

Lines of Influence: Musical Transcription as Revelatory Tool

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This paper argues that through the creation of transcriptions of recorded music, lines of influence can be traced with regard to stylistic development within many popular and world music traditions. Transcription using standard Western notation can reveal cultural and creative processes contributing to a more complete history of specific musical styles and performance practices. Musical sound is demonstrated in this research to be cultural, and transcription shown to be an indispensable tool for investigating the role of influence in the development of a style. Using case studies of clave-based improvisation in Cuban dance music and its related US 'Latin' popular music forms, ethnographically-based and stylistically appropriate transcription demonstrates how this mode of investigation is an effective means of testing out ethnographic fieldwork; it can reveal subtle information about cultural and social history alongside insights into the creative process. Transcription is used here as a mode of investigation, one which is firmly embedded within ethnography, fieldwork and performer-as-researcher methodologies. A contextualised transcription is thus a revelatory tool which highlights connections between players, recordings and performance traditions.