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Thought-Provoking Dissonances:
Remarks about Machaut’s Compositional Licences in Relation to his Texts

The music of Guillaume de Machaut, especially his motets, contains many unexplainable passages when compared with the music and theoretical treatises of his time. The contention of this article is that many of these peculiarities probably are no errors of composition or mistakes in the transmission but deliberate transgressions. When the texts are taken into account, the consistency of certain ideas makes clear that these transgressions can be explained as a means to set the performers and the audience on the track of a problem which is expressed both in words and in music.

‘Newness’ as an aesthetical criterion in Western art music has a long history. It can be traced back even further than the late fifteenth century, where Carl Dahlhaus found one of its first expressions. The concept is already present in the fourteenth century, with the poet-composer Guillaume de Machaut (ca 1300-1377). His pleasure in novelty and the unheard is attested by a passage from the *Dit de l’Alerion* (generally dated before 1349), where a fabulous hunting-bird *Alerion* is praised for its rareness; its difficult training serves as a metaphor for learning the arts of love and poetry. Machaut explains the pleasure of hearing about things new and strange (see Figure 1).

He later repeats the idea specifically with respect to music in his quasi-autobiographical *Livre dou Voir Dit* (written between ca 1362-1365) where in a letter to his beloved Peronne he describes, with apparent pleasure, the melody of his newly composed ballade *Nes qu’on porroit les estoilles nombrer*. It was made in the way of a *res d’Alemaigne*, and is *moult estranges et moult nouviaus*, ‘very strange (outlandish) and very new’. And in one of his last poems, the *Prologue*, written as an introduction to his complete works (ca 1372) and in which he formulated his artistic and aesthetic creed, newness appears as an important concept; Lady Nature and Amour ordain Machaut to create ‘new and pleasant’ works about love and he promises to use all his ‘subtlety’ to obey their command. The search for novelty was thus a constant in his aesthetics. His very originality may however also have impeded his appreciation for a long time to come.

Apart from the remaining complete-works manuscripts, the making of which he mostly controlled himself, Machaut’s works are only feebly represented in contemporary codices. Although his music probably was appreciated by the generation immediately succeeding him (the so-called Ars subtilior composers) his fame soon declined in the
late-fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and his name—at least as a musician—faded into oblivion. This fate, however, befell many others as well; during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries a composer’s renown generally did not last not much longer than one or two generations, partly to be explained by the changing notation and lack of sources. Tinctoris’ dictum from the 1470s that nothing worth hearing had been composed more than forty years ago is symptomatic. This author is exceptional in that he admits having seen music (without author names) predating that of Dunstable, the ‘fount and origin’ of the new art; but according to him that music ‘rather offended than pleased the ear’.4

The first nineteenth-century music historians who mentioned Machaut’s name again and for whom dissonance control was an essential criterion in their judgment of contrapuntal skills, dismissed the few polyphonic works known to them as poor in quality.5 Only since the early twentieth century have Machaut’s compositions slowly begun to be valued for their individual and singular character.6 Indeed, in his music Machaut sometimes went far beyond the conventions as known from theoretical treatises and

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5 See for the early history of the Machaut-reception: Earp 1995, pp. 277-281 and Earp 2002. Dissonance control is not a regular issue in fourteenth-century theory; it is scarcely mentioned and always in the context of discussions on florid counterpoint, more with regard to the length of the dissonance than to its resolution. See Sachs 1974, pp. 140-169.
6 Editions of the music in Ludwig 1929-1954 and Schrade 1956. Ludwig’s edition is to be preferred for its accuracy but is less readily available. In the music examples my transcriptions are all in reduction 4:1 (longa=whole note, brevis=half note etc.). I have transcribed the minimis in prolatio major in triplets, following Ludwig’s edition since it permits to give a clearer image of the original perfect mensuration. For a survey of the literature on Machaut’s music and a brief biography and introduction to the manuscripts, see the excellent bibliography in Earp 1995.
practical works by his contemporaries. Even today his music is not yet always understood in every detail: sometimes unconventional turns, when suspected to be mistakes, are ‘normalized’ in the editions; students of his works have repeatedly tried to detect what could have gone amiss during the process of composition or copying and have proposed explanations. This is hard to reconcile with Machaut’s repeated statements that he sought to create something ‘strange and new’; such pronouncements, however vague they be, should be a warning to be cautious in measuring his works against conventions that we can only deduce from the treatises and the small amount of compositions remaining from the earlier fourteenth century. Moreover, Machaut’s oeuvre has come down to us in no less than six manuscripts of his works in different stages of completion. Their production probably was supervised by the artist himself in at least one but possibly three or four of those copies. Therefore we have a far more reliable transmission of his works than with most late-medieval and Renaissance composers—with the caveat that copying mistakes in a hand-written transmission cannot be ruled out and that Machaut probably did not scrutinize the copying of his manuscripts in every detail.

