
Who Actually Needs Transcription? Notes on the Modern Rise of a Method and the Postmodern Fall of an Ideology

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Who Actually Needs Transcription? Notes on the Modern Rise of a Method and the Postmodern Fall of an Ideology

Marin Marian-Bălașa

Abstract

This article surveys theoretical contributions to the discussion of problems and developments of the major and basic ethnomusicological pillar that is transcription. It also summarizes issues raised at a recent meeting of the European Seminar in Ethnomusicology. Ideas and practices that are pro- and anti-“faithful,” or microscopic, transcriptions are analysed, and the possible pluses and minuses offered by computer programs mentioned. Yet, the major concern here revolves around the ignored aspect of ideology, and so this paper puts forward a critique which revisits and questions our view of transcription from the perspective of both its first grounds and multidirectional ultimate meanings. In the light of a postmodern critique, what was traditionally conceived and performed as open method is now tackled and discussed as covert ideology. In the end, the issue of transcription is revealed as one of the gates musicology and musicologists set up to act, unwarily but efficiently, as makers of a specific politics—the politics of ethnomusicology—which is similar to other ideological and political processes.

1. Handling an Aporia

No doubt, musical transcription is, nowadays, in ethical crisis. This is an ideological crisis because we can see there are so many things, apparently more and more numerous, that can be said about music—without music being present audibly or visually (through graphical representation). From a postmodern perspective, we can legitimately ask the question “who still needs, nowadays, to make and refer to musical transcriptions?” And we find an increasing number of negative answers and fewer and fewer positive arguments. Indeed, many very-ethnomusicological books lack any transcribed musical text,¹ and there are books with just a few scanned, music-related photos or even scores just inserted for their decorative quality rather than their musicological relevance. Not to mention the so-numerous ethnomusicological books

having nothing of that kind, but a compensating, perhaps more rewarding, CD attached to the inside back cover. Moreover, when we can see a musicologist preferring a concert to an analysis, and a listening session to a score reading, the situation gets depressing. Or does it? What follows on the next pages is not a complete or systematic assessment of the development of the problems and achievements of transcription theories and practices. The current status of this issue is more than heterogeneous and diffuse, and, as we will see, it perpetuates all the historical paradigms together while also complementing or ignoring them by the automatic renditions of computer programs.

As is well known, during musical audition the human mind selects, refuses, reprocesses, loses, and modifies many acoustic elements (Jourdain 2002). A human being cannot transcribe only what his ear “really” perceives, but also how music really sounds inside his culture-selecting and culture-embedded heart and mind. A person will perceive and transcribe music *as culture*, or *cultural music*; whereas computers render sonorous physicality, sheer acoustics, that which has only partially to do with *culturally constructed music*.² This is why aural transcription is, more often than not, irreplaceable by computer sonograms and spectrum visualizations, although aural transcription is rather indispensable to the practice of any traditional analysis. Yet, sonograms are effortless (to the musicologist’s brain)—easily obtainable, and their use, at times more than their usefulness, tends to get generalized nowadays. On the one hand, computer sonograms provide facts or arguments that open and transgress the borders of all types of operations required and implied by traditional analysis. On the other hand, the acoustic and rhythmic accuracy brought in by sonograms can often increase understanding and enrich interpretation. Yet, if sonograms reveal a physiologically and culturally forgotten or ignored world, manually written notations imply subjectivity, variable expertise, and a certain degree of interpretation and (re)composition. So, neither of the two—human vs. electronic transcription—is “perfect”, “objective”, “complete” (etc.); and they actually prove, if it still is necessary, that we should not continue to define ethnomusicology’s job with reference to these conceptual categories.

Indeed, this is one of the very few things that can be “objectively” said, besides the fact that the atomizing paradigm, which dominates today’s research, helps establish the *objectification of subjectivity*. In the matter of musical transcription, this now epistemic subjectivity proclaims: the best transcription is sometimes the one revealing phonetic/diacritic/microscopic facts and at other times the one that fits the researcher’s purpose or the one that proves something, anything (be this provisionally or circumstantially). On the other hand, we should not think that the better a notational representation of musical texts is, the better the conclusions are. A transcription is a text in itself, and its reading depends on the multidisciplinary intellectual maturity of the musicological reader. As in the case of a literary text, each person understands, notices, and processes those elements that inspire or appeal to his or her mind. Nowadays, if the classic and outdated trust in (pure) objectivity is a matter of ridicule, formerly undoubted “truths” and “proofs”, such as musical transcription, can be used

for backing not only unconventional, liberal, unearthing issues, but also musicological sophisms. Can all this multifarious—methodological, technological, intellectual, and even ideological—complexity be classified and systematized without faults? I think not, which is the reason why this article, together with all those that follow in this volume, leaves aside some of the most common, obvious, and well-known aspects, selectively sampling some of the past and recent theoretical and practical developments of the subject.

2. A Brief (and Selective) Summary of a Hunt for Perfection

The issue of musical transcription represents a recurrent theoretical problem, predicament, and aporia. From time to time, ethnomusicologists challenge the musicological community by discussing it, revealing the limits and merits of this basic and main pillar of all musicological disciplines; yet, each time, they shake this pillar without long-lasting effect, arriving at no ultimate and generally valid conclusions, and just appeasing an intellectual turmoil and quest that will soon reawaken afresh. How and why music came to be put down on paper was a matter which went unquestioned until the birth of ethnomusicology; and it is to the merit of this discipline that the issue of transcription—when applied to oral musics—has evolved into a very important intellectual struggle for meaning, epistemology, ideology, teleology, and, perhaps, even moral consciousness. It was not historical musicology which, through inquiring into the complexity and usefulness of musical semiography, came to investigate its own self, to raise the crucial question of its own being or nonbeing, doing and undoing. It was to ethnomusicology to start crossing limits pertaining to its core matters, doubting and revising itself, inventing constantly, all with only short delays and with constant vigor, which by any reckoning, is a process or trial that is indeed a proof of seriousness, development, creativity, responsibility, and maturity.

A most comprehensive bibliography on the quest for the most accurate and informative or most instructive and pragmatically useful transcription is to be found in Stockmann (1979:234-45). Yet, the entire fussy history about how to transcribe orally conceived music could be traced as starting from the contribution of Abraham and Hornbostel (1909-10). It was in that paper that the minute details of all the parameters of musical sound were indicated and requested from transcribers. The two musicologists and acousticians also incorporated the cents measurement, and instructed the reader in the use of additional notational methods, such as that of representing the melodic flow by straight or curved lines. In early 1980s, while a music conservatory student, I was myself taught to approximate a folk tune in this way, after first writing the melody down as a most faithful transcription and again as a second, quasi-analytical step. At that time it was still considered a scholarly gesture, which I always did while cracking a smile, because I found it ridiculous, not to mention irrelevant and useless. Note-heads on a staff also draw a contour—straight, ascending, descending, curved—so why repeat it with thick lines and describe it through words? However,

the illusion of making science by looking for methodological exhaustiveness—even by applying tricks or gadgets, technical pretenses, and fantasies—has been *the Dogma* of traditional ethnomusicology from early times until nowadays. The larger the number of operations an object of study allowed (or was supposed to allow), the more the respective science gained in legitimacy, authenticity, authority, and autonomy. Often, in the past as well as today, the quest for systematic and exhaustive study was and is accompanied by the illusion and play of empty technicalities, without the awareness that what might have been interesting or useful decades ago, from political points of view might have become obsolete or dispensable nowadays. The point is, however, that ethnomusicology was born or launched with a large baggage, or repertoire, of theoretical-analytical instruments and operations. An accumulating science, ethnomusicology did not get rid of any of them, and all of the various schools, traditions, circumstances, paradigms, or trends have performed, mixed, favored, selected, mingled, and complemented one another in accordance with dominant ideologies, or with inertia, to produce at times quite inventive positions and capabilities.

