Transcribing: between listening, memory, and invention

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Introduction

In 2005, having just completed a degree in philosophy with a thesis on Giordano Bruno, the sixteenth-century heretical philosopher who claimed that the universe was infinite and without a center, I decided to take a more serious approach to my composition studies at the conservatory. Reading Luigi Nono's late writings, I was surprised to discover that we shared a love for Giordano Bruno, and that Nono associated Bruno's ideas about the infinite with his own conception of the infinite possibilities of listening to a single sound. According to Nono (Nono 2018), listening has the potential to put us in contact with infinite *others*, with "other thoughts, other noises, other sonorities, other ideas" that we did not previously know, and that we could not have imagined before. In this sense, listening could be an act of discovery, but as Nono warns us, it is a difficult task, the easier way being "to find ourselves in others":

> Instead of listening to silence, instead of listening to others, we hope to listen to ourselves once more. It is a repetition that becomes academic, conservative, reactionary. […] We love convenience, repetition, myths. We always like to listen to the same thing, with those small differences that allow us to show off our intelligence. Listening to music. It is very difficult. (Nono 2018, 367)

Reflecting on Bruno's infinite worlds, and thinking that composing could be a way to learn this "difficult" art of listening to the infinite possibilities of sound, I came across a small book about the art of transcription: *Arrangements-Derangements*, edited by Peter Szendy (Szendy 2000a). In Szendy's introduction, I found two ideas that have become the roots of my doctoral research: Transcriptions are not mere repetitions of musical works, not different ways to say the same thing, but written traces of acts of listening. They are not (only) repetitions, but *relations* to musical works, critical and active forms of listening that have been written down (Szendy 2000b, 11).

The idea of transcribing as a way of writing down one's own experience of listening resonated with Nono's words and brought me to write my first transcription, *Une petite fleur bleue*, after Girolamo Frescobaldi. *Une petite fleur bleue* is the oldest piece of mine that is still performed, and, listening to it now, I can somehow recognize myself – or, said another way, I do recognize some features of the sound typical of my later works as well. Did my plan of "listening to the other" work out? Also, who was the "other" I was listening to? Frescobaldi? Or, as Nono warned, was I comfortably listening to myself instead of awakening the

ear? Was I repeating myself (even if it was then one of the first times), or Frescobaldi's music? And, if that was a repetition, why did it feel more like a discovery?

This tangle of repetition and discovery, of listening and invention, is what I have been exploring in recent years, both in and through my own compositional practice.

Transcribing

My research topic is about the practice of rewriting music, a practice that is usually called *transcribing* or *arranging*.[1] I will use these two terms interchangeably, namely as a transformation of a musical work, an adaptation usually made for a medium different than that of the original.[2]

My main research question is: What happens when a composer transcribes a musical work? Subsequent questions are: What happens to the piece which is transcribed? And what happens to the transcriber?

Bird's-eye (over)view

The practice of transcribing goes through the whole of Western music history. It does not have one single meaning, as it is a transversal and polyhedral practice that responds to several different needs in different ages and contexts. The history of transcribing has not been written, and as I will show later, the mere definition presents a few issues, depending on the ontological perspective from which one wishes to consider the matter. Before narrowing the field of my research and defining the sides of the practice that I am going to investigate, I will briefly trace an overview of transcribing across Western music history. To do so, I will make use of two relevant lemmas from Grove Music Online, Malcolm Boyd's "Arrangement" (Boyd 2001) and Peter Burkholder's "Borrowing" (Burkholder 2001), as well as of the second of Luciano Berio's Charles Eliot Norton lectures, "Translating Music" (Berio 2006a).

The simplest form of transcription is copying a musical text by hand, and for centuries, this practice has been the means that allowed music to be transmitted

[1] The term "arrangement" is common in an English-speaking context, and it mostly points to the practical and functional aspects of the practice. I prefer the term "transcription" instead, because – as is especially evident in Italian and other Latin languages – it contains the word "script," which points to the act of writing. "Transcribing" is therefore a form of writing that undergoes a process of traversal or crossing, changing from one condition to another. Furthermore, the prefix "trans-" allows the word "transcription" to resonate with words like "translation," "tradition," and the Italian *tradimento* (betrayal). Both "tradition" (*tradizione* in Italian) and *tradimento* are derived from the Latin *tradere*, which means both "to pass on" and "to betray."

[2] I will use the term "original" throughout this thesis to refer to the pre-existent musical work that is then transcribed, and without any implication of the term's more standard sense as a stable and static autonomous entity.

through time. Copying was a common practice in monasteries and courts of the late medieval period, and several manuscripts have survived, some very handsomely penned and decorated. A distinguished example of a scribe is the many-sided figure of Petrus Alamire (ca. 1470-1536), who was also a composer, a diplomat, and a spy. He worked in Mechelen and Brussels at the courts of Margaret of Austria, regent of the Netherlands, her successor Mary of Hungary, and Emperor Charles V. His workshop produced music manuscripts that contain a significant amount of Franco-Flemish polyphony, including several works by Pierre de La Rue, Josquin Desprez, Heinreich Isaac, Jakob Obrecht, Jean Mouton, and Antoine de Févin, among others.

During the Middle Ages, secular melodies were transcribed with liturgic goals in mind, bringing them into a different context. Already in the fourteenth century, as instrumental music began to develop a certain autonomy, there were transcriptions of polyphonic vocal works into intabulations for lute or keyboard. Vocal pieces by composers such as Francesco Landini and Guillaume de Machaut were transcribed for solo polyphonic instruments, and in many cases, the upper voices were elaborated with ornamentation that would fit the new instrumental context. In the sixteenth century, the practice of transcribing vocal music for instruments increased and expanded throughout Europe thanks to the invention of printing and a wider dissemination of instruments among amateurs, and it continued to do so for at least two centuries. Among these published collections of intabulations, we also find a specific form of transcription that anticipated, and probably influenced, the monodic style of the end of the century: polyphonic vocal music transcribed for voice and one polyphonic instrument, such as a keyboard or a plucked instrument, transformed into solo songs with accompaniment. A clear example of this practice is Franciscus Bossinensis's two volumes of *Tenori e contrabassi intabulati col sopran in canto figurato*, published by Ottaviano Petrucci in Venice in 1509 and 1511, respectively. Here, the top voice is left to the singer, while the tenor and bass parts are transcribed for lute, and the alto part is usually omitted (Pelagalli 1997). Bossinensis's books are the first known to present a solo voice part (in mensural notation) separated by the other voices of the composition transcribed in the accompaniment for the lute (in tablature). This "mixed" score format was implemented by Petrucci, who was fully aware of the innovative nature of this format (Fabris 2005, 479-480; Fabris 2018, 78).

