

Imitare con varii colori

Ornamenting in the style of Silvestro Ganassi

1. *Dechiaration del suo termine*¹

Just as the painter, who “imitates the effects of nature with the use of various colours, as nature itself produces various colours”, the recorder player “imitates the utterings of the human voice with the quality of the airflow and the occlusion of the tongue with the assistance of the teeth”.² With this simile, the musician of the Doge, Silvestro Ganassi dal Fontego (who was also an accomplished painter) opened his *Opera Intitulata Fontegara* (Venice 1535), “a treatise that teaches how to play the recorder with all the appropriate art of this instrument, specifically the art of diminution”.³ Ganassi concludes his first chapter with a self-confident statement: “Consequently, one could well say that this instrument lacks nothing but the shape of the human body, as it can be said of a well-made painting that it lacks nothing but the breath. Therefore, you can be certain of the aim of the treatise, as according to the said reason, it is possible to imitate speech”.

In the context of music, colour is often referred to as a (rhetorical) device for ornamenting a certain basic structure.⁴ One of the options available to musicians of the Renaissance to add coloristic lustre is the so-called *Ars diminutionis*, which Ganassi defines in his treatise as “nothing but varying something or a process which by nature seems pure and simple”.⁵ In *Fontegara*, Ganassi provides the reader with an exceptionally rich palette of over 2000 musical examples (called *atto*) that serve to embellish various intervals and cadential patterns (called *moto*) and, in Ch. 13, urges us to consider these *moti* in their polyphonic context. Ganassi presents each *moto* on the far left side of the page opening. Making maximum use of the oblong format of the book, the subsequent diminution examples (*atti*) of

¹ “Statement regarding its aims”. *Fontegara*, Ch. 1. See Titan 2019, p. IX. All translations are taken from the recent doctoral dissertation on *Fontegara*, written by Dina Titan, *The origins of instrumental diminution in Renaissance Venice: Ganassi’s Fontegara* (Utrecht 2019). See Windkanal 2019-2, for a presentation of this dissertation.

² *Fontegara*, Ch.1. See Titan 2019, p. XI.

³ *Fontegara*, frontispiece. See Titan 2019, p. III.

⁴ For instance, Martin Agricola’s statements in the 1545-edition of his treatise *Musica instrumentalis deudsch*: “Das die organistische art und Colorathur die beste und billich auff allen Instrumenten zu gebrauchen sei”; “Als nemlich von Coloriren....welchs trefflich ziert die Melodey auff Instrumenten allerley”, and “Mit Coloratur Risswerck auch, drumb üß dich wol inn solchem brauch”.

⁵ *Fontegara*, Ch. 9. See Titan 2019, p. XXXIX.

progressive (rhythmical) complexity are spread out and numbered in horizontal orientation across the full page opening. If compared vertically, equally numbered *atti* are of a similar typology and embellish the same interval (or cadence), which is now ordered scale-wise.

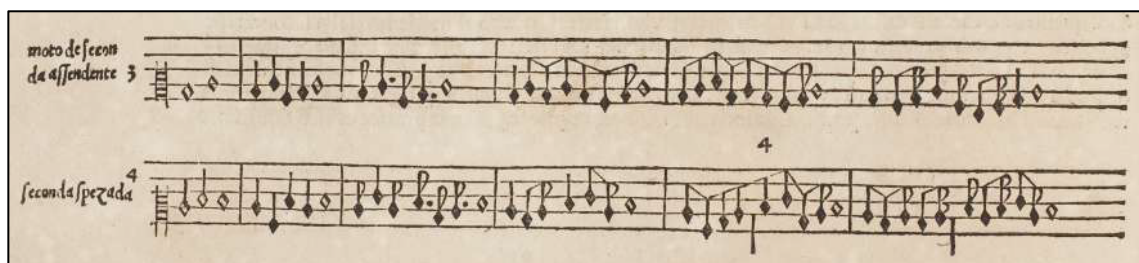
Presented in alternation, for the intervals of the (ascending and descending) second Ganassi distinguishes between *moti* of a length of a semibreve and *moti* (labelled *spezada*) for which the semibreve is divided into two minims. The *moti* of the interval of the (ascending and descending) third, fourth and fifth are presented with their intermediate notes. After the intervals, Ganassi proceeds with the *moti* of the cadence, which are equivalent to the length of two semibreves and feature a melodic formula commonly known as *clausula cantizans*. Ganassi recycles the over-all design of the *moti* in four consecutive *Regole*, which are characterised by different proportions. Numerical signs at the beginning of each *Regola* identify its respective proportion.⁶ As a consequence, the diminutions in *Fontegara* consist of any possible number between three and twenty-eight notes and/or rests per semibreve.

