The Tradition of Illusion

Guitar Arrangement as a Post-Canonical Patchwork

KATALIN KOLTAI

Abstract

THIS PAPER PROPOSES an underpinning terminology for scholarly discussions of contemporary arrangement practices in the field of classical guitar performance. The introduction provides some historical foundations for the topic, aiming to present the roots of different approaches and methods in the work of important guitar arrangers. The paper continues by contextualizing arrangement processes within linguistics and language philosophy, discussing the topic of translation, and giving an overview of relevant terminologies. The centre of the paper is the theoretical investigation of arrangement and the identification of translating acts related to musical space, instrumental choreography, texture, timbre, or a combination of those, demonstrated in various examples by contemporary guitar arrangers.

Glossary of Terms

Affordances. De Souza, in his exploration of instrumental spaces, cognitive processes, and perception of instrumental performance,[1] applies the concept of *affordance* as proposed by the founder of ecological psychology, James J. Gibson.[2] An instrument's affordances are its possibilities for action. For example, the violin can play long sustained notes, and a six-stringed guitar can play a maximum of six notes simultaneously.

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[1] Jonathan De Souza, *Music at Hand: Instruments, Bodies, and Cognition*, Oxford Studies in Music Theory (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017); Jonathan De Souza, "Fretboard Transformations," *Journal of Music Theory* 62, no. 1 (2018): 1–39; Jonathan De Souza, "Guitar Thinking," *Soundboard Scholar* 7 (2021): 1–23, doi.org/10.56902/SBS.2021.7.7.

[2] James Jerome Gibson, *The Senses Considered as Perceptual Systems*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1966); James Jerome Gibson, "The Theory of Affordances," in *Perceiving, Acting, and Knowing: Toward an Ecological Psychology*, ed. Robert Shaw and John Bransford, (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1977), 67–82.

Instrumental space. Merleau-Ponty describes a musical instrument as a *space* where the musician settles in.[3] This instrumental space has certain affordances, and the musician's perception and cognition of music are strongly affected by them. For example, the guitarist operates in the space of six parallel strings of the same length and nineteen or twenty frets, where the left hand can reach a maximum of five to seven frets, depending on its position on the fingerboard.

Choreography. I use this term when describing extramusical content, such as embodiment and sequences of movements, and its interrelation with the musical text. The term *instrumental choreography* is thoroughly discussed in the collaborative research of Gorton, Shaw-Miller, and Heyde.[4] Clarke et al.[5] define it as "physical movements of the hands that can be built into the musical materials for dramatic effect." In this paper, however, instrumental choreography is always considered relevant to the observation of instrumental performance, whether "dramatic" in its effect or not.

Instrumental idiom and **idiomatic**. Based on the Greek root of the word "idiom," referring to one's own self or one's own property, the phrase *instrumental idiom* suggests that peculiar instrumental features influence how the music is organized. This peculiarity is strongly connected to an instrument's affordances. A composition is *idiomatic* when it meets these affordances.

Idiosyncratic. I use this term for musical textures that contradict the affordances of a specific instrument. When material is *idiosyncratic*, it presents a higher level of resistance throughout the performance; indeed, in some cases the realization is not possible at all, as the text exceeds the idiomatic boundaries of the instrument.

Transcription and **arrangement**. In this paper, these two terms are used interchangeably to refer to the transference of a composition from one medium to another. This transference includes different levels and types of creative input on behalf of the arranger. I acknowledge the Lisztian distinction between transcription, reminiscence, and paraphrase, in the sense that different types of arrangement processes involve different degrees of recomposition. And yet even in the case of a literal transcription, the process of arrangement may not be straightforward, as the change of medium forces the arranger to rethink the relationship between texture and instrumental idiom and to recompose some of the material to create the illusion of a literal transcription.

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3 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald A. Landes (London: Routledge, 2012).

4 David Gorton, Simon T. Shaw-Miller, and Neil Heyde, "Instrumental Choreography: Gesture and Performance in Gorton's Capriccio for Solo Cello," in *La musique et ses instruments*, ed. Michèle Castellengo and Hugues Genevois (Sampzon: Editions Delatour France, 2013), 485–96.

5 E. F. Clarke et al., "Fluid Practices, Solid Roles? The Evolution of *Forlorn Hope*," in *Distributed Creativity: Collaboration and Improvisation in Contemporary Music*, ed. E. F. Clarke and M. Doffman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 1–22.

Therefore, I use the terms *transcription* and *arrangement* as synonyms. When there is an advanced level of compositional input in the arranging process, it is referred to as a *compositional arrangement*.

1   The Guitar's Patchwork Canon: Historical Introduction

"I was eleven or twelve years old when the experience that turned me into a musician occurred,"[6] says György Kurtág in an interview, revealing how hearing Schubert's "Unfinished" Symphony on the radio programme had a pivotal role in his life. Many musicians recall something similar, the memory of listening to a particular piece that had a transformative effect on them. I grew up in an environment of classical music in the former Eastern Bloc, where the status of the musical canon was barely questioned. As a child, my primary connection to "classical music" was listening to the "greatest Western classical composers" and a selection of twentieth-century composers from the former Soviet Union. Mesmerized by the music I heard, I decided to become a musician at a very young age and started playing the guitar, the only instrument accessible to me. A few years later, I gradually recognized the gap between the music I listened to and the guitar repertoire. While interviewing guitarist arrangers, I sensed a similar experience; many of us desired to play the music we had loved since childhood, but it hadn't been written for the guitar.

It is thus hardly surprising that transcription and arrangement have come to form a crucial part of the guitar's canon. This impersonal dialogue with the musical text compensates, perhaps, for the lack of authentic partnership between guitarists and canonical Western classical composers. While the guitar is largely absent from historical research on composer-performer collaboration, it features prominently in a new and fast-growing field that is devoted to the study of *patterns of collaboration* in contemporary music.[7] The fluid transformation of these patterns throughout different musical eras reflects social and cultural changes, such as the shifting status of composers and conductors in the implicit hierarchy of musicians' roles. Similarly, the transformation of the praxis of arrangement is highly dependent on these kinds of cultural and aesthetic shifts.

Collaboration between composers and performers has always been an important factor in the development of the canonical instrumental repertoire. Despite the various historical documents outlining instances of close collaboration between Romantic composers and instrumental virtuosos,[8] Eduard Hanslick, one of the most important aesthetic theorists of the period, seemingly denies the existence of such

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6 Bálint András Varga, ed., *György Kurtág: Three Interviews and Ligeti Homages* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2009), 4.

7 Vera John-Steiner, *Creative Collaboration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Morgan Buckley, "Creative Performer Agency in the Collaborative Compositional Process" (PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 2018).

8 For example, we can examine the profound musical partnership between Joseph Joachim and Brahms through their many letters discussing idiomatic questions of Brahms's Violin

collaborations. On his view, the composer's genius alone creates the masterwork, separate from the instrumental virtuoso who performs it. The role of an instrumental collaborator in his description is limited to polishing "the artistic realization … checking, gauging, revizing."[9] Nevertheless, even when the prevailing aesthetic view does not see the creative process as shared between composer and performer, collaborating instrumentalists may have a significant influence on the idiomatic features of a piece, and the resulting canonical masterpieces in turn become agents of the evolution of instrumental idioms.

As for the guitar, since the start of the Romantic era, its journey has been quite different from that of instruments more firmly established within classical music. Much of its culture has been isolated, including its repertoire and performance tradition,[10] its "unique relation to musical amateurism,"[11] and the historical and gendered stereotype of the guitar as a "limited instrument…, particularly among the fair sex."[12]

On the positive side, the instrument was primarily acknowledged for its flexible nature, suitable for accompanying singers performing famous tunes.[13] This tradition resulted in a wide variety of arrangements, including fashionable operatic arrangements. Thus it is not surprising that Carulli, in his treatise on harmony,[14] makes his demonstrations through guitar arrangements of piano or orchestral accompaniments. The guitar's flexibility as an accompanying instrument that could perform "entire operas in drawing room versions"[15] shows how much the instrument is an arranger by nature. This, of course, seen in the context of the evolution of the idiom, also comprises the practice of figured bass and the improvisatory practice of song accompaniment in folk music, both practices strongly related to arrangement.

From various methods and letters of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, we can observe how guitar composers saw arrangement as a tool for developing not only their compositions but the idiom and technique of the instrument as well. Collaboration with luthiers to develop new guitars (mostly multi-string, that is, with more than six strings) was typical of the period's guitar-composers — Sor, Carulli, Legnani, Giuliani, Coste, and others.