More than 45 years ago Richard Hoppin explained a number of so-called licences in Machaut’s notational practice as being entirely consistent with the conventions of his day and criticized their ‘corrections’ in the editions as misunderstandings (Hoppin 1960); only slowly Hoppin’s re-adjustments are being incorporated into present-day performance practice. Hoppin restricted himself to purely musical criteria and questions of rhythmic notation. Below I shall try to explain some questionable passages in Machaut’s melody, counterpoint and notation by also taking account of the text. Since he was both a poet and a composer it seems reasonable to assume a mutual influence between the two sides of his art. My contention is that a number of Machaut’s transgressions were deliberately made, in order to set the performers on the track of a problem which is expressed by the co-operation of text and music. To support my argument I shall try to show that some system can be found in these collisions with the norms.

Machaut’s musical renderings of two literary topoi will be discussed, the excess of desire and the death of the lover. The cases are chosen mainly from the motets which are perhaps the genre in which one senses best Machaut’s experimenting with music-theoretical issues. Twenty of his motets apparently belong to his earliest compositions; thus they are closest to the time when he presumably had contacts with theorists and fellow-musicians and could try out and discuss theoretical issues in practical music. Since the motets demonstrably form a closed and coherent corpus, written within a restricted period of time, they may more easily show up related ideas than works that

7 In contrast to musical studies, in the Romanistic field his poems were at first judged to be highly unoriginal, since Machaut, in choosing his literary themes, followed almost exclusively the tradition of the thirteenth-century trouvères. Nowadays they are, on the contrary, admired for their ingenuity and originality in construction. For a good introduction to his literary works see Cerquiglini 1985.
9 See for their interdependance Earp 1989, pp. 461-503; also Avril 1982 and Bent 1983.
10 Although text-music relations in medieval music still are a much debated point; see Stevens 1986, especially pp. 372-405.
11 Machaut wrote 23 motets but the numbers 21-23 were certainly written later than the first twenty motets, probably between 1358-60. The terminus ante quem of numbers 1-20 falls between 1350-1356 (on ground of the manuscript transmission) but they were probably composed much earlier. Machaut is mentioned among a group of other musicians and theorists in two ‘musician-motets’ (edited in Motets of French Provenance, numbers 9 and 33); they suggest that he had contacts with these colleagues (we know nothing about his musical education).
were composed later and throughout Machaut’s long career. Moreover, when theorists cite examples from practical music these are almost invariably chosen from motets; the motet was the genre par excellence to illustrate theoretical issues in practice.\textsuperscript{13} To introduce the problem, however, I shall start with a chanson.

Ballade 19, \textit{Amours me fait desirer}, gives voice to the complaint of a lover who is in a state of intense desire, provoked by the God of Love, Amour, but who hopes to obtain his lady’s grace without having to pray for it. Its form is that of a \textit{balade duplex} (a \textit{baladelle} in Machaut’s terminology), with ouvert- and clos-endings in both parts. The text of the first strophe is presented in Figure 2.

This stance needs a brief explanation. In the strict love-ethics of the troubadours and trouvères of which Machaut was a direct and faithful heir, a true lover should never speak out his love directly or beseech the lady openly for her grace, nor should a lady give any clear sign that she returns his; in doing so they would commit a transgression against honourable comportment and give cause to slander. The result is an impasse. However, the intensity of the lover’s desire makes him transgress the measure of moderateness: he loves ‘foolishly’, for wanting to confess his feelings.\textsuperscript{14}