Contrary to modern notational conventions, Ganassi consistently makes use of the C-clef in *Fontegara*, and transmits rhythm without a direct visual link to a specific beat or pulse. He simply beams together all consecutive quavers and semiquavers and, at the end, adds a single flag to identify the value of the preceding notes. Ganassi's flexible, modal understanding of rhythm is considerably compromised with any system of transcription in modern notation, and I strongly advise to consult the original notation to approach the musical content of *Fontegara* (digitally easily accessible, for instance, via IMSLP).

The following fragment of *Regola Prima* shows five examples (*atti*) of two consecutive *moti* of the ascending second (*moto* no. 4 is labeled *seconda spezada*). Even a short glimpse will suffice to get acquainted with Ganassi's notation, and to understand the fundamental principle underlying the art of diminution, which he explained in chapter 13: *che nel far le diminutione habino similitudine si nel fine come nel principio* ("When making a diminution, there should be a resemblance between its ending and its beginning").⁷

⁶ *Regola prima*: C; *Regola Seconda*: C5/4; *Regola Terza*: C3 and *Regola Quarta*: C7/4. In *Regola Quarta*, Ganassi only provides one *moto* for each interval.

⁷ See Titan 2019, p. LV



Respecting this core principle, the first and the last notes of the embellishment in all *atti* above are identical to the (first) note of their respective *moto*. In all *atti* of the *secon da spezada* no. 4, also the pitch of the second minim of the *moto* is represented at the corresponding moment. Furthermore, Ganassi includes a small vertical dash in *atti* no. 4 and 5 of this *moto*, which visually facilitates the recognition of the two subsections of the diminution equivalent to each minim of the *moto*.

The rhythmically progressive order of the *atti* is quite clear: crotchets, a combination of crotchets and quavers, quavers, a combination of quavers and semiquavers, and (on the right hand page) diminution examples that are predominantly made up of semiquavers. Interestingly, Ganassi also includes *atti* that only consist of the actual note(s) of the *moto*, rhythmically organized as repeated notes of mixed values.

Ganassi's idiom features an extensive use of dotted note values. For instance, in *atto* no. 2 of *moto* no. 4 he prescribes two dotted quavers, which – perhaps surprisingly – are neither preceded nor followed by a semiquaver.

2. *Certamente altro non e diminuire che dornamento al contra ponto* – applying the diminution examples of *Fontegara*⁸

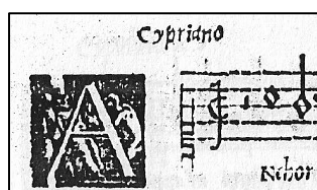
Unlike the authors of later treatises on the art of diminution, published in the second half of the sixteenth century and after, Ganassi does not provide a complete embellished piece. Instead, he deems sufficient to offer two short examples that illustrate the application of the treatise to a single musical phrase.⁹ Recently, significant progress could be made in our understanding of Ganassi's musical style, mainly because of groundbreaking musicological research by Dina Titan. Based upon her findings, I would like to demonstrate the application of the treatise, and the vast range of creative possibilities that *Fontegara* offers to instrumentalists and vocalists of all technical levels and musical ambitions, by way of three

⁸ “It is certain that the art of diminution is nothing but ornamentation of the counterpoint”, *Fontegara*, Ch. 13. See Titan 2019, p. LVII.

⁹ In Ch. 20, Ganassi shows how to assemble a diminution for a musical phrase, solely using *atti* from *Regola Prima*. In Ch. 21 he illustrates how to make a diminution of a phrase applying the various proportions of all four *Regole*.

short diminutions of my own making. To facilitate easy comparison, these diminutions all ornament the same melody, for which I selected the final phrase of Cipriano de Rore's well-known madrigal 'Anchor che col partire'.

Rore sets the poem for four voices in the fourth mode, and prescribes the *alla breve* mensuration sign:



Ganassi mentions this particular mensuration sign in *Fontegara*. His treatment of it is in complete concordance with the practice that is described by many theorists of his period. In short: though the sign does indicate a change of note value that is connected to the beat, in practice the musicians of the 16th century simply maintained the same note value for the beat as they used for the mensuration C (*alla semibreve*, with the beat on the minim), but executed it in a (slightly) quicker tempo.¹⁰

Written in C-clef, the *canto* part book transmits the final phrase of Rore's composition as follows:



