

## Obrecht and Erasmus

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- 1 Erasmus, *Annotations to 1 Corinthians* (publ. Basel, 1519); after Wegman, *The Crisis of Music*, 161-65.

[*In marg.* Musica quae hodie in templis.] Obsecro quid sentiunt de Christo, qui credunt illum huiusmodi uocum strepitu delectari? Nec his contenti, operosam quandam ac theatricam musicam, in sacras aedes induximus, tumultuosum diuersarum uocum garrutum, qualem non opinor in Graecorum aut Romanorum theatris unquam auditum fuisse. Omnia tubis, lituis, fistulis, ac sambucis perstrepunt, cumque his certant hominum uoces. Audiantur amatoriae foedaeque cantilena, ad quas scorta mimique saltitant. In sacra aedem uelut in theatrum concurritur, ad deliniendas aures.

Et in hunc usum, magnis salarijs aluntur organorum opifices, **puerorum greges, quorum omnis aetas in perdiscendis huiusmodi gannitibus consumitur, nihil interim bonae rei discentium.** Alitur sordidorum ac leuium ut plerique sunt Dionysiaci hominum colluuijs, ac tantis sumptibus oneratur ecclesia ob rem pestiferam etiam. Quaeso te ut rationem in eas, quot pauperes de uita periclitantes, poterant ali cantorum salarijs?

[*In marg.* Music in today's churches.] What do they think of Christ, I beseech you, those who think that they are pleasing Him with such a din of sounds? Not content even with these things, we have brought into the churches some kind of laborsome and theatrical music, an uproarious chattering of varied voices, which I doubt was ever heard in the theaters of the Greeks and Romans. The whole thing is a noisy racket of trumpets, crumhorns, shawms, and sackbuts, and the human voices are vying with them. Obscene love songs are heard, such as harlots and minstrels dance to. One flocks together in church as if it were a theater, for the gratification of the ears.

And for this custom, organ builders are maintained at large stipends, and **crowds of children, whose entire youth is wasted in arduously learning such yelpings, meanwhile studying nothing of value.** One supports this washed-up sewage of vile and unreliable men, as most Dionysiacs are, and on account of this pestilential custom the Church is burdened with so many expenses. Just calculate, I ask you, how many poor folk, barely clinging to life, could be supported with the stipends of singers?

- 2 Heinrich Glareanus, *Dodekachordon* (Basel: Henricus Petri, 1547), 256; trans. after Heinrich Glarean, *Dodecachordon*, trans. Clement A. Miller, 2 vols., *Musicological Studies and Documents*, 6 ([n.p.]: American Institute of Musicology, 1965), 252.

Primum [exemplum] est Iacobi Hobrechthi Symphonetae, quod ad **copiam** attinet, ac **carminis maiestatem** D. Erasmi Roterodami Praeceptoris

The first example is from the *symphonetes* Jacob Obrecht, who is second to none in regard to **prolificacy** and to **majesty of song** in the opinion of our teacher, D. Erasmus of Rotterdam, and also

nostri, atque adeo etiam nostro iudicio, nulli secundus. Fuit autem puero Erasmo in Musicis Praeceptor, ut ex ore Erasmi ante multos annos ipsi audiuius.

in our opinion. And he was the teacher in music of the boy Erasmus, as we ourselves heard many years ago from Erasmus's own lips.

3 Heinrich Glareanus, *Dodekachordon* (Basel: Henricus Petri, 1547), 456; trans. Miller, 277-78.

Tertius in hac classe haud dubius est Iacobus Hobrechth et ipse Belga, quippe qui D. Erasmo Roterodamo Praeceptor fuit, cuius iudicium de eo in Aeolio retulimus. Hunc praeterea fama est, **tanta ingenij celeritate ac inuentionis copia uiguisse**, ut per unam noctem, egregiam, et quae doctis admirationi esset, Missam componeret. Omnia huius uiri monumenta **miram quandam habent maiestatem et mediocritatis uenam**. Ipse hercules non tam amans raritatis, atque Iodocus fuit. Ingenij quidem ostentator sed **absque fuco**, quasi qui auditoris iudicium expectare maluerit quam se ipse efferre. Multae passim huius uiri sunt compositiones, et nos aliquot eius in hoc adeo libro exempla lectori ostendimus, maxime cum de sesquipla ratione dissereremus. Ideoque de eo plura dicere supersedemus.