Machaut’s music responds to this subtle love-casuistry. The cantus of the ballade starts with a surprise, an upward tritone leap, emphasized by the iambic rhythm (Example 1). Although not explicitly forbidden it certainly is a most unusual opening.\textsuperscript{15} Theorists speak about the \textit{asperitas} or \textit{duritia} (rudeness or hardness) of the tritone, which is better avoided in practical composition, both melodically and in counterpoint. Around 1321 Jacques de Liège writes:

\begin{quote}
\begin{tabular}{ll}
\textbf{A}\textsuperscript{o} & \textit{Amours me fait desirer} \\
& \textit{Et amer,} \\
& \textit{Mais c’est si folettement,} \\
\textbf{A}\textsuperscript{c} & \textit{Que je ne puis esperer} \\
& \textit{Ne penser} \\
& \textit{N’yimaginer nullement,} \\
\textbf{B}\textsuperscript{o} & \textit{Que le dous viaire gent} \\
& \textit{Qui m’esprent} \\
& \textit{Me doie joie donner,} \\
\textbf{B}\textsuperscript{c} & \textit{S’Amours ne fait proprement} \\
& \textit{Tellement} \\
& \textit{Que je l’\textit{’}aie sans rouver.} \\
\end{tabular}
\end{quote}

\textit{Figure 2}

Ballade 19, First strophe.

\begin{quote}
\textit{Amours me fait desirer} \\
\textit{Et amer,} \\
\textit{Mais c’est si folettement,} \\
\textit{Que je ne puis esperer} \\
\textit{Ne penser} \\
\textit{N’yimaginer nullement,} \\
\textit{Que le dous viaire gent} \\
\textit{Qui m’esprent} \\
\textit{Me doie joie donner,} \\
\textit{S’Amours ne fait proprement} \\
\textit{Tellement} \\
\textit{Que je l’\textit{’}aie sans rouver.}
\end{quote}

Love makes me desire \\
and be in love, \\
but it is in such a foolish way, \\
that I cannot hope \\
nor think \\
nor imagine in whatever way, \\
that the sweet and noble face \\
which sets me ablaze \\
may grant me joy, \\
if Love does not make it precisely \\
in such a way \\
that I have it without praying.

\textsuperscript{13} Johannes de Muris’ theoritical writings come closest to the practical music of Machaut; his authenticated treatises have been translated, on the basis of earlier critical editions of the Latin texts, in \textit{Jean de Murs} 2000. In the \textit{Libellus cantus mensurabilis} he mentioned Machaut as taking liberties with notational conventions; see the just cited edition pp. 202-203.

\textsuperscript{14} See on the concept of \textit{folie} in troubadour poetry Cropp 1975, p. 134.

\textsuperscript{15} For a survey of Machaut’s tritones in his chansons see Brothers 1997, p. 123 (notes 62 and 63). I know of no other fourteenth-century chanson in which the cantus opens with a tritone.
'This conjunction of tones can however have no place in one and the same hexachord; whence it must be used most seldom because it is very rude, whether its tones are brought forth successively or together; and they will always be sung according to different singing modes.'

The well-known term *diabolus in musica* is not medieval, however; its occurrence in Fux' *Gradus ad Parnassum* of 1725 might even be one of its first recorded instances.

Machaut used the tritone sparingly as a melodic interval and nowhere else in his chansons is it found in such a prominent position. There can be no doubt that a tritone is intended; all the manuscripts contain the sharp-sign.

16 ‘[...] haec autem vocum coniunctio locum habere nequit in una et eadem sex vocum solfatione; unde rarissime utendum est ea quia rudis nimirum est, sive voces illae successive proferantur, sive simul et cantantur semper per diversos modos cantandi.’ *Jacobi Leodiensis Speculum musicæ*, ed. Bragard, Liber VI, pp. 187-188.