Abraham and Hornbostel's systematization, Béla Bartók's awareness and practice, Constantin Brăiloiu's transcribing method—all proving the necessity for musical transcriptions to be as identical as possible to the aural aspect of performances—were not immediately embraced by everybody. Pedagogical or mnemotechnical aims, not to mention amateurish and less specialized transcribers, tended to perform the option of rendering graphically just the gross melodic and rhythmic line of a tune. And since the late 1950s our community has conceptualized the methodological divide between “prescriptive” and “descriptive” transcription (see Seeger 1958). To Seeger, the prescriptive/descriptive tandem marked the divide “between a blueprint of how a specific piece of music shall be made to sound and a report of how a specific performance of it actually did sound” (Seeger 1958:184). He definitely called ethnomusicology a *descriptive science*, and like Bartók and Brăiloiu in earlier decades, advocated the most faithful transcription. “As a descriptive science, ethnomusicology is going to have to develop a descriptive music-writing that can be written and read with maximum objectivity” (*ibid.*:194). In this respect, no means should be spared, and Seeger—himself an inventor of a mechanical tool for better musical transcription—expressed the belief: “graphing devices and techniques show the way toward such an end” (*ibid.*:194). Thus he advised scholars to appeal to both hand graphs and automatic (graphic apparatus) “oscillograms”. Seeger considered that mechanical help might become able to solve problems such as those raised for a transcriber by *vibrato* and *rubato*, but he still set too much optimism in generalizing upon this help. Seeger's ending words, “Is there not a clue here to the vexing problem of form and content in music, and perhaps an indispensable guide to the present almost abandoned effort to develop a worldwide philosophy of music upon a rational rather than a mystical base?” (*ibid.*:195), were, in fact, idealistic. On the one hand, the alleged “rational base” was, in fact, a reductive, materialistic positivism. On the other hand, the sociological and anthropological approaches that, mainly in the USA, would re-

direct ethnomusicological studies during subsequent decades, came—to a consistent extent—only to transpose and transcribe in rational ways what was formerly presumed “mystical”.

However, the fascination toward and infatuation with technical-mechanical devices was overpowering, and the promise represented by what computers would soon become appeared to ethnomusicologists like a graspable elixir or Holy Grail. [Melo-]“Graphic notation” was embraced and praised already in the late 1950s (see also Cohen and Katz 1960). The soon-to-be-invented sonogram received different names (such as “photography” in Gurvin 1953), and then started to be recommended even by those who later on, when computers would reach their specific brilliance, would forget about it (Rouget 1970).

In the meantime, the capabilities of the traditional (ear and hand) notation were tested. The 1963 symposium duly described by N. England in an article (England *et al.* 1964:223-33) was meant to test the ultimate capacities and relevance of human musical transcription. Four prominent members of the American ethnomusicological establishment, R. Garfias, M. Kolinski, G. List, and W. Rhodes, offered their individual and independent transcriptions of the same musical piece. Then, C. Seeger made a synoptic score out of a common fragment transcribed by the four, thus making more obvious the huge differences in aural perception and graphical transcription. A similar test was done in the early 1970s by G. List (1974), when students and mature ethnomusicologists listened to folk tunes and transcribed them independently. Their approach was much more complex and refined than the previous ones, and the conclusions were not as dramatic as those silent tones and the “no comment” ending of the 1964 article mentioned above. To List and his collaborators, “the inescapable conclusion is that the capability of the unaided human ear should not be underestimated... Transcriptions made by ear in notated form are sufficiently accurate, sufficiently reliable to provide a valid basis for analysis and comparative studies of the two aspects of musical style discussed, pitch and duration” (List 1974:375-76). In fact, List compared singers’ styles, as well as several transcribers’ styles. He eventually made a synoptic score out of sonograms and handwritten versions. Then he compared all versions with the scores given by the melograph. “When we attempt to compare notations made by hand and ear with transcriptions in the form of electronically derived graphs of fundamentals and amplitude, we are faced with two problems, both difficult of solution. The first problem is how to accurately interpret the graph, the second is how to apply the interpretation made within the restrictions of the Western notation system” (*ibid.*:374). List, however, considered the computer graphs useful in that they can help the transcriber to make slight adjustments in accuracy of pitch, perhaps inspiring the transcriber to adjust special signs (such as arrows-up for pitches higher than usual or for other alterations of accidentals), as well as improving the allocation of durational values. Yet, it is worth mentioning that such “deviations” from temperament and exact pitch were well known to all good musical folklorists, and already implied by early fieldworkers. Bartók used them in his later-called “microscopic”, “ultimate”, and “perfect” transcription (Somfai 2000).

Further ethnomusicologists identified other possible benefits resulting from mechanical transcription, yet none dismissed human transcription. "It will be clear that an automatic transcription should not be thought of as a replacement for aural transcription. They perform different but equally justifiable functions. The primary value of automatic transcriptions would be to throw light on what we do not 'hear', what we change in the process of 'hearing', or what we take for granted" (Jairazbhoy 1977:270). Pleading for the ear and hearing went on almost unstopped.

Against the lamenting chorus of those claiming that Western staff notation is not capable of rendering the minute details of an oral, traditional, rubatic, and melismatic song, ethnomusicologists proposing the invention and implementation of new graphic symbols had demonstrated the contrary: if improved by adjustments, staff semiography can be quite hospitable and helpful. Charron (1978) and Beaudry (1978) gave sonograms and photos showing how the glottis produced vocal effects or sounds, but also proposed shape notes for different means of sound production.³ De Vale (1985) proposed drawing-like, vertical scores for vocal-instrumental or just instrumental musics. The graphic repertoire is virtually limitless, in the sense that it requires only inventive transcribers, who can adopt or transform graphic signs as necessary in order to fit the musical phonemes or phenomena they encounter in real performances.⁴

3. On One of the Most Recent Quests

The 19th "European Seminar in Ethnomusicology" (ESEM), hosted by the University of Vienna, took place in Gablitz on 21-25 September 2003. Organized mainly by Regine Allgayer-Kaufmann, it had as one of its two main themes, *Music to be Seen: On the Impact of Visualization*. This theme was proposed by Regine Allgayer-Kaufmann and appealed to or inspired the contribution of many fellow ethnomusicologists, who gathered in nine sessions. A few of them are present within this issue, which is the reason why I comment less on their articles and will rather focus on some of the main ideas that can be extracted from other colleagues' presentations. I will refer to the expanded version of papers here published only to the extent that they relate or can be correlated to other general or particular trends or ideas that were stressed during the Seminar.