The scholar Marco Ramelli describes it like this:

Concerto. See Boris Schwarz, "Joseph Joachim and the Genesis of Brahms's Violin Concerto," *The Musical Quarterly* 69, no. 4 (1983), 503–26.

9 Lee Rothfarb and Christoph Landerer, *Eduard Hanslick's* On the Musically Beautiful*: A New Translation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 50.

10 Stephen Goss, "The Guitar and the Musical Canon: The Myths of Tradition and Heritage in Concert Repertoire and Didactic Methodology," *Journal of the European Guitar Teachers' Association EGTA* (2000), 7–8.

11 Christopher Page, *The Guitar in Stuart England: A Social and Musical History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 4.

12 Erik Stenstadvold, "'We Hate the Guitar': Prejudice and Polemic in the Music Press in Early 19th-Century Europe," *Early Music* 41, no. 4 (2013), 598.

13 Jelma van Amersfoort, "'The Notes Were Not Sweet Till You Sung Them': French Vocal Music with Guitar Accompaniment, *c.* 1800–40,' *Early Music* 41, no. 4 (2013), 605–9.

14 Ferdinando Carulli, *L'harmonie appliquée à la guitare* (Paris: Ph. Petit, 1825).

15 Amersfoort, "'The Notes Were Not Sweet'," 612.

Sor and Carulli saw the guitar as an imitator of the orchestra. Organological development of the guitar was driven by their need for arranging. For example, Legnani and Mertz developed guitars with more strings to be used for the fantasy of opera. There is a correlation between the development of the orchestra and the guitar of the time. For example, the classical orchestra of the time is searching for a sweet and gentle sound, just as the guitars Sor preferred (Lacote—Panormo—Pages). However, the Italian orchestra has a predilection towards high registers, and agility. This correlates with Giuliani's idols (Fabricatore and Stauffer) searching for *bel canto*, agility and a most sonorous high register. Then the development of the Romantic Orchestra, including the addition of brass and bigger sonority, relates to the Torres Model.[16]

Sor, in his *Method*, emphasizes the importance in any arrangement of doing justice to the original, what today's music aesthetics might call "authenticity":

> The imitation of some other instruments is never the exclusive effect of the quality of the sound. It is necessary that the passage should be arranged as it would be in a score for the instruments I would imitate.... I have always been of [the] opinion, that to arrange any piece we please for an instrument which cannot render it properly, is rather to derange it; and instead of saying "arranged" for such an instrument, the expression should be "sacrificed to" such an instrument: I play the figure with a double subject in B flat in the oratorio of the *Creation*, by Haydn; but I should never venture to undertake Mozart's, in the overture to the *Mysteries of Isis* (the *Zauberflöte*),... because the guitar being by no means suited to the nature of the subjects, nor to the treatment of them in inverted double counterpoint, I should be able to present but a skeleton.[17]

Another source demonstrates how Giuliani describes arrangement as a vehicle for compositional and idiomatic evolution. In a letter to Ricordi, he mentions the following about his Rossini paraphrases, entitled *Rossiniane*: "During the stay I had in Rome, I set out to write musical pieces in a style I had never known before, and even though I know Rossini well, this is original above and beyond that, in order for me to translate everything as it pleases me."[18]

Around the turn of the twentieth century, Francisco Tárrega was constantly transcribing pieces from a wide range of genres (oratorio, orchestral, chamber ensemble, and solo instrument) for guitar and regularly performed a tremendous number of his own transcriptions at his recitals. It seems that for him, the practice of transcribing masterpieces helped him improve his compositional technique and stretch the instrument's idiomatic borders. As Joan Manén recounted in a 1915 letter,

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16 Personal communication with Marco Ramelli, December 7, 2021.

17 Fernando Sor, *Method for the Spanish Guitar,* trans. A. Merrick (New York: Da Capo Press, 1971), 16–66.

18 Marco Riboni, *Mauro Giuliani* (Palermo: L'Epos, 2011), translation by the author, 437.

"He [Tárrega] let me hear one of his arrangements of Schumann and explained to me a new way of playing that required even more study, more sacrifices, new efforts."[19]

Typically in his recital programs, Tárrega programmed his own pieces alternating between transcriptions.[20] Critics of the time marveled at the results of Tárrega's transcriptions, as with Fola Igúrbide in 1907 describing him as able "to play the guitar, that is to make the delicious warm honey of music pour out of all ears, to revive Mozart and Chopin and many other masters, pulling them out of the tomb so they might be brought back to life for a moment in their brilliant works, marvellously interpreted by this extraordinary Quixote."[21]

It is important to note, therefore, that Andrés Segovia was not the first guitarist with a mission to perform arrangements of great masterpieces on the guitar. He joined a well-established tradition of canonical guitar arrangement; we know that the first arrangements Segovia performed were by Tárrega and Llobet. In his autobiography, Segovia recounts an event when, as a young guitarist, he was offered an opportunity to perform at a private salon for Rafael de Montis, a well-established pianist in contemporary Spain: "Luis's father pointed at me and said: 'This young man plays real music on the guitar,' and added lispingly, with a double-edged smile, 'nothing less than Chopin preludes and mazurkas and short pieces by Schumann and Mendelssohn. He'll even take on Bach!'"[22]

Indeed, if we define "real music" as Western classical canonical masterpieces, then Segovia's only choice at the time was to play transcriptions. Later as a world-famous musician, he outlined his list of apostolic goals for the guitar's establishment, including to "create a non-guitaristic repertoire [*repertorio extra-guitarrístico*]—that is, . . . composed by great symphonic musicians."[23] Segovia worked on this mission both by commissioning non-guitarist composers and by transcribing non-guitar music.

2   Originality, Authenticity, and Arrangement

Of course, instrumental arrangements were not only particular to the guitar. Although transcription and arrangement (including paraphrase) is a popular and well-established practice in Western classical music, it occupies different roles in the history of each musical instrument. While in the history of the guitar, arrangement represented for centuries the only bridge towards "real music," it has a very different role

19 Adrián Rius Espinós, *Francisco Tárrega, 1852–1909: Biography* (Valencia: Piles, 2006), 187.
20 A typical recital program by Tárrega would be similar to the following: Mendelssohn: Romanza; Schumann: Barcarola; Albéniz: Serenata; Tárrega: Tremolo; Schumann: Nocturno; Tárrega: Fantasia Espanola; Chopin: Mazurka de Concierto. Discussed in Rius Espinós, *Francisco Tárrega*.
21 Rius Espinós, 211.
22 Andrés Segovia Torres, *An Autobiography of the Years 1893–1920* (London: Boyars, 1977), 19.
23 Luis Achondo, "The Guitar's Apostle: Imaginaries and Narratives Surrounding Andrés Segovia's Religious Redemption of the Classical Guitar," *Journal of Musicological Research* 39, no. 4 (2020), 2.

in the history of the piano, where arrangements may have also served as vehicles for instrumental evolution. In the second half of the nineteenth century, instrumental arrangements for the piano were greatly in fashion, bringing the most famous tunes to people's doorsteps.

It is not surprising that the musicological terminology for arrangements from this period originates from one of the greatest arrangers of Western classical music history, Franz Liszt, who adds the terms *transcription* and *paraphrase*, together with the term *reminiscence*, in a marginal note to his copy of Lina Ramann's biography of him.[24] According to the Liszt scholar Alan Walker, one of the "private" motivations for Franz Liszt to create his piano transcriptions was that it pushed him to stretch the idiomatic boundaries of the instrument.[25] Although Liszt dedicated half of his piano oeuvre to arrangements, during his career there was growing criticism towards this practice, suggesting that the reason for his ongoing arranging practice was that he lacked creative genius of his own.

He writes about this with irony in a letter:

> Cannot you hear the ever-increasing rumblings of the Goliaths of learned criticism, the yappings and croaks, the protests and invectives from the newspapers of all sizes … which declare in unison a truth which is truer than true: that LISZT has never been and never will be capable of writing four bars … that he is sentenced without remission to drag around the ball and chain of transcription in perpetuity.[26]

In this context, with the concept that original work is superior and arrangement is second-class, we can understand Segovia's frustration, impatiently seeking original "real" music. As a matter of fact, Segovia treated transcriptions similarly to his commissioned works: "Always I have to modify many things. I am accustomed, you know, with the composers who have written for me, to modify something or other in almost every bar."[27] According to Stephen Goss, he was "treating the guitar as a creative prosthesis, [as he was] more concerned with translating abstract compositional ideas, so that they might be effective for the guitar after some intermediary work."[28]

By the second half of the twentieth century, the aesthetic shift towards historical authenticity and the Urtext movement, in particular, transformed the role of arrangements and transcriptions categorically. The Busonian approach, seeing the notated text of a composition as "an ingenious means of pinning down an improvisation so that

24 Alan Walker, *Reflections on Liszt* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), 29.

25 Alan Walker, "In Defence of Arrangements," Library of Congress Lecture, November 9, 2013, posted by Alan Walker, YouTube, 45:29, youtu.be/quFtSrro_Xc?si=1XNJfxMixegiRaCN.