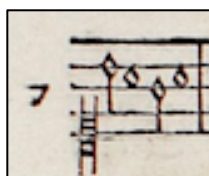
According to Ganassi's detailed explanations in chapters 20 and 21, we may assemble *atti* at choice to embellish this phrase, as long as they respect the intervallic model of the melody (and, *in extenso*, preserves the counterpoint of the composition). In *Fontegara*, the intervallic *moti* proceed from semibreve to semibreve (with or without intermediary notes), but – as we will see – occasionally a segment of an *atto* may be used to embellish a singular minim as well. In chapter 19, Ganassi explains the option to embellish minims (*accio tu possi*

¹⁰ *Fontegara*, Ch. 13. See, for instance, the explanations by Francesco Gaffurio (Lib. II, Ch. 14 of *Practica Musicae*, Milan 1496) or Glarean (Lib. III, Ch. 8 of *Dodecachordon*, Basel 1547). For extensive information on this subject, I recommend to consult Ruth DeFord: *Tactus, Mensuration and Rhythm in Renaissance Music* (Cambridge 2015).

imparare a diminuire la minima alaltra – “This will teach you how to make diminutions from one minim to the other”) and mentions a few reasons for it: syncopation, unison and variation of proportions.¹¹ Also, Ganassi mentions the possibility to transpose the *atti* (chapter 20) and allows for the exchange of the final note of an *atto* (as made clear, for instance, in the very first *moto* of the treatise). Both options have to be used with great care though, as they easily result in inelegant melodies or even mistakes in the solmisation.

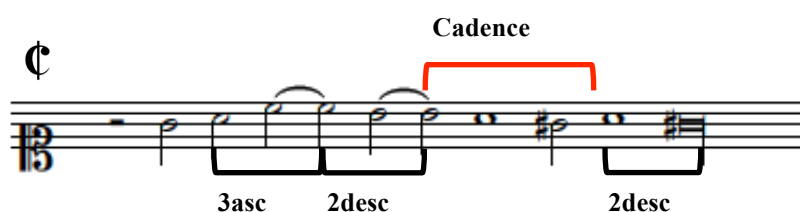
A closer analysis of the concluding segment of the madrigal (which sets the words *gli ritorni mei*) is needed to determine the correct *moti* for the selection of the individual *atti*. Rore’s melody could be described as follows: a slightly ornamented cadence on the pitch A-re is preceded by a minim rest, two minims and a semibreve (in syncopated position). After the cadence, the madrigal concludes with a descending second.

In the *Regole*, the cadential pattern on A-re appears as no. 7 of the *moti* for cadences:



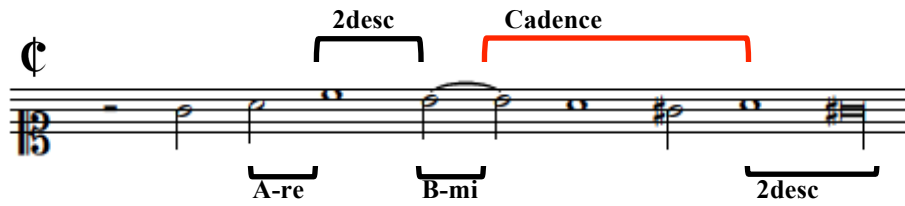
To be able to apply this *moto* to Rore’s cadential pattern, we need to split the dotted minim B-mi in the same way as Ganassi did in his musical example in chapter 20. The section of the melody preceding the cadence can be analysed in two ways:

1. After the initial minim, the melody proceeds with an ascending third with intermediary note moving in minims (A-re, C-fa / C-fa), followed by a descending second with intermediary note (C-fa, B-mi / B-mi):



2. The syncopated semibreve displaying a descending second (C-fa / B-mi) is both preceded and followed by an individual minim (respectively, A-re and B-mi):

¹¹ Fontegara, Ch. 19. See Titan 2019, p. LXXXI



Having established the various *moti* of the original melody, we may now proceed and choose from the corresponding *atti* to embellish this phrase. To identify each selected *atto* for the diminutions below, I applied Titan’s codification system. For instance, RP-4ascM8A2 indicates: *Regola Prima*, the interval of the ascending fourth no. 8 (*moto*), diminution example no. 2 (*atto*). To each diminution I added short comments that highlight several important aspects concerning the application of *Fontegara* and Ganassi’s musical style.