17 See Reese, lemma ‘Tritonus’ in the old *Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart* 13, pp. 699-712 (there is no such entry in the second edition of MGG). See also Smith 1979 for Jacques de Liège's view on the tritone which fascinated him for its mathematical properties. Although this hot-tempered opponent of Ars nova-theorists and composers likes to hurl colourful invectives, he nowhere uses the term *diabolus* in connection with the tritone. Neither have I found the term in any other treatise in the *Thesaurus Musicarum Latinarum* (http://www.music.indiana.edu/tml).
Perhaps he took over this melodic phrase from his earlier composed Ballade 3 *On ne porroit penser* (with the text: *que j’aim de fine amour*, ‘whom I love with perfect love’; Example 2; the similarity is striking), but there it is rather the last part of the A-section and is rhythmically less emphasized.\(^\text{18}\) In Ballade 19 the tritone is embedded in a consonant contrapuntal context: the $G^4$ over the tenor’s $A^3$ serves as a leading note to reach the following $D^4$ over the tenor’s $G^3$.\(^\text{19}\) A subtlety of the song is that the first note of the tenor, $B^3_b$, will later appear to be the final (the first tenor notes are given in Example 1); in this opening phrase, however, $G$ is the tonal focus.\(^\text{20}\) The tritone is immediately followed by a resolution to the fifth and then by a pure upward fourth. Together the two fourth leaps divide the rising octave $G^3$-$G^4$; the upward impetus is then balanced by the serpentining melody down to $G^3$. The excess of the initial tritone is compensated in bars 6-7 by the ‘contraction’ of a filled-in diminished fourth $B^3_b$/$F^3$ (a far more common figure in Machaut’s melodic language). In the next phrase the upward tritone-gesture is repeated, with an intermediate third,\(^\text{21}\) but in the continuation the cantus does not rise higher than $E^4$ and comes to rest on $D^4$ in the ouvert-cadence. The melody passes through several more fourths, in direct leap or filled-in, to end with a fourth-leap to the final $B^3_b$, both at the clos-cadence of the first and of the second part (the ending is identical for the A- and B-parts). The fourth in its different forms is thus an important structural interval in the cantus of this ballade and could even be called its dominating musical idea. The strong tension of the audacious beginning seems to represent the literary theme in an emblematic way: ‘Love makes me desire [...] but it is in a such a foolish way’, ‘foolish’ (*folettement*) denoting the transgression of *mesure*, moderateness. The essential point of the text, in the refrain, is that the lover humbly wishes to obtain his lady’s grace ‘without praying’ (*que je l’aie sans rouver*); and the tension of the initial tritone is balanced by the pure upward fourth leap $E^3$/$B^3_b$ in the clos-cadences, perhaps as an expression of this development from excess to humility and moderation.

\(^{18}\) It may seem strange that in this song Machaut combines the words ‘fine amour’ (‘perfect love’) with the glaringly imperfect interval of the tritone; however, as I have explained in Boogaart 2004a, for him the perfection of love consists in the moment where it is just not yet fulfilled (imperfect), a paradox which he treated in his first motet.

\(^{19}\) Pitch-indications according to the ASA-code.


\(^{21}\) I think major since in such a rising line most treatises prescribe a major third, but others assume it to be minor. See Arlt 1982, pp. 258-260.
Machaut’s seventeen French- and French-Latin texted motets form an ordered series of reflections on the different stages and obstacles in the quest for perfect love.22 The subject of the opening work, *Quant Amour vint premierement/Amour et Biauté parfaite/Amara valde*, is the beginning of love and the lover’s striving in vain for its fulfilment which he wishes, again, to obtain without asking, in order not to harm the lady’s honour.23 In this motet a passage that is reminiscent of the opening gesture of *Amours me fait desirer* occurs in the triplum part, bars 118-120, a tritone with an intermediate third as in the second phrase of the chanson. The text at this point is closely related to that of the ballade: *mais j’aime si follement que je n’ose merci rouver* (‘but I love so foolishly that I do not dare to pray for grace’).

22 See the analysis of the corpus of motets, its order and its thematical coherence in my PhD-dissertation (Boogaart 2001, chapter 1). The sequence is identical in all but one of the manuscripts; the exception (ms Paris Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 9221) dates from after Machaut’s death and was made without his control.

23 The idea of fulfilment is effectively rendered by the emphasis on perfection in the mensuration of this motet as its musical equivalent; exceptionally, all the mensural divisions are ternary. The only other motet to have exclusively ternary mensuration is the last one in Machaut’s original series, motet 20. See for the symbolical meaning of this mensuration Boogaart 2001, pp. 233-239 and Boogaart 2004a.

Example 2
Motet 1, *Quant Amour vint premierement/Amour et Biauté parfaite/Amara valde*, bars 109-121.
The musical situation is more complex, however, than in the chanson in which the tritone is, certainly, an audacious gesture but one that is nevertheless placed in a consonant context (Example 3). In the passage in the motet the $F^{4}$ of the triplum leading to $G^{4}$ causes what the theorist Petrus dictus Palma Ociosa (writing ca 1336) would certainly classify as a *dura collisio*, a hard collision (if he would have conceived of such a dissonance at all); since at the same time the tenor phrase cadences to $F^{3}$ (natural) an augmented octave results between the two voices at the beginning of a perfection which according to most contrapunctus treatises should be consonant. One has to keep in mind that the singers performed from parts, not from a score, and thus can only have become aware of the problem while singing. The obvious adjustment, generally applied in modern editions and performances alike, would be to raise the tenor note also to $F^{3}$. As a rule, however, the tenor of a motet is never to be altered, especially when it is a plainsong tenor (as is the case here) since it is the most important part of the motet, which is built on it; the other voices should adapt to it. Moreover, it would result in a strange passage in the tenor’s melodic phrase; it would make a delayed cadence to $G^{3}$, at the beginning of the next talea. One can only conclude that the $F^{4}$ of the triplum (the sharp-sign is in all manuscripts) steers the counterpoint into a momentary impasse, without the possibility of a regular solution. The triplum cadences to $G^{4}$, the tenor to $F^{3}$. $G$ and $F$ are the basic notes of the hard and soft hexachords by which the tenor of the motet is solmized and are at the same time the two tonal poles of the whole piece between which the tension continually oscillates (Machaut often uses the associations of hard and soft of the *durum* and *malle* hexachords to express the feelings of hardness and softness in his texts; this work is built on the opposition of *dous* and *amer*, sweet and bitter). The situation is easily explained with a view to the text: the intention would be, then, to make the amorous impasse be felt in the music. By creating this impasse Machaut forces the performers to think about the reason for the transgression.

