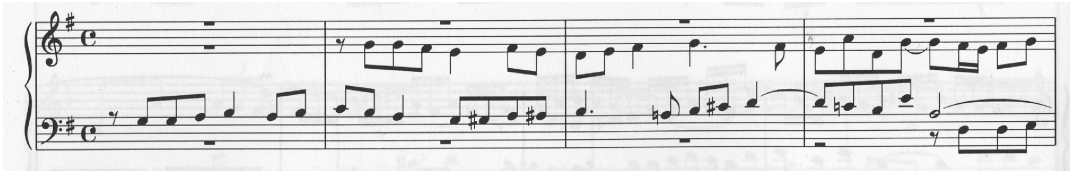


RICHARD BEAUDOIN AND JOSEPH MOORE

Conceiving Musical Transdialection



While it may not surprise you to learn that the first bit of music above is the opening of a chorale prelude by Baroque master Johann Sebastian Bach, who would guess that the second bit is a transcription of it? But it is—it is a transcription by the contemporary British composer Michael Finnissy.¹ The two passages look very different from one another, even to those of us who do not read music. And hearing the pieces will do little to dispel the shock, for here we have bits of music that seem worlds apart in their melodic makeup, harmonic content, and rhythmic complexity. It is a far cry from Bach's steady tonality to Finnissy's floating, tangled lines—a sonic texture in which, as one

critic put it, real music is “mostly thrown into a seething undigested, unimagined heap of dyslexic clusters of multiple key- and time-proportions, as intricately enmeshed in the fetishism of the written notation as those with notes derived from number-magic.”² We are more sympathetic to Finnissy's music. But still, how can one maintain that his music *transcribes* Bach's? What conceptual undertaking and what art-historical trajectory can produce such a relationship without straining the term ‘transcription’ past its useful limits?

In this article, we illuminate the wandering notion of musical transcription by reflecting on the various ways ‘transcription’ and its cognates have

been used in musical discourse (Section I). At root, musical transcription aims at preservation, though as we bring out, exactly which musical ingredients are preserved across which transformations varies from transcriptional project to transcriptional project. In fact, our primary goal is to uncover, articulate, and endorse one very interesting such project—we call it “transdialection”—in which a transcriber reexpresses a work in a different musical dialect. We sketch the emergence of this fruitful musical undertaking by examining some notable twentieth-century Bach transcriptions, including Finnissy’s, which became increasingly loose through the decades (Section II). We sharpen our understanding of this new species of transcription by exploring an analogy with poetic translation (Section III) and by responding to several objections (Section IV). We conclude, among other things, that Finnissy’s transcription is justifiably and usefully so called. And we suggest ways in which our notion of transdialection might be extended to illuminate other artistic practices (Section V).

I. “TRANSCRIPTION” TRAVERSED

The word ‘transcription’ is used in several ways in musical discourse. It is worth introducing some terminology so that we can set apart the notion—“musical transcription”—that we aim to illuminate as well as to show how, at root, transcriptions in all senses aim at preservation. “Notational transcription” is the process of renotating a musical work—that is, of notating in a new form a previously notated work, as when a piece written in tablature is transcribed to staff notation, or when a trumpet part in C is transcribed to be played on a trumpet in B-flat. Notational transcription aims to preserve a musical work across some difference in notational form, and it can be carried off without actually listening to the work itself. “Ethnomusical transcription” is the process of writing down or notating music that is heard in live performance or on a recording. This might be done in an effort to preserve the music of some culture or musician for ethnomusical study; but it might also be done for musical education, as when an aspiring jazz musician transcribes an improvised solo from a recording.³

While notational transcription aims to preserve music across differences in notation, and ethnomusical transcription aims to preserve music in a notated form, what we call “musical transcription” aims to preserve the expressive content of a musical work across some difference in musical context. Determining just what differences can legitimately engage a project of musical transcription is the central concern of this article. But the paradigm case is the attempt to preserve a musical work across a difference in performance-means, as when Ferruccio Busoni reset for the piano certain chorale preludes that Bach composed for the church organ. (We discuss this very example in the next section.)

‘Musical transcription’ is an apt term for a distinct and distinguished musical undertaking that has engaged many composers and arrangers. But the label should not imply, of course, that notational and ethnomusical transcriptions have nothing musical about them. And it should not imply that all musical transcriptions go by this label. The musical undertaking we have in mind can go by other names—‘arrangement,’ ‘setting,’ ‘orchestration,’ and ‘reduction’ being the most common in English.⁴

Musical transcription is a highly circumscribed form of musical borrowing—a sort of limit case, in fact. J. Peter Burkholder usefully defines musical borrowing as the taking of “something from an existing piece of music and using it in a new piece.” And he adds that this “*something* may be anything, from a melody to a structural plan. But it must be sufficiently individual to be identifiable as coming from this particular work, rather than from a repertoire in general.”⁵ The musical transcriber can be regarded as a musical borrower who treats a specific, preexisting work (or a clearly delimited section of it, such as a movement) in its entirety and unembedded in a longer work.⁶ In order to count as a transcription, this treatment must satisfy two additional constraints. First, the transcriber aims, in ways we will explore, to *preserve* this work’s expressive content across some musical difference, and not merely to use it as material in some new, derivative work. Second, she succeeds in carrying out this preservation.⁷

Musical transcription has the conservative goal of reexpressing the content of the target work in a new musical context. And indeed, the phrase

‘reexpression’ suggests how musical transcription is, paradoxically, a sort of maximal form of musical borrowing, and thereby nearly not a case at all. In musical transcription the original work is not “borrowed” in the way one might borrow a hammer and some nails in order to build a shed or a theme in order to compose a set of variations upon it. The musical transcriber aims not to create an entirely new (even if derivative) musical work, but rather, as it were, to redeploy or revoice the original work in a new context.⁸

This explains some of our uneven descriptive tendencies. We do not know, for example, whether to count a transcription as a new (even if maximally derivative) work, and we do not know whether to count the transcriber as a cocreator of the result. This seems to us to be largely a conventional matter of labeling: whether we give the transcriber primary billing or list him more secondarily as the “arranger” is largely a matter of marketing.