The third man in this class [after Josquin and Ockeghem] undoubtedly is Jacob Obrecht, and he is also a Belgian, who in fact was the teacher of D. Erasmus of Rotterdam, whose opinion of Obrecht we have reported in the Aeolian. Moreover, it is said that he worked with **such quickness of device and fertility of invention**, that, in a single night he composed an excellent Mass, and one which was also admired by learned men. All the monuments of this man have **a certain wonderful majesty and an innate quality of moderation**. He certainly was not such a lover of the unusual as was Josquin. Indeed, he did display his skill, but **without ostentation**, as if he may have preferred to await the judgement of the listener rather than to exalt himself. There are many compositions of this man everywhere, and we have shown the reader several examples of his in this very book, especially when we were discussing the one and a half ratio. And therefore, we refrain from saying more about him.

4 Heinrich Glareanus, *Dodekachordon* (Basel: Henricus Petri, 1547), 296; trans. Miller, 257.

Quis est enim symphonetes, qui non in hoc modo aliquando diuae uirginis salutationem tentauerit, idque frequenter cum aliorum aemulatione, quo contentionis genere libenter certabat Iacobus Hobrechth, ut qui **copia** omnes suae aetatis cantores (quod in *Missa Hercules dux Ferrariae*, uisus est uoluisse ostendere) superabat, quicquid enim conabantur dicere Carmen erat, ut ille ait. Magnifica est eius ad diuam uirginem salutatio ad hunc intonata Modum.

For what *symphonetes* is there who has not sometime attempted in this [Dorian] mode the Salutation of the Blessed Virgin, and this frequently in competition with others; in such a contest Jacob Obrecht gladly took part, since he excelled all the singers of his time in **prolificacy** (as he seemed to have wanted to show in the *Missa Hercules Dux Ferrariae*), for whatever he tried to express became a song, as it is said. His Salutation to the Blessed Virgin, composed according to this mode, is magnificent.

- 5 Erasmus, *De recta latini graeciqve sermonis pronvnciatione* (1528); after *The Crisis of Music*, 227 n.17.

Atque adeo miror hoc homini musico videri, qui noris quomodo vocem, quam hodie maximam vocant, dividant in longam; rursus quomodo longas in breues, breues in semibreues, semibreues in minimas, **et has insuper secant in plusquam minimas**: tum non ignores quomodo proportionibus, quas illi modos hodie vocant, varie producant aut accelerent pronvnciationem, nunc ad rationem duplam, nunc ad triplam.

I am totally amazed that this would seem [to be the case] to a musical man [like you], who knows so well how they divide the note which they nowadays call the maxima into the longa, and again how a longa into breues, breues into semibreues, semibreues into minimis, **and [how], in addition, they split those into less than minimis**: you know, besides, how they slow down or speed up the performance in different ways by means of proportions, which nowadays they call *modi*, now at a duple ratio, then at triple.

- 6 Johannes Tinctoris, *Proportionale musices* (c.1472-73); after Tinctoris, *Opera theoretica*, ed. Albert Seay, 2 vols., *Corpus scriptorum de musica*, 22 (Rome: American Institute of Musicology, 1975-78), 2a: 17.

Et quamvis ita sub proportione dupla duae minimae pro una ponuntur, non tamen propter hoc ut indocti garriunt semiminimae sunt, sicut duae maximae pro una, duae longae pro una, duae breues pro una, duae semibreues pro una, sub hac proportione scribuntur aut proferuntur, nec tamen inde semimaximae, semilongae, semibreues, semisemibreues dicuntur.

And although two minimas under duple proportion are thus set in the place of one, still they are not for that reason “semiminimas,” as unlearned folk babble; in the same way that two maximas under that proportion are written or performed for one, two longas for one, two breues for one, two semibreues for one, yet neither are these for that reason “semimaximas,” “semilongas,” “semibreues,” or “semisemibreues.”

- 7 Johannes Tinctoris, *Tractatus de regulari valore notarum* (c.1474-75); *Opera theoretica*, 1: 112.

Quamquidem minimam tunc imperiti semiminimam dicunt, sed admodum errant, ut in libro quem *Proportionale Musices* inscripsimus manifeste probamus.

