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Wind and Wood

Affordances of the Wooden Transverse Flute in Swedish Traditional Music

Markus Tullberg, PhD Student

Introduction

The wooden transverse flute is being (re)established in Swedish traditional music. This involves artistic and pedagogical processes on both individual and collective levels. Being deeply involved in these processes as both musician and teacher, I have been spurred to ask questions about these processes. At the centre of this cluster of questions lies the complex relationship between the musician, the instrument and the musical tradition. This is an area in need of

further research: "... the expressive and communicative meanings that emerge as a result of particular kinds of embodied interaction with different instruments constitute a largely unexplored research territory" (Dogantan-Dack, 2015, p. 173). Through exploring what the concept of affordances has to offer artistic and pedagogical processes in music, this PhD-project aims to contribute to the exploration of this territory.



Photo: Anders Westlander

Affordances

The musical instrument is at the centre of the project, both as subject for research and as a tool in the research process. This highlights the need for a theoretical framework that elevates the musical instrument from being a passive object in the hands of the musician. Central to this approach is the concept of *affordances*, originally formulated by Gibson in his work on visual perception:

"The *affordances* of the environment are what it *offers* the animal, what it *provides* or *furnishes* for good or ill. The verb *afford* is found in a dictionary; but the noun *affordance* is not. I have made it up. I mean by it something that refers to both the environment and the animal in a way that no existing term does. It implies the complementarity of the animal and the environment."
(Gibson, 1986, p. 127.)

The concept of affordances has previously been used to study the relationship between the musician and the musical instrument. Used in this context it could be understood as:

"...an instrument affords different musical possibilities to different performers; hence, the affordances of an instrument are as dependent on the individual performer as on the acoustic properties of the instrument."
(Östersjö & Coessens, 2014, p. 337)

In the PhD-project at hand the affordances of the musical tradition are as central as the musician and the musical instrument, thus creating a cluster of affordances in which the musician is situated:

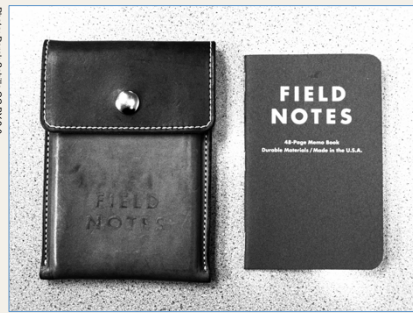
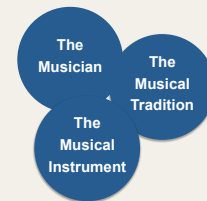


Photo: Derek Schmitt CC BY 2.0

Three studies of the project

The project consists of three studies, each with its specific method.

A: Interviews with three prominent flutists and one flute maker. This study aims to investigate the role of the wooden transverse flute in other genres, and the complex relationship between the musician and the instrument maker.

B: The tranSVerse project is a **co-operative study** within a community of flute players. This study explores the ways in which the musical instrument is used as a point of departure in the collective artistic and pedagogical processes.

Visit the website of the tranSVerse project www.transverse.se

C: A series of autoethnographic substudies on my own practice. Through intentionally challenging my own relation to the instrument, I hope to get a deeper understanding of the relationship between musician and musical instrument.



Photo: Jan Andersson

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