This conventionalism would follow from the view that the individuation of musical works is subject to indeterminacy.⁹ However, our treatment of musical transcription does not depend upon this or any other view about the contested individuation of musical works. We rely instead upon a sufficiently robust notion of expressive content, which we will defend in Section IV. Sameness of expressive content is clearly necessary for work identity, but we are agnostic here about whether it is also sufficient.

Musical transcription is not an automatic or merely technical process. Transcriptions can be highly creative, as we will show in the next section, though the transcriber’s creativity is balanced against—or better, played out within—a guiding and constraining fidelity to the original work. In negotiating this tension between authenticity and originality, the transcriber is, as Stephen Davies notes, like the performer: a good transcription, like a good performance, is faithful to the parent work while also providing the audience with something original. And like an interesting performance, what a good transcription often provides is some sort of insight into the parent work:

A transcription cannot help but comment on the original in re-presenting the musical contents of the original, so a transcription invites reconsideration of and compari-

son with the original. Rather than being valued merely for making the musical contents of their models more accessible, transcriptions are also valued for enriching our understanding and appreciation of the merits (and demerits) of their models.¹⁰

Expanding on Davies’s observation, Paul Thom has recently argued that, in this capacity, transcription can be viewed as a form of noncritical interpretation: while the music critic might *say* something about a work’s meaning or content, the transcriber (and also the performer and the composer of variations on a theme) can *show* it.¹¹ This interpretative function has, we submit, become more prominent as the invention and wide distribution of musical recordings have increasingly obviated the transcriber’s traditional task of simply making a work more widely accessible, by transcribing it for performance on the living room piano, for example.¹² (A similar shift occurred in painting, where a rise in abstraction was concurrent with the onset of photography.) This shift in function helps explain the emergence, in the twentieth century, of a new, “transdialectical” form of transcription.

II. BACH TRANSCRIBED

We now discuss in some detail five twentieth-century transcriptions of works by Bach.¹³ These transcriptions, which span the entire century (1907–1992), reflect what we regard as a general emergence of musical “transdialection” from a more traditional trans-instrumental form of musical transcription.

Bach–Busoni: In 1907, Ferruccio Busoni sought to transfer the original organ music of Bach’s *Komm, Gott, Schöpfer, heiliger Geist* to the modern piano.¹⁴ Busoni’s transcription nicely represents a tradition of more or less “straight” piano transcriptions that was already well established and widely practiced by the early twentieth century. But even in his relatively straightforward transcription, Busoni employs some artful constructions of his own. In his score, Bach directs the organist to perform *organo pleno*—that is, to use a substantial complement of pipes. Busoni, imitating the octave-rich *organo pleno* sound, fills his transcription with numerous octaves that are not

present in Bach's score, maximizing the timbre of the piano in an effort to emulate the sound of the organ.

Bach's original asks the organist to read three staves of music at once: one for the left hand, one for the right hand, and one for the pedals, operated by the feet. It would have been an easy matter for Busoni to reduce the three staves of the organ music into a simplified version for piano written on two staves. However, Busoni, capturing the performative complexity of the original, ingeniously maintains a three-staved texture, with a staff for the left hand, a staff for the right hand, and a middle staff that uses both hands in alternation.

Busoni successfully preserves the overall tone of Bach's chorale prelude, and indeed of the exalted plainchant on which it is based—"Come, Creator, Spirit blessed!" Even though Busoni has not changed the fundamental harmonic or melodic content of Bach's original, he has nevertheless had to make some slight musical changes in order to preserve across instruments the experience of playing and hearing Bach's work.

Bach-Webern: Anton Webern's notorious 1934 orchestral transcription of Bach's six-part *Ricercar* from *The Musical Offering* moves subtly away from Busoni's more traditional transcription.¹⁵ Webern's conceptual leap is not to alter Bach's notes or rhythms—they are all faithfully preserved. Rather, it is to break up Bach's long contrapuntal melodies into small units, distributing each melody among several different instruments. (The technique is called *Klangfarbenmelodie* or tone-color melody.) For example, a single instrument would originally play the first twenty notes of Bach's fugue theme.¹⁶ But in Webern's orchestral transcription, the first five notes are played by the trombone, the next two by the horn, then two by the trumpet, two by the horn with harp, dovetailing into four by the trombone, and so on.

Webern's transcription is kaleidoscopic. Bach's original lines are all present and accounted for, but each is "sung" by an unpredictable and ever-changing orchestral voice. Moreover, Webern's coloristic choices foreground many short motives that are not heard as such in the continuity of Bach's original. Since much of Webern's own mature music is made up of similar tiny motivic cells, his transcription is a "Webernization" of Bach. Nevertheless, while Webern's fragmentation and

often lush twentieth-century colors seem poised to break away into dodecaphonic variations, those familiar with both works will hear the Webern as a faithful reexpression of Bach's work, though its extreme timbral discontinuities point the way toward transcriptions that are even looser musically.

Bach-Stravinsky: Igor Stravinsky's 1955 transcription of Bach's canonic variations on *Von himmel hoch da komm' ich her* marks an important departure from the musically faithful transcriptions described above.¹⁷ Stravinsky reproduces all of Bach's notes and rhythms, but then adds some that are all his own. These additional notes are foreign not only to Bach's original work but also to Bach's musical language. In fact, they create chords that are quintessentially Stravinskian.

The clearest example occurs in Stravinsky's setting of Bach's Variation III. Early on, Stravinsky adds notes that echo Bach's chorale melody, but at an interval (minor sevenths above and below) that creates a line foreign to Bach's original. The added pitches form new harmonic collections (so-called 0257 collections such as C-D-F-G) that are completely absent from Bach's compositional language. Music theorist Joseph Straus nicely summarizes the relationship:

Stravinsky's added lines do not conform to the prevailing harmonic logic of Bach's original. . . . The harmonies formed by the lines are no longer triadic, but consistently create a small number of non-triadic sets, particularly the tetrachords 0247 and 0257, . . . which are principal motives of [Stravinsky's great neoclassical ballet] *Pulcinella* as well. In this sense, the lines are regulated to each other, but on Stravinsky's terms, not Bach's.¹⁸

Stravinsky intentionally here moves beyond the transcriber's traditional goal of remaining as faithful as possible to the musical notes and language of the original while adjusting to differences in performance means. He strives instead to preserve the work's expressive content across a difference in musical language—a dialect he himself created in his neoclassic period. But as we see it, Stravinsky does not, in his work, build an entirely new musical expression upon music he has borrowed from Bach. Rather, he provides a musical language—a palette of harmonic and timbral sensitivities—within which he endeavors to reexpress Bach's original music. Stravinsky does not say something

new; he says in his own way what Bach previously said in his, revealing features of the original in the process.