Worse things happen in Machaut’s Motet 2, *Tous corps/De soupirant cuer/Suspiro*. This piece evokes the sighing lover, whose heart is rent by utterly contrasting feelings of hope and despair. The motetus has an upward melodic tritone, interrupted by a rest, no less than three times and always at the same position in taleae II-IV, bars 27-29, 51-53, and 75-77, causing intolerable dissonances in the counterpoint (Examples 4a, b and c). Again these cannot be adjusted because the tenor must not be altered and even if one did, it would result in an impossible melody; the problem is even more urgent than in Motet 1. Here one might indeed be tempted to think of compositional mistakes, by supposing that Machaut, laying out the composition with a kind of adjustable model talea,27 had miscalculated the effect since the tritone leaps and the resulting dissonances occur each time at exactly the same place in each talea. On the other hand, a look at the text reveals that the same amorous problem is evoked: the lover at last takes ‘courage’ (bar 27 [Example 4a]; *hardement*) to declare his love to his lady but is forced to remain silent; he is then ‘taken prisoner by

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24 ‘Sed sciendum est, quod illae species discantus praedictae dicurunt dissonantiae, eo quod nullo modo possunt se diu compati secundum auditum, quin generent discordantium. Est autem discordantia diversorum sonorum sibimet permissorum ad aures pervenientium dura collisio’ (‘But one must know that these aforementioned species of discantus are called dissonances, for this reason that they can in no way be suffered for a long time in hearing, without generating a discordance. A discordance is a hard collision of different sounds coming to the ears mixed with each other.’) His examples of dissonances go no further than the tritone and both the sevenths. Ed. Wolf, p. 518.

25 Petrus dictus Palma Ociosa declares it to be ‘out of order’ (*devium*) to alter the tenor (ed. Wolf, p. 514); see also Bent 1972, p. 76.

26 For a complete analysis see my PhD Dissertation (Boogaart 2001), pp. 211-239.

gazing at her’ (bar 51 [Example 4b]; si sui pris en regardant; the dissonance might also be an illustration of the male pointure in the triplum, the ‘bad sting’ which his lady gives him) and fears a rebuttal ‘which cannot please him’ (bar 76 [Example 4c]; qui ne me puet plaire). The tritone leap corresponds again with the impasse of the love-confession.

28 An echo of this gesture, combined with the same literary topos, is found in Motet 6, S’il estoit nuls/S’Amours/ Et gaudebit cor vestrum (bars 58-60). This work contains many textual and some musical reminders to the preceding five motets of which it forms a kind of conclusion. It should not be concluded, however, that for Machaut the tritone was always connected with the topos of excessive desire, only that in a number of cases its general association (‘better to avoid it’) could serve as such. In a similar way the rest sign could serve several purposes, as a symbol of sighing, silence, breaking-off etc.
on the whole is a prime example of division and conflict, not only in the counterpoint but also in its rhythmical setting in which imitations of sighing, conflicting mensurations, disruptions and syncopations abound. In a passage from Machaut’s Remede de Fortune the sighing of a true lover is described as characterized by recoper et sincoper, interruptions

\textsuperscript{29} This is, alas, ‘normalized’ and therefore invisible in the two main editions of the piece. I have newly edited the motet and explained the mensural problems in Boogaart 2004 where the piece is further analysed.

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and disruptions.\textsuperscript{30} This motet evokes such a lover in an almost realistic way. Tenor and motetus have contrasting isorhythmical sighing motifs, symbolized by broken-off notes at the beginning of each talea. Tenor and upper voices are written in different mensurations (perfect and imperfect mode respectively); the upper voices show up many syncopations (Example 5, talea I).