26 Liszt to Alfred Jaëll, 1904, quoted in Alan Walker, *Hans von Bulow: A Life and Times* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 291.

27 Christopher Nupen, dir., *Andrés Segovia at Los Olivos* (Allegro Films, 1968).

28 Stephen Goss, "*Hiraeth*: Manuel de Falla, Andrés Segovia, Nostalgia, Tradition, and Performance Practice," March 2021, video, 32:05, youtu.be/JViZkhx5wfo.

it can be revived at a later date"[29] was brushed away by the "cult of the urtext"[30] and the concepts of "historic authenticity"[31] and "historically informed performance."[32]

As a result, by the end of the twentieth century, arrangement and transcription had become marginalized from the classical music mainstream. In accordance with this trend, guitarists started to turn towards playing original early music on historical instruments: lutes, vihuelas, and renaissance and baroque guitars. At the same time, a growing interest in research into unknown original guitar music of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries also started its course.

Furthermore, thanks to the work of the guitar's main twentieth-century figures, such as Llobet, Segovia, Bream, Tanenbaum, Starobin, Isbin, Yepes, and others, the guitar became a well-established instrument of the Western classical music mainstream. Transcription is no longer the only bridge to "real music." Its role has changed, and so has its aesthetic context.

Yet, it is important to remember that prior to the twentieth century, the guitar was separate from the musical mainstream and overlooked by nearly all composers. Berlioz, Paganini, and possibly Schubert were the only widely known composers who played the guitar.[33] Thus, with the lack of dialogue and collaboration between guitarists and the leading eighteenth- and nineteenth-century composers, we cannot find a coherent guitar tradition in the context of the Western classical music canon. If one would argue the case for the existence of a contiguous guitar canon[34] before the twentieth century, it would perhaps be that of the practice of arrangement. It is a practice that consistently carries on through the guitar's history without creating a line of gradually evolving tradition, but instead integrating diverse approaches that retain their own distinct influences, like a patchwork.

It is as if the nature of being a guitarist involves being an arranger, since nearly all the well-established performers over the guitar's centuries-long history created their own arrangements. Analyzing the diverse practice of significant twentieth- and twenty-first-century guitar transcribers inherently raises issues of the complex

29 Ferruccio Busoni, *Sketch of a New Esthetic of Music*, trans. Theodore Baker (New York: Schirmer, 1911), 5.

30 Clive Brown, *Classical and Romantic Performing Practice 1750–1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 4.

31 Richard Taruskin, *Text and Act: Essays on Music and Performance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 91.

32 Christopher Berg, "Bach, Busoni, Segovia, and the Chaconne," *The Guitar Whisperer Blog*, December 28, 2015, blog.christopherberg.com/2015/12/28/ bach-busoni-segovia-and-the-chaconne.

33 It is interesting to see that Berlioz's particular relationship with the guitar and the assumption that he may have composed on the guitar and not on the piano led to significant cultural prejudices, exemplified by statements such as Boulez's: "On the other hand, as I have said, there are awkward harmonies in Berlioz that make one scream; it is easy to see that he picked out his chords on the guitar and could hear almost nothing. It is all very well to claim that Berlioz's unusual choral placing is a sign of 'genius': I think rather that it was clumsiness." Quoted in Pierre Boulez, *Conversations with Célestin Deliège* (London: Eulenburg, 1976), 20.

34 William Weber, "The History of Musical Canon," in *Rethinking Music,* ed. Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 336–55.

relationship of guitar music to culture and language. Unpacking some of these aspects of arrangement in contemporary guitar culture is the principal aim of this article.

3 Arrangement, Translation, and Illusion

It's really no different from the translator who must resort to a loose or idiomatic translation in order to convey fully the essence of some piece of poetry or prose.[35]

I would start my discussion with a few philosophical questions:

Is a musical work a definitive object? Is a composition finite?
Is there a reality corresponding to an original instrumental work that we aim to transcribe?
If there is such a reality, how do we define it? Is it the notated score? Is it the sonic appearance? Is it the instrumental choreography?

Maybe this reality is the undefinable illusion that only a musical piece can create, an illusion created by a complex system of interrelated elements, a limited system that is able to express something unlimited:

May we call it a language?

For some philosophical and linguistic context, we may turn to Ludwig Wittgenstein and his thoughts about illusion and musical language:

The same strange illusion which we are under when we seem to seek something which a face expresses whereas, in reality, we are giving ourselves up to the features before us—the same illusion possesses us even more strongly if repeating a tune to ourselves and letting it make its full impression on us, we say: "This tune says something" and it is as though I had to find what it says. And yet I know that it doesn't say anything such that I might express in words or pictures what it says. And if, recognizing this, I resign myself to saying "It just expresses a musical thought," this would mean no more than saying "It expresses itself"[36]

Ordinary language philosophy, largely originating from the late works of Wittgenstein, demonstrates how the meaning of words should not be thought of as a fixed essence but rather must be found in the way a word is used in context. Attempts to determine the "true meaning" of concepts can create apparently unsolvable philosophical quandaries.

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35 Carlos Barbosa-Lima, "The Art of Transcription," *Music Journal* 34, no. 5 (1976), 32.
36 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1964), 166.

According to this theory, an attempt to identify an original musical work solely based on notated text, sonic appearance, or any other form can create deceptively confident determinations and theories of "true meaning." How, then, can we translate a musical work while preserving its true meaning? Here we come to the American philosopher and logician Willard Quine and his thesis on the indeterminacy of translation. Quine, who was strongly influenced by thinkers of the Vienna Circle, in particular by Rudolf Carnap, argues that "manuals for translating one language into another can be set up in divergent ways, all compatible with the totality of speech dispositions, yet incompatible with one another."[37] For explanation, he continues with the following example: "The sentence 'That man shoots well,' said while pointing to an unarmed man, has as present stimulation the glimpse of the marksman's familiar face. The contributory past stimulation includes past observations of the man's shooting, as well as remote episodes that trained the speaker in the use of the words."[38]

This example draws our attention to the complexity of stimuli—including remembrance, facial expression, etc.—tied to a seemingly simple verbal object. Similar complexity applies to our perception of the complex domain of music. Innovative writers of recent music theory research embrace the diversity of our perception of music and go beyond pure analyses of musical text through new approaches based on embodiment, space,[39] timbre,[40] and texture.[41] This new plurality of concepts and values offers new insight into the process of musical transcription.

Transcribers and arrangers, consciously or not, scaffold their translation method by applying a diversity of concepts and methods. However, in the end, the art of transcription is transcendental. The transcriber's main intent is to create an illusion, as suggested in the following famous examples from the guitar world, by Dyens and Segovia, respectively:

> The main challenge eventually is aiming to write an arrangement which make[s] people doubt the music was originally written (therefore conceived and thought) for another instrument than the guitar.[42]

> Transcribing is not merely passing literally from one instrument to another. It means to find equivalents which change neither the aesthetic spirit nor the harmonic structure of the work being transcribed.[43]

37 Willard Van Orman Quine, *Word and Object* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1960), 24.
38 Quine, 24.
39 De Souza, *Music at Hand.*
40 David K. Blake, "Timbre," in *The Oxford Handbook of Critical Concepts in Music Theory*, ed. Alexander Rehding and Steven Rings (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 142–48.
41 Jonathan De Souza, "Texture," in Rehding, *The Oxford Handbook*, 160–83.
42 Roland Dyens, interview by Guilherme Vincens, in Guilherme Caldeira Loss Vincens, "The Arrangements of Roland Dyens and Sergio Assad: Innovations in Adapting Jazz Standards and Jazz-Influenced Popular Works to the Solo Classical Guitar," (doctoral diss., University of Arizona, 2009), 79.
43 Andrés Segovia, "A Note on Transcriptions," *Guitar Review* 3 (1947), 53.

The topic of the following discussion is how this illusion is created through translating texture, timbre, space, and instrumental choreography. By discussing phenomenological examples based on these four critical concepts, I also aim to create terminology for these acts of musical translation. The plurality of concepts behind the art of transcription seems to be infinite. Therefore, potentially many more key aspects could be added to this discussion, a fertile area for further scholarly research.