Transcribing can also be a tool of stylistic appropriation, and, as Berio underlines, "copying, the simplest form of transcription, was an important learning experience," since, he continues, quoting Walter Benjamin, "the power of a text is different when it is read from when it is copied out" (Berio 2006a, 35). Looking for Benjamin's original sentence, I found an interesting reflection that shed light on the practice of copying texts: "Only the copied text thus commands the soul of him who is occupied with it, whereas the mere reader never discovers the new aspects of his inner self that are opened by the text, that

road cut through the interior jungle forever closing behind it: because the reader follows the movement of his mind in the free flight of daydreaming, whereas the copier submits it to command" (Benjamin 1996, 448). The act of transcribing – even if it only consists of straight copying – allows a deeper relation to a text, as it obliges the transcriber to travel more accurately through the original. The slowness inherent in writing – in contrast to the relative quickness of simply reading – gives access to a temporal dimension that leads to a qualitatively different contact with and involvement in a text.

If we now make a step forward in time from Bossinensis towards the eighteenth century, we can find a young Johann Sebastian Bach, who transcribed for solo harpsichord a large number of concerti by Italian composers including Antonio Vivaldi and Alessandro and Benedetto Marcello, driven by the wish to absorb their instrumental styles (Bietti 2018, 45). In the Baroque, the interest in instrumental music largely increased, and features such as musical roles and hierarchies became relatively stable. A certain homogeneity of instrumental techniques combined with a highly codified notation fostered the practice of transcribing instrumental music from one medium to another. Composers such as Bach were indeed constantly transcribing their own as well as their colleagues' music. Burkholder observes that this practice of reuse or reworking of entire pieces has seemed most foreign to later centuries because of the gradual acceptance of nineteenth-century ideas about originality and plagiarism (Burkholder 2001, § 9). Relevant examples from the end of the eighteenth century are found in Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's transcriptions: He transcribed fugues by Georg Friedrich Händel and J. S. Bach for string trio and string quartet, and he reorchestrated *Messiah* and other works by Handel in order to "bring them closer to the current taste for performances […], inaugurating a tradition of Bach arrangements and Handel reorchestrations that continued for a century and a half" (Burkholder 2001, § 10).

In the nineteenth century, piano transcriptions flourished in the market of sheet music for amateurs, and "innumerable transcriptions brought the orchestral and chamber repertory into the homes of domestic pianists (or piano duettists), but more interesting are those with which the traveling virtuoso dazzled and delighted his audiences" (Boyd 2001, § 4). A key figure of that time is the composer and piano virtuoso Franz Liszt, a considerable proportion of whose piano music, according to musicologist Donald Jay Grout, "consists of transcriptions or arrangements – fantasies on operatic airs, transcriptions of Schubert's songs and Berlioz's and Beethoven's symphonies, Bach's organ fugues, excerpts from Wagner's music dramas, and the like." He continues, writing that "the usefulness these pieces had in their day should not be underrated. They made important music known to many people who had little or no opportunity to become acquainted with the original works; furthermore, Liszt's transference of orchestral idioms to the piano demonstrated new

possibilities for that instrument" (Grout 1980, 582). While Liszt made important contributions to the evolution of piano technique through transcribing, his transcriptions also fulfilled the functions of diffusion and transmission of the original works.

This role of transmission was taken into the twentieth century by the radio and the gramophone, which "largely replaced the piano transcription as a disseminator of the chamber, orchestral and operatic repertory" (Boyd 2001, § 4). Interestingly, Szendy polemizes with Boyd's "wrong reading" of transcriptions in the Romantic era as a means of transmission and communication of the original works, and then as their substitutes (Szendy 2008, 38). Szendy recognizes a critical necessity, not (only) a practical one, in the transcriptions made by composers such as Liszt and Schumann. He claims that it is precisely in starting from this Romantic heritage that it is possible for us to conceive of transcriptions as active and critical relationships with musical works (Szendy 2008, 65). I will write in depth later about Szendy's perspective, as his ideas are a crucial point of departure for my understanding of the practice of transcribing. For the moment, it is important to point out that in the nineteenth century, we clearly find a new historical awareness among musicians that allowed a confrontation with musical heritage and tradition: Both the idea of "the foundation of a musical Museum" (Goehr 1992, 205) and "the canonization of dead composers and the formation of a musical repertoire of transcendent masterpieces" were the result, "both sought and achieved," of a Romantic conception of music (Goehr 1992, 247).
In the twentieth century, the practice of transcription became emancipated from, but also lost, the many practical functions that it previously had; it gained, however, an autonomous artistic dimension (Laterza 2017, 3). When transcribing loses the practical aim of adapting and replacing an original so that it can still be performed and listened to,[3] the interest shifts to *how* the original is transformed by the transcriber instead of remaining focused on the original. That is, a gap emerges between the transcription and the original, a gap that could be simultaneously aesthetic, technical, linguistic, and historical, produced by the transcriber's creative process.

Before narrowing the field of my research and delving into the specific practice of transcribing that I am interested in, and since I will deal with more recent and

[3] The practical aim of allowing a piece to be performed (and heard live) by a formation different from the original one survives in pedagogical contexts. Another context is highlighted in the research of the musician Michael Drapkin. Drapkin's reductions for chamber orchestra of several orchestral works of the classical canon aim to combat the marginalization of classical music in the US (Drapkin 2024). In such a context, transcribers usually strive to minimize the gap between the original and the transcription, erasing their traces and making their intervention (and musical language) as invisible as possible. In contrast, my research focuses on exploring the gap between original and transcription.

contemporary transcriptions throughout this thesis, I will conclude this overview by just mentioning three influential transcriptions from the first part of the twentieth century, created by three of the leading composers of their times: Maurice Ravel's orchestration (1922) of Modest Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* for piano; Anton Webern's orchestration (1935) of J. S. Bach's six-part "Ricercar a 6" from the *Musikalisches Opfer* (1747), which I will discuss extensively in chapter 2 of this thesis; and Igor Stravinsky's *Monumentum pro Gesualdo* (1960), an instrumental version of three madrigals by Carlo Gesualdo da Venosa.