The theorist of the \textit{Berkeley Manuscript} (dated 1375; perhaps a certain Goscalcus) testifies to such rhythmical procedures, but with a warning:

\begin{quote}
'It must be noted that one may well syncopate in discanting and sing various mensurations that differ from the tenor, so long as he knows how to proportion them to each other and maintain properly his coequal mensuration; otherwise he should not concern himself with these things.'\textsuperscript{31}
\end{quote}

In this motet Machaut seems to have taken up the theoretical challenge.

The idea of excess is often rendered by the mensuration in Machaut’s work. In the motets many mensural subtleties are found which can easily be misunderstood because Machaut’s indications are sometimes minute. In the words of Richard Hoppin: ‘It should be emphasized, however, that Machaut, although he did not use mensural signs, almost invariably provided some hint that a change of mensuration was taking place.’ (Hoppin 1960, 20.) One example of such a tiny clue may suffice.

Motet 4, \textit{De bon Espoir/Puisque la douce rousee/Speravi}, deals with the fierce attacks of Desire on the lover and his loss of hope, which leads to subjection to the will of the lady and of Love. The motetus part contains three passages in perfect mode, one in each talea, interpolated in an otherwise imperfect mode (Example 6a and b). The change is not indicated by coloration but by a \textit{punctum} after the central long of the passage (bars 53-55 and 87-89 in the examples), of which the theorist Johannes de Muris says in his \textit{Notitia artis musicae} that ‘be aware of the point because, although it is smallest in size, yet it is greatest in power.’\textsuperscript{32} De Muris distinguishes only between a point of perfection and one of division (and thus not a point of augmentation as Ludwig calls it in the commentary to his edition of Machaut’s works),\textsuperscript{33} and in accordance with this Machaut’s point is one of perfection. As Ludwig remarks, the passage was puzzling for the scribes—the manuscripts differ—and it certainly is an uncommon way of indicating a change of mode. The \textit{punctum perfecti}on after the long affects its direct surroundings before and after: it causes both the two breves preceding the long and the two which follow to be read as Brevis recta-Brevis altera (were the point one of augmentation, then the breves would not be affected.

\begin{footnote}
\textsuperscript{30} ‘Et qu’il lui couvient recoper/ Ses paroles et sincoper/ Par souspirs puisiez en parfont/ Qui mut et taisant le parfont.’ (‘And he is forced to cut short his words and interrupt them with sighs drawn from the depth of his being, that render him mute and silent.’ \textit{Remede de Fortune}, ed. and trans. Wimsatt/Kibler 1988, II. 1761-1764; italics are mine.)
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\textsuperscript{31} ‘Item notandum est quod bene licet alicui sincopare in discantando, et diversas mensuras alias a tenore cantare, dum tamen siect eas ad invicem debite proporcionare, et tenere suam mensuram debite coequatam. Sin autem de hiis se nullatenus intromittat.’ \textit{Berkeley Manuscript}, ed. Ellsworth 1984, pp. 132-135, the translation is his. The same author also allows for beginning and ending a florid counterpoint over a tenor note with a dissonant provided that the counterpoint on the whole remains consonant (Ellsworth 1984, pp. 132-133). He may, however, not have thought of Machaut’s reckless dissonants in this motet.
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\textsuperscript{32} ‘Cavendum est a puncto, quod licet sit minimum quantitate, est tamen maximum potestate’ (\textit{Jean de Muris} 2000, pp. 104-105)
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\begin{footnote}
\textsuperscript{33} The \textit{Berkeley Manuscript} (of which the third treatise forms an enlargement of De Muris’ \textit{Libellus cantus mensurabilis}) mentions the point of augmentation but deems it unnecessary (ed. Ellsworth, pp. 166-167).
\end{footnote}
and would be read without being doubled by alteration). The next long is however left without point and must be understood as imperfect again, without any warning. In this case it is justified to speak about a notational licence; no theorist mentions this way of indicating a temporary change of mode and it is difficult to understand without further reflection. A look at the text at these places clarifies the idea behind the mensural excess: two times, in taleae II and III, a problem of time and measure is expressed: je ne puis avoir durée (‘I cannot have duration’), and une ardeur desmesurée (‘an unmeasured glowing’).

In the texts of this motet the lover is fiercely attacked by the allegorical figure of Desir, plus qu’il ne suet, ‘more than habitually’ as the text says. Likewise the singer must stretch his notes ‘more than habitually’.