4 Translating Acts between Instrumental Spaces, Choreography, Texture, and Timbre, Including Cross-Translation

> The strongest point with the guitar is definitely the fact it's a "limited" instrument…. But once you start entering its world, you figure out the billions of possibilities it possesses. Then it turns to something unlimited.[44]

When arranging music from one medium to another, the affordances of the instrumental spaces have an essential influence on the arrangement methods, toolsets, and approaches. In relation to a musical work, we may talk about different affordances[45] that determine some characteristics of the composition and its interpretation. A piece for Baroque flute has very different characters in different keys, determined by the flute's affordances, including "strong" and "weak" notes of the instrument. For example, in Bach's *St. John Passion*, both the key (F minor) and scoring (Baroque flute and oboe da caccia) of the aria "Zerfließe mein Herze" generate lots of "weak" notes to play, increasing the expression of sorrow and pain. A composer may also take the affordances of the interpreter into account when writing a piece. Historical examples include Ravel's left-hand concerto written for Paul Wittgenstein, who tragically lost his right arm during the First World War, and leading operatic roles such as Hasse's Cleopatra, written for the extremely wide vocal affordances of Farinelli.[46]

Based on how well an arrangement aligns with the instrumental affordances, it can be considered either idiomatic or idiosyncratic. Huron and Berec define idiomatic as follows:

> Musical passages can be characterized as more or less idiomatic depending on the extent to which the music relies on instrument-specific effects…. The most distinctive instrumental idioms include gestures that are unique to a particular instrument. For example, a well-known solo trumpet passage at the end of Leroy Anderson's "Sleigh Ride" imitates the sound of a neighing horse. No other Western orchestral instrument can produce this sound so convincingly and so the effect

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44 Dyens, in Vincens, "The Arrangements," 79.
45 Gibson, "The Theory of Affordances," 67–82.
46 Anne Desler, "Orpheus and Jupiter in the Limelight: Farinelli and Caffarelli Share the Stage," *Studies in Musical Theatre* 4, no. 1 (2010), 27–44. Johann Adolf Hasse had written the roles of Cleopatra in *Marc'Antonio e Cleopatra* (Naples, 1725), Arbace in *Artaserse* (Venice, 1730), and Arbace in *Catone in Utica* (Turin, 1732) for Farinelli.

may be said to be idiomatic to the trumpet. Using Gibsonian terminology, we might say that the trumpet affords the possibility of generating a sound that alludes to a neighing horse. While idiomatic properties can be regarded as opportunities, in music, it has also been common to describe idiomatic properties as limitations. Perhaps the foremost idiomatic concern (encountered by musicians around the world) relates to the pitch range of an instrument or voice.[47]

4.1 Spatial Translation

In the work of some guitar arrangers, the transformation of the space is fundamental. A transformation may be necessary in order to enable the realization of idiosyncratic compositional elements, including an extended range, infrequently used keys, technically impossible pitch combinations, or unfamiliar resonances. Our guitar space is highly determined by the number of strings, their tuning, and possible fret intervals.[48] De Souza emphasizes the importance of open strings in our "guitar thinking,"[49] and I also gave some insight on how these factors may affect arranging or composition.[50] Transforming the space may take place in many forms, including scordatura, extending the numbers of strings, capos, different types of fretboards, etc. When these acts occur during the arrangement process in an effort to align instrumental affordances to one or more features of the compositional space of the original work, I will call that action a *spatial translation.*

Roland Dyens, in an interview, defines a "guitaristic" arrangement as: "an arrangement that uses … either open strings as guitar 'lungs' or … scordatura which 'enlarge' things in general."[51] Indeed, in his extensive use of scordaturas, Dyens often builds his arrangements on open strings. When talking about his aesthetic views toward arrangements, he adds an important qualification. As we have seen, he claims that the aim of an arrangement is to deceive the listener into thinking that it in fact is an original, but he then adds: "Most of the arrangements I know sound too 'guitar' to my ears. Arrangements obviously have to be guitaristic (besides it's the goal no. 1 to reach) but they are too frequently stuffed with usual 'guitar habits' [and] therefore limited in a way ([the] guitar should 'obey' the music and not the contrary)."[52]

Dyens's arrangement of Chopin's Valse op. 69, no. 2 is a perfect example of what he means. Although the piece would function very well (as a guitaristic arrangement) in A minor, he keeps the original key of B minor. For this inconvenient key, he applies

47 David Huron and Jonathon Berec, "Characterizing Idiomatic Organization in Music: A Theory and Case Study of Musical Affordances," *Empirical Musicology Review* 4, no. 3 (2009), 104.
48 Timothy Koozin, "Guitar Voicing in Pop-Rock Music: A Performance-Based Analytical Approach," *Music Theory Online* 17 (2011), mtosmt.org/issues/mto.11.17.3/mto.11.17.3.koozin.html.
49 De Souza, "Guitar Thinking."
50 Katalin Koltai, "Breaking the Matrix: Transcribing Bartók and Ligeti for the Guitar Using a New Capo System," *Soundboard Scholar* 6 (2020), doi.org/10.56902/SBS.2020.6.7.
51 Vincens, "The Arrangements," 79.
52 Vincens, 83.

a scordatura, tuning string 5 to B and string 6 to F♯. This unusual setting opens the space for new combinations of resonances and vertical structures and helps him to step away from overused guitar patterns tied to A minor (compare **figures 1** and **2**).

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Figure 1   Fryderyk Chopin, Valse op. 69, no. 2, mm. 1–4.

Figure 1.   **Figure 2**   Chopin, Valse op. 69, no. 2, arranged by Roland Dyens, mm. 1–4.

We see another approach towards "enlarging" the space and the "lungs" of the guitar in the work of Paul Galbraith. When explaining his artistic path leading to the Brahms Guitar,[53] Galbraith describes the musical and instrumental space in a Cartesian way:

> One day it really became inevitable for me that a guitar with a wider range would better cope with the entire repertoire.... I'd already previously played six-string guitar for years in a vertical position, which allowed for a wider range of technical options than those normally available in the standard guitar posture, using a footstool or equivalent. Things like a ready, open stretch available at any given moment to the left hand, and access to what Kreisler called "the lungs of the string player — the free wrist" in the right hand. So when the eight-string was finally ready, I dived straight in, feeling that I was still basically dealing with those same technical challenges that I had already been facing since I changed posture, only now extended to a wider set of coordinates.[54]

53 The instrument adds two strings to the standard six — a low A (a 5th below the standard low E), and a high A (a 4th above the standard high E), giving A E A D G B E A. The guitar's frets are fanned to allow for different string lengths.

54 Paul Galbraith, interview by Daniel Hathaway, *Cleveland Classical*, March 13, 2018, clevelandclassical.com/galbraith-returns-with-extra-strings-to-cleveland-classical-guitar-society.

Then I came to the idea that I could take advantage of my already cello-like vertical posture, and use a cello end-pin, whilst sitting up on a chair again, thus liberating the full resonance of the instrument.[55]

Figures 3 and **4** demonstrate the increased affordances of the musical space of the Brahms Guitar in Galbraith's transcription of the Adagio from Mozart's Sonata к. 570. The translated space allows the vertical distance to separate independent voices well in the musical space.

Figure 2.   **Figure 3**   W. A. Mozart, Sonata к. 570, movt. ii, Adagio, mm. 1–4.

Figure 3.   **Figure 4**   Mozart, Adagio, arranged by Paul Galbraith, mm. 1–4. Notated at sounding pitch.

In my own work as an arranger, I extensively apply spatial translation, using the magnet capo system and the "Ligeti guitar"[56] to make the instrumental space highly transformable. I have previously detailed the realization of an innovative attempt to fill some gaps in the guitar's modern musical idiom, including enabling Bartokian clusters and Ligeti's pitch sets on the guitar.[57] By breaking the cognitive limit of

55 Andrea Fortuna, "Paul Galbraith: An Unconventional Technique for an Unconventional Guitar," blog, April 20, 2018, andreafortuna.org/2018/04/20/paul-galbraith-an-unconvention-al-technique-for-an-unconventional-guitar. This passage appears to have been taken from the biography on Galbraith's website, now revised: see paul-galbraith.com/bio.

56 Katalin Koltai, "The Transformed Space of the Ligeti Guitar," in *21st Century Guitar: Evolutions and Augmentations,* ed. Richard Perks and John McGrath (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023).

57 Koltai, "Breaking the Matrix."

fret intervals and equal string lengths, the Ligeti guitar fundamentally changes our perception of the guitar space. In my arrangement of "The Night's Music" from

Figure 5   Open-string set and fretboard diagram for Béla Bartók, *Out of Doors*, Sz. 81, "The Night's Music," arranged by Katalin Koltai.