The ignorant then call that [colored or flagged] minima a “semiminima,” yet they are completely in error, as we demonstrate in the book which we have entitled *Proportionale musices*.

## 8 SegC s.s., gathering XXVI (two-voice settings).

200r	Alexander Agricola	<i>Gaudeamus omnes in domino</i>	
200v	Jacobus Hobrecht	<i>Regina celi</i>	sexquitercia : dupla : superbiparciens [tripla] : dupla superbiparciens [tripla] : tripla : quadrupla : quindupla : sexquitercia : sexdupla : dupla : sexquiquarte : sexquialtera : dupla : sexquiquarta : quadrupla : sexquioctaua
201r	Adam	<i>De tous biens playne</i>	tripla : quadrupla : quindupla : sexdupla : sexquioctaua
201v	Alexander Agricola	<i>Comme femme desconforté</i>	
202r	Johannes Tinctoris	<i>De tous biens playne</i>	
202v-203r	Roelkin	<i>De tous biens playne</i>	
203v	Johannes Tinctoris	<i>Le souvenir</i>	
204r	Johannes Tinctoris Johannes Tinctoris	<i>D'ung aultre amer</i> textless	
204v	Johannes Tinctoris	<i>Tout a par moy</i>	
205r	an.	<i>Fecit potentiam</i>	
205v	Johannes Tinctoris	<i>Comme femme desconforté</i>	

9 Johannes Tinctoris, *De inventione et usu musicae* (c.1481-3). After Karl Weinmann, ed., *Johannes Tinctoris (1445-1511) und sein unbekannter Traktat "De inventione et usu musicae"* (Regensburg: F. Pustet, 1917), 45-46.

Neque preterire in animum venit: quod exiguo tempore lapsa: duos fratres Orbos natione Flamingos: viros quidem non minus litteris eruditos quam in cantibus expertos: quorum uni Carolus: alteri Johannes nomina sunt. Brugis audiverim: illum supremam partem et hunc tenorem plurimum cantilenarum: tam perite: tamque venuste hujusmodi viola consonantes: ut in ulla nunquam melodia: me profecto magis oblectaverim.

Nor should I pass over the fact that a little while ago, I heard in Bruges two blind brothers, men of Flemish birth who, in truth, are no less learned in literary studies than they are versed in music, of whom one is called Carolus and the other Johannes, making concord on this kind of viol (the former playing the top part, and the latter the tenor of many songs) so skilfully, and so gracefully, that I truly have never found greater delight in any harmonious sound.

- 10 Ockeghem's visit to Bruges and Damme, August 1484. After *Johannes Ockeghem en zijn tijd*, Buitengewone uitgaven, 24 (Dendermonde: Oudheidkundige Kring van het Land van Dendermonde, 1970), 115 and 119-20.

Domini mei consentiunt quod sex cannae vini solvantur ex equalitate pro subsidio sociorum de musica, in cena dudum facta domino thesaurario Turonensi, domino Johanni Ockeghem, primo capellano regis Francie, musico excellentissimo, sum suis. (St Donatian's, Bruges, chapter acts; 15 Aug. 1484)

My lords [of the chapter] agreed that six jugs of wine be paid from the Equalitas for the support of the companions of music [in this church], in a dinner recently made for the lord treasurer of Tours, *dominus* Johannes Ockeghem, first chaplain of the King of France, excellent musician, and his [companions].

Item den viij<sup>en</sup> dach vander zelve maendt ghepresenteert mynen heere de provoost van Tours, eerste capellaen vanden coninc van Vranckerycke, hier commende met zynen gheselscepe, iijj kannen wyne van vj grooten den stoop; comt ij lb. viij s. par.

Item, on the 8th of the same month [August], presented to my lord the provost of Tours, first chaplain of the King of France, arriving here with his company, four jugs of wine of 6 gr. per *stoop*; altogether 576 gr. par.

- 11 Johannes Tinctoris, *Complexus effectuum musices* (c.1474-75), Ch. 19; *Opera theoretica*, 2: 176-77.

Nonus decimus effectus est: Musica peritos in ea glorificat.