The passage we just discussed illuminates the point. The original chorale melody in Bach's organ work is written as an inner voice, surrounded above and below by other faster-moving lines of counterpoint. Stravinsky's transcription foregrounds Bach's inner part in two ways: first, he scores the line for human voices, which always brings prominence; second, he uses brass instruments to echo the chorale melody in minor sevenths. This is particularly elegant, since it is the "Stravinskian" additions that highlight and foreground an otherwise backgrounded element of Bach's original counterpoint. For these reasons, we regard Stravinsky's transcription as a solid example of what we call "transdialectical transcription" or, more simply, "transdialection." The goal in this species of transcription is to revoice or re-express the original not (or not merely) across a difference in performance means, but across a difference in musical dialect.

Bach–Friedman: Born in 1882, the same year as Stravinsky, the Polish piano virtuoso Ignaz Friedman likewise saw fit to add "non-Bachian" elements to an original work by Bach. Friedman's 1948 arrangement for solo piano of the "Gavotte, en Rondeau" from Bach's Partita No. 3 in E Major for Solo Violin modifies the original on two fronts: texture and harmony.¹⁹ Texturally, Friedman adds a thoroughgoing accompaniment to Bach's original monophonic composition, which appears complete and intact as Friedman's melody.²⁰ Since a melody–accompaniment texture is standard in Friedman's late-romantic or early-modern style, his addition of accompaniment can be said to modernize the texture of Bach's original. Harmonically, Friedman's transcription begins by invoking Bachian harmonies to support Bach's line; however, during a reprise of the rondeau theme (measures 48–53), Friedman's accompaniment veers into a slippery, modern chromatic harmony that is foreign to Bach's language. During this passage, Friedman's early twentieth-century harmonic sensibility exerts itself on Bach's baroque melody.

Given Friedman's additions, one might question whether Friedman's treatment is really a transcription of Bach or whether it falls into a broader category of musical borrowing instead.

After all, composers (including classical variation writers and modern jazz musicians) often borrow a melody from a preexisting piece and reharmonize it without the intention of reexpressing the work. In such cases, the earlier melody is merely a compositional jumping-off point. But Friedman's treatment remains a transcription—more exactly, a transdialection—because it preserves the totality of Bach's original. It does so by adding an accompaniment that is wholly in keeping with Friedman's own musical style. For all of his pianistic modernizing, Friedman ingeniously reexpresses Bach's original in an early twentieth-century voice.

Bach–Finnissy: We now turn to the example that opened our article, Michael Finnissy's transcription of Bach's "Deathbed Chorale," so called because Bach may have dictated the piece to a colleague during his final days of life.²¹ If Stravinsky and Friedman crossed a conceptual threshold hinted at by Webern, then Finnissy tramples that threshold and runs a good deal further for good measure. For in Finnissy's transcription the Bach original is now increasingly difficult to perceive, both aurally and graphically.

Amidst the many alterations, Finnissy's piece generally maintains a through line that follows Bach's counterpoint from beginning to end, but in almost all cases the rhythms, pitches, and location of the voices are distorted. To complicate matters further, Finnissy adds some surrounding material, including other superimposed melodies from Bach's original, and melodies from Alban Berg's 1935 Violin Concerto. Finnissy's use of Bach's chorale prelude seems a direct challenge to the traditional notion of transcription. But then why should we continue to regard Finnissy's project as transcription?

It seems to us that, despite the significant musical alterations, Finnissy's fundamental aim is to remain faithful to Bach—to reexpress Bach's original in Finnissy's own twentieth-century musical language. And this can be heard, though doing so requires more than a casual listening (or a passing glance at the respective scores). We will briefly highlight three dimensions of transdialectical fidelity—mood, texture, and relative historical complexity.

Though Bach's score specifies no tempo marking or performance indications, the piece is

profoundly melancholic: its contrapuntal unfolding is steadfast, lacking any obvious climax point or shift in dynamics. The same can be said of Finnissy's transcription: his tempo marking reads *Legatissimo, sostenuto, intimamente* (very connected, sustained, very intimate), while his dynamic never rises above *pianississimo* (extremely quiet). Though Finnissy shifts the position of Bach's lines and confounds their tonal logic, they nevertheless maintain a mood of calm, contrapuntal rumination.

The Bach and the Finnissy also share musical texture. Each exhibits a pattern of four-voice counterpoint that winnows to a single voice, then works its way back to four voices, only to oscillate back again. In both, the simultaneous deployment of various lines inhibits the dominance of any single melody.

Finally, Finnissy's transcription inhabits a similar position with regard to his own contemporary musical environment as Bach's did to his. Bach's "Deathbed Chorale" is a work of extreme contrapuntal complexity: written in 1750, this four-part chorale prelude stood at the pinnacle of a learned practice that had already gone out of fashion. It features contrapuntal techniques such as *vorimitation* (a foreshadowing of the chorale melody), augmentation (the reappearance of certain lines in doubled note values), and inversion (whereby a line of counterpoint is answered by an upside-down version of itself). But these techniques were outmoded at the time of composition, having been supplanted by a less contrapuntally complex Galant style, exemplified by composers such as Bach's son, Johann Christian Bach (1735–1782), in which a well-defined melody with a supportive, nonimitative bass was the norm.

The contrapuntal fabric of Finnissy's work—with each hand playing multiple voices and virtually no sense of prevailing meter—strikes one as cryptic, in just the way that Bach's four-part chorale prelude might have struck his own Galant contemporaries. Only a handful of composers currently write music with Finnissy's level of rhythmic complexity. And the profoundly atonal harmonies and dissipating, noncadential phrases diverge from the prevailing pop, minimalism, and more overtly "tuneful" musical landscape of modern Britain, where Finnissy lives and works. The work's opening chord (B, C, E-flat, F-sharp, G)

has no place within common tonal practice, and includes a level of dissonance not often found outside of high-modernist or avant-garde circles in the late twentieth century.

