[41] Its lyrics seem to reflect an awareness that music has now been pushed beyond what is natural, beyond reason, beyond measure—into a twilight realm that can only be typified as the Perverse:

> Now all is put at adventure, for this is how I must fashion *a la nouvelle figure* [i.e. in the new rhythmic notation], which is bound to displease everyone; it is wholly contrary to good art which is perfect: *certainly this is not well made*.
>
> Our making is contrary to Nature, unmaking that which is well made, for which Philippe [de Vitry], who is no more, gave us the right example. We are leaving all his doings for Marquet [of Padua], who does the contrary: *certainly this is not well made*.
>
> The art of Marquet has no measure, nor ever knows how to bring anything to perfection; it's too great a presumption to follow and to draw these figures, and to drag all to where nothing is of proper treatment: *certainly this is not well made*.[42]

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[40] For a good example of the kind of music condemned by Pope John XXII, listen to the anonymous Sanctus, of MS Ivrea, Biblioteca Capitolare, 115 (1360s); The Clerks' Group, dir. Edward Wickham, recorded 1998; sound recording made by Signum Records (SIGCD011), track 11. For an example of the sort of rhythmically uninvolved polyphony that Pope John approved, listen to Guillaume de Machaut, *Messe de Notre-Dame*, Ensemble Gilles Binchois, dir. Dominique Vellard; recorded 1990; sound recording made by Harmonic Records (H/CD 8931), tracks 1 and 15.

[41] For a recent recording of this ballade, listen to *Codex Chantilly*, Ensemble Organum, dir. Marcel Peres; recorded 1986; sound recording made by Harmonia Mundi (HMC 90 1252), track 4.

[42] 'Or voit tout en aventure
Puis qu'ainsi me convient fayre
A la novelle figure
Qui doyt a chascun desplayre;
Que c'est trestout en contraire
De bon art qui est parfait:
Certes, ce n'est pas bien fayt.

Nos faysoms contre Nature
De ce qu'est bien fayt deffayre;
Que Philipe qui mais ne dure
Nos dona boin exemplaire.
Nos laisons tous ses afayres

A world out of joint, weary and exhausted, unstable, riven by wars, epidemics, famine, collective hysteria, exhibiting the most bizarre fashions in music and dress, and because of all this, almost certainly nearing the end of time. Such a world seems to cry out for a Renaissance, the very kind of Renaissance that Burckhardt so compellingly sketched in his classic study. So when musical tastes did finally turn around in the 1430s, and compositions were systematically purged of these decadent subtleties, it is hard for us not to feel that a new age has dawned in the history of music—even though our crown witness Martin le Franc took just this change to spell the imminent end of time. Both Le Franc and Tinctoris ascribed the origin of the new style to English composers—not, interestingly, Italians. We also know that the style first took root in northern France and the Low Countries—not, interestingly, Italy.[43]

Is the new style indicative of a Renaissance in music? I very much doubt it, for a combination of reasons I cannot go into at this point. All I would suggest is that neither Le Franc nor Tinctoris can be made to support that conclusion. When Tinctoris looked back on the stylistic changes some forty years after the fact, he too, I think, had an agenda that coloured his remarks, and that drove him into wild exaggeration.

Critiques of music, claims that the art was decadent, effeminate, and wasteful were issued not only in the fourteenth century, but continued into the fifteenth. In fact, the new English style could well be seen as a response, a concession, to those critiques. As I have argued in my recent monograph *The Crisis of Music in Early Modern Europe*, the

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Por Marquet le contrefayt:
Certes, ce n'est pas bien fayt.

L'art de Marquet n'a mesure,
N'onques rien ne sait parfayre;
C'est trop grant outrecuidure
D'ansuir et de portrayre
Ces figures, et tout traire
Ou il n'a riens de bon trayt:
Certes, ce n'est pas bien fayt.'
Gordon K. Greene, ed., *French Secular Music: Manuscript Chantilly, Musée Condé 564*, Polyphonic Music of the Fourteenth Century 18 (Monaco, 1981) 80.

[43] For an example of the new English style that was to change the course of music history, listen to Leonel Power, *Missa Alma redemptoris mater*, The Hilliard Ensemble; recorded 1980; sound recording made by EMI (CDM 7 63064 2); reissued by Virgin Veritas (7243 5 61345 2 2), track 10.

critiques intensified precisely in the 1470s, the decade when Tinctoris was writing his treatises.[44] Many humanists, at this time, sought to banish music from the humanist curriculum, on the grounds that the art was empty and vain, and took too much time away from proper academic pursuits. And Reformist critics were bent on outlawing all polyphonic music from the church—a position that no one less than Erasmus would subscribe to in the last two decades of his life. Against this background—that of a groundswell of criticism targeted against the very art of music, not just isolated excesses—Tinctoris was forced to write from a defensive position. His prologues bear all the hallmarks of this. He invoked the powerful criterion of lineage by showing music's venerable ancestry in ancient and biblical times. He even asserted, without any apparent basis in Scripture, that Jesus Christ himself had been the greatest musician of all time, and he boasted recent breakthroughs so marvellous, so astonishing, that music seemed to have become a new art. Such was his agenda.

As Tinctoris's prologues suggest, then, few contemporary topics were as heavily charged with social, moral, religious, and political issues as the state of the art. Few things are as likely to obscure those issues from our view than the wish to read a Renaissance into them. In this, as in many other respects, a fundamental reconsideration of Panofsky's study, as proposed by this volume and the conference from which it arose, is long overdue.

[44] Rob C. Wegman, *The Crisis of Music in Early Modern Europe: 1470–1530* (New York, 2005).