The foregoing cases illustrate some of the ways in which Machaut rendered in music the topos that Love makes her followers transgress the boundaries of mesure. Another topos which inspired Machaut to devise unconventional musical equivalents is the death of the lover by unrequited love.

In four of Machaut’s motets the voices do not end simultaneously; in the editions the ensuing dissonances have, with one exception, been amended. Of course it may be argued that in Ars nova-motets the last talea is often a little deviant from the other ones.
without being explicitly so marked. However, apart from the fact that in Machaut's works irregular endings are always written out, three of these cases bear out a similar turn of thought. The first is Motet 4, where the tenor ends later than the upper voices (Example 7). The subject of the French texts is the loss of hope and the excess of desire (as seen above); the only thing that remains for the lover is obeisance and faith. The texts of both the upper voices express that idea at the end, by a promise to love until death (malgré li l’amerey loyaument and leur voloir jusqu’au morir; ‘in spite of herself I’ll love her faithfully’ and ‘I shall obey their will until death’). In the editions the tenor is shortened; a practical solution in accordance with the text would be on the contrary that the upper voices hold their penultimate note until the tenor has reached its final.

A very similar case is the final cadence of Motet 10, Hareu! Hareu! Le feu/Helas! Ou sera pris confors/Obediens usque ad mortem. This work is also in its theme narrowly related to Motet 4; it treats the amorous fire that threatens to burn the lover’s heart. Again the tenor ends later than the upper voices. In the final cadence the upper voices have for their text: morir malgré Nature and N’en feu cuers humeins Ne puet longue duree avoir (‘to die in spite of Nature’, and ‘in the fire a human heart cannot last for long’) against the tenor’s Obediens usque ad mortem, ‘obedient until death’; the pun in the music is even clearer here (Example 8).35

34 The only other motet with a problematic ending is number 17, Quant Vraie Amour enflammée/O series summe rata/Super omnes speciosa. Here the non-simultaneous ending expresses not the death of the lover but the idea of a disturbed cosmic harmony. I have discussed this piece extensively in Boogaart 2001a, pp. 41-50.
35 The texts are modeled on Vitry’s motet Douce playsence/Garison/Neuma quinti toni; see Boogaart 2001a, pp. 51-55.

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**Example 7**

Motet 4, final cadence.
In Motet 15, Amours qui ha le powoir/Faus Samblant m’a deceü/Vidi Dominum, it is the triplum which cadences later than the other two voices, causing a dissonance which well expresses the texts: in the triplum Mené a desconfiture, ‘has led me to destruction’; in the motetus m’a mis en nonchaloir, ‘has let me wither’ (Example 9).

In the poems the lover complains that he has been deceived by Faus Samblant, the ‘False seeming of Love’, to his ruin. As an exception, only in this motet both editions have preserved the dissonant ending as given by the sources. The piece has been analysed in two joint articles by Kevin Brownlee (interpretation of the texts) and Margaret Bent (musical analysis; Brownlee and Bent 1991); Bent proposed to amend the dissonant ending, as being ‘very hard to swallow’ (although she now regrets that proposal). In those motets where the voices do not end simultaneously, then, the reason for the resulting dissonance can be found in the texts. Who would have understood this? We know

36 Bent 1991, p. 15, note 1; and personal communication during the discussion at the Tenth International Symposium on Late Medieval and Early Renaissance Music, Novacella 2006.
next to nothing about the circumstances in which motets were performed, but the little information we have points to circles of connoisseurs, possibly colleague-composers, who themselves performed such pieces at their gatherings and formed their own audience. This would explain why Machaut could permit himself such clashes with the conventions of composition; those informed persons would have understood his puns. Whether in present-day concerts, where the texts are no longer understood, one always should sing these endings as written or sometimes amend them is another question, to be left to taste. The important point is that Machaut’s singers, without an (amended) score and singing from parts, must have struck on a problem and were left in a situation where they had to decide how to perform the ending.

Example 10a
Motet 11, opening (bars 1-22).