Sławomira Żerańska-Kominek ("Orality, Literacy, Visuality: Ethnomusicology in Transition") opened the floor with an assessment of the role of transcription in the formation and academic performance of ethnomusicology. She stressed the traditionally overemphasized importance of notation and the benefits brought by the visual recording insured by filming.⁵ Katalin Lázár ("About Some Questions on Ethnomusicological Transcriptions") underlined the merits of prescriptive transcription when applied to the teaching of traditional music to both urban children and those willing to assimilate and perform folk music. For pedagogical reasons, she assumed that first presenting the recordings, second assimilating the style through imitation, and only then presenting a simplified transcription, were fruitful steps. In contrast, Lucian

Emil Roșca (“Limits of the Faithful Transcription: Problems Raised by Ornaments and Phrasing”) pleaded for descriptive notation. He made us listen first to a dull performance of an instrumental rendition of a simplified transcription, and then to the same piece, this time performed with the stylistic features and ornaments that should have also been preserved and communicated by a responsible transcription. Gerlinde Haid (“On the Musical Concepts of Traditional Musicians”) analyzed instances when folk musicians have access to musical literacy and use scores for their learning and performing processes. In her turn, Selina Thielemann (“The Visual Experience: Transcription and Indian Music”) suggested that the oriental reluctance toward Western notation and descriptive transcription rested on the romantic or uncritical pretense that the real flow of the live performance would always escape any graphic representation.

The group of researchers specializing on Indian musics also included Martin Clayton (“Re-Sounding Music: Putting the Auditory Dimension Back into Ethnomusicology”), who touched the visualization issue by trying to explain in literary terms the transfer of singers’ live musical experience into body movements, Nicolas Magriel (“Representing *Khyāl* Songs”), and Wim Van der Meer (“Visions of Hindustani Music”). The papers of the latter two introduced to European-centered ethnomusicology—that is, the one dominated by its “systematic” dimension—an elusive world that “refused” descriptive transcription for both axiological and moral or deontological purposes, or, if you prefer, for the sake of experiential spirituality and liveliness actualized during performance. This aspect was made graspable especially through the explanations given by van der Meer, who tried to explain why visualization of music through mythical images and paintings could have, to Indians, a communicational efficiency that was not achieved by musical transcriptions. In his turn, Magriel mediated between Western technicality and several oriental musical notations, or rather between the Western requirements for a detailed transcription and the very lightly loaded alphabetic and numeral notation that was traditional in India and China, by proposing the improvement and thus development of Indian semiography and transcription from within. This endeavor truly is a helpful form of non-conflicting, respectful, and cooperating dialogue, because it neither negates the divine simplicity of Asiatic notations nor perpetuates the uncritical essentialist-spiritualist dogma (that can itself come down to a political choice, i.e., the ideological refusing of the Western quest for faithful transcription). Hence, in the midst of “our” typically European struggles—because they are indeed Eurocentric!—between the issues of objectivity/subjectivity in human transcription, the limits of and gains from computer sonograms, and the unsurpassable (?) informational force of listening/hearing, not to mention the “systematic” anxiety about losing something from the sight of notation, checking with the mental attitude and methods of several oriental musicologies cannot but be beneficial.

An essay such as Van de Meer’s paper would also fill in the gap between musical transcription and musical iconography, the latter being a musicological discipline per se,⁶ yet having so much to tell about the way we enhance and communicate both mu-

sical experience and musicology. Indeed, musical iconography is also a way of noting down, transcribing, and communicating, artistically or just visually, what someone experienced while making or listening to music. Yet, with this realm we are on the borders of both topic and discipline, subject and object; and it is these borders that postmodern ethnomusicology will soon question, challenge, threaten, elude, blur, and definitely trespass.⁷

Another plea for traditional transcription (notes on staves, by hearing) came from the panel session “Why (Not) Change the Tune? Continuity and Change in Chinese and Estonian Folk Songs, and the Continued Importance of Music Transcriptions as Research Tools.” There, Antoinet Schimmelpennich and Frank Kouwenhoven, who discovered that plenty of Southern China folk songs were composed within a “monothematic” structural style, asserted that in order to demonstrate this feature only that type of structural analysis permitted by traditional staff transcription is effective; consequently, one cannot dismiss that notation without then missing interesting aspects (such as the monothematism). Another case of melodic monothematism (where numerous poetical texts are sung to a small number of tunes) was then considered and theorized by Taive Särg in relation to Estonian *regilaul* (runic songs). To Ardian Ahmedaja (“Time, Tempo, Pulse, Sound and Space in Albanian Free Rhythm Traditional Music”) it was clear that if one studies the variability and changes at any level, and especially the delicate aspect of implying free rhythm and form in multipart singing, traditional transcription is needed. Similarly, it was very clear to Jehoash Hirschberg (“The Constant and the Variable in Karaite Responsorial Chant”) that both melodic development and periodical factors within the dialogue of solo-and-choir free forms are better noticed and analyzed once duly written down on paper, as well as accompanied by computer sonograms. Some of the sonogram’s merits and shortcomings were discussed by Domenico Di Virgilio (“An Image of Sound by Means of Computer, Shall We Trust It?”); his use of musical videos and sonograms proved to be a scholarly method making sense much beyond its apparent theatrical complexity.

A strong argument for conventional transcription was provided by Regine Allgayer-Kaufmann’s panel, “From the Innocent to the Exploring Eye: Transcription on the Defensive”, with contributions also by Gerd Grupe (“Notating African Music: Issues and Concepts”) and Gerda Lechleitner (“Transcriptions Intended for Orientation”). These papers left behind the elementary and excessively redundant dispute between visual vs. aural, descriptive vs. prescriptive, ear transcription vs. computer rendition, and Western intellectual methods vs. folk empirical experience. They indeed set updated grounds for future developments, and the printed articles presented here deserve further attention. Two more contributions belonging to Triinu Ojamaa (“Throat Rasping: Problems of Notation”), and Rytis Ambrazevičius in cooperation with Rūta Žarskienė (“Do We Hear What We Think We Hear? Tuning of Skudučiai”) brought arguments for further development of transcription methods by discussing less known musical phenomena and systemic intonational features. These presentations during the seminar set the fundamentals for the fully rewritten versions that are published here as independent articles. Despite the ornamental gesture at the end of

Ojamaa's article (which gives comfort to activists who, in an anti-intellectualist posture, emphasize that one should listen to traditional singers and learn their music empirically), one of the exceptional contributions occurring here is that her quest for a complete grasp underlines the fact that music is (also!) a sort of breathing management. Out of this point it naturally results that sonic events prior to consonants and vowels qualify as music and provide theoretical discoveries. On a different yet convergent track, spectral analysis empowers Ambrazevičius to see the existence of several "performance modes" (actualized during performance), which ignore the simplifying modal systems imposed and generalized by traditional musicologies. The real tolerance and acoustic flexibilities of those modes could not be measured without computer programs, thus the notation system could not be adjusted and renewed the way it is creatively proposed by Ambrazevičius.

During the Austrian meeting of the European Seminar in Ethnomusicology, Jan-Petter Blom ("Confirming Folk Conventions of Rhythm through Practice: Visual Representations and the Dance/Music Interface") appropriately expanded the concept of visualization to discussing *internal* (imaginary) musical representations. In a speculative vein, he took on the music-dance interaction and mutuality, as well as the seldom-observed aspect of the visualization of music as this is performed by conductors in front of their orchestras. Indeed, both dance in general, and conducting are forms of internalizing and externalizing music, as well as "drawing" it in space. Their visual aspect, however, is discussed for dance by choreology, ethnochoreology, and the anthropology of dance,⁸ while for conducting it is either ignored, or covered by a focus on the technical, pragmatic, or pedagogic roles fulfilled by conducting. The role of the physical body in expressing and reshaping musical movements or ideas generally remains an issue for future studies. Yet, partially, it was touched on also by Il-woo Park's talk "'Scoring the Body': The 'Lived Body' as Virtual Score for the Musical Non-Literate: A Comparison between an Irish Reel and Hornpipe", in a difficult theoretical assemblage where she speculated on the cognitive and pedagogic role of rules and technical requirements for performing unwritten musics.