Avoiding strict definitions

As can be concluded from the previous section, rewriting existing music is a practice that has a long and varied history in Western (art) music, and it is a compositional attitude that has different meanings in different ages and within different aesthetical theories. In this sense, it is difficult to trace the borders of this practice using a univocal definition and absolute criteria. I prefer to avoid a strict and normative definition of what a transcription is; instead, I will look at it as a plurality of practices and compositional approaches that have similarities and *family resemblances.*

"Family resemblances" is an expression that Ludwig Wittgenstein introduces in his *Philosophical Investigations* (Wittgenstein 1953, § 65–71) as a shorthand for a particular feature of the way we can use some words to challenge the assumption that they have to be defined by rigidly limited concepts (Fox 2014, 56). A concept may be described as a "complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing" and it may be extended "as in spinning a thread we twist fibre on fibre. And the strength of the thread does not reside in the fact that some one fibre runs through its whole length, but in the overlapping of many fibres" (Wittgenstein 1953, § 67).

Likewise, I will proceed in my investigation starting not from a rigid definition, but instead experimenting with different approaches through my own artistic practice. I will reflect on which possible relations to a work of the past – and thus to musical heritage and tradition in general – are embodied within ways of rewriting a musical work from the past. I argue that such an approach will elucidate the particular perspective of the transcriber at work who establishes a new relationship with a pre-existing musical work. This approach will lead to new insights into an existing practice and a particular understanding of it, rather than contributing to a taxonomy.

Nevertheless, it is useful to narrow the field of my research as clearly as possible. I am interested in the practice of transcribing not when it is an automatic or exclusively practical procedure (as, for example, is the case of piano reductions in the preparation of vocal scores, or of reductions that aim for an orchestral

work to be performed live by a smaller formation without the intention of altering the original), but when the original is filtered through the imagination of the transcriber: When this happens, transcriptions can tell us something about the original work, the transcriber, and their relation. In this sense, I look at transcribing as a creative practice (mainly) performed by transcribers who are also, and mostly, composers, authors of their own music. In this dissertation, I will mostly refer to these composer-transcribers simply as transcribers, without implying with this word any diminutive sense in terms of creativity or artistic value.

Usually, and especially if following a model that considers the original work as a fixed entity to be preserved – a model supported by music philosophers such as Stephen Davies (Davies 2003) and Paul Thom (Thom 2007) – a transcription that is not respectful enough of the original and appears to be too creative, telling us too much about its transcriber, can be considered a new and distinct musical work. I will come back to this matter later, as it is very much entangled with the ontology of musical works and thus of transcriptions. As will become clearer throughout this thesis, I look at transcriptions as *traces* of the relationships that transcribers establish with original works. What I am interested in is not defining what a transcription (or an original) is as a musical object, but exploring and understanding the practice of transcribing from within. From an ontological perspective, a relationship is not conceivable as an object or a fixed entity, as it is a practice and a performance. Regarding transcriptions as traces of a practice will allow me to avoid the (false) problem of looking at them as static entities whose borders are very problematic to define, and to focus instead on what really matters: the dynamic happening of a relationship, a happening that modifies both the original and the transcriber.

As a further limitation, I will only consider transcriptions that arise from an exclusive relation to an existing musical work: i.e., transcriptions that are explicitly designed as such, that are completely derived from an original, and that relate to the original in their totality. Following this path, I will also exclude music that relates to a multiplicity of other works, or that only uses portions of them, as in collages or quotations, though this perspective does not imply any qualitative judgment on those practices per se. I will therefore investigate – by experimenting through my own artistic practice with different approaches to different original musical works – what can happen with the peculiar relationship between transcription and original.

Rewriting music today

Nowadays, thanks to recordings and technological innovations, the relation to the musical past has changed radically as the repertoire has become more accessible and people are able to experience music through domestic and mobile listening (Hosokawa 1984, 165–80; Sterne 2003; Ashby 2010). This vast and constant accessibility has made repertoires from different ages and places

fundamentally contemporary. The musicologist Marilena Laterza writes that the past "[has] started to walk on its own legs, becoming a freely accessible, autonomously available, reviviscent entity" (Laterza 2017, 3). She also observes that, in this context, instead of freely choosing to confront the past themselves, composers today have been forced, each in their own way, to redefine their role towards a secular tradition; consequently, the practice of transcribing has been able to mirror these positionings, and to express cultural and aesthetical needs.

Furthermore, the advent of new technologies has greatly increased the role of postproduction – a term commonly used in media and music productions to refer to all the procedures that take place after the raw material has been recorded – in the arts, and this has also had a strong influence on composers' approach to pre-existing works (Rutherford-Johnson 2017, 256–59). For example, composers such as Marko Nikodijevic and Bernhard Lang have made extensive use of digital technology and have based several of their instrumental works on pieces by other composers. In works such as the haunting *cvetić, kućica … /la lugubre gondola* (2013) for orchestra, after Liszt's famous piano piece, Nikodijevic stretches and compresses other composers' works through algorithmic and fractal computations. This approach produces a melancholic and distorted feeling of a simultaneous involvement with and distance from the music of the past, which, as with a hallucination, appears to be recognizably present, yet is at the same time an illusion, a reflection of something absent.
Lang, in his cycles *Monadologie* (2007-) and *Differenz/Wiederholung* (1998-), influenced by the ideas of the philosopher Gilles Deleuze, chooses very different and well-known existing pieces, processing them algorithmically to produce long, self-generative sequences. He then selects and orchestrates smaller parts of these sequences. In Lang's music, there is a clear shift of focus from the material to the process: In his case, "the fact that so much of the source material is well known matters strangely little because of the minimal impact it has on the final piece," and the mood of the "original is quickly subsumed by Lang's processes and their dizzying, machine-like results" (Rutherford-Johnson 2017, 259).
Another example of the use of a postproduction strategy in composing is Daniela Fantechi's *et ego – tape version* (2018). This fixed-media piece is derived from processed recordings of Fantechi's earlier work for guitar and electronics, *et ego* (2017), played back through one or two transducers placed on the soundboard of a guitar. A transducer is a device that transforms an electrical signal into a mechanical one, sending physical vibrations to the resonant body to which it is attached, so that "the whole body of the guitar – the soundboard and the strings – becomes the resonant space through which the piece is propagated" (Fantechi 2022). The original *et ego* for guitar and electronics is itself based on another musical work, namely Gesualdo's "Tristis est anima mea" from the *Tenebrae Responsoria* (1611). In the tape version, we hear through the body of the guitar the presence (and the absence) of a previous piece, which in turn

evokes distant memories, developing a texture of highly reverberated, "frozen" sounds reminiscent of Gesualdo's vocal music.