Finnissy accomplishes these significant musical similarities despite the striking musical differences we noted at the outset. But did Finnissy intend to carry out what we hear as an expressive transdialectical preservation? Concerning the piece at hand, Finnissy writes: "Layered fragments of Bach's chorale-prelude (BWV 668) surface throughout, but no consistent 'tonality' is suggested as a context. The constituent measures of the original are constantly melting away, refracted through varying intervals of transposition, undermining any sense of rational 'perspective.'"²²

Finnissy's expressed goal of *undermining* tonality and "rational perspective" might seem to conflict with the preservational aspirations of the transcriber. But consider how Finnissy describes another of his transcriptions—this time of Verdi:²³ "I worked from an earlier transcription by Alexander Abercrombie, generally increasing the harmonic ambiguity, eliding the original phrases, re-voicing Verdi's (orchestral) texture, creating a kind of production of the scene in my imagination."²⁴

Here the move away from a determinate "perspective"—or at least toward greater harmonic ambiguity—is presented less as an attempt to undermine the original and more as a way of imaginatively restaging the original in Finnissy's own musical language. The point to recognize is that Finnissy's general musical style traffics in the overlaying, the clashing, and the ultimate destruction of fixed perspective—an expressive voice not entirely foreign to contemporary artists. So, the "perspective-denying" features of the music properly characterize not some nontranscriptive goal, but rather the character of the musical language within which Finnissy endeavors to reexpress Bach's work.

Finnissy's bold treatment of Bach is so successful precisely because of the insight it gives into Bach's original. The numerous stepwise motives in Finnissy's transcription recapitulate Bach's contrapuntal voices, but Finnissy's freely atonal language allows us to hear them anew, accentuating the poignancy of the title, "When we are in the deepest need." Despite—or, as we have claimed,

because—of Finnissy’s acknowledged attempt to “frustrate and deny the logic” of Bach’s original, *Wenn wir in höchsten Nöthen sind* seems to us to be a more developed instance of the new form of the transcription glimpsed in Webern and ventured by Stravinsky and Friedman.

III. TRANSDIALECTION TRANSLATED

If we are right, a new musical undertaking—transdialection—has begun to emerge from a more traditional, trans-instrumental form of musical transcription. There are several reasons this may have happened when it did. One is the twentieth century’s increasingly intensified thirst for new artistic forms. But there is also the shift in function mentioned in Section I: since we can now hear a recording of the original with a click of the mouse, the need simply to access the work no longer creates much of a demand for traditional, trans-instrumental transcription.²⁵ This would understandably lead transcribers to experiment with different transformations as a way of carrying out the now heightened function of providing new interpretative perspectives. But the functional shift also foregrounds a different type of accessibility: transdialection can serve to make the original work accessible to an audience whose musical dialect has different expressive sensitivities.²⁶ Although we may have recordings available to us and although our powers of musical discrimination may be just as refined as any citizen of eighteenth-century Leipzig, the expressive content of Bach’s works may nevertheless be difficult for us to access because of a dialectical difference in the way musical features map onto expressive ones.

To appreciate this point, consider an analogy with poetic translation—an analogy the word ‘transdialection’ wears on its sleeve. Our capacity to understand music that is very foreign to us will be limited until we spend time accommodating to the culturally different musical fabric in which it is created and expressed. However, we can access at least some central expressive features of most music that hits our ears. Certainly those surrounded by Western popular music can listen to Bach with a modicum of musical understanding. So, in most cases, the musical transformation we have high-

lighted is usefully thought of as crossing musical dialects, not languages (though the distinction is, of course, metaphorical and vague). It is for this reason that we have appropriated a term that has been used to refer to the intralinguistic translation of literature.

In fact, the term ‘transdialection’ is as rare as the practice it names.²⁷ And for good reason: we usually think it sufficiently easy and valuable to learn enough of a different dialect so that we can read an original work as is. Indeed, we often learn a dialect in the very process of trying to interpret a text written within it. But this norm is not always in place: it might be important to make the original accessible to those who cannot or will not cross a dialectical divide, and we might also think that doing so sheds illuminating light on the original. And so there are modern-English transdialections of, for example, the King James Bible, Shakespeare, and even David Hume.²⁸

But musical transdialection also trades in strict fidelity to notes and rhythms for reexpression of a deeper sort. And although intralinguistic translation of any type is rare, certain interlinguistic translations have certainly had the analogous goal of reexpressing a piece of literature not merely in the words of a different language but in the mindset of a different age. Among the many trade-offs a translator needs to weigh is one of purpose: is the translation to serve simply to make the original accessible to someone who cannot speak the original language or might it also serve to reexpress the original along some other dimension? A looser translation which sheds light on the original by bringing to the fore one of its hidden aspects or by reexpressing it against contemporary sensibilities is more to the point when the target audience knows at least some of the original language.

As Peter Green notes in the preface to his recent translations of Catullus, “from the Renaissance to comparatively recent times, literary (as opposed to informational) translations have almost always had as their target other scholars and men of letters *who knew the original language*, and who would thus appreciate elegant pastiche.”²⁹ To articulate the typical aim for such “literary translations,” Green cites John Dryden, who “justified his extensive Anglicization of whatever ancient poet he tackled on the grounds that ‘my own [version] is of a piece with his, and that *if he were living, and*

an Englishman, they are such as he would probably have written.’”³⁰ Exactly the same conception, articulated in much the same counterfactual, guided Robert Lowell when, three centuries after Dryden, he undertook a book of translations he called *Imitations*:

Boris Pasternak has said that the usual reliable translator gets the literal meaning but misses the tone, and that in poetry tone is of course everything. I have been reckless with literal meaning, and labored hard to get the tone. Most often this has been *a* tone, for *the* tone is something that will always more or less escape transference to another language and cultural moment. I have tried to write alive English and to do what my authors might have done if they were writing their poems now and in America.³¹

Of course, Dryden and Lowell articulate just one conception that might guide a project of poetic translation. We might debate the utility of such “imitations” on a given occasion: for a bilingual audience, it is only “literary” translations of this type that will be of any value, while other audiences may call for a stricter, more “informational” translation. In any case, we find it useful to regard musical transdialection as an intralinguistic and musical analogue to the interlinguistic projects of literary translation in which Dryden, Lowell, and others have engaged.