Unde Ecclesiastici xliiii<sup>o</sup>: Homines "in peritia sua requirentes modos musicos . . . in generationibus gentis suae gloriam adepti sunt et in diebus suis habentur in laudibus." Et quoniam olim in Graecia summa musici afficiebantur gloria propter summam eruditionem quam ipsi Graeci sitam censebant in nervorum vocatione cantantibus, non modo praestantissimi viri philosophi operam illi impenderunt, ut Socrates, Pythagoras, Plato, Aristoteles, sed et bellicosissimi principes, ut Epaminondas et Achilles, Themistocles, qui cum epulis recusaret lyram, habitus est indoctior. Immo ut et cum hoc Cicero ponit in prologo *Quaestionum Tusculanarum*: "Discebant id omnes nec qui nesciebat satis excultus doctrina putabatur."

Nostro autem tempore experti sumus quanti perique musici gloria sint affecti. Quis enim Johannem Dunstable, Guillelmum Dufay, Egidium Binchois,

The nineteenth effect is: Music glorifies those skilled in it.

Whence in the forty-fourth [chapter] of Ecclesiasticus, men "such as found out musical tunes . . . were honoured in their generations, and were the glory of their times." And since in Greece the greatest musicians once earned glory because of their greatest training, which the Greeks themselves held to reside in reciters on strings and voices, not only did the the most outstanding philosophers devote time to it, such as Socrates, Pythagoras, Plato, Aristotle, but even the most warlike princes, such as Epaminondas and Achilles. Themistocles, when he refused the lyre at a banquet, was held to be poorly educated. Along with this [report], Cicero states in the prologue to his *Tusculan Disputations*: "All sought to learn it, and he who had no knowledge of it was thought to be lacking in learning."

In our time we have experienced how very many musicians have been endowed with glory. For who does not know John Dunstable, Guillaume Dufay, Gilles Binchois, Johannes

Johannem Okeghem, Anthonium Busnois, Johannem Regis, Firminum Caron, Jacobum Carlerii, Robertum Morton, **Jacobum Obrecht** non novit? Quis eos summis laudibus non prosequitur, quorum compositiones per universum orbem divulgatae, Dei templa, regum palatia, privatorum domos summa dulcedine replent? Taceo plurimos musicos eximiis opibus dignitatibusque donatos, quoniam etsi honores ex hiis adepti sunt, famae immortalis quam primi compositores sibi extenderunt minime sunt conferendi. Illud enim fortunae, istud autem virtutis opus est. Unde Vergilius *Aeneidos*, libro decimo: “Stat sua cuique: dies breve et irreparabile tempus / Omnibus est vitae, sed famam extendere factis, / Hoc virtutis opus.”

Ockeghem, Antoine Busnoys, Johannes Regis, Firminus Caron, Jacob Carlier, Robert Morton, **Jacob Obrecht**? Who does not accord them the highest praises, whose compositions, spread throughout the whole world, fill God’s churches, kings’ palaces, and private men’s houses, with the utmost sweetness? I say nothing of the very many distinguished musicians who have been presented with outstanding wealth and dignities, for although they have obtained honours from them, these are not at all to be compared with the immortal fame that the first composers have prolonged for themselves. The former belongs to fortune, but the latter to virtue. Whence Vergil, in the tenth book of the Aeneid, “Each has his appointed day; short and irretrievable is the span of life for all; but to prolong fame by deeds—that is the task of virtue.”

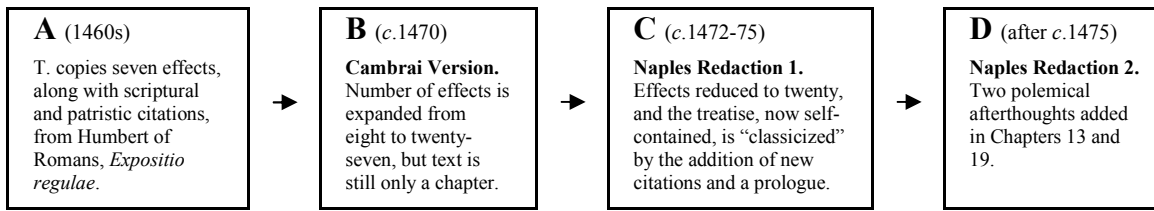
- 13 Augustin Renaudet, *Préforme et humanisme à Paris pendant les premières guerres d’Italie (1494-1517)* (Paris: Librairie d’Argences, 1953), 219.