My last case concerns not a dissonance but unusual consonances, and they occur not at the end but at the beginning and in the middle of the work. In both his literary and his musical works Machaut often played with the double sense of the word fin, as ‘perfect’ and ‘end’. Motet 11, Dame, je sui/Fins cuers dous/Fins cuers dous, is one of only two motets in which the lover addresses his lady directly (the other is Motet 1). Its theme is a complaint of the lover who is forbidden to see his lady; her hardness threatens to bring him death. The chanson melody of the tenor (a modified virelai with the form Abb’A’a) is focused on G3 in its refrains; only in its middle phrases (bbb’) other tonal

goals come into play. The work opens with a surprising consonance, first because of its major third (according to most counterpoint treatises of the time a piece should open and close with a perfect consonance, without thirds) and, second, because the fifth in the triplum has a very unusual sharped plica which fills out the major sixth, with some kind of vocal ornament. Together they form a languishing doubly imperfect sonority $A^3/C^4/F^4$ (Example 10a), sounding more like the preparation of a final cadence than as an opening. The composer chose it of course in accordance with the preparatory function of the first tenor note; but it is also in harmony with the word *fins* in motetus and tenor. The tension is resolved in the second bar but immediately another tending consonance

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38 The voice-effect of the plica is uncertain; the thirteenth-century theorist Lambertus gives one of the rare suggestions for its performance: ‘*Fit autem plica in voce per compositionem epiglotti cum repercussione gutturis subtiliter inclusa*’ (‘The plica is produced in the voice by pressing the epiglottis with a subtly enclosed repercussion of the throat’); pseudo-Aristoteles (recte Lambertus), *Quoniam circa artem*, in Coussemaker, *Scriptorum*, 1, 273a.) I have transcribed it as a trill-sign.

39 The terminology used here is the one proposed in Fuller 1986.
follows, which is then prolonged until the arrival on a stable G-sonority in bar 10.\textsuperscript{40} The alternation of suspension and resolution into G-cadences continues until bar 21. In bar 14-16 the triplum has the words \textit{sans mort avoir}, ‘without receiving death’ (meaning that the lover will meet death when he is forbidden to see his lady).

Exceptional in Machaut’s motets is the prolonged perfect consonance lasting precisely until the midpoint of the piece (bar 51; example 10b),\textsuperscript{41} in a ‘pedal point’ on G\textsuperscript{3} of no less than 4 breves’ length (bars 48-51), during which the voices successively end their phrases and slowly start anew. This is all the more striking as the tenor ends its phrase on the note A\textsuperscript{3} in bar 47; the upper voices prepare its next entry on G\textsuperscript{3}. In all other motets with such prolonged consonances Machaut avoids placing them on the main note of the motet, in order not to give the impression that the piece has reached the end: the tension is always maintained until the final cadence. Here is the only exception. For the listener the passage gives at first the impression of a (premature) ending and seems to be the illustration of the triplum text: \textit{Las! einsi ay de ma mort exemplaire} (‘thus I have the image of my death’), or, slightly earlier, in the motetus: \textit{Que briefment morir ne doie} (‘that I’ll have to die shortly’). The real final cadence of the motet is reminiscent of the opening, but triplum and tenor have exchanged their melodies (with transposition a fifth upward in the triplum; Example 10c).

In Motets 4 and 10 the problematic final cadence serves to express the idea of trying to keep faith until death; here, in Motet 11, the consonance in the middle of the piece which deceptively sounds like an arrival renders the idea of a premature death.

In this brief discussion of some problematic passages in Machaut’s music I have argued that the composer explored the limits and transgressed, sometimes even by far, common conventions of counterpoint and notation, and that he must have done so on purpose. The analysis suggests that his deviations from the norm are no bizarre caprices but carefully calculated devices, meant to convey literary ideas by means of music. The examples pose problems which sometimes hardly have a solution. Such puzzles were surely meant to provoke the performers into reflecting about how words and music combine to form a signification; perhaps also, when the problem is understood, into singing expressively. The piece thus becomes more than a finished work of art: it is a play, a continuous crossover between interpretation and performance to which the composer invites his singers and his audience, perhaps for the first time in the history of Western music and unique for a long time to come. Machaut’s motets are not only intellectual constructs—they certainly are that since their mensural complexities and their erudite texts demanded a fair amount of musical experience and literacy to understand them—but also, in performance, a demonstration of music’s potential both to reflect upon human emotions and to express them. His audacity in defying the norms in order to create ‘something new and strange’ challenges us even today to take part in this play, as a sign of the actuality of his art.

\textsuperscript{40} In bars 7-8 of the motetus we find again the tritone, combined with a text related to the theme of transgression: the lover beseeches his lady to let him gaze at her, but he is not allowed to \textit{(on me deffent de par vous que plus ne voie)}.

\textsuperscript{41} Schrade’s transcription is wrong here; see Hoppin 1960, pp. 19-20.
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