Figure 4.   **Figure 6**   Bartók, "The Night's Music," arranged by Katalin Koltai, mm. 7–9. Numbers in red highlight open strings stopped with magnet capos.

Bartók's suite *Out of Doors*, the instrumental space translates into a world of clusters resonating on open string sets (**figures 5** and **6**).

When arranging some of the piano works of György Kurtág, I attempted to break the somewhat resigned notion of the composer, who saw the guitar as barely more than a tombstone of the six open strings.[58] In my arrangement of his *Ligatura Y*, I attempt to create a musical space where the central A minor and A major trichords

Figure 5.   **Figure 7**   György Kurtág, *Ligatura Y*, arranged by Katalin Koltai, mm. 1–3.
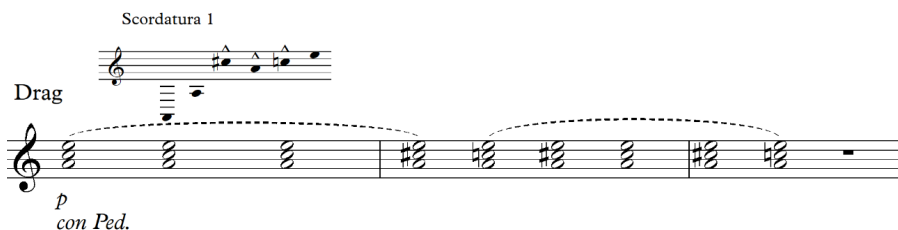
Figure 6.   **Figure 8**   Kurtág, *Ligatura Y*, arranged by Koltai, mm. 15–16: a detail from the score.
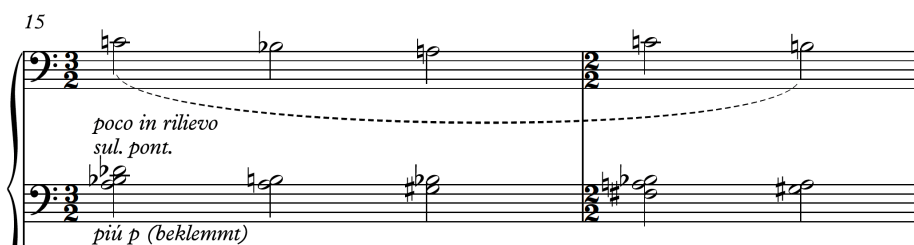
(**figure 7**) are supported in resonance and can be "pedalled together" (as on piano) and the open string set also creates the affordance of adjoining cluster chords (**figure 8**).

Spatial translations are also relevant for arranging early music. Tilman Hoppstock talks about how he transformed the musical space for two transcriptions, the Allemande from Froberger's Suite xix and J. S. Bach's Suite bwv 995, to get a similarly dark timbre effect as in the original pieces:

> The music is very dark. In the cello version [of the Suite bwv 995], there is a scordatura; the first string is tuned one note lower from A to G. This changes everything. The resonance is completely different. For the guitar, I changed the strings to another position; therefore, it sounds like a lute a little bit. I thought: "this music needs more deep sound; how can I do that?" The effect is really

58 Koltai, "The Transformed Space," 116.

interesting because you have the feeling, not only that [it] is to lower the sound, but you think that there are two or three more strings at the bass.[59]

4.2 *Choreographic Translation*

> Where the bicycle converts action into momentum, musical instruments convert action into sound.… How do various instruments transmit a player's actions? How do they transform a player's energy? Which sonic parameters reflect bodily action? Which reflect instrumental affordances?[60]

Lawrence M. Zbikowski, in his *Foundations of Musical Grammar,* explores how musical choreography brings in extramusical content through the cognitive phenomenon of analogy. His demonstration is based on Sagreras's famous virtuoso guitar piece, *El colibrí.* Zbikowski states that, despite the odd and idiosyncratic nature of the piece, "once the title is known, features that seemed odd quickly organize themselves into a coherent image."[61] The somewhat idiosyncratic fingerings of the opening three bars

Figure 9   Julio Sagreras, *El colibrí: Imitación al vuelo del picaflor,* mm. 1–5.

(**figure 9**) result in a choreography with rapid shifts along the length of the strings, an analogy for the hummingbird's flight: "For a brief moment, the guitarist's hand becomes the hummingbird flitting between flowers."[62]

Our perception of music performance is heavily affected by instrumental choreography and gestures. As Zbikowski puts it: "despite the importance of contextual knowledge to the interpretation of sonic analogs, our typical experience of music is one marked by its immediacy. Such immediacy is oftentimes an illusion — even our most basic perceptions have proven to be heavily mediated by the various brain functions activated by sound, smell, or light — but in the case of music the illusion seems to be borne out by the cognitive transparency of many sonic analogs and by music's independence from language."[63] In the field of musical transcription, we need to acknowledge how the removal of the musical work from the original medium

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59 Tilman Hoppstock, interview by the author, November 16, 2021.
60 De Souza, *Music at Hand,* 29.
61 Lawrence M. Zbikowski, *Foundations of Musical Grammar* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 26.
62 Zbikowski, 43.
63 Zbikowski, 31.

and the creation of new instrumental choreography alter our musical perception. Translating musical gestures by creating a new instrumental choreography can be called *choreographic translation*.

One of the most famous and controversial transcriptions in the guitar's history is Kazuhito Yamashita's work on Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*. Recorded and premiered in the 1980s, this work inspired vivacious polemics among guitar scholars. A number of contentious topics were addressed, including the role and rules of transcriptions, and commenters either praised Yamashita's talent or, to the contrary, accused him of fraudulently using double-tracking. The most debated section of Yamashita's transcription was "Gnome." The passage in **figure 10** shows an excerpt of the seemingly untranscribable pianistic texture.

Figure 10 Modest Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, "Gnome," mm. 72–82.

Figure 7. **Figure 11** Mussorgsky, "Gnome," arranged by Kazuhito Yamashita, mm. 72–79.
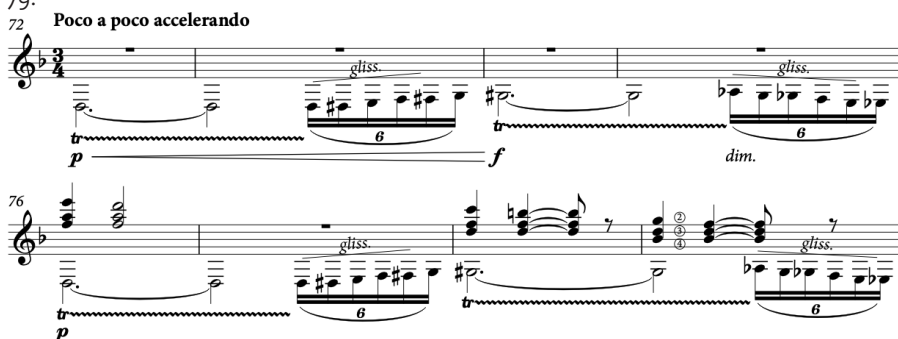
In **figure 11**, we can see what it was that made some of the reviewers reading the score and listening to the recording raise suspicions of double-tracking. Evidently, a trill on the bottom string's first position cannot be played simultaneously with chords at the high tenth fret. Amid these debates, in a letter to *Soundboard*, Matanya Ophee accused English journalists of discriminating against Yamashita "simply because

he is Japanese."[64] He points out that in an early review of Yamashita's recording of *Pictures*, John Duarte — who was not among Yamashita's accusers — had already explained how the passage, which he characterized as "physically improbable if not impossible," was to be approached: "The illusion," wrote Duarte, "has to be created by ultra-rapid shifting." But Ophee went further, arguing that if this shifting might create some awkwardness, it was only to the benefit of the music:

> What is the "aesthetic spirit" of this passage? In her notes to the Soviet edition of the facsimile of the autograph of the Pictures (Moscow, Muzyka, 1982) Emilia Fried quotes a letter by Vladimir Vasilievich Stasov (1824–1906), the well-known critic and dedicatee of the Mussorgsky work in question, which describes the Hartmann picture of a Christmas-tree ornament depicting an ugly, bow-legged dwarf which served as the basis for this piece, as "a kind of nutcracker, a gnome into whose mouth you put a nut to crack." … Fried further elaborates: "Mussorgsky's piece is grotesque, with a touch of tragedy, a convincing example of the 'humanization' of a ridiculous prototype. In the music portraying the dwarf's awkward leaps and bizarre grimaces are heard cries of suffering, moans and entreaties. The gnome is related to other characters in Mussorgsky's works where behind an ugly appearance one senses a living and suffering soul."