IV. TRANSDIALECTION DEFENDED

We now sharpen the notion of transdialection by responding to a pair of objections—one about its intelligibility and a second about its applicability. The first worry is conceptual: the notion of transdialection assumes that there is something that can be recomposed or reexpressed. But what is this “thing”? It is not, of course, the exact sequence of notes and timbres that are preserved, since it is precisely these that the transcriber alters. The same holds for the notations in the original score. We have avoided any assumptions about work identity and have talked instead about the preservation of a work’s “expressive content.” But what is this exactly? And how is it determined? If music were fully like a natural language, then we might appeal to some sort of denotational seman-

tics for help. But our metaphorical talk of musical languages and dialects is meant only to highlight the culturally contingent and conventional quasi-syntactic constraints of genre and musical culture that allow a piece of music to achieve its expressive effects.

This first, and most important thing to note is that this worry applies to *any* notion of transcription, including the more traditional trans-instrumental variety. Not only do most theoretical treatments of traditional transcription speak explicitly about expressive content and its cognates, but the traditional transcriber is also clearly guided in his choices by a sense of something more stable and, dare we say, deeper than the sheer notes of the original. So, the first objection undermines our notion of transdialection only insofar as it undermines the intelligibility of the well-established practice of transcription generally.

Still, it would be nice to say more. Alas, we do not have a theory of expressive content to offer. But in fact, we do not think we need one for our purposes. We are sympathetic to the possibility that this term (and this notion) shifts its semantic focus along with the diverse aims and standards of our musical practice and discourse. And so, the notion of expressive content may not get at anything entirely fixed.³² If this is right, then talk of a work’s content arises from (and is sustained by) a sort of semantic pretense that composers, performers, listeners, and music writers implicitly and collectively engage in. (Perhaps it is like our reifying talk of “the average American couple” with 1.7 children. And live where—Springfield?) When semantic push comes to metaphysical shove, it may be that this talk is subtly misleading: it purports to get determinately at something fixed and precise, while it is actually activated in a more rough and ready way by shifting clusters of a work’s aesthetically relevant properties.

If this is right, then “expressive content” might occasionally be vague in application, and this vagueness would ramify, affecting concepts such as that of a musical transcription that are built upon it. In the case of musical transdialection, the presumption is that the successful transcriber has pursued a determinate musical isomorphism—a function that takes a musical feature in the dialect of the original and yields a musical feature in the new dialect that gives rise there to the same

expressive feature.³³ In practice, of course, the exact mapping, not to mention the individuation of musical features, of expressive features, and, indeed, of musical dialects, is shot through with indeterminacy and vagueness. And this explains, among other things, the difficulties we sometimes have in determining whether certain borderline musical undertakings count as transdialections or as some sort of looser form of musical borrowing on the way to musical pastiche or homage.³⁴

But even if the notion of expressive content is looser and more unsettled than it seems, it is sufficiently constrained, even if we cannot explicitly say quite how, to play a useful role in our thought and talk about music. Frequently enough, we make clear, justified, and even legal judgments about which musical undertakings are transcriptions and which are not. This practice not only pins down a robust notion of transcription, but it also helps determine the correlative notion of expressive content that is bound up with it.

The second worry is empirical: even if transdialection is intelligible in principle, is it clear that Stravinsky, Friedman, Finnissey, or anyone else has really engaged in it? We suggested in Section I that musical transcription of any stripe is both an intentional and a normative notion. In saying that musical transcription is intentional, we mean that the transcriber paradigmatically intends to preserve a work's expressive content across some difference in musical context.³⁵ This intentional condition is not sufficient, however, since a would-be transcriber might fail to pull it off. So transcription is also a "success notion"—the musical details matter. Whether or not the constructions of Webern, Stravinsky, Friedman, and Finnissey count as transdialections depends, then, upon whether they satisfy these two conditions in turn.

So did our transcribers really intend their constructions as transdialections? Here self-descriptions, like the ones we have quoted, are relevant. And we think the evidence supports an intention to transdialect.³⁶ It is always possible, though, for an artist to "play off" a genre. Finnissey's self-descriptions, for example, are highly nuanced, and it is possible that his project merely starts with transdialection and builds upon, or perhaps against it.

It is also possible for an artist, like anyone else, to hide his real intentions from the public, or even

from himself. Joseph Straus has argued that the very recompositions of Stravinsky and Webern that we have discussed were not "undertaken in the spirit of homage, the generous recognition by one master of the greatness of an earlier master. The internal evidence of the pieces, on the contrary, suggests a vigorous and self-aggrandizing struggle on the part of the later composer to assert his priority over his predecessor, to prove himself the stronger."³⁷ If Straus is right, his claim would hold despite any public or even private proclamations these composers might have made.

What then of our second condition: intentions aside, did our transcribers succeed in transdialecting Bach? This question embroils us, of course, in the vagaries of expressive content that we touched on above: just which musical details are relevant might be indeterminate and shift with explanatory context. But as we have emphasized, this complexity is not all-encompassing, since we are capable of judging determinate success and failure in a great many cases. And we have given solid musical evidence that Webern, Stravinsky, Friedman, and Finnissey succeeded in transdialecting Bach. Still, clinching the case would involve a much more extended musical discussion.

In any case, we take ourselves to have opened up a new hermeneutic possibility: with transdialection as a theoretical possibility, musical details that might otherwise point, for example, to what Straus regards as content-destroying one-upmanship on the part of certain twentieth-century composers can be understood instead as manifesting various projects of transdialection.³⁸ We submit that, for both music theorists and philosophers trying to understand our transcriptive practice, the notion of transdialection is squarely in play.