The art critic Nicolas Bourriaud refers to postproduction as a way of creating artworks on the basis of already existing works, noting that "since the early nineties, an ever-increasing number of artworks have been created on the basis of pre-existing works; more and more artists interpret, reproduce, re-exhibit, or use works made by others or available cultural products. This art of postproduction seems to respond to the proliferating chaos of global culture in the information age" (Bourriaud 2002, 13). Interestingly, Bourriaud, who is not talking about music here, describes a way of creating works of art on the basis of already existing works, and in this respect, his way of looking at postproduction can be helpful for understanding the practice of transcribing in the context of contemporary art practices and aesthetics. Indeed, postproduction in today's modern media age plays a larger and larger creative role. Bourriaud's description, which does not exclude non-technological forms of postproduction, sounds very close to Grove Music Online's definition of *arrangement* (Boyd 2001): "the reworking of a musical composition." Further, "the word *arrangement* may be applied to any piece of music based on or incorporating pre-existing material." According to this definition, we may certainly apply the term arrangement to postproduction practices such as sampling, remixing, and DJ-ing.

Moreover, in her *This is not a remix*, Margie Borschke describes the remix as "a technical process and a compositional form," and, especially relevant for the current context, "a new arrangement, an alternative mix of a composition." Interestingly, she also specifies that "the prefix *re* (in Latin 'again' or 'back') signifies a remix's reflexive relationship with its source material. It signifies a return, or a repetition of sorts. It is recursive" (Borschke 2017, 33).
We might therefore listen to transcriptions as postproductions, and we might listen to remixes as arrangements. In doing so, all of these concepts resonate with each other, and their borders become unclear, but this entanglement may help in understanding the significance of the practice of transcription among contemporary composers, while relating it to a wider picture.

Transcribing as a form of listening

Transcribing is an activity that presupposes a pre-existing musical work. This presence might be more or less explicit and emerges in different ways. Szendy, in his meditation on listening and on the role of the listener throughout the centuries, attributes to transcriptions exactly the meaning of critical, active relationships with works (Szendy 2008, especially chapter 2). He also writes – and this is a seminal idea that deserves an in-depth reflection – that "what arrangers are signing is above all a listening. *Their* hearing of a work. They may even be the only listeners in the history of music to *write down* their listenings"

(Szendy 2008, 36). Szendy's expression "writing down their listenings" may suggest the act of "fixing" the result of a preceding hearing activity. However, as I will discuss, transcribing is an experimental process where the transcriber's auditory imagination is at work through various activities. From this perspective, writing is itself a form of auditory imagination, rather than merely the fixing of a previous listening experience. Listening is never crystallized and remains "unfinished" even after the writing process is completed, as each listening experience will inevitably be different.

Transcribing establishes relationships with musical works, and it is one of the possible forms of listening enacted by a transcriber. If on the one hand these possible relationships to a musical work – that is, the infinite number of ways of listening to a musical work through transcribing it – are precisely the subject of my research, on the other hand, I do not claim any right to know how the audience *should* listen. The awareness of the fact that a transcription is a *transcription* is not a prerequisite of a good or a proper musical experience (enjoyment, understanding) for an audience, even if it affects and makes the listening experience of the same piece different: It is the listening experience that gives music sense, and if something such as musical meaning exists, it is supplied by the listener. In other words, musical meaning is not in the composer's (or in the transcriber's) intentions, but in the way that the listener engages with the music, "not something concealed within the music as an expressive message but something the ear creates with the help of the music" (Craenen 2014, 248). Furthermore, from my perspective, the transcriber – and I would extend this definition to the composer in general – is in the first place a listener. As the composer Fabien Levy writes, a composer "has to be, despite his lack of distance, his own first and best listener" (Lévy 2013, 205). This perspective strongly resonates with Barthes's ideas expressed in his famous essay "The Death of the Author," in which he writes that the explanation of a work is not to be sought in the man or woman who produced it, since a text does not release "a single theological meaning (the 'message of the Author-God')" but is a "a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash" (Barthes 1977a, 146). Barthes continues, suggesting that there is a place where this multiplicity is collected, namely, in the reader – or in our context, the listener – and that "the reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination" (Barthes 1977a, 148).

Nevertheless, the awareness of listening to a musical work (a transcription) that relates to another musical work (the original) certainly has a relevant impact on how we listen, and this awareness has the potential to articulate the listening experience differently: It might create a triangulation between the listener, the transcriber, and the transcribed piece. It might draw our attention to the *relation* that the transcriber establishes with a musical work. In this sense, Rutherford-

Johnson, writing about postproduction, describes "a fundamental shift in creative priority" – and, I would add, in what an audience is possibly listening to – "from what is made to what is done *to* what is made" (Rutherford-Johnson 2017, 257).

Szendy's perspective on transcribing as a form of listening is revealing, but he does not give us a detailed description of the actual activities of a transcriber who is listening. Reflecting on his idea, and on the practice of writing and rewriting music, I find that what he calls listening might in fact refer to a number of different practices. Listening is not simply a receptive activity, but a truly performative and creative act. In this context, it produces traces, it produces new works. Along this line of thought, David Lewin describes musical perception as an embodied action that manifests itself in a number of creative responses such as performing and composing. And referring to music making as a mode of musical perception, he paraphrases Harold Bloom's assertions about the meaning of a poem, saying that "a poem can only be perceived in the making of another poem, a poem not itself" (Lewin 1986, 381).[4] This idea opens the space to think of transcription as a manifestation of musical perception, as a performative and creative response to a musical work,[5] as a trace of an activity that involves both perception and imagination, a trace that is audible in itself.

If a transcription is the transformation of a musical work, according to Szendy, the composer's listening is an activity that perceives and reimagines, able to transform and to make musical choices. The music philosopher Marcel Cobussen, reflecting on the role that imagination plays in the experience of listening to music, writes that "listening not only encompasses the aural perception of a reality, the outside world, but also a creative interplay with that perception in the mind" (Cobussen 2019, 126). He calls this process "imagining-through-listening," and this expression describes the ability of hearing double, "of thinking about the oscillations of different listenings that inhabit our inner ear."