The point Ophee makes here is that the instrumental choreography Yamashita created in his transcription is successful because it vividly translates the aesthetic spirit into choreography; the artist's impossible struggle inside the completely idiosyncratic texture is equivalent to the gnome's existence.[65]

In twenty-first-century guitar culture, collaborative arrangement processes with living composers are very important. Łukasz Kuropaczewski collaborated with Krzysztof Penderecki to transcribe three pieces by him (the Cadenza for solo viola, the Aria from the Suite for solo cello, and the Viola Concerto) for guitar. He described the composer's approach to translating texture as somewhat strict and literal. However, in the collaboration, he found out that Penderecki was more open to translating idiomatic gestures between the different instruments:

> Penderecki said: "Make a transcription…. Make sure that it is as close to the original as possible. I don't really want to have more harmony, more basses, octaves." I asked him: "If some parts are very, very strong, and it's just a single line, can I make an octave?" And he said: "No, no. I prefer one single line; and when

64 Matanya Ophee, letter to the editor, *Soundboard* 15, no. 2 (1988), 95–97. The quotations that follow, including those from Duarte, are taken from this same letter.
65 The controversy surrounding the feasibility of Yamashita's arrangements is resolved by several available video recordings of his live performances that seem to vindicate Yamashita and his defenders: see, for example, Kazuhito Yamashita, "Pictures at an Exhibition (Modest Mussorgsky)…," published October 12, 2023, video, 32:42, youtu.be/DjOQ69JjTR0?si=lUpXZEOmEOrku2PH.

I write two notes, I want two notes; and when I write a chord, I want a chord." …
[In the viola concerto] there are some glissandos, that they are doing one bow and
the left hand is just going up on the string; of course that glissando on the guitar
doesn't sound like it, so I do a campanella-style glissando with my left hand going
up and campanella in the right hand. So it is really powerful. He liked that; he liked
that effect.[66]

While the connections are not obvious between the guitar and Penderecki's mu-
sic, such is not the case with arranging folk-inspired Spanish music of the twentieth
century. I interviewed José Maria Gallardo del Rey about his approach to arranging
Spanish music, including the masterworks of Falla and Albéniz. Gallardo del Rey
points out that although most of these works were not written for the guitar, they
often deliver a cultural heritage of folk music, imitating and referring to guitaristic
instrumental choreographies:

I am trying to transfer the main rhythmical patterns or inspirational patterns in
the transition for example, from piano to guitar, or from orchestra to guitar. There
is always a deep route … that you have to follow to get the authenticity of the real
style of Spanish music. When I am playing de Falla, Albéniz or Rodrigo, I try to
understand what flamenco patterns they were using to put together this or another
piece, for example, de Falla's *Seven Spanish Folksongs* [*Siete canciones populares
españolas*]. When I go to the arrangement, I try to incorporate the "salt and pepper"
coming down from the original inspiration.… Falla first lived in Cadíz and then
Granada … but imagine how many times he heard flamenco guitar or flamenco
singing in his daily life. As you know, at the end, he only wrote one original piece
for the guitar.… But in his mind, I mean his soul, the echoes of the flamenco guitar
was in his music. For example, in the *Danza del molinero*, if you play it, you don't
have to change the tonality, it's already E major and G major, so it's just the guitar's
natural tonality.… He could go to whatever tonality because he was writing from
the piano, but he keeps it, the guitar's natural tonality.… That makes me aware [of]
how much he felt the guitar inside, in his soul. Falla was respecting very much the
ideal dream of having a guitar in his own orchestration.[67]

Gallardo del Rey's comments bring in the concept of intertextuality, a linguistic
term originally established by Julia Kristeva, as relevant to the theory of musical
arrangement. Kristeva describes *text* as "productivity," inevitably consisting of "a
permutation of texts, an intertextuality: in the space of a given text, several utterances,
taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another."[68]

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66 Łukasz Kuropaczewski, interview by the author, November 22, 2021.

67 José Maria Gallardo del Rey, interview by the author, November 18, 2021.

68 Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (New York:
Columbia University Press, 1980), 36.

While *Danza del molinero* was originally composed for orchestra, its tonal positions, patterns, and textures can be seen in Kristeva's terms as "permutations" of earlier texts: the music of Flamenco players the composer heard on the street of Cadíz and Granada and of "the guitar inside [Falla's] soul."

Gallardo del Rey also shared some thoughts on creating the illusion that the arrangement was a genuine guitar work by the composer. He describes his imaginary dialogue with the composers as follows: "What I do when I am transcribing something [is] … I try to imagine how [the composers] could do it if they would play the guitar. I try to put myself in the position of [e.g.] Albéniz on the guitar, playing his own pieces. That's how I became a composer. I began arrangements, and then I felt the necessity to become my own speaker. For that I began to compose."[69]

Gallardo del Rey also comments on how arranging Falla's *Siete canciones populares españolas* for guitar can be different now than in the time of Pujol and Llobet: "I think the guitar technique made a big evolution from the beginning of the twentieth century to the beginning of the twenty-first century. The approach of Pujol-Llobet was more classical than my approach. I am getting more flamenco echoes, even more flamenco techniques, and probably Pujol and Llobet never experienced playing with a flamenco guitarist."[70] While Gallardo del Rey's arrangement of *Siete canciones populares* has not been published yet, his compositional arrangement *Lorca Suite* is also relevant to this discussion (**figure 12**).

Figure 12 José Maria Gallardo del Rey, *Lorca Suite*, mm. 30–39.

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69 Gallardo del Rey, interview.
70 Gallardo del Rey, interview. The only published transcription is by Miguel Llobet, edited by Emilio Pujol. Gallardo del Rey is planning to publish his own version in 2026.

4.3 Textural Translation

Musical texture is commonly described in terms of four categories: monophony, homophony, polyphony, and heterophony.[71]

De Souza explains how, based on interpretation, we can categorize Bach's C-major Prelude (ʙᴡᴠ 846) in different ways, such as "chordal homophony," "monophony," or "three-part polyphony." Through various examples, he proves that "a seemingly monophonic texture also can create a sense of polyphony" (**figure 13**).[72]

Figure 13   J. S. Bach, Prelude in C, ʙᴡᴠ 846, mm. 1–2 (*Well-Tempered Clavier*, book 1): three textural interpretations by Jonathan de Souza.

Alejandro Drago applies Charles Seeger's concepts of prescriptive versus descriptive notation to his discussion on arranging and performing Piazzolla's music.[73] Seeger argues for an approach based on "aural tradition" instead of a conventional notation-based approach: "Our conventional notation . . . is practically entirely prescriptive in character. . . . It does not tell us as much about how music sounds as how to make it sound. Yet no one can make it sound as the writer of the notation intended unless, in addition to a knowledge of the tradition of writing, he has also a knowledge of the oral (or, better, aural) tradition associated with it — i.e., a tradition

71 De Souza, "Texture," 160–63.

72 De Souza, 160–63.

73 Alejandro Marcelo Drago, "Instrumental Tango Idioms in the Symphonic Works and Orchestral Arrangements of Astor Piazzolla: Performance and Notational Problems; A Conductor's Perspective" (Doctoral diss., University of Southern Mississippi, 2008), 51.

learned by the ear of the student, partly from his elders in general but especially from the precepts of his teachers."[74]

If there is a hidden world of aural tradition behind the notated score, how can we translate that?

Our perception of texture is based on many features, including the sense of continuity, pitch distances, tempo, rhythm, etc. The guitar's limitations pose a remarkable challenge to the transcriber, whether transcribing highly polyphonic or monophonic works. While in the first case, the narrow range limits the separation of voices vertically, in the latter, a lack of sustain restricts the sense of horizontal continuity.

The Scarlatti scholar Ralph Kirkpatrick describes the guitar's polyphonic nature in the following way:

> Impressionistic polyphony is one of the oldest traditions of lute and guitar music (witness the sixteenth-century lute transcriptions of vocal and instrumental music). In a web of sound dominated by vertical harmony, the movement of voices and the entrances of subjects and imitations are indicated, but not fully carried out. No strict and consistent conduct of horizontal parts can be maintained. The sharpness of musical outline is blurred by the necessary breakings of chords and by the impossibility of sounding all the voices simultaneously at the vertical points of consonance or dissonance at which they coincide. A whole technique of upwards and downwards and irregularly broken arpeggiation had to be developed in order to give the impression that parts are sounding simultaneously whereas really they are seldom together. Anyone who has heard Segovia play polyphonic music on the guitar will know exactly what I mean.[75]

Recomposing texture to create the illusion of the original is one of the principal aspects of guitar arrangement; I will refer to this act as *textural translation*.