Diminution A

For the first proposal, I have selected *atti* that consist of relatively few notes.¹²

- Use of proportions in *Fontegara*

The proportional sign 6/5 might perhaps raise questions for a reader who is accustomed to modern indications of meter. In *Fontegara*, Ganassi uses the proportion signs in concordance with the explanations of the theoreticians of his period. For instance, Francesco Gaffurio writes about the sign 6/5: “In this proportion, six notes equal the preceding five of the same sort and value, so that each note loses 1/6 of its length”. The other proportion signs function in similar fashion: the denominator reflects the situation of the preceding proportion, and the numerator informs about the following number of notes that

¹² The accompanying audio-examples were recorded on 30-1-2021 in Maranathakerk, The Hague (NL), and are played by Maurice van Lieshout, recorder (copied by Peter van der Poel, after Schnitzer) and Jörn Boysen, harpsichord (copied by Titus Crijnen, after Ruckers).

replaces this. It is important to note that Gaffurio purposely does not specify any particular note values in his definition.

In *Fontegara*, proportions operate on three different rhythmical levels: the semibreve, the minim and the crotchet. In RS-C7A3, for instance, Ganassi applies the proportion prescribed in *Regola Seconda* on the level of the semibreve (five crotchets replace four crotchets), whereas in RS-2descM4A2, he uses the same proportion on the level of the minim (five quavers replace four quavers). In the diminution example I selected for the final *moto* (RT-2ascM3A1), Ganassi applies the proportion of *Regola Terza* on the level of the semibreve (six crotchets replace the preceding five). An *atto* that demonstrates a proportion operating on the level of the crotchet is shown in Diminution C (see below).

- Intermediary notes and change of final note of the *moto*

Note that to the *moto* of the ascending third with intermediary note (A-re, C-fa / C-fa), it is not possible to simply apply Ganassi's diminution examples for the ascending third, as these examples do not reflect the intermediary note of Rore's melody and therefore would result in violations of the counterpoint. To embellish this particular *moto*, I selected RP-4ascM8A2, because it contains the correct intermediary note, and followed Ganassi's advice to exchange the final note of the *moto*. I have also changed the final note of the *atto* (RT-2ascM3A1) that I selected for the concluding *moto* of the madrigal (a descending second).

Due to the presence of the rests, this diminution gains an expressive and somewhat tentative quality at first, and then develops into a lyrical embellishment of Rore's counterpoint.

Diminution B

For the second diminution example of the same phrase, I follow the second analysis of the *moti* as presented above, for which I have designed a more energetic diminution. Apart from the two individual minims adjacent to the syncopated semibreve, I decided to embellish the initial minim as well (which appears directly after the rest).

The image shows a musical score for a piece in 15th-century style. It consists of two staves: a vocal line (top) and a lute line (bottom). The vocal line begins with a semibreve rest, followed by a melodic phrase. The lute line provides a rhythmic accompaniment, with various proportions indicated by labels: RP-2ascM4A4, RP-2ascM6A3, RP-2descM7A3, RP-2descM4A2, RP-C7A5, RP-2ascM1A6, and RP-2descM14A2. The lute line features a complex rhythmic pattern, including a syncopated semibreve and several minims. The score is written in a style that reflects the historical context of the music.

- Embellishing minims and longas – Concepts of construction

In chapters 9-12, Ganassi classifies his diminution examples according to the varied combination of three parameters: melodic contour (called *vie*), use of note values (*minute*) and use of proportions. For this diminution, I decided to apply exclusively *atti* from *Regola Prima* and, hence, it features only one proportion. For the embellishment of the beginning of Rore's phrase, I have selected (segments of) three *atti* that result in a literal repetition of the note values, while maintaining a certain resemblance in the melodic contour. Also other concepts of construction as, for instance, mirror image, retrograde and re-ordering of elements are frequently encountered in *Fontegara*.

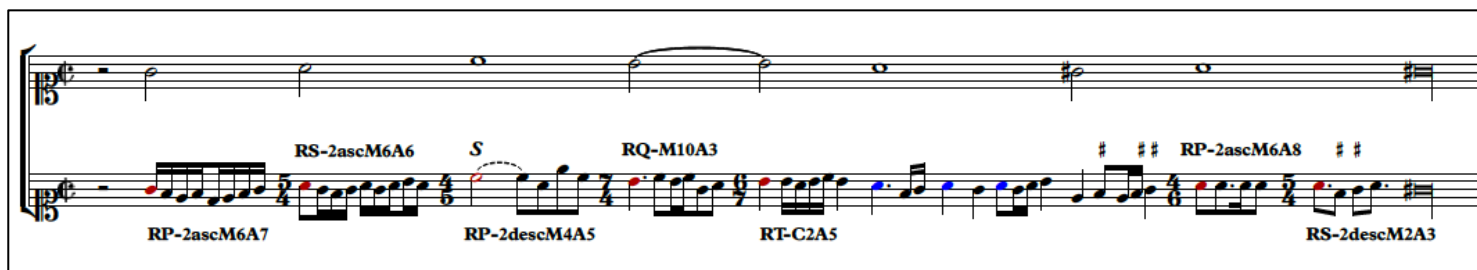
To embellish the first minim of the phrase, I selected one of the *atti* with the vertical dash I discussed in the facsimile above. In this diminution (RP-2ascM4A4), the first note of the *moto* is re-stated just before the vertical dash. In the musical example of chapter 21 Ganassi demonstrates that such segments are considered as individual units, and may be applied independently. Diminution RP-2ascM6A3 displays the same features and, hence, could be used to ornament of the following minim (A-re) in Rore's melody. For the individual minim B-mi, which links to the cadential pattern through a unison, I have used the second segment of RP-2descM4A2. For the ornamentation of the final *longa* of the madrigal, I followed Ganassi teachings for the ornamentation of longer note values than a semibreve (chapter 19), and selected an *atto* that embellishes the unison (RP-2descM14A2).