[4] Bloom's original assertion is: "The meaning of a poem can only be a poem, but another poem, a poem not itself." It is very interesting to notice in this perspective the consonance of Bloom's thought with Wittgenstein's sentence on understanding, on which I will reflect later in chapter 1 (Wittgenstein 1953, § 531; Bloom 1973, 70). Berio also draws on this idea when he writes that "the most meaningful analysis of a symphony is another symphony" (Berio 2006c, 125).

[5] An active and operative attitude towards music is also central in Roland Barthes's idea of a *musica practica*: "[…] one must put oneself in the position or, better, in the activity of an operator, who knows how to displace, assemble, combine, fit together; in a word (if it is not too worn out), who knows how to structure (very different from constructing or reconstructing in the classic sense). Just as the reading of the modern text consists not in receiving, in knowing or in feeling that text, but in writing it anew, in crossing its writing with a fresh inscription, so too reading this Beethoven is *to operate* his music, to draw it (it is willing to be drawn) into an unknown *praxis*" (Barthes 1977b, 153).

In the last pages of his book *Composing under the Skin*, the composer Paul Craenen focuses on the corporality of the composing subject, giving a concrete description of the multiple activities that result in what we call composing, and that, in this context, I could also apply to the activity of transcribing:

> Filming the composing body thus provides us with an image of a body with changing identities. It is a body that alternates between the positions of a planner, improviser, listener, performer, technician, or official manager of the composer's thinking. It makes predictions, develops them, listens to them, and then tries to capture the object of its enthusiasm in writing. To succeed in this, the composing body uses notation techniques; it *measures* and *projects* the inner movements of its musical imagination. (Craenen 2014, 244)

I believe that composing and transcribing are not very different in light of these reflections about musical imagination and the creative entanglement of listening and imagination. What does make transcribing different is the (more or less) explicit presence of another musical work to deal with.

Transcriptions as relations to musical works and Derrida

Once more, in my research I am interested in looking at the practice of transcribing as a form of listening, and more precisely, as creating a new relation to an already existing musical work, a relation that, as I have illustrated above, establishes itself in a composer's musical imagination: The *other work* is transformed; it is reimagined, reinvented, rewritten.

In order to consider in a more articulated way the issue of the relation to the *other*, I will refer to two essays of the philosopher Jacques Derrida, as they can provide me with the tools to better frame the topic and at the same time to put it in a wider perspective: "At This Very Moment in This Work Here I Am" (Derrida 2007a) and "Psyche: Invention of the Other" (Derrida 2007b).

In the first essay, dedicated to his friend, the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, Derrida presents the idea that paying tribute to someone does not necessarily imply that one should imitate the person to whom that tribute is paid. Derrida almost inverts the whole idea: Truly honoring something or someone means that one should do injustice to them. I will read and extrapolate a few passages, keeping in mind the context of my research: a composer transcribes a musical work, they listen to the other, and enter into a relationship with this other. I also bear in mind the polarity expressed by Nono between listening to the other and listening to the same – that is, to ourselves.

First of all, for Derrida, the relation with the other implies the ever-threatening risk of "betrayal" or of "contamination." This risk cannot be eluded since it is "always threatening." Besides, contamination is not an "accidental evil" or a risk but "a fate that must be assumed" (Derrida 2007a, 167 and 185).

Just as Nono was asking how it is possible to listen to the other and not to ourselves, Derrida asks himself how the "wholly other," which is "incommensurably heterogeneous to the […] discourse of the same" could be inscribed within the language of the same, "within its syntax and lexicon, under its law" (Derrida 2007a, 150). He answers that "it is less a matter of exceeding this language than of dealing otherwise with its own possibilities […] so that the fault, the one that consists in inscribing the wholly other in the empire of the same, alters the same enough" (Derrida 2007a, 150).
Derrida invites us to consider the relation to the other – to another musical work in my case – in an ethical perspective that puts responsibility at the center of listening, reading, and writing practices. The language of the same, which is a language that lets us listen to, and repeat, only ourselves, is "foreign or allergic to the Other" (Derrida 2007a, 155). Nevertheless, it is the language that we have, and we then have to prepare an opening into it for the other to come. This language, and our listening, can be open to the other: It can be altered and contaminated, revealing the presence of an other, another musical work, even as a "fault" or an absence. This approach requires openness and availability for listening and for being transformed by this experience.[6] This openness to the other is for Derrida an ethical openness, a responsibility that always hides the possibility (and the freedom) of betrayal (Derrida 2007a, 158).

From this perspective, I am interested in a practice of transcribing that does not consider the original as a thing to be used and integrated within a transcriber's language, but as the other that has to be listened to. I look at this practice as a relation with the other, as a practice that, at the risk of betrayal, contaminates the language of the other with that of the transcriber:

> Another language comes to disturb the first one. It doesn't inhabit it, but haunts it. Another text, the text of the other, without ever appearing in its original language, arrives in silence with a more or less regular cadence to dislocate the language of translation, to convert the version, turn it inside out, bend it to the very thing it pretends to import. It [*Elle*] disassimilates it. (Derrida 2007a, 152)

The ethics of transcribing will first of all transform the original musical work. But Derrida's thoughts might reach further: Considering the practice of transcribing in this light, what gets transformed is not, or not only, the original, but rather musical language itself: concurrently, the transcriber's musical language is transformed by the opening to the other, by listening to it. This ethical perspective brings us very far from the (normative) question about what

[6] About a possible connection between listening and ethics, see the first chapter of Cobussen and Nielsen's *Music and Ethics* where the authors argue that "a hospitable, caring attitude creates a space between music and listener where ethics can happen" (Cobussen and Nielsen 2012, 10).

a transcription is, and it shifts the focus to what could happen within the relationship that defines the practice of transcribing. Transcriptions become objects that are ontologically problematic and ethically ambiguous, as they are events or performances, and not solid and present beings.

In a passage of the same essay, I found ideas that were very helpful for me to frame the relation between the original, that in this context is the other, and the transcriber's listening, their musical invention:

> Your reading is thus no longer a simple reading that deciphers the sense of what is already found in the text; it has a limitless (ethical) initiative. It [*Elle*] obligates itself freely starting from the text of the Other, which today one might say, wrongly, it *produces* or *invents*. [...] And even if you don't read *as one must* [comme il faut], as EL says one must read, still, beyond the dominant interpretation (that of domination) that is one with the philosophy of grammar and the grammar of philosophy, the Relation of dislocation *will have taken place,* there is nothing you can do about it any longer, and without knowing it, you will have read what will have made only possible, starting from the Other, what is happening: "at this very moment." (Derrida 2007a, 161)

Listening (reading) is not a simple listening that only deciphers. It is not about listening only to what is already in the original (in the text): Listening produces or invents the text of the other. And even if we do not listen "as one must," the relationship "will have taken place," and this very listening will have made possible what is happening, "starting from the other."