La mission avait pour chef Jean Mombaer, qu’on appelait aussi, du nom de sa ville natale, Jean de Bruxelles. **Tout enfant, à l’école-cathédrale d’Utrecht, il avait appris la grammaire, et, sous la direction d’Obrecht, la musique d’église.** Puis il était entré au couvent d’Agnietenberg, où il se liait avec Reynier; il devenait ensuite confesseur des religieuses de Bronope, sous-prieur de Gnadenthal, dans le duché de Juliers.

- 14 Jean-Noël Paquot, *Mémoires pour servir à l’histoire littéraire des dix-sept provinces des Pays-Bas*, 3 vols. (Louvain: Imprimerie Académique, 1765), 1: 311.

Qui se trouve aussi nommé *Momburnus*, ou *Mamburnus*, ou enfin *Joannes de Bruxellâ*, parce qu’il étoit natif de *Bruxelles*, fut envoyé dans son enfance à *Utrecht*, & élevé dans la **Cathédrale de cette ville, où il apprit la Grammaire, & le chant Grégorien.** Ces premières études finies, il prit l’habit de Chanoine-Régulier au *Mont-S<sup>te</sup>-Agnès*, (fameux monastère près de *Swolles*, dont *Thomas à Kempis* a écrit l’histoire,) & fut ensuite chargé de différens emplois dans la congrégation de *Windesem*, où la discipline étoit alors dans un état très-florissant.

12 Tinctoris, *Complexus effectuum musices*, hypothetical reconstruction of its genesis, with examples of the seventh and thirteenth effects (see *The Crisis of Music*, 53-54, 63-66, 189-91).



Item, tristitiam malam depellit. Glossa super illo verbo Jac. 5: Tristatur aliquis vestri, etc.: Crebra psalmodiae dulcedo nocivae tristitiae pestem depellit; ideo dicit David, Ps. 70: "Exultabunt labia mea, ed est, ita replebor gaudio quod in labiis apparebit, cum cantavero tibi."

Quintodecimo: Tristitiam depellit. Jacobus: Tristatur aliquis uestrorum; oret equo animo et psallat. Hinc Augustino teste [*Conf. IX. vii. 15*]: "Hymni et psalmi ut canerentur secundum morem orientalium partium (ne populus meroris tedio contabesceret) ab occidentalibus institutum est."

Septimus effectus est: Musica tristitiam depellit. Unde Jacobi capitulo quinto: "Tristatur aliquis vestrum? oret. Aeque animo [est]? psallat."

Hinc de Polyphemo Vergilius in tertio libro *Aeneidos* ait: "Solamenque mali de collo fistula pendet."

Et quoniam in amore plurimum tristitiae accidit, hanc musica quodam innato solamen depellere solet. Unde idem Vergilius de Orpheo tristi propter absentiam Euridicis quam flagranter amabat, proprio instrumento se consolante in quarto libro *Georgicorum* sic inquit:

"Ipse cava solans aegrum testudine amorem  
Te, dulcis coniunx, te solo in litore secum,  
Te veniente die, te decedente canebat."

Nono: Homines letificat. Vt enim Museus ait, hominibus cantare delectabilissimum est, propter quod in conuentus ac deductiones rationabiliter ipsam assumunt musicam, tamquam potentem letificare [Moerbeke trans.]

Tertiusdecimus effectus est: Musica homines letificat. Namque, prout refert Aristoteles, in octavo *Politicorum*, "museus ait esse hominibus delectabilissimum cantare propterea quod in conuentus et deductiones rationabiliter assumunt ipsum tamquam potentem letificare"; . . .

. . . et letificat alios quidem plus et alios minus. Namque quanto plus in hac arte perfectus est tanto plus ab ea delectatur, eo quod naturam ipsius et interius et exterius apprehendat. Interius quidem virtute intellectiva qua intelligit debitam compositionem ac prononciationem et exterius potentia auditiva, qua percipit concordantiarum dulcedinem. Tales autem sunt solum qui de ipsa musica vere iudicare delectarique possunt; propterea quod philosophus, in 8<sup>o</sup> *Politicorum*, consulit juvenibus . . .

15 Matthaeus Herbenus, *De natura cantus ac miraculis vocis* (1496); after *The Crisis of Music*, 175-77.

Sed quid de nostris cantibus dixerint qui, antequam memoriae imprimi possint, iam evolaverunt? Mercurii ego eas filias rectius appellari iudicaverim! Quibus nostri temporis cantores se exercentes, ut proprio satisfaciant sensui, omne iudicium plane nobis adimunt.