In its immediate meaning and reification, the issue of visualization was taken on by contributions theorizing around, or at least just redundantly backing, the usefulness of shooting film (Vyacheslav M. Schurov: "Studying Local Traditions of Russian Singing: The Role of Cinematographical and Video Materials"; Charlotte Vignau: "On Videography in Ethnomusicology"; Alla Sokolova: "Traditional Instrumental Music as Audio-Video Syncretism: The Visual Aspect of Adygh Instrumental Music"), as well as by those introducing several musical and musicological websites (Emil H. Lubej: "Emap.FM—Internet Radio for World Wide Ethno Music & Reports"; Dana Rappaport: "Interactive Listening for Traditional Music"; Astrid Nora Ressem: "Medieval Ballads in Norway on the Internet"; Olav Saeta: "Norwegian Folk Music: Editions of Transcriptions as Books and on the Internet"; and August Schmidhofer: "A Database of Malagasy Music"). The latter was a useful bunch of presentations, especially since there still are many ethnomusicologists who avoid

the various resources offered by computer programs (unconventional transcriptions represented by sonograms) as well as the Internet.

4. Let's Generalize Now

As can be seen, there has been no mono-directional development of our ideas on the graphical representation of music, musical semiography, and transcription. The same historic concerns, already identified a century ago, continue, including: the need for faithful (that is, descriptive) transcriptions of recorded live performances; a wish to ignore the metred measures of art music, which includes the writing down of notes and ornaments in accordance with free durational flows and basic pulses; and pressures to adopt or invent new signs and symbols. Meanwhile, the same, 150 year-old pragmatic principles—such as: preserving only the basic and suggestive elements of a tune; listening to and learning folk musics from their original sources; leaving space for improvisation; and rendering and publishing folk songs only for the sake of testifying about local patrimonies—continue to exist in an unhindered parallelism. So, there has been no constant general advancement (on the track of intellectualism or technical expertise), no universal movements back and forth, no grand rises and falls, as my title suggests metaphorically. There is, rather, a succession of more or less contextual, opportune, or adequate usages, as well as some accumulation of side-tracks, and various group or individual contributions. Among the latter, the most spectacular and generous seems to lie in the Internet's cyberspace, plus the new transcription tool that recording and sonogram-producing computer software offers. As an unlimited space for animation, interaction, promotion, marketing, and information, as well as a space allowing the association in very accessible ways of any visual or graphic rendition with acoustic performances and documentary recordings, the Internet is a hospitable avenue, which does facilitate research and communication.

In fact, there is no history proper, in the sense of a linear, evolutionary development; or if there is some "history", this is indeed ubiquitous, present in all its strata. Nowadays, there are numerous researchers, both amateur and specialized, who transcribe and publish folksongs in accordance to the pre-scientific paradigm of simplified, prescriptive, elementary-educational method, adhering more to an always adjusted or relative transcription. There are stubborn purists, who insist on demonstrating and illustrating the benefits of descriptive transcription. In between the two extremes, the wide "gap" is filled by the majority of ethnomusicology practitioners, who adjust their relative method of transcription in order to suit their limited or momentous purpose. Sometimes, the too obvious superficiality in representing a song, or a too solid demonstration in favor of the prescriptive and shallow transcription makes even a reasonable theorist react and plead for use of a more scholarly and sophisticated method.⁹ On the other hand, and apparently paradoxically, the computer sonogram and spectral analysis join and back both sides with new force and arguments: from sonograms and specters, "purists" can dig in and pull out microscopic

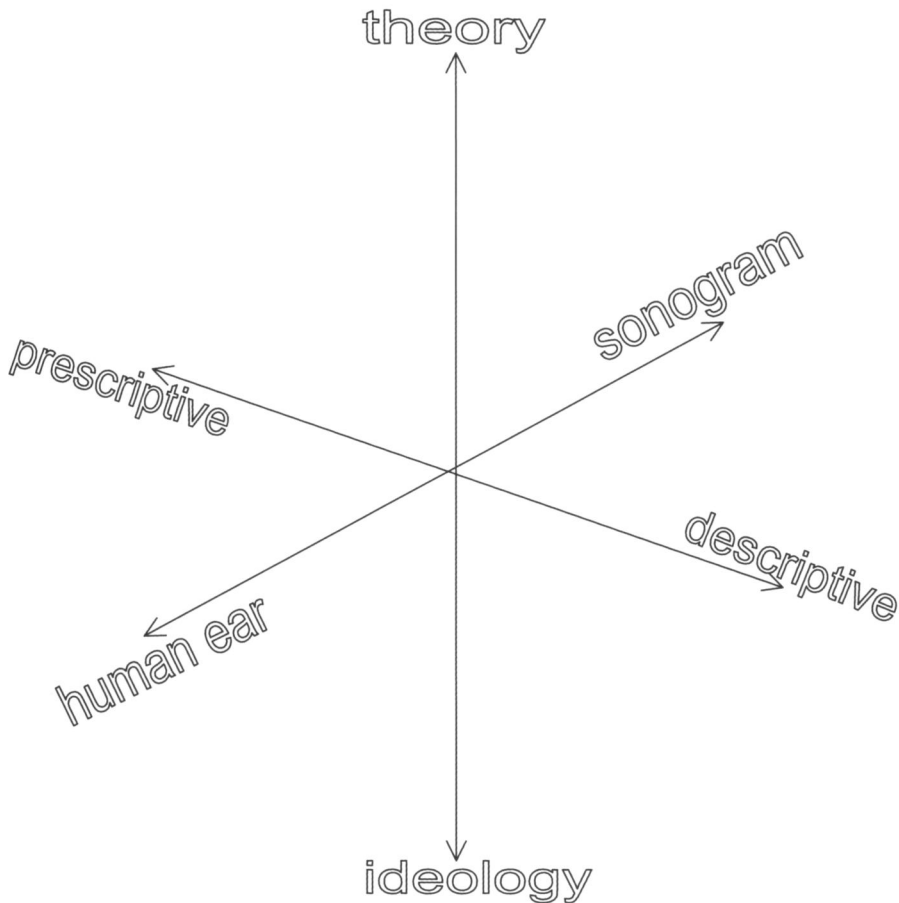


Fig.1. Axes of the practice and performance of transcription.

details (usually acoustic elements), and loose theorists can interpret them in an amateur manner. There are also scholars who doubt and challenge both methods, and there are anthropological-oriented academics who find no use in the graphic representations of tunes whatsoever. Last but not least, there are a few ethnomusicologists who unveil the dogmas and purposes behind the transcription issue revealing it either as hiding a fragile navigation between ideologies, or as providing the fundament for false or unnecessarily over-complicated analytical work.

Yet, if I were to summarize and set within a unique formula the entire dialectics resulting from all presentations, readings, discussions, and theoretical illustrations—not only of the seminar reviewed above but of all possible discussions on or around the subject matter—I would imagine and visualize several primary axes:

(a) vacillation between the right and the left (the “right” meaning supporting the descriptive option, the “left”, supporting the prescriptive solution);

(b) movement toward the north (trust in the computer's involvement) or the south (relying on classic aural transcription); as well as

(c) pushing toward up (pleading for technical perfection or micro- and macroscopic exhaustiveness) or down (the realm of hidden politics or less aware ideology; see Figure 1).