- Octaviating the initial or final note of a *moto*

The diminution of the cadential pattern is borrowed from *Regola Prima* (RP-C7A5). This particular *atto* ends on the lower octave. To ensure an elegant melodic flow, I selected an *atto* that starts on the lower octave (RP-2ascM1A6) for the following *moto* of the phrase.

Diminution C

To conclude this short survey, I have assembled a more intricate diminution, which demonstrates several stylistic features that are characteristic of *Fontegara*.



- Proportion operating on the rhythmical level of the crotchet

Diminution C kicks off with a direct and energetic musical gesture that demonstrates in what way proportions in *Fontegara* operate on the rhythmical level of the crotchet as well (RS-2ascM6A6). Conform the proportion sign of *Regola Seconda*, Ganassi replaces four semiquavers with five in this *atto*. The repeated motive of three semiquavers clearly divides the diminution of the minim C-fa into two equal halves that are equivalent of five semiquavers, both beginning with the note that is being embellished. In turn, these groups can be subdivided in respectively 2:3 and 3:2. Ganassi applies the same internal rhythmical organisation in reversed order (3:2 and 2:3) for the (second) *atto* I selected for the embellishment of the final *moto* of the phrase (RS-2descM2A3), a clear example of the careful and logical construction of the *atti*. For the *atto* RQ-M10A3, Ganassi adopts the proportion of *Regola Quarta* at the level of the minim (seven quavers replace the preceding four). The internal rhythmical organisation is 3:4, of which the first segment is expressed using one single note and the second segment with a lightly ornamented motive of four quavers.

- Flexible approach to rhythm

RT-C2A5 demonstrates another important feature of Ganassi's flexible approach to rhythm. Ganassi ornaments the central semibreve (A-re) of the cadential *moto* with a diminution that is equivalent to six crotchets (*Regola Terza*). The continuous reiteration of the *moto* note (A-re, marked in blue) clearly subdivides this group into three units of two crotchets length, whereas the diminution of both adjacent minims displays units that are equivalent to three crotchets.

- Purely rhythmic diminution

Ganassi includes a significant number of *atti* that exclusively consist of the actual note(s) of the *moto*. A survey of Ganassi's *Ars diminutionis* would not be complete without applying this unique feature of *Fontegara* (RP-2ascM6A8).

- *Galanteria*



As Ganassi explains in chapter 24, an artful performance also requires *galanteria*, i.e. the addition of trills of various qualities such as *soave* and *vivace*. In chapter 25, he complements his description with illustrations of the appropriate fingerings for trills. The fingering Ganassi indicates for the *soave* trill (marked with *S*) on the note C-fa results in a rather small interval of less than a semitone, which seems suitable for the expressive long C-fa of Rore's melody. In the illustration, the letter 'm' indicates that this hole should be only partially covered (*mezzo*) and 't' marks the finger that trembles to perform the trill.

In chapter 21, Ganassi encourages the reader to invent own diminutions. Despite the considerable progress of the recent musicological research mentioned above, it is fair to say that we still are in the initial stages of our understanding of the fascinating concepts Ganassi presents in his treatises.¹³ Much practical experimentation is necessary in order to become thoroughly acquainted with his unique musical style. For now, it is perhaps sufficient to limit us using the colours of Ganassi's own palette. Fortunately, *Fontegara* is a precious treasure store of diminution examples that offers us sheer infinite possibilities to find our way in Ganassi's universe. Happy diminutions!

¹³ Ganassi also published two treatises on the viola da gamba and the lute (*Regola Rubertina*, Venice 1542 and *Lettonne seconda*, Venice 1543).