Novi ego certe cantus quosdam mira simplicitate progredientes ita captare sensus quorundam hominum, ut alios, subtilioris longe venae, salebrose quidem caprizantes, penitus exhorruerint. Praeterea indoctos musicae homines, naturali dono ac cantandi quadam gratia praeditos, ita plano contrapuncto vernaculas quasdam suas cantilenas modulantes ut non solum aequales suos in sui sollicitarent amorem, sed etiam peritos artis in praecipuam inducerent admirationem, quia syllabatim prolatae eorum notulae ab omnibus facile poterant internosci.

Quamobrem ut mihi itidem et multis aliis credo placere tales cantus ac hymnos, quales Iasper Cimber in divam parthenicem edidit plurimos et **Jacobus Hoberti, eius patriota, in honorem consecrationis templi atque salutiferae crucis**, ceterique huiusmodi. Quibus singillatim comprehensis notulis, una cum verborum debite applicatis syllabis, mens ad altiorem contemplationem facile rapitur, dum pulchritudo cantus tam apte conservatur. Quid enim mihi de tuis vocum refractionibus, dum ita garrias ut neque verbum neque syllabam unam neque virtutem compositionis cognoscere valeam; quod in compositis cantibus omnino vitandam duxerim. Secus autem, ubi multis *ad librum*, ut aiunt, concinentibus tenorista verba explicans pro omnibus satisfacit.

Quomodo enim te fovisse oculos existimabis, si quispiam speciosam imaginem aliquam ostensus, antequam in eandem intuitum defigas, multis versicoloribus picturis subito te involvat? Irritatum ego te magis crediderim quam delectatum, cum de illa nullum certum

But what would [the ancients] have said about our songs which, before they can be imprinted in the memory, have already flown away? I should more rightly call them the daughters of Mercury! By these, the singers of our time completely deprive us of judgement, exerting themselves only in order to please their own feelings.

As a matter of fact I myself have known certain songs which, proceeding with wondrous simplicity, captured the senses of some men in such a way that they completely shuddered at other, more artful songs, that leapt about like goats. Also, [I have known] men unlearned in music, [but] endowed with a natural gift and a certain grace in singing, who fashioned some vernacular songs with simple counterpoint in such a way that they not only aroused the love of their companions, but brought even experts in this art to particular astonishment, because their notes, being uttered in syllabic fashion, could be easily made out by all.

It is for this reason, I believe, that I myself and many others take pleasure in those songs and hymns of which Gaspar the Cimbrian [Weerbeke] wrote many for the Holy Virgin, and **Jacob Obrecht, his compatriot, in honor of the dedication of the church and of the salvific Cross**, and more of this kind. The mind is easily carried off to a higher contemplation by those singly-understood notes, together with properly placed syllables, the beauty of the song being so aptly maintained. So what are your note divisions to me, when you chatter in such a way that I can recognize neither a word nor even one syllable, nor any virtue in the composition? In composed works I should have thought that this must be avoided at all cost. On the other hand, when there are many singing together “upon the book,” as they say [i.e. improvising counterpoint upon a plainchant], it is sufficient for the tenorist to speak the words on behalf of all.

For how will you think your eyes have been gratified if someone who is going to show you some beautiful picture dazzles you all of a sudden, before you can fix your gaze on it, with many paintings that change color? I should think that you’d be annoyed rather than delighted,

iudicium reddere possis. Nam, quod de sensu visus dico, de omnibus aliis dicere possim. Requirit enim sensus spatium ad recipiendum intentiones conveniens; quod si non concedatur, quomodo de imaginationibus nondum bene formatis ratio iudicabit? Absorbetur igitur in talis cantibus iudicandi ratio, qui tam celeriter aures praetervolant, ut, antequam de eis iudicium fiat, iam evanuerunt.

because you could render no certain judgement about it. Now, what I say here about the sense of vision I could say about all others as well. For the senses need proper space for taking in the meanings: if that [space] is not granted, how can reason judge about those imperfectly formed ideas? In those songs, therefore, which fly past the ears so swiftly that they vanish before there could be a judgement of them, the capacity to judge is overwhelmed.