Sérgio Assad, one of the most important figures in contemporary guitar, gave some insight into his arrangement process of *Estaciones porteñas* (Seasons of Buenos Aires) by Astor Piazzolla, with whom he had personally collaborated. As with many of Piazzolla's compositions, the composer never created a notated version for publishing, nor did he publish the manuscripts of the parts for his legendary quintet.

The role of texture as an element that integrates notation and aural tradition becomes particularly relevant here. Piazzolla's lack of intention to create finalized publishable notated scores of many of his compositions may be explained by Omar García Brunelli's observation:

> Still more than in the case of academic music, what happens with urban popular music is that even what is written on the score does not offer a good enough

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74 Charles Seeger, "Prescriptive and Descriptive Music-Writing," *The Musical Quarterly* 44, no. 2 (1958), 186.

75 Ralph Kirkpatrick, *Domenico Scarlatti*, rev. ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 195.

representation of the sonoric reality, because in popular music the performer stays above the work, and stamps on it his personal seal, whereas in academic music the essential element is the composition, which travels through the centuries in the hands of the performers.[76]

Ramón Pelinski also provides some insight into the role of notation in tango music: "Tango assumes, indeed, an intermediate position between jazz and classical music, between the interpreter-performer and the composer, between improvisation and music notation." He concludes that "manners of interpretation do not need to be graphically represented in order to be able to become sonoric actualizations."[77]

Thus, it comes as no surprise that Assad did not use any notated source when creating his guitar arrangement of Piazzolla's *Estaciones porteñas*:

At the time, … Piazzolla's scores were not available. So, the only way to write down something it was to do it by ear. It turns out that I had experience with that already as I created a few arrangements of Piazzolla for guitar duo just copying the records I had. Piazzolla recorded the whole cycle of *Estaciones porteñas* just once. He rerecorded eventually one or another in different occasions but never more the four together. The record was of a live concert and a friend of mine gave me a copy so I could work from it.[78]

A very challenging section of the piece to transcribe for a solo version is the opening fugato of "Primavera porteña." The movement, also transcribed by Roland Dyens, stretches the guitar's polyphonic abilities beyond its limits. In a letter, Dyens turned to Assad for advice:

I just started "visiting" Spring [i.e., "Primavera"] today and I already have a little anxiety that is rising in my chest :-). I ask my "predecessor" then: in your version of this piece (which I do not want to hear yet), you were faithful to the original text of the quintet … the fugato part in particular. Can you reassure me by saying that it is "quite" difficult to accomplish…?[79]

Assad explains his approach to transcribing highly polyphonic material in the following way: "Many times the instruments are playing highly dense counterpoint. In these moments you have to choose what you think is really essential."[80]

76 Omar García Brunelli, "La obra de Astor Piazzolla y su relación con el tango como especie de música popular urbana," *Revista del Instituto de Investigación Musicológica "Carlos Vega"* 12 (1992), 158; quoted in Drago, "Instrumental Tango Idioms," 46. The translation is presumably Drago's own.

77 Ramón Pelinski, "Astor Piazzolla: Entre tango et fugue, à la recherche d'une identité stylistique," *Analyse musicale* 48 (2003), 38–54 (translation by A. M. Drago).

78 Sérgio Assad, personal email correspondence, September 23, 2021.

79 Roland Dyens, letter to Sérgio Assad, in *The Last Tango: Music of Astor Piazzolla*, arranged for Guitar by R. Dyens (Lévis: D'Oz, 2015).

80 Assad, personal email correspondence.

On the live recording of Piazzolla's quintet playing at Teatro Regina in 1970, the first appearance of the main theme played on the bandoneon is accompanied by percussive rhythmic patterns played on the bodies of the other instruments of the quintet. The theme is ornamented by semitone acciaccaturas (**figure 14**).

If we compare Dyens's and Assad's versions, we can see how differently they approach the transcription of this first section. While Assad (**figure 15**) aims to create a stylistic and idiomatic guitar part, Dyens (**figures 16**) decides on a highly descriptive, nearly literal translation combining the bandoneon and the percussive elements in one guitar. Compare also the endings of another tango in the set, "Verano porteño," as rendered by Assad and Dyens in **figures 17** and **18**. It is interesting that

Figure 14   Astor Piazzolla, *Estaciones porteñas*, "Primavera porteña," mm. 1–5: descriptive notation by A. M. Drago. In this and the following excerpts from "Primavera porteña," the bar numbers are normalized so that m. 1 is the first complete measure.

Figure 8.   **Figure 15**   Piazzolla, "Primavera porteña," arranged by Sérgio Assad, mm. 1–5.

Figure 9.   **Figure 16**   Piazzolla, "Primavera porteña," arranged by Roland Dyens, mm. 1–2. Note that Dyens's ♩ equals 𝅗𝅥 of the other versions.

Figure 17   Piazzolla, *Estaciones porteñas*, "Verano porteño," arr. Assad, mm. 76–78.

Figure 10.   **Figure 18**   Astor Piazzolla, "Verano porteño," arr. Dyens, mm. 58–59 (5=B, 6=D).
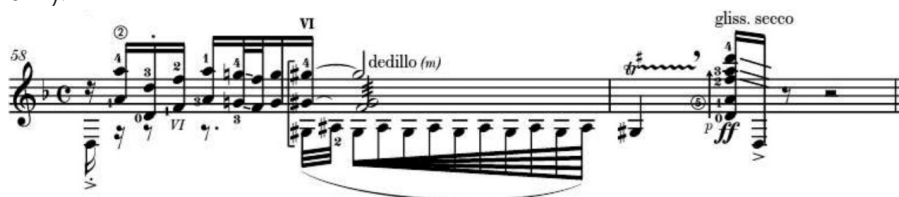
Dyens's "nearly literal translation" is hardly played by guitarists eight or nine years after he made it, whereas the more free arrangement by Assad is the standard one played all over the world.

After the statement of the theme on the bandoneon, the fugato continues with entries by the electric guitar and then the violin, building up to a dense three-voice counterpoint. All three sections are accompanied by percussive elements on the contrabass. The three-voice section leads to a more homophonic part, with the theme in parallel octaves and a walking bass. Assad decides to reduce the build-up of the contrapuntal texture into two voices and then progress towards the homophonic part. He mostly keeps the first line in his translation and combines it with signature idiomatic elements, including functional bass lines, *arrastres*,[81] acciaccaturas, and imitative gestures.

Another interesting question is how to differentiate between composed (notated) and improvised elements in the transcription. Assad suggests that this distinction gives space for more compositional freedom in the assumed improvisatory parts:

> In some parts of the pieces, there are passages that sound improvised. I thought it would be irrelevant to copy down what seemed to be improvised lines. So, I would create my own lines. A good example that comes to my mind is in "Invierno porteño" where normally you hear a kind of piano cadenza just after the theme's first exposition. I learned later that the cadenza was actually written down, but I thought it was just invented by the pianist. To transcribe the piano line it wouldn't be as good as the piano, so I decided to create something guitar-friendly and idiomatic.[82]

81 *Arrastre* is a special tango instrumental effect "consisting of increasing the volume in a chord, sustaining it briefly, to then suddenly cut it"; Drago, *Instrumental Tango Idioms*, 36. Assad translated this element to rasgueados, glissandi, and chord bending in some cases.
82 Assad, personal email correspondence.

4.4 Timbral Translation

> The guitar is a small orchestra. It is polyphonic. Every string is a different colour, a different voice.[83]

> In a very real sense, timbre exists only in the mind of the listener.[84]

By starting my discourse on timbre with these two slightly controversial statements, I aim to emphasize the mysterious complexity of timbre's role in music composition and transcription.

According to Blake, timbre, being an initial "perception of sound quality, like that of light or temperature, is preattentive, occurring immediately in the subconscious prior to conscious attention."[85] Nevertheless, timbre received little attention in Western classical music research until the radical statement of Arnold Schoenberg in his 1911 treatise: "Tone-color is, thus, the main topic, pitch a subdivision. Pitch is nothing else but tone color measured in one direction."[86]

Why is it so difficult to analyze timbre's role in a classical music context? Blake argues that "the preattentive nature of timbral cognition is also … responsible for the fundamental problem of timbral analysis because unconscious sonic processing precedes and takes place outside of conscious verbalization.… The problem with timbre — with *analyzing* timbre — is that it does all its work outside the realm of language."[87]

Timbre reaches "toward our stockpile of experiences, emotions, and associations." The role of timbre is contextual and is based on our embodied recognition of sounds. Finally, "not only is timbre sublinguistic and preattentive, … it is also multidimensional." We cannot notate timbre as straightforwardly as pitch, volume, or rhythm. "Spectrograms can show the acoustical phenomena comprising distinct timbres empirically, without the mediation of language or notation. Yet they cannot account for psychoacoustical processes."[88]

A study by Jason Noble and Steve Cowan attempts to create a system of notating timbre composition on the guitar. They present a notational system based on three aspects:[89] "1. Physical mapping from notation onto physical objects, such as parts of the guitar; 2. Analogical mapping from notation onto models from other domains, such as vowels; and 3. Organizational mapping from notation onto musical structures,

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83 Nupen, *Andrés Segovia at Los Olivos*.