If the first binary axes, "prescriptive-descriptive" and "human transcription versus computer sonogram", are clear, and represent topics consciously approached by many, less awareness has been granted to the fact that all theoretical arguments—for one or the other, as well as for the combination of two methods—back trends of a more or less political nature. The political axis is the one where open narratives and plain theory (usually focusing upon technicalities) can cover hidden narratives of an ideological nature.

All these tendencies or axes, however, are not necessarily in conflict with each other. A preference for prescriptive transcription might not be opposed to the descriptive method, revealing only the transcriber's choice for pedagogic, laboratory, archival, or mnemonic purposes. Ear-hand, human transcription need hardly be put in opposition to sonograms, and the option of one or both methods is variably applied. As mentioned, only the theoretical vector versus the ideological vector is a connection usually kept under the discreet shadow of technicalities, as if mere technicality would not constitute also a smokescreen for patronism, authority, obedience, allegiance, or commandment. In fact, among other things, ideology is also the field where ethnomusicology justifies itself, in the sense that it exploits the issue and methods of the musical transcription—in a self-centered way—to legitimate and expand its own domain, authority, legitimacy, and autonomy. Ideology is the field in which transcription is called in order to support not only fruitful, intelligent, creative, or revealing knowledge, but also artificial problems, and—maybe primarily—tautological analyticism. It is also the field in which ethnomusicology can chase its own tail; where it nourish an intellectual tension that might deserve better quests or fights; where it can perpetuate old, inertial points; or vice versa, can promote shallow resources, sell gratuitous theoretical gadgets, and launch fake discoveries strictly because novelty cannot be easily checked. In fact, the cunning breeze of politics permeates all implied concepts, attempts, methods, and paradigms.

5. From Theoretical Illusions, Intellectual Sophisms, and Imagination, to Ideology (Notes on Ethnomusicology's Ego)

Transcription cannot be severed from the famous work of historical ethnomusicology, namely collecting-transcribing-classifying, three major and interconnected activities that are political acts of equally intellectual and imaginary practice and appropriation. Collecting, whether in the field or from other sources, leads to archiving, which is a second, institutional phase of the impulse of taking folk culture into intellectual, academic, and political possession. Archiving, nevertheless, is useless and

less feasible without communication. Thus, transcription is not only meant to secure the preservation process by providing an additional medium (notation on paper), but also to communicate the belongings of an archive, making known the materials held. Prior to the very recent diffusion and accessibility of computer hard- and soft-ware allowing CD burning it was much cheaper for archival music to be published as transcribed pieces in book format. Nowadays, CDs accompanying ethnomusicological books substitute rather than supplement the presence of graphic musical representation. However, in the process of being communicated through publishing, the collected, archived, and then transcribed music gets “entangled” in the domain—uniquely specialized, scholarly, intellectual, and autonomous—of analytical classification and typologization. In its turn, typology is the end of an ethical and imaginary representation of the act of possession. The communication act displays the expanding field of possession. Prescriptive transcriptions inform teachers or performers about the general contour of a song, whereas descriptive notation communicates not only those mentioned categories (because out of a sophisticated transcription one can easily extract a simpler one), but also shows off its own achievement to the elite body of other researchers. Through classification and typologies, tables and indexes, transcription, and analysis of all sorts, ethnomusicology advertises both itself and a new field of possession: that of the intellectual, theoretical realm. In order to be better grasped, this is a fact that deserves to be “storied”, or summarized with examples.

As mentioned, transcription brought in the illusion that a song, once put down on paper, is conquered, possessed, tamed, domesticated, subjected, and mastered. The history of ethnomusicology relies on this candid illusion, which became the fundament of its scholarly quality, its “scientific” dimension. One can imagine the excitement of the first ethnomusicologists, who were capable, just by listening, of setting immediately the melodic and rhythmic turns of a tune on staves. They were experiencing the thrill and power of capturing and possessing an otherwise elusive being. It was the real Being of a song that was caught and then exhibited—like an exotic bird in the golden cage of enlightenment which was musical literacy. Superior, divine mediators, these transcribers sometimes appealed to helping techniques and devices, such as memorizing the tune, singing it themselves, playing it on piano, violin, or harmonium, only then identifying the notes and setting them on staff paper.¹⁰ The ultimate prop, nevertheless, was the phonograph, then the magneto-tape recorder; in fact, the history of real and proper musical transcription began within the same years that mechanical recording was implemented in the work of collecting folk music. In Eastern Europe, Bartók and Brăiloiu decided on making one transcription during the very fieldwork-*cum*-recording session, a simple, symptomatic transcription, which the former would use in order to “restore” the “real” song (possibly “ruined” by the folk singer in the inhibiting presence of the phonograph),¹¹ while the latter used it only as a documentary sketch, kept among the additional papers meant to accompany and document the event (Brăiloiu 1931). Yet, afterwards, once in the office, while listening repeatedly to the acoustic recording, both scholars agreed upon making a second, publishable, faithful, very detailed, complete, descriptive transcription. In the

1930s, Brăiloiu also practiced what he called *synoptic transcription*, where all stanzas of the entire performance of a song were duly and faithfully transcribed, putting each subsequent stanzaic version, one after the other, on horizontal staves, mentioning only the places where variants occurred, thus obtaining a score that helped the viewer to notice at first glance where and how the impulse for variation worked.¹² The master art of variation was also one of Bartók's concerns, although he did not treat it anthropologically, by which I mean his concern was not for the mechanisms actualized during performance but rather for what laboratory-based analytical academism might reveal. His complex transcriptions were not "faithful" in the sense we use this word nowadays. They were more the output of a scholarly decision, and are thus the fingerprint of an interventionist authority: before a sheet of staff paper, Bartók would re-compose each tune. Although he indicated the stanzaic variations in tune notes or footnotes, from the entire real performance he would select, preserve, and publish the one stanza which he considered most significant (perhaps the most complex), thus implicitly minimizing "what was intentional, accidental, or just personal in the performance" (Somfai 2000:215). This means that Bartók imposed on his transcriptions his own authority—equally scholarly, self-made/self-appointed, theoretical, artificial, imaginary, and subjective. In contrast, Brăiloiu wanted folk music pieces to be transcribed and communicated exactly the way they sounded during performances, an epistemological standpoint which would obviously allow a greater number of analytical observations to be made later on by various other musicologists, while reading such a faithful transcription. Briefly put, Bartók's transcriptions illustrated Bartók, whereas Brăiloiu's method was impersonal. Yet, both of them imposed models, which ended up pushing Hungarian and Romanian ethnomusicology to trust in the empirical essentialism and positivistic analyticism that are made possible only by the "perfect", microscopic, faithful, descriptive transcription.

From all these there was only one step to be taken to the "alienation" that occurs when the song becomes to ethnomusicologists less its aural reality or sonic experience, and more its graphic representation. This did indeed happen, characterizing many careers, tomes, and projects—in fact, the summit of official ethnomusicology in most communist-nationalistic states involved securing office work, which, on the one hand, was apparently objective, scientific, and apolitical, and on the other, bent over itself and became inebriated with itself, producing theoretical compositions and virtuosic solipsism.

Indeed, after the analyst has done his job on a set of transcriptions, he would end up by making a new notation, or better said, writing something of his own, in a self-sufficient, absolutely self-referential analyticism. He would set on staves all sort of scales, modes, structures, formulas, patterns, rhythms, types (etc.), all in the form of categorized structures, types, tables, indexes, all with the air of applied mathematics, statistics, ordering, and ultimate reduction, communicating something (an order and ordering) that had no use besides that of its own existence. Perfect typologies, such as those characteristic of Romanian ethnomusicology,¹³ exhibit at large the composing structures and microstructures, melodic-rhythmic types and subtypes (etc.). Only

the other musicologists never refer to the classifying and typologizing outputs; everybody picks up melopoetic texts only, from the anthology section of those volumes. Those formalized analyses constitute just another form of notation, a self-centred and autonomous writing, just transcribing something from theory's practice or applicability.

