As a field, “Renaissance music reconstruction” asks questions on topics ranging from composition and improvisation to notation and performance practice, and the answers are often relatively speculative. But in cases where a self-contained polyphonic composition has lost a voice (or voices) in transmission, there is long-standing acceptance of the idea that an “informed reconstruction” of a “complete” version is a worthwhile pursuit, both to enable performance and to further the study of counterpoint, musical style and structure, and even the composer in question. That said, most such reconstructions focus (necessarily) on internal musical aspects: few reflect in detail on how we should take aspects of a specific composer’s style into consideration.

Using examples from the reconstruction session at the Gaspar conference this past summer, this lecture aims to consider how one should weigh competing priorities of reconstruction. How does one prioritize between counterpoint and voice leading, when tension between these aspects is often present in the transmission of contemporary works? How does one balance musical considerations with considerations of text and text underlay? And finally: to what extent should one try to compose in the original composer’s voice, and what can this tell us about a composer’s musical style?