A composer, while transcribing, (re)invents the original. They allow it to say things that the original maybe never said but that are nevertheless present in the musical text and have been made possible by the fact that this new relationship transpired. When speaking about their own works, both Luciano Berio and Dieter Schnebel point out the potential of transcriptions to let unsaid things emerge. In the second of his Charles Eliot Norton lectures, Berio states that a transcription can "make explicit the virtualities that are contained in the original, as if one were dealing with a natural, pre-existing structure, and sought to extract inherent forms and hidden patterns" (Berio 2006b, 36).[7] Schnebel, talking about his project *Re-Visionen I*, seven rearrangements of classical works, describes transcription as "an attempt to tap into the potential of the past, to carve out its perhaps still undiscovered possibilities" (Schnebel 1998, 12). In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze presents the vivid image of works of art immersed in their own virtuality, defining the virtual writing as "opposed not to the real but to the

[7] Here I quote, and translate, Berio from the Italian version. The English version does not use the term "virtualities," simply skipping that part of the sentence, surprisingly.

actual. The virtual is fully real in so far as it is virtual." In this sense, "the virtual must be defined as strictly a part of the real object – as though the object had one part of itself in the virtual into which it plunged as though into an objective dimension" (Deleuze 1994, 208–9). Transcribing has the potential to make hidden aspects of an original work audible, to actualize some of its virtualities. Considering these ideas on virtuality from the perspective of the transcriber's language, transcribing can also make musical works from the past virtually present in contemporary music, allowing the past works to (re-)appear, repeated but different, like ghosts. I will come back to this idea, when discussing my own experiences of transcribing.

Let us now look in more detail at what Derrida means by "inventing" through a passage in "Psyche: Invention of the Other," where, again, Nono's words about listening seem to resonate:

> Our current lassitude results from the invention of the same and the possible, from the invention that is always possible. It is not against this possible invention but beyond it that we are trying to reinvent invention itself, another invention, or rather an invention of the other that would come, through the economy of the same, indeed, while miming or repeating it ('*Par le mot* par . . .'), to offer a place for the other, to let the other come. I am careful to say 'let it come,' because if the other is precisely what is not invented, the initiative or deconstructive inventiveness can consist only in opening, in uncloseting, destabilizing foreclusionary structures so as to allow for the passage toward the other. But one does not make the other come, one lets it come by preparing for its coming. (Derrida 2007b, 44–45)

It is important to underline that there is an invention of the same, beyond which (and not against which) it is possible to invent the other. But since the other is "precisely what is not invented," then the invention consists in an "opening" that allows its passage. Derrida insists on calling it invention "because one gets ready for it, one makes this step destined to let the other come, *come in*" (Derrida 2007b, 39). Here Derrida tells us that writing means to leave room for the other, and that invention, and then listening, are precisely this availability to contamination. Very interestingly, "Psyche: Invention of the Other" ends in the form of a dialogue and with an invitation to polyphony:

> "What do you mean by that? That the other will have been only an invention, the invention of the other?"
> "No, that the other is what is never inventable and will never have waited for your invention. The call of the other is a call to come, and that happens only in multiple voices."

The other is not assimilated to the language of the transcriber, it rather "disassimilates it." The other is not "only an invention." Transcribing means creating room so that the other can come and resonate, and this can happen only "in multiple voices."

Derrida's ideas have helped me to reframe the practice of transcribing, and to shed a new light on the questions that I ask in my research while listening, transcribing, and reflecting on them. What happens to the original work? What happens to my musical invention? What kind of relation am I establishing with the other work? Am *I* doing that, or can I only prepare myself and an audience for the other to come?

Paying respect

A central topic in the discussions around transcriptions is the fidelity to the original, the respect for it. I have argued that, following Derrida, this topic can be addressed in a completely different way: Transcribing means to run the "always threatening risk of betrayal," and, even more, "[i]t would then be necessary that beyond any possible restitution my gesture operates without debt, in absolute ingratitude. The trap is that I then pay homage, the only possible homage" (Derrida 2007a, 146). In this way, the question of how to pay respect to the original is still a central (ethical) matter, but a very different one. To truly pay respect means to operate in "absolute ingratitude," not imitating, but letting one's language be contaminated by the other. The original appears transformed in the transcription, but what happens simultaneously is that the language of the transcriber transforms and is contaminated by the relation with the other.

Contamination is an important concept here. The other (the original) contaminates the transcriber's language and is itself contaminated by this contact. In his book *Profanations*, the philosopher Giorgio Agamben writes that contamination is a form of profanation, "a touch that disenchants and returns to use what the sacred had separated and petrified" (Agamben 2007, 83–84). He continues by stating that the impossibility of using, of dwelling, of experiencing, has its emblematic place in the museum. The practice of transcribing, betraying the originals, contaminating and being contaminated by them, could then serve to take them out of what Lydia Goehr calls "the imaginary museum of musical works" (Goehr 1992), returning them to a new dimension of use.

The ethical relation to a musical work is further explored by Bruce Ellis Benson. He claims that the moral obligation of being faithful to the work (and to its composer) comes from the ideal of the musical work as an autonomous entity that needs respect and fidelity to be preserved. In contrast to this ideal, he proposes the idea of "being in dialogue" with musical works, dialogue as a creative and performative practice. This approach also frees the transcriber from the dichotomy between being faithful and unfaithful, and it renders irrelevant the question of where a transcription stops being a transcription and becomes a different, independent, original piece (Benson 2003, 10). It shifts the focus to a

dialogue that, as Derrida writes, happens "only in multiple voices." The attempt to both allow the presence of and engage in dialogue with these other voices – other ideas, other works, other languages – has a central role in my experience with the practice of transcribing, which will be the focus of later chapters in this thesis.

Heritage

The practice of transcribing – understood as engaging with an existing musical work – can be a powerful tool to explore possible relations to the past and to musical cultural heritage. The topic of the relation to the past, both as individuals and as a community, is vast. Looking at and reflecting on this relation through a specific artistic practice and concrete musical experiences can provide an original perspective and relevant insights.