I call *analyticism* the exaggerated, self-referential, and redundant performance of analysis—analysis *per se*—that has become obvious in much of our ethnomusicological studies. More often than not, analyticism became *the* ethnomusicological objective, central to traditional ethnomusicology in its entirety and truly ultimate in systematic ethnomusicology, enjoying a rarely discussed hegemony.¹⁴ Notation and transcription were crucial to this unchallengeably prestigious realm, which constituted for many scholars the core of the ethnomusicology's *raison d'être*. Through analyticism (in fact as well as through any analysis), the “music” of the transcription itself was that of petty calculations, arithmetics, structures, syntaxes, motifs, patterns, cells, types, subtypes, categories, subcategories (and computerization could increase the number of such units, sometimes even without identifying them), which the analyst could see by reading a transcription and sets of transcriptions.¹⁵ Compared with the aural experience from which it departed, this theoretic-analytical infatuation and self-referentiality is a sort of estrangement or alienation. Compared with intellectualism, this is creation. Thus the practice of music theory and analyticism should also be seen as a work of art.

At the beginning of the twentieth century the usefulness of graphic transcription was thought to be multifold. Composers would be able to read it and take inspiration from it. I cannot help to wonder whenever I face this major aim of historical ethnomusicology: were composers in the first half of the twentieth century lacking inspiration so badly? Wasn't musical composition meant to be profoundly creative—even if not necessarily innovative or revolutionary? Why take inspiration from folk musics? It is my sense now that, in fact, only nationalism could really back and nourish such a scholarly obsession, which, eventually, proved to be a dispensable presumption and pathway.¹⁶ If Bartók perpetuated and illustrated it with his musical creations, other composers could do very well without it. George Enescu, for instance, simply ignored it, in the sense that he kept himself at a distance from ethnomusicology; yet he reinvented the roots and spirit of folk music within his very personal language. Brăiloiu also started his career with the illusion that art music can do better if based on folklore. After writing a few modest volumes of harmonic arrangements of folk tunes, he completely gave up composing and opened up the career of a most solid, theoretic, and analytic-systematic ethnomusicologist. To him and his disciples the graphic rendition of a musical piece was good for the practice of another sort of epistemological religion, which was that of positivistic and virtuosic analysis. Thus, what the score tells from an analytic point of view has become the main purpose of a positivistic ethnomusicology.

Besides turning ethnomusicology into an ideological prop for supporting ethnocentric and nationalistic supremacy and superiority, where theoretical study was con-

cerned, communism—as formerly colonialism and imperialism—favored exclusively the analytic and “systematic” side of ethnomusicology. This side was apparently apolitical, certain, objective, solid, infallible, and unquestionable. This was the idea, but it was fully wrong. Extracting musical scales, melodic types, and sonorous systems out of a transcription was a political act for a number of reasons. Namely, it:

- (a) generalized a unique and supreme ethnomusicological method;
- (b) restrained the concept of ethnomusicological study;
- (c) behaved hegemonically and kept Russian and Eastern-European ethnomusicologies away from modern, anthropological, Western, and speculative-creative trends;
- (d) served local-oriented ideologies, which required the demonstration of immemorial ancestries and national or racial/ethnic specificities;
- (e) obscured these effects with its appearance as a nonpolitical, objective, and useful process.¹⁷

All these would not have been possible without the concept of descriptive musical transcription. Or would they?

I already mentioned the joy musical folklorists used to experience, at the dawn of ethnomusicology, when discovering a musical pearl and writing it in the form of notes on staves. But much more than that, one has to imagine the awe a folk singer must have experienced when glancing at a transcription of a song—something so immaterial!—on paper. Something of the same awe which the first non-modern, illiterate people experienced on viewing the photograph of their own image, something of the amazement which is felt by anyone hearing for the first time his/her voice on playback—sometimes fearing it, sometimes taking it as a taboo violation—must also be imagined as taking place when people glanced without expertise at a graphical representation of a tune. The folk song, indeed, was something very private, personal, and intimate, and seeing it represented on paper, under the weird forms of dots and lines, miniature geometric shapes, graffiti, non-literary symbols, must have suggested at least a sense of wonder, strangeness, alienation, and disbelief. In fact, to the musically illiterate, including our contemporary colleagues who work only on the literary aspects of songs, an ambiguous respect for the musical transcription comes a little while after that primeval, irrational wonder or mistrust. Does this transcription look closer to the model (the audible song) than Duchamp’s *Nude Descending the Stairs* did, or than Picasso’s *Les Femmes d’Alger* as compared to real feminine bodies? Of course not.¹⁸ Musical illiterates should be as scandalized as fine art fans were at the beginning of the twentieth century standing before the mentioned paintings and witnessing the birth of cubism; only that, nowadays, they cannot afford to sincerely express their instinctive refusal or wonder. They look at these abstract drawings which scores, including musical transcriptions, truly are, and simply give credit to the musicologist—representative of a science and discipline!—who proposes them.¹⁹

No doubt, a musical transcription is an artistic drawing, implying an always unique, relatively free, optional, and combinatorial play with graphic symbols. This

play is equally subjective and objective, and both its subjectivity and its objectivity can be argued for or against, negotiated, and accepted or doubted. As history shows, there is little chance that transcriptions by different musicologists will be identical: so, there is an unpredictable amount of subjective capacity for hearing, identifying, and representing graphically what is performed as music. On the other hand, computers and cognitive studies have definitely proved that musical hearing transforms and selects what is acoustically emitted, and cultural studies have proved the acoustic studies almost futile. Indeed, what is the anthropological point and humanist use in measuring the minute intonational differences between similar pitches, the few cents discriminating between sharps and flats, the milliseconds in between two accents or rhythmical continua? To musicians themselves, to real audiences, and especially within specific functions and social-cultural contexts, such mathematical, exact calculations mean nothing, and bring in a scarcely relevant knowledge; or at least they demonstrate things or general ideas that we already knew. Moreover, the details provided do not contribute to *quality knowledge*. Perfect technical transcriptions, such as sonograms and spectrum visualizations, are interesting to a very small number of scholars, whereas they increase the distance or rather estrangement between, on the one hand, people conceiving, performing, and enjoying the music performed, and on the other hand, people who study it. Yet, as in its colonial or imperialistic beginnings, the contemporary transcription—at its technological top, the sonogram—impresses, imposes itself, demands, and automatically obtains respect. The sonogram, however, is obtained more easily; it is effort free, since computer programs do it automatically, on our behalf. The scholar needs no heavy musicological or ethnomusicological training to produce a sonogram, and this makes room either for him or her to focus on other aspects (in the best case) or on superficiality (in the worst case). The traditional, formerly hardworking and painstaking concept of transcription is heavily undermined by the recent technological facilities, or rather by the easiness these facilities introduce. Or, moreover, it is at a turning point, which will surely lead to theoretical and methodological shifts. Or, perhaps, it will restrain its own applicability, necessity, and relevance to very particular and peculiar, more and more isolated, moments and aspects.