V. TRANSDIALECTION EXTENDED

Our focus here has been on the practice of musical transcription as it has been carried out within Western classical music. Our main claim has been that this practice is best understood as extending, over the last century, into an undertaking we have articulated and defended as transdialection. This, we think, is already a significant reconception of an important practice. But it also seems to us that the notion of transdialection has intriguing and

illuminating conceptual connections with certain other artistic practices. We end by briefly mentioning some of these.

One connection is with the practice of producing covers in rock, jazz, and other popular idioms. To elaborate with just one example, Joe Cocker's famous cover of the Beatles' *With a Little Help from My Friends* seems simultaneously to be both a performance of the Beatles' song and also a distinctive version of it. (Musicians might deliberate about whose version to perform.) In the latter capacity, Cocker's cover seems to us to be a transdialection of the Beatles' original: it is a re-expression of the original in Cocker's distinctively expressive musical dialect, and it provides an interesting and informative "noncritical" interpretation of the original.

Transdialection might also be useful in understanding the development of certain oral and folk traditions. Examples include the development of early American blues music, wherein regional styles and instrumental preferences forced incoming songs into new arrangements, and the "doption" tradition of the Trinidadian Spiritual Baptists, wherein Southern Baptist hymns became wordless devotional pieces. In both cases, preexisting, though typically unscored, pieces of music seem to be intentionally reexpressed in modified musical contexts, in the manner of transdialection.

Transdialection may also have illuminating connections with artistic practices outside of music. We have already explored the analogy with literary translation. But might we also view certain literary and cinematic adaptations as undertakings in the mold of transdialection? To take the case of film, Brian De Palma's 1983 "remake" of the 1932 *Scarface* might count as a transdialection because, although it alters details of setting, character, and even plot, it seems to do so in order to preserve and re-present the original's expressive content in an historically updated context.

These possible extensions will have to negotiate vague borderlines analogous to that between

musical transdialection and looser forms of musical borrowing. But as in the case of transdialection, doing so will be illuminating. Why is it, exactly, that Dr. John seems clearly to have transdialected the works of Johnny Mercer on his recent album, *Mercernary*, while John Coltrane seems, in his famous recording, to use Rogers and Hammerstein's "My Favorite Things" merely as a jumping-off point for a quite different musical expression? Does Jane Smiley's treatment of *King Lear* in her *Thousand Acres* (1991) count as transdialection or rather as a looser form of literary adaptation—a "deconstruction," perhaps? Did Joyce transdialect Homer's *Odyssey*? Asking such questions with the generalized notion of "reexpression" might illuminate these and many other works.

Finally, we do not mean our investigation to be merely descriptive: we hope that, once transdialection is explicitly seen as a distinct and entirely legitimate musical undertaking, it will be even more widely practiced. For transdialection seems a fruitful way of engaging music across wide differences in musical context—a way not only of making more readily and differently accessible works that are expressed in distant musical dialects but also of shedding new interpretative light upon them.³⁹

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APPENDIX—Bach Borrowed: A Spectrum of Cases

<p>KURTÁG: <i>Durch Adam's Fall ist ganz verderbt</i>, after BWV 637, arranged for piano, six hands (1991) A straight arrangement of Bach's organ prelude</p>		MUSICAL BORROWING	
<p>BUSONI: <i>Wachet auf, Ruft uns die Stimme</i>, after BWV 645, arranged for piano (1910) A straight arrangement of Bach's organ prelude</p>			
<p>RUMMEL: <i>Esurientes implevit bones</i> from the <i>Magnificat</i>, after BWV 243, arranged for piano (early 20th century) A straight arrangement of Bach's aria for voice and continuo</p>			
<p>BUSONI: <i>Komm Gott Schöpfer, heiliger Geist</i>, after BWV 667, arranged for piano (1907–9) [Ex. 1] An arrangement of Bach's organ prelude with small alterations</p>			MUSICAL TRANSCRIPTION
<p>SCHOENBERG: <i>Komm Gott Schöpfer, heiliger Geist</i>, after BWV 667, arranged for orchestra (1922) Bach's organ prelude arranged for the Romantic orchestra</p>			
<p>BUSONI: <i>Chaconne in D minor</i> from <i>Partita No. 2 for solo violin</i>, after BWV 1004, arranged for piano (ca. 1897) Explodes Bach's solo piece into late-Romantic piano style</p>			
<p>WEBERN: <i>Fugue (Ricercare) a 6</i> from <i>Das Musikalische Opfer</i>, after BWV 1079, arranged for orchestra (1934–35) [Ex. 2] A kaleidoscopic arrangement of Bach's fugue marked by significant timbral discontinuities</p>		MUSICAL TRANSDIALECTION	
<p>STRAVINSKY: <i>J. S. Bach: Choral-Variationen</i>, after BWV 769, arranged for chorus & ensemble (1955–56) [Ex. 3] An arrangement of Bach's organ work in which Stravinsky adds 'Stravinskian' counterpoints to Bach's original lines</p>			
<p>FRIEDMAN: <i>Rondeau</i> from <i>Partita No. 3 in E Major for solo violin</i>, after BWV 1006, arranged for piano (ca. 1910) [Ex. 4] An arrangement of Bach's solo violin piece, with added Romantic accompaniment and late-Romantic harmonization</p>			
<p>FINNISSY: <i>Wenn wir in höchsten Nöthen sind</i>, based on BWV 668, arranged for piano (1992) [Ex. 5] A transcription of Bach's 'deathbed chorale', preserving certain musical parameters while obscuring most of Bach's original notes and rhythms</p>			
<p>REWORKINGS, e.g., BUSONI: <i>Goldberg Variations</i>, based on BWV 988, for piano (1914) Busoni cuts some of Bach's variations, reorders the rest, and writes a new ending</p>			
<p>VARIATIONS, e.g., REGER: <i>Variations & Fugue on a theme by J. S. Bach</i>, Op. 81, for piano (1904) A borrowed Bach theme becomes the basis for Reger's variations</p>			
<p>BORROWED FUGUE THEMES, e.g., C. W. SCHUMANN: <i>3 Fugues on themes of J. S. Bach</i>, for piano (mid 19th century) Borrowed themes from Bach become the subjects for Clara Wieck Schumann's fugues</p>			
<p>DECONSTRUCTIONS, e.g., FOSS: <i>Phorion</i>, based on BWV 1006, written for large ensemble (1967) A score exclusively 'made-out-of' the score of Bach's solo violin prelude; Foss's work is longer, partly aleatoric, and achieves markedly different expressive ends</p>			
<p>FANTASIES, e.g., BUSONI: <i>Fantasia after J. S. Bach</i>, KiV 253, for piano (1909) A work by Busoni with stylistic similarities to Bachian counterpoint</p>			
<p>HOMAGES & PASTICHES, e.g., DUTILLEUX: <i>Hommage à Bach</i> from <i>Au gré des ondes</i>, for piano (1946) Hints at the tonal language and texture of a Bachian figuration prelude</p>			
<p>QUOTATIONS, e.g., BERG: <i>Violin Concerto</i> (1935) A 12-tone concerto which includes a quotation from Bach's chorale 'Es ist genug', from BWV 60</p>			