84 Cornelia Fales, "Short-Circuiting Perceptual Systems: Timbre in Ambient and Techno Music," in *Wired for Sound: Engineering and Technologies in Sonic Cultures*, ed. Paul Greene and Tom Porcello (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2005), 163.

85 Blake, "Timbre," 142.

86 Arnold Schoenberg, *Theory of Harmony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 421.

87 Blake, "Timbre," 142.

88 Blake, 148.

89 Jason Noble and Steve Cowan, "Timbre-Based Composition for the Guitar: A Non-Guitarist's Approach to Mapping and Notation," *Soundboard Scholar* 6 (2020), 23, doi.org/10.56902/SBS.2020.6.8.

especially orderings of musical events that do not follow a straightforward linear pattern."

In guitar performance and transcription, the significance of timbre cannot be overestimated. The instrument's rich timbral range mitigates its limitations in terms of volume, pitch range, and texture. Thus, translating timbral features of the original piece is a key aspect of guitar transcription.

Pavel Steidl shares his thoughts on the guitar's ability to create illusions through different timbres: "I like the guitar because somehow you can transform the sound always. And again, I am coming back to Segovia, who is telling 'When you play the guitar, it doesn't need that it sounds like the trumpet, but you can make it like you dream that you hear the trumpet.' You give an illusion with that instrument, and that is something very beautiful and something magical."[90]

Yamashita, in his transcription of Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*, explores a wide range of timbres to imitate both the wide spectrum of piano ranges of the original work and the colorful palette of Ravel's orchestral version. In his transcription of "The Old Castle," he imitates the dark timbre of Ravel's bassoons (**figure 19**) by deploying a variation of unusual guitar techniques (rigorously described in explanation notes of the published sheet music), including playing at the octave node on the string and plucking notes with the flesh of the thumb and ring finger (**figure 20**).

In the compositional arrangement *Cantigas de Santiago* by Stephen Goss, we can see both Goss's transformation of twelfth- and thirteenth-century monophonic melodies and his translation of the distinctive reverberant timbre of the cathedral-like spaces in which they would have been heard. The composer describes the guitar's resonance, comprising over-ringing harmonics and campanella effects, as his main "compositional tool" (**figure 21**).[91]

4.5   Cross-Domain Translation

The four elements discussed above (space, choreography, texture, and timbre) form a complex web of interrelations with other conventionally discussed musical elements (pitch, rhythm, register, etc.). The device of translating between those domains as a way of creating an equivalence through another element (e.g., pitch translated to timbre, or texture translated to choreography) is commonly used in guitar arrangement. I call this transcribing act *cross-domain translation*.

As discussed above, in "Gnome," Yamashita translates the texture into the instrumental choreography, where the performer's effort re-creates the "essence" of the original work. Translating register to timbre is extensively used, due to the guitar's limited registral range, as opposed to its wide timbral range. During my collaboration with Kurtág, the composer suggested translating very low bass notes into a particular

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90 Pavel Steidl, "The Roots," *Guitar Magazine*, published on September 20, 2019, video, 20:32, youtube.com/watch?v=u1KuWSWwh1Y.

91 Stephen Goss, personal email correspondence, January 15, 2022.

Figure 19 Modest Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, "The Old Castle," orchestrated by Ravel, mm. 1–6.

Figure 11. **Figure 20** Mussorgsky, "The Old Castle," arranged by Kazuhito Yamashita, mm. 1–5.

Figure 12. **Figure 21** Stephen Goss, *Cantigas de Santiago*, 1. "Quen a Virgen ben servirá," mm. 1–2.

timbral quality created by the extended technique of hitting the bridge with the thumb, which creates a thumping deep timbre.

Goss explains his approach to cross-domain translation in the following way:

> The task is to transform something that's idiomatic for, say, piano, into something that's idiomatic for guitar. It's easy to mistake "the score" for "the music." The score is only an idiomatic representation of the music—instructions for the hands.... My model for cross translation comes from examples of where composers have arranged their own works for other forces. This typically happens when composers orchestrate their own works. Ravel gives us some excellent examples of this in such pieces as "Alborada del gracioso," *Tombeau de Couperin,* and *Mother Goose.* Ravel

leaves no trace of the idiom of the piano duet in his orchestration of *Mother Goose*. If you only knew the orchestral version, it would be impossible to guess that the original was for piano duet. Consequently, my own arrangement of "Alborada del gracioso," for two guitars, makes the most of guitaristic textures and gestures that try to create the impression that Ravel might have originally written the piece for guitar. If we can hear the piano or the orchestra in my arrangement, then I have failed in my cross translation.[92] (**figure 22**)

Figure 22 Maurice Ravel, *Miroirs*, "Alborada del Gracioso," arranged for two guitars by Stephen Goss, mm. 1–5.

5   Towards the future of guitar transcription and arrangement

The centuries-long heritage of guitar arrangement, integrating a great variety of approaches, provides strong roots for today's guitarist and stable foundations for future arrangers. New cultural trends, including the decolonization of the music industry, the redrawing of cultural hierarchies, the promotion of shared creative processes, and the increased acceptance of and dialogue between diverse cultures, may lead to a sense of greater freedom and therefore more imaginative approaches. Creating composer-approved transcriptions is an important contemporary trend, linking the instrument to new music through collaboration with composers.

The transcriber's work depends on an understanding of the theoretical framework of the music that provides context for the original and the transcription. We have seen the status of transcription change over the centuries as the work of performers and creators evolves. Today the hierarchy of the Western classical canon is softening, diversifying, and finding a different global footing. Amid this increasingly diverse setting, the practices of music-making continue to dissolve and recrystallize in new forms, and the practice of transcription takes on yet new meanings.

92 Goss, personal email correspondence.

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List of Musical Examples

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About the Author

Katalin Koltai is an innovative guitarist, inventor of the "Ligeti guitar" and an Honorary Research Fellow at the Royal Academy of Music, London. Her work expands the idiom of the guitar through the development of new technology and novel repertoire. During her PhD at the International Guitar Research Centre, University of Surrey, she developed the Guitar Magnet Capo System and the Ligeti guitar (2022), making a significant contribution to the guitar's evolution. This invention expands the harmonic and voicing possibilities of the guitar by allowing the rapid transformation of open strings.

Katalin has produced an extensive number of arrangements for solo guitar and ensemble, featuring works by Bartók, Ligeti, Chopin, Saariaho, Ravel, and Kurtág. Collaborating and commissioning new music, she has been at the forefront of premiering music by leading contemporary composers. Her most recent collaborators have included Hans Abrahamsen, György Kurtág, David Gorton, Samu Gryllus, and Gráinne Mulvey.

Katalin's work has received widespread recognition in both academia and the music industry. She has performed as a soloist at prestigious venues, including the Royal Festival Hall, Kings Place, Budapest Music Center, Kuhmo Festival, and the Guitar Foundation of America. She has released recordings with various labels and published music with Doblinger Austria. Her publications have appeared in *Soundboard Scholar* and Bloomsbury Academic, with presentations at leading conferences. In 2024, Katalin was awarded the Royal Musical Association's Practice Research Award. She has also received the American Musical Instrument Society's Gribbon Research Award and the Royal Musical Association's Frank Howes Grant.

Katalin serves as the Chair of the Banjo-Mandolin-Guitar Working Group of the American Musical Instrument Society and the Composer-Performer Collaboration Study Group of the Royal Musical Association. Since 2009, Katalin has been the guitar soloist for the Hungarian State Opera and the UMZE Ensemble. She is the artistic leader of the interdisciplinary new music ensemble, the Barefoot Musicians. Since 2002, she has been collaborating in a flute and guitar duo with Noemi Gyori, creating joint arrangements as part of the Classical Flute and Guitar Project.

Katalin has also established herself as a producer of musical theatre and a community music leader, including productions with Krétakör and Katona József Theatre, and the cross-arts youth series at the Museum of Fine Arts Budapest. In recognition of her work with marginalized groups, especially children in segregated Roma settlements, she received the Junior Prima Prize in Education in Hungary.

For more information, visit katalinkoltai.com.

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