A strong image describing the complex relationship that Europe has with its own past and tradition is provided by Agamben in the last chapter of his *The Man Without Content*: "The interruption of tradition, which is for us now a *fait accompli*, opens an era in which no link is possible between old and new, if not the infinite accumulation of the old in a sort of monstrous archive or the alienation effected by the very means that is supposed to help with the transmission of the old." He clarifies that this "breaking of tradition does not at all mean the loss or devaluation of the past," but that, quite the opposite, "the past has lost its transmissibility, and so long as no new way has been found to enter into a relation with it, it can only be the object of accumulation from now on" (Agamben 1999, 107-108). According to Agamben, we witness the "monstrous" accumulation of our cultural heritage, and, at the same time, the impossibility of an active and living relation to it. As mentioned earlier, this impossibility – that is, an impossibility of "free use" – "has its emblematic place in the Museum" (Agamben 2007, 83). Precisely this "growing museification of culture" is an evident sign of the crisis that Europe is experiencing with its own past (Agamben 2017, 10). Agamben claims as a peculiarity the fact that Europeans "can gain access to their truth only by means of a confrontation with the past, only by settling accounts with their history." And, he continues, "if art has today become for us an eminent figure – perhaps *the* eminent figure – of this past, then the question that we must never stop posing is: what is the place of art in the present?" (Agamben 2017, 9-10). Agamben's urgent question resonates with the topic of my research: If musical works are eminent figures of our musical past, and they are treated as entities to be preserved in a museum, how can we return them to free use, in order to establish that active and living relation to them? How can we "disenchant" what the sacred has separated and petrified? Agamben suggests that "the passage from the sacred to the profane can […] also come about by means of an entirely inappropriate use (or, rather, reuse) of the sacred: namely, play" (Agamben 2007, 74–75).

I see the practice of transcribing as one of the possible games that can be played to make use – even an "entirely inappropriate" one – of musical works from the past. Transcriptions are noteworthy because, when listening to them, we listen to the transcribers' active relation to musical works, as transcriptions are the traces of their listenings (Szendy 2008). The matter of the relation to an original musical work is an ethical one, as it implies the relation to the other. It is precisely in this sense that Cobussen writes about ethicality in the contact between music and listener: "Through attentive listening, with an attitude that at least endeavours to encounter music with respect, with openness, with responsiveness, a listener can meet an otherness without reducing it to the order of the same" (Cobussen and Nielsen 2012, 33). In other words, a transcriber can enter into a dialogue (Benson 2003) with a musical work in order to open a space that allows the other to come and contaminate their language (Derrida 2007a), so that the other – the original – could in turn be contaminated and then exit from the separate sphere of the sacred, becoming liberated from the condition of museification (Agamben 2007).

In my research, I have experimented with various ways of engaging with musical works from the Western repertoire. My selection of these works as well as examples from other composers' and performers' work referenced in the thesis did not aim for exhaustiveness. Instead, I engaged with a repertoire I felt invited to respond to. I will argue that the practice of transcribing not only transforms and reveals unheard aspects of a musical work but also reveals much about the transcriber. My choice of repertoire for this research was guided by my desire to have my musical language and imagination influenced and contaminated by specific works. These are works that I both recognized and actively chose as part of my musical heritage. I recognized their potential to unfold for me as a composer, and they are works I resonated with and wished to share. But did I choose them, or was I invited and chosen by the musical works? Is musical heritage something one can (re)invent, or is it more about recognizing it? Engaging with the (musical) past is an active choice, but it is also impossible not to relate to the past. I chose to engage with it, and at the same time, I felt invited to do so. It was calling me as much as I was calling it.
My choices of repertoire were personal, driven by a desire to engage deeply with the main tradition that shaped my background and studies in Italy and the Netherlands. My artistic involvement and situatedness as a musician were conditions enabling deep engagement, as is the case in any artistic practice. Furthermore, although I dealt with music strongly connected to my own musical language, my research aims to provide insights and theoretical tools for thinking about the practice of transcribing in new ways, and to contribute to others imagining new steps to undertake, following their own musical and cultural attitudes and interests.

Contribution

Music is a form of thought in its own right, and it provides a specific form of knowledge. In this thesis, transcriptions – both mine and those of other transcribers – are integral to reflection. In the presentation of this research, I have situated my particular approach to transcribing within a broader discourse, engaging with the works, reflections, and ideas of composers, performers, artistic researchers, musicologists, philosophers, poets, and writers.

Transcribing has a long history and it remains pervasive in contemporary music. This practice, deeply intertwined with composers' stances on the musical past and their cultural heritage, is a relevant subject. Creative engagements with the past are evident not only in transcribing but also in a variety of musical practices such as sampling, collage, and quotation. Moreover, there are numerous ways for composers to let the past resonate in the present without using an existing musical work as a point of departure, e.g. by using specific techniques, or by being inspired by musical forms or genres, or by another composer's oeuvre. The topic of musical influence, whether technical, poetic, conscious, or unconscious, is vast. Within this broad landscape, transcribing presents a distinctive approach to engaging with the musical past, offering a focused investigation. As a transcriber, the engagement with a single and concrete pre-existing musical work indeed allows for framing and exploring this relationship in a clear, experimental setting. Furthermore, the explicit presence of the original work allows for a detailed comparison with the transcription.

I experimented with different transcribing strategies, documenting each step of the process. My investigation, grounded in my situatedness as a practitioner, revealed deeper insights not obtainable through any other form of inquiry. In my research, transcribing served as a means to reflect on themes such as otherness and the relationship between self and other. Additionally, through my artistic practice, I have been able to address fundamental questions, such as what constitutes a musical work and what defines it as original. Furthermore, transcribing, from its peculiar theoretical and practical perspective, questions topics such as the relationship between listening and musical invention, originality, tradition, fidelity, and the role of repertoire and its museification. As a composer and artistic researcher, it is my aim to provide a deeper understanding of this practice and relevant insights for a broader, more articulated context. These insights could have significant implications for discourses on contemporary music, musical cultural policies, and critical aspects of classical music education. The results of my research may contribute to the ongoing debate on the practice of transcribing and, more broadly, to the discourse on the relationship with musical tradition and heritage.

In the thesis, I have explored an expanded set of research questions: What happens when a composer transcribes a musical work? What happens when a transcriber enters into dialogue with another musical work? What happens

within these relationships that renders transcriptions written traces of listening? What happens to the original musical works? How are they adapted and transformed? How are they listened to? But also: What happens to the transcriber? What happens to their language, and how is it transformed? Which questions, reflections, ideas, and musical issues arise while transcribing?
While my artistic practice is inevitably personal, others should be able to benefit from and build upon the knowledge and insights generated by my research, including its theoretical framework, to explore new paths and perspectives.