1. The first figure is the first four measures of Johann Sebastian Bach's Chorale *Wenn wir in höchsten Nöthen sein*, BWV 668a, composed in 1750. The second is the first system of Michael Finnissy's *Wenn wir in höchsten Nöthen sind*, Work No. 177, composed in 1992, published in *Finnissy: Collected Shorter Piano Pieces Vol. 2* (Oxford University Press, 1998), and reproduced by permission.

2. Julian Silverman, "Aspects of Complexity in Recent British Music," *Tempo New Ser.* 197 (1996): 33–37, at p. 37.

3. For more on ethnomusicological transcription, see Ter Ellingson, "Transcription (i)," entry in *Grove Music Online* (Oxford University Press, 2007), whence we derived the label. For more on transcription in the jazz tradition, see Mark Tucker and Barry Kernfeld, "Transcription (ii)," entry in *Grove Music Online* (Oxford University Press, 2007).

4. We also do not mean to imply that our taxonomy is exhaustive. In fact, there is at least one further use of the word 'transcription'—we might call it "medial transcription"—in which we pick out the process of transferring music from one non-instrumental and relatively proximal source (such as a storage medium) to another, as in a "broadcast transcription" or a dubbing. For more on this notion of transcription, see Howard Rye, "Transcription (iv)," entry in *Grove Music Online* (Oxford University Press, 2007).

5. J. Peter Burkholder gives this definition on p. 863 of "The Uses of Existing Music: Musical Borrowing as a Field," *Notes, Quarterly Journal of the Music Library Association*, 2nd Ser. 50 (1994): 851–870. He goes on to provide a tentative typology of musical borrowing and urges further study of the field. We regard our article as one response to Burkholder's invitation.

6. Requiring in our definition that the transcribed work preexists ensures that later drafts in a compositional process do not count as transcriptions of previous ones. We get this point from pp. 216–217 of Stephen Davies, "Transcription, Authenticity, and Performance," *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 28 (1988): 216–227. Requiring the treatment of entire works, or clearly delimited sections thereof, marks off transcription from certain other forms of musical borrowing, such as theme and variation. And requiring that the transcribed material be unembedded rules out a sort of extended musical quotation in which a work is sandwiched between bits of new music, thereby transforming the overall expressive content of the original.

7. We will say more about these two conditions later in the article. We note here, though, that our commitment to the first, "intentional" condition is qualified: certainly, it is satisfied in all cases of actual transcription, but our received concept of transcription does not seem sufficiently determinate to rule out the possibility of an unintended transcription.

8. That there is a tenable and useful, even if intentional and vague, distinction between the revoicing or reexpression of a work and a mere appropriation of it is a central implication of our article. For an example clearly on the far side of the distinction, consider Perotin's *Alleluia: Nativitas*, written around 1200. In this organum, Perotin greatly elongates a preexisting Gregorian chant and uses it as a *cantus firmus*, over which he composes two new, fast-moving lines. The original music is obscured—at times, over sixty notes sound over a single note of the borrowed chant. Since the preexisting music is used as a kind of hidden scansion on which the new music rests, Perotin has here appropriated a

monophonic chant, and incorporated it as part of his new polyphonic work.

9. This view is defended in Joseph Moore, "Musical Works: A Metaphysical Mash-up," unpublished manuscript.

10. Davies, "Transcription, Authenticity, and Performance," p. 221.

11. Paul Thom, *The Musician as Interpreter* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007).

12. Along with making a work more accessible and providing an interpretation of it, Davies notes that transcriptions have also played a role in musical pedagogy and in providing a vehicle for a composer to show off his compositional skill. Since it seems to us that this last function is achieved by carrying out one of the others, and since pedagogy is not at play in the transcriptions we will discuss, it is only the first two functions—increasing accessibility and providing interpretation—that will be at play in our discussion.

13. We do not have space to discuss these transcriptions in more detail, much less to discuss additional examples. Please contact the authors for access to recordings of the examples we discuss. See our appendix for a spectrum of selected Bach borrowings. And for a more extensive (though still partial!) list of transcriptions and other settings dedicated to works of Bach alone, see www.bach-cantatas.com/NVD/PT.htm.

14. Bach Original: *Komm, Gott, Schöpfer, heiliger Geist*, BWV 667, ca. 1708–1709; Busoni Transcription: *Komm, Gott, Schöpfer, heiliger Geist* from *10 Chorale Preludes*, original organ works by J. S. Bach, "Transcribed for the piano in chamber style" by Ferruccio Busoni, 1907–1909.

15. Bach Original: *Fugue (Ricercare) a 6* from *Das Musikalische Opfer*, BWV 1079, 1747. Webern Transcription: *Fugue (Ricercare) a 6* from *Das Musikalische Opfer*, arranged for orchestra by Anton Webern in 1934–1935.

16. The six-part *Ricercare* is somewhat unique in Bach's oeuvre, since he wrote it in "open score," meaning that no exact instruments were specified.

17. Bach Original: *Einige canonische Veränderungen über das Weihnachtslied: "Von himmel hoch da komm' ich her" vor die Orgel mit 2 Clavieren und dem Pedal*, BWV 769, 1746–1747. Stravinsky Transcription: *J. S. Bach: Choral-Variationen über das Weihnachtslied Von Himmel hoch da komm' ich her* Gesetzt von ("set by") Igor Stravinsky for mixed chorus and ensemble in 1955–1956.