All such observations lead to the same argument I started with: our intellectual work as ethnomusicologists is more useful to ourselves—an isolated elite of the society, born out of music, yet soon artificial, autarchic, and autocratic—than to those cultures and peoples that represent themselves through their musics. Yet, the musical world can save itself from ethnomusicologists no longer, because it cannot save itself from the innumerable ways and instruments for mediation, from the increasing forms of culture making. Ethnomusicology became a form of intellectual production, we have to admit, and no one should still be expected to support its often-solipsistic development with the traditional sophisms that accompanied and motivated its birth and early stages. We must acknowledge it with no ethical complexes, and advance as creatively as possible on this path of sublime—intellectual and imaginative—technicality or artificiality.

As one may notice, transcription does not bring more visibility to and interest in cultures that are represented by written music. Rather CDs do this, and we indeed witness nowadays, especially due to the concept of World Music, a tremendous availability and diffusion of folk musics worldwide. Our musicological books circulate less—in fact, they are not even part of the public market—and are less readable than recordings are audible; therefore, anthologies of real music (actual recordings) are (socially) much more effective than transcribed collections. Difficult transcriptions impress no longer, and, as we can often see, comfortable, intellectually effortless listening is more appealing to everybody.

In fact, the links between the graphic design of a tune (i.e., the visual aspect of a musical text) and its audible being are scarce and difficult. These direct mental links depend on intense training; this training and its final output—a mental disposition towards spontaneously releasing an imaginary music while seeing and reading the visual rendering through notation of the very same music—is specific only to some composers and most conductors. Many musicologists, as most singers and instrumental players, need first to install an approximate body of the music under the form of notes—pitches, rhythmic durations, and definitely no ornaments—through the medium of vocal solmization or with the help of a piano; only then, with perhaps faster tempo and growing facility, do they get closer to the “music” represented. There are many musicologists who do not hear the music sounding inside their heads while watching a score, whereas such a capability is undoubtedly required from conductors who must, at least, figure out instantly the way that music should sound in order to interpret and shape its embodiment in performance. However, there are many musicologists who make no connection between experiencing a song through listening to it and reading it from a transcription. Like any and all common folk, they know the “joy of music” only while it is performed and heard, and find in a transcription the dry reference or field, which forms an excuse to talk about something the “real” music ignores. They theorize and justify a discipline that is secondary, artificial, and parasitic to what music really is.

Indeed, a written score allows the specialized reader to identify and systematize elements such as gamut, mode, scale, and sonic and rhythmic system, or to say that a tune is based on a tetrachord or such and such a pentatonic scale. It helps the reader of musical notation to better discriminate between homophony and unison, homophony and heterophony, metric and tonic accents, or between ionic mode and major gamut. It helps the musicologist a great deal, and if this musicologist is also a composer or an educator, or serves the interests of a composer or teacher; he or she can apply, assimilate, imitate, transform, develop, or at least explain what features noticed from the music under analysis. In cases where this musical analyst has no such applied interests, she or he just dissects and systematizes for the sake of dissecting and systematizing, for the sake of illustrating an intellectual investment that may be called pure musicology. And, in fact, this is where we (mainly and mostly) have arrived. This is also the reason why we must acknowledge that, through our solipsistic technicalities, musicology illustrates a discipline that has imposed its autonomy, a discipline that

has developed to some extent independently and at the expense of its object of study (which was music itself)—despite the fact that it once claimed to help and shape the better understanding, performance, and enjoyment of music.

In fact, did musicology ever claim that? If it really did, it surely was not sincere, or it was just illusory. Musicology and ethnomusicology are rather for musicologists and ethnomusicologists, a deluxe enjoyment for an intellectual elite. Thus, the answer to the question “who really needs transcriptions (analyses, etc.)?” is, definitely, musicologists and ethnomusicologists.

One of the recent achievements of musicology has been its demonstrated usefulness in understanding and explaining human behavior, society, and culture. This is, indeed, a most deserving purpose and achievement, and we must acknowledge that its appearance and inspiring performance is owed mainly to the most modern turns and shifts of ethnomusicology, especially to the branch more and more called musical anthropology. One has to ask, nevertheless, in this respect and within this perspective, is music notation or transcription useful? Perhaps yes, provided we learn how to read anew these transcriptions: less with the eyes of that systematic musicology subjected to ideological and political needs, less with the routine of philosophically irrelevant details, less with the wrong habit of considering as music only what is acoustically emitted, aurally heard, and graphically notated. Music is also what people imagine or fantasize about music, and what people culturally and socially construct around it. For “visualizing” or “transcribing” this, a mind endowed with multidisciplinary cultural information, not to mention wisdom, is required. Thus for the communication of the real or ultimate meaning of a song, a score or a sonogram will rarely be relevant, whilst the musicologist will have to transform him- or herself into a philosopher. This, because one of the yet untackled problems of a future ethnomusicology will no longer be how to write or obtain a graphic representation of music, but rather what to see and read in it. And naturally, as with any paradigm shift, this will also bear ideological and political overtones.

6. Instead of Conclusions: How Human, Cultural, and Political is a Musicologist?

Instead of obeying the most common academic convention, that of providing either a more-or-less redundant or dispensable introduction (to a thematic set of contributions), or a report on and a systematization of the history and current status of a target topic (musical transcription), this article sets out to intrigue or challenge by voicing and underlining ethical and political issues. The matter of transcription was revealed here as a path and journey from method—a truly modern achievement and developing quest—to an inward-oriented exercise of covert power and ideology, which, naturally, involved also the professional, academic, and ultimately social empowerment of a discipline. Transcription and the academic representation of folk music also helped ethnomusicology to gain status, and then to legitimize and impose its posi-

tion. In time and geocultural space, the levels of intellectual awareness differed, and practices and discourses varied, in accordance with various ideologies and (more-or-less academic) politics. The ultimate conclusion is that musicologists cannot help but also produce both culture and politics.

Notes

- 1 See Rouget 1984, for instance, not to mention the avalanching literature revealing power, ideology, gender, and sexuality issues involved in the making of both music and musicology.
- 2 Obviously, I prolong here the ethnomusicological teleology resulting from crucial views such as those formulated and permeating works by Merriam 1964, Blacking 1973, Kramer 1990 to evoke just a minimal list. For a short and inspiring synthesis on the intellectual tension between the concept of transcription in positivistic musicology, the broader perspective brought in by ethnomusicology, and the anthropological spin given to the idea of music as cultural text, see Shepherd 1992.
- 3 On a similar trail, Triinu Ojamaa launches in the present journal an arrow sign that would indicate ways of producing specific sounds by breathing-in and breathing-out, respectively, while Rytis Ambrazevičius proposes the revision of the staff's blank spaces and black lines.
- 4 Some of the articles mentioned in this section were also compiled in Shelemay 1990. In her volume the listed works are paged as follows: Abraham and Hornbostel 1909-10:1-25; Seeger 1958:26-41; Cohen-Torgovnik Katz 1960:43-50; England *et al.* 1964:51-105; Rouget with Schwartz 1970:107-40; List 1974:141-65; Jairazbhoy 1977:167-77; Charron 1978:179-93; Beaudry 1978:195-207; Stockmann 1979:208-49; De Vale 1985:250-81.
- 5 A revised version of this paper, under the title "From Modern Science to Postmodern Art: Ethnomusicology in Transition," came out in *Svenskt tidskrift för muikforskning* 86, 2004:91-99.
- 6 See further the periodicals *Imago Musicae* (ed. Tilman Seebass; Lucca: Libreria Musicale Italiana) and *Music in Art* (ed. Zdravko Blažeković; New York: The Research Center for Music Iconography). Evans 2002 is a sort of dictionary of collaborating artists and composers, listing musical pieces dedicated to or inspired by fine art works.
- 7 The book *Postmodernism and Globalization in Ethnomusicology* discusses the adjustment of the ethnomusicological paradigm to World Music, globalization, and trans-ethnic and trans-identity narratives. Yet, when concluding that a future subject matter for ethnomusicology should be "the study of culture-transcendent appropriation" (Nercessian 2002:132), it becomes obvious that neither the basic notion of transcription nor those of what-kind-of-musical-visualization-is-best are threatened. On the contrary, watching the transfer or circulation of forms and pieces will increase the demand for representations (graphical) and evaluations (analytical), which will again be answered by the equally revealing and frustrating technique of hand-versus computer-transcription.
- 8 In this respect, see at least Kaeppler 1996.
- 9 While consulting an entire (collective) book that gave me the impression that too many passages were anti-transcription, myself I became an occasional purist: "It is perfectly true that performance means and brings much more than a transcription (of a performance!), but this should not be repeated in a manner that would encourage analysts to ignore transcriptions and the production of high quality transcriptions. More often than not, bored professors and hasty