This thesis is divided into five chapters, each dealing with one specific experience of transcribing that I had between 2005 and 2022, with the exception of chapter 2, which is dedicated to Webern's *Fuga Ricercata* (1935), his orchestration of J. S. Bach's "Ricercar a 6" from the *Musikalisches Opfer* (1747). Each chapter outlines a further stage in the progression of my research and presents a different approach to transcribing, along with various issues and strategies for engaging with a musical work. Additionally, each chapter offers reflections and remarks that consider and develop concepts and ideas from the literature and other transcriptions that I have studied.
It might seem that the relationship between my transcriptions and the originals becomes progressively looser as my artistic freedom expands. However, as I will argue, what happens is actually quite the opposite: A deeper relation corresponds to a greater transformation, both for the musical work and for the transcriber. By transcribing in "absolute ingratitude," and in assuming the "risk of betrayal," I prepared a space for the original musical works to contaminate and transform my language as a transcriber.

Chapter 1 is dedicated to *Une petite fleur bleue* (2005), a short transcription for string quartet of one of the pieces from Girolamo Frescobaldi's *Fiori Musicali* (1635) for organ. There, I begin my reflections on transcribing as a learning tool and a form of understanding, and I consider the questions of what constitutes an original and what it means to pay respect to it. I also reflect on the role of slowness in the quality of the relationship with a musical work, both for the transcriber and the other listeners (i.e., the performers and the audience). Furthermore, I discuss my idea of creating a sound layer through which to listen to the original work. I do this particularly in relation to Dieter Schnebel's *Schubert-Phantasie* (1978), and to the idea that transcribing has the ability of staging the mediation of an original work.

Chapter 2 is dedicated to Anton Webern's *Fuga Ricercata* (1935), his orchestration of J. S. Bach's "Ricercar a 6" from the *Musikalisches Opfer* (1747), which was a reference for my work at the time. I discuss Webern's work as a model in showing how transcribing transforms an original work, actualizing some of its virtualities, and I reflect in particular on the idea of looking at the polyphonic

texture of a piece as a net of individual points that could be connected in new ways, thereby actualizing new constellations.

Chapter 3 deals with the desire for a more intimate relation with the original and, simultaneously, a wider artistic freedom. It presents *Hortense* (2013), a string trio that is a transcription of Carlo Gesualdo da Venosa's madrigal for five voices "Languisce al fin." The presence of a poetic text in Gesualdo's madrigal plays a central role in my process of creating an instrumental transcription, becoming a map through which I navigate Gesualdo's music. In this chapter, I delve into themes such as intimacy with the original work, the ability of transcriptions to account for the (inevitably) mediated perception of an original piece, and the possibility of embracing Webern's legacy regarding transcribing. I connect these themes to concrete musical choices, both technical and aesthetic, by discussing my own work and examining the work of other composer-transcribers such as Stefano Gervasoni, Stefano Scodanibbio, Richard Barrett, and Salvatore Sciarrino. Furthermore, I consider musicologist Marilena Laterza's use of the philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer's ideas to present transcriptions as "incarnated acts of interpretation."

Chapter 4 is about my work *Una notte* (2016) for voice and orchestra, and its relation to Franz Schubert's Lied "Der Doppelgänger" (1828). With *Una notte*, I explore more radical possibilities in the utilization of a poetic text within a musical work to shape its transcription. The theme of the double and the unsettling encounter with another self is central to Schubert's Lied, and in this chapter, I reflect on how a transcription can serve as a double of an original work, revealing and actualizing some of its unexpressed virtualities.
In order to reflect on my practice and put it in a wider context, I discuss Hans Zender's *Schuberts "Winterreise"* and especially his ideas about how it could be considered a "composed interpretation." Furthermore, I examine the work of performers and artistic researchers Heloisa Amaral and Lucia D'Errico, who have explored innovative performance practices for Western notated art music, challenging the boundaries of freedom for classically trained musicians. The chapter concludes with an examination of Fabio Nieder's transcription of the same Schubert Lied, offering a noteworthy example of a distinct approach by another composer.

Chapter 5 presents *Tutto chiudi negli occhi* (2018) for string quartet. In this transcription, I return to the music of the Renaissance, dissecting the work *Nymphes des bois, or La déploration sur la mort de Johan Ockeghem* (1497), by Josquin Desprez. In this chapter, I synthesize the results of my research by using the findings and insights from my previous transcriptions while also delving deeper into the theme of the relationship between otherness and double that emerged in the previous chapter. Considering an essay by Sigmund Freud, and writings by Jorge Luis Borges, Ovid, Heinrich Heine, and Emily Dickinson, I reflect on

the other as something both intimate and foreign, always already virtually present within the self rather than opposed to it. I reflect on my transcribing process, describing how Raymond Queneau's novel *The Blue Flowers*, with its alternating chapter structure wherein the main characters dream of each other, served as a blueprint for my engagement with Josquin's music, leading me to view dreaming as a model for the relationship with the other, and also leading to a gradual blurring of the boundary between transcribing and composing. This chapter concludes with the examination of two more transcriptions of the same work by Josquin undertaken by Daan Janssens and Stefano Gervasoni.

Methodology

My research is an investigation into and through the practice of transcribing music, in order to expand the knowledge and understanding of this creative practice. I have carried out this research through my own artistic practice of transcribing, reflecting on which possible relations to a work of the past – and therefore to musical heritage and tradition in general – are embodied within specific ways of listening and reinventing music. My research methodology involved three main activities intended as distinct moments of the same process that influence each other in a constant feedback loop: First, my involvement as a composer in experimenting with the practice of transcribing existing musical works; second, a study of the existing literature by musicians, artistic researchers, musicologists, philosophers, and writers; and finally, a reflection on specific works, on different approaches among composers, and on my own artistic experiments.

I use different styles of language and media to articulate my thoughts and ideas, and to present the specific knowledge embodied in the artistic processes that are the object of my research. While an academic language serves my reflections and conclusions, I sometimes need a more intimate and subjective tone when considering my own artistic process, in order to avoid an unachievable claim of neutral objectivity. Scores and recordings of my artistic experiments are a relevant part of my research output and have been integrated into the discourse of my dissertation, being themselves research questions or conclusions in their own right.