18. Josef Straus, "Recompositions by Schoenberg, Stravinsky, and Webern," *The Musical Quarterly* 72 (1986): 301–328, at pp. 320–323.

19. Bach Original: "Gavotte, en Rondeau" from the Partita No. 3 in E Major from *Sei Solo a violino senza Basso accompagnato*, BWV 1006, 1720. Friedman Transcription: "Gavotte, en Rondeau" from the Partita No. 3 in E Major, arranged for solo piano by Ignaz Friedman, published 1948.

20. Occasionally, Friedman adds countermelodies above the source material, but Bach's original is never challenged as the *hauptstimme*, or most prominent voice, of the texture.

21. Bach Original: *Wenn wir in höchsten Nöthen sein*, by J. S. Bach, BWV 668a, 1750. Finnissy Transcription: *Wenn wir in höchsten Nöthen sind*, by Michael Finnissy, "based on the Chorale-Prelude by J. S. Bach BWV 668," written for piano in 1992. For a summary of the complex heritage of the "deathbed" attribution, see David Yearsley, *Bach and*

the Meanings of Counterpoint (Cambridge University Press, 2002).

22. Michael Finnis, liner notes from “Michael Finnis: Etched Bright with Sunlight,” Nicholas Hodges, piano (Cornwall, UK: Metronome Recordings, compact disc MET 1058, 2002): 2–5, p. 3.

23. *Verdi Transcription No. 10* (“Me pellegrina ed orfana,” 1986–1988).

24. Finnis, “Michael Finnis: Etched Bright with Sunlight,” p. 3.

25. Traditional transcriptions are still useful, of course, for pedagogical reasons—for example, simplified versions for student performers and as exercises for aspiring composers, including would-be transdialectors.

26. For an example of the way musical transcription can be used to make Bach accessible to a contemporary audience, consider the recordings of Béla Fleck and the Flecktones—for example, *Bach* Fugue No. 2, from *The Hidden Land*.

27. It is so rare in fact that we thought we had coined it, until we looked it up. The *Oxford English Dictionary* shows the term used as early as 1698, and, interestingly, in 1776 by the English music historian, Charles Burney.

28. See, respectively, lf nexus.com/weareforanewtransdialectionofthekingjamesversionofthebible.htm, www.csulb.edu/~richmond/Shakespeare.html, and http://www.earlymodern texts.com/f_hume.html.

29. Peter Green, *The Poems of Catullus: A Bilingual Edition* (University of California Press, 2005), p. 25.

30. Green, *The Poems of Catullus*, p. 25.

31. Robert Lowell, preface to *Imitations* (1961), reprinted in *Collected Poems*, ed. Frank Bidart and David Gewanter (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), p. 195.

32. Compare Paul Thom: “I believe that there is no absolute criterion on the basis of which we can give a uniform determination of what should be included in a work’s content. The transcriber’s decision about what to count as the work’s content will be relative to his or her purpose.” *The Musician as Interpreter*, p. 11.

33. Since there may be several musical features in the new dialect that exhibit the relevant expressive feature, there may be several mapping functions that ground a given project of transcription. (We could say, alternatively, that the relevant mapping relation is not always a function.) It is important to emphasize, though, that the relevant functions (and associated transcriptive projects) are relativized to musical dialects, and this puts significant constraints on a project’s success conditions. There is, to be sure, *some* mapping function—and so, *some* conceivable project of transdialection—according to which Stravinsky’s *Pulcinella* counts as a transcription of Bach’s *The Musical Offering*. But relative to the respective musical dialects of Stravinsky and Bach, *Pulcinella* clearly and determinately fails to transdi-

lect *The Musical Offering*. We thank Diana Raffman for pushing us on this point.

34. A transdialection can, of course, shed light on the original by selectively highlighting certain of the original’s expressive features while downplaying others. But a musical undertaking can count as a transdialection even when the reexpression engages in a somewhat broader conversation with the original. How broad can this “conversation” be? This is clearly a vague matter, though transdialection does not extend to undertakings whose expressive feel is primarily one of interrogation, much less of subversion or new construction. There is obviously much more to be said here, and we hope to say some of it in a future project. (We thank an anonymous referee for highlighting this issue.) In the meantime, see the appendix for our view of where some other examples fall on the spectrum.

35. As we noted in Section I, there is surely enough indeterminacy in the notion of a transcription that one might label as a “transcription” some far-fetched composition that was not intended as such. Despite this, the intentional condition seems central to the notion, though dropping it would, of course, only strengthen our empirical claims.

36. We do not require, of course, that a transdialector conceive her project with the explicit understanding we have articulated here, much less that she use our label.

37. Josef Straus, “Recompositions by Schoenberg, Stravinsky, and Webern,” p. 327.

38. As another example where our notion might be useful, consider Stephen Davies’s wavering description of Stravinsky’s *Pulcinella*: “Stravinsky does more than reorchestrate Pergolesi’s music, he adds to it. But he does so with a light touch, aiming to add an ‘edge’ to the sound rather than to recompose Pergolesi’s piece. So, though *Pulcinella* has a Stravinsky-like sound one would not associate with Pergolesi, the work is more like a transcription than anything else. It is a work by Pergolesi/Stravinsky, not by Stravinsky alone” (Davies, “Transcription, Authenticity, and Performance,” p. 219). What Davies seems to want to say—what he could say with our terminology—is that *Pulcinella* is determinately a transdialection of Pergolesi’s piece. And we agree that certain movements of *Pulcinella* might, indeed, be classified as transdialections. However, we have not discussed Stravinsky’s Pergolesi-inspired ballet because it does not treat a single work by Pergolesi and because many of Stravinsky’s source movements were not written by Pergolesi, though Stravinsky thought they were.

39. An earlier version of this article was delivered at the ASA Annual Meetings in November 2008. We thank the audience members on that occasion and particularly our commentator, Diana Raffman. For additional comments, suggestions, and helpful examples we thank James Harold, Greg Hayes, Tom Wartenberg, and an anonymous referee from this journal.