students decide to give up duly transcribing and reading transcriptions, and relate their impressionist ideas only on listening to performances. Actually, the sophistic arguments supporting the unscientific and thus illegitimate choice of rendering vague, 'prescriptive' (read incomplete) musical transcriptions are completely false. Reducing a musical text to its skeleton is as if one would transcribe from a poem, as Reichl himself puts it, only 'elements which are structurally necessary to differentiate meanings' (p. 5). I feel the need to stress this point: the more phonetic a transcription is, the more generous it becomes to a larger number of present and future analysts and interpreters. Difficulties such as those raised by complicated, perhaps rubatic, free tempo, pieces can be surpassed by hard work; this type of work has been performed more than often, and the outdated prejudice against transcription which inspires bad musicology is no longer acceptable" (Marian-Bălașa 2003c:161).

- 10 For the debatable tactics employed by musical fieldworkers for transcription see also Barwick 1988-89.
- 11 In the preface, written in French, Bartók notes: "Il n'est pas bien de se servir exclusivement du phonographe sans noter les airs sur les lieux mêmes où ils se chantent, car souvent le chanteur, mis en face de l'appareil, dénature involontairement la mélodie, et dans ce cas le collectionneur doit observer et contrôler ces modifications, en tenir compte et les noter. Toutes les fois que j'ai remarqué de semblables variants, je les ai consignées séparément dans chaque chanson, et j'ai noté la différence entre le phonogramme et l'air écrit à l'audition directe du chanteur. On peut en outre observer d'autres changements de détail, que nous prouvent que la forme des airs populaires est très élastique. Ainsi, devant le phonographe, le chanteur chante l'air bien plus lentement, avec beaucoup plus de floritures et fait de nombreuses fautes, dues à des lacunes momentanées de la mémoire" (Bartók 1913:xii).
- 12 See Brăiloiu 1931, and especially his subsequent scholarly essays and thematic monographs published partially in French and mostly in Romanian (Brăiloiu 1932, 1938; Brăiloiu and Stahl 1936).
- 13 See, for instance, the big tomes by Sulișteanu 1986, Kahane and Georgescu-Stănculeanu 1988, and Moldoveanu 2000.
- 14 "We have assumed that what should be done with music is transcription and analysis. But do we really want to analyze? Do we know what analysis is?" (Herndon 1974:220). "Various methods have been propounded, but there has been little discussion of the relative merits of these methods" (*ibid.*:221). Among the analytical methods discussed by Herndon, there are at least a couple proving that "total attention is focused upon the musical transcription rather than upon the sound itself" (*ibid.*: 239).
- 15 See, just as an example, the concept of "folksong type" as explained by L. Dobszay (Dobszay-Szendrei 1992:20-24). "The term [type] originated as a scholarly expedient whose special meaning developed in folk music research, and so its definition is a conventional one. But apart from heuristic approach it also has a real content: the reality which is reflected in this way in research is present in folk music itself; the types are real formations in terms of music history and their study is a task within the history of melody... Researchers have been led to the concept of types through the intensive work of collection, notation and ordering, and the content of the concept can most easily be revealed by recalling this course which led up to it" (*ibid.*:20). "To sum up, a *type* means a group of songs, similar in all important features but occurring within a typical circle of variants, brought about through research in order to produce a profounder acquaintance with the material and facilitate the research activity. A type on the one hand constitutes *the aggregate of the pieces of data* belonging to that group and on the other *the musical abstraction* of the melodic pieces of data (as it were an ideal image of them),

as if the community possessed a collective musical consciousness of the melody's essence and the individual pieces of data were manifestations of this scheme realized in several different ways. A researcher aims to delineate a type as a circumscribed group of melodies" (*ibid.*:22). As one can notice, the Hungarian concept of (melodic) type refers to a melodic construction that transcends genre. Romanian ethnomusicologists focused their study, as well as their anthologies and typologies, on particular genres; thus the Romanian concept of type referred to microstructures (sonorous types and subtypes) circulating inside particular genres.

- 16 Here is an extreme yet typical sample of nationalist enthusiasm furthering bad ethnomusicology: Leoš Janáček, writes: "Instrumental motives simply taken from the truest Czech tune. Sometimes only the rhythm becomes the theme. Pluck these petals from a song and use them as the focal point of a composition. Strew them out as the form requires; into the code, the development, etc. a bedding consisting of rose petals. Every tone that falls into its aroma exhales its fragrance. We must water instrumental motives with Czechness—to take them to their source, to the present, to the sphere of Czechness" (quoted in Beckerman 1994:49). "This is the type of writing which has given Janáček a bad name as an incoherent babbler, and has contributed more than a little to his dubious reputation as a theorist; yet its intent and import are clear. Janáček has postulated a musico-philosophical theorem that simple folk speech and melody, due to their infusion with real-life experience, call forth an inevitable aesthetic judgment based on the mood and quality of the motive. Further, he maintains that these motives either transform into, or serving as models for instrumental or vocal motives, are the proper basis for a work of art, which is, according to Janáček, a *national* work of art" (*ibid.*:49).
- 17 In Bohlman 1993 the quest for positivism, as invested in excessive analysis, musical classifications, and typologies, is called "essentialism", and demonstrated as political work in its entirety. For the political connotations, implications and effects of office analyticism, see also Bohlman 2001:203-5; Marian-Bălașa 2002, 2003a, 2005.
- 18 With respect with the real content of depiction, Picasso was sincere: "I paint objects as I think them, not as I see them," In fact, musical transcribers do exactly alike—transcription is not the rendering of the aural "reading," rather of a mind/thinking reprocessing—only without acknowledging it with the same straightness.
- 19 I once had the curiosity to try to understand the presence of musical scores on the most popular political posters: banknotes (Marian-Bălașa 2003b). Of course, there always was a direct link between the composer depicted on paper money (Chopin, Enescu, Khachaturian, Gallus, Mokranjac, Paliashvili) and the accompanying transcriptions. With the exception of Jenny Lind (accompanied by the incipit of the aria *Casta diva* from Bellini's *Norma*), all excerpts of musical scores were authored by those composers depicted, and reminded the money bearers of the musical contribution brought by those national composers to the universal cultural patrimony. Yet, this explanation was valid in theory only. In fact, amidst the iconographic elements of realistic illustration (human faces, cultural buildings), sometimes those musical quotations were something purely abstract, rather playing an ornamental or decoratively balancing role.

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