

Guest Editor's Column

Introduction. On ethnomusicology and a theory of shifts

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Welcome to the ninth issue of *Puls*! The volume contains five original papers, covering a diverse range of fields and topics.

Märta Ramsten looks at diachronic oral transmission of a repertoire of songs among religious dissenters in north Sweden and finds a dynamic process marked by the interplay between acceptance and avoidance/repudiation.

Johan Franzon discusses translations of "schlager" lyrics for the popular music market in Sweden. He identifies six different ways of adapting the song lyrics to Swedish language, varying from "liberty" to "fidelity", and examines how these approaches have varied in response to shifting trends in and conditions for the popular music industry.

Daniel Fredriksson analyses the strategies of a Black Metal band to position themselves within the cultural hierarchies in Sweden to receive public funding for staging the story of a local religious doomsday-cult through black metal, props and rituals.

Josepha Wessels and **Helene Hedberg** discuss how performing and teaching Arab music in southern Sweden may open potential spaces for cross-cultural interaction, and for negotiation of representations, identities and belonging in an increasingly diverse world.

Olga Nikolaeva explores a dance performance in which the audience is invited to reflect on how traumatic experiences that are potentially beyond representation can be communicated meaningfully to others through dance.

Just like previous editions of *Puls*, this issue reflects today's wideranging ethnomusicological practices, rather heedless of academic subject definitions and border disputes. The diversity of fields, topics and issues, a hallmark of contemporary ethnomusicology, is partly a result of ethnomusicologists being active in so many academic disciplines. The contributing authors here have their academic residence in disciplines such as Visual Communication, Media and Communication studies, International Migration and Ethnic Relations, Sound and Music Production, Musicology, and Scandinavian studies.

The scope and content of the papers prompts some reflections on what ethnomusicology is and what it is that holds this vast field of study together. To end, a few paragraphs on a common underlying theme in the papers and in current Swedish ethnomusicology at large.

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Ethnomusicology?

A main reason behind the diversity in today's ethnomusicology is a productive uncertainty about what the subject matter of the discipline is, or should be, that has characterized the discipline since its very first days. Over the years, there have certainly been calls for subject definitions. Still, a most feasible conclusion that can be drawn from today's quite vast literature on the subject's emergence, development and winding path as an academic discipline around the world, is that the attempts to prescriptively define the field have not been successful, and that such attempts may indeed be inherently futile.

A more accessible path, then, is to take a descriptive stance and simply claim that ethnomusicology is what ethnomusicologists do. And with the increase of ethnomusicologists over the years, more has certainly been done. The result is an impressive expansion of the discipline, in all kinds of directions. When Bruno Nettl, one of the grand old men of ethnomusicology in the U.S., set out to describe the field from his American horizon in 1983, the result was published in the much-read textbook *The study of Ethnomusicology. Twenty-nine issues and concepts*. In the second edition in 2005, the number had increased to 31, and a third edition a few years later to 33 (Nettl 2005, 2015). Taken together, these issues and concepts can be read as a map of the terrain that constitutes ethnomusicology, based on what ethnomusicologists actually do. Or, to be more precise, have been doing. If there is something that has distinguished ethnomusicologists over the years, it is a habitus characterized by an indomitable will to constantly move on, widen the horizon, incorporate more fields, and add more questions. Therefore, ethnomusicology is also a universe in constant expansion.

That Bruno Nettl's 33 issues and concepts are only the beginning of a long unfinished story is precisely what we find in this ninth issue of *Puls*. However, the apparent diversity notwithstanding, there is also a core that holds together the rather loose and sprawling web that ethnomusicologists have woven over the years. This core is, to put it simple, a profound interest in music as culture: what people do with music and dance, and what music and dance do with people. That this is the case also with the five contributions published here goes without saying. Over and above this defining core and credo, the contributions to *Puls 9* can in their different ways be read as concrete manifestations of both the ever-growing universe of ethnomusicology, and of the expansive habitus of ethnomusicologists.

Adding issues and concepts

However, a close reading of the five papers shows that there is in fact yet another pertinent issue that they all have in common, an issue that begs to be included on the growing list of ethnomusicological issues and concepts. In one way or the other, they all deal with mobilities, transfers and displacements, or to use a current term in Swedish ethnomusicology – shifts, referring to when people, music and/or artefacts are set in motion, spatially, temporally, socially, and moved from one place, time or context to another (Clausen, Hemetek & Sæther 2009, Ronström 2010, 2014, Hyltén-Cavallius 2023, Eriksson 2023, Eriksson & Lundberg 2023, Eriksson & Hyltén-Cavallius

2023, Helmersson 2023, Modin 2023).

Ramsten provides an example of a *temporal shift* in her discussion of the oral transmission of songs throughout two centuries within a religious community.

Franzon's contribution deals with another basic form of shift, *translation* from "foreign" to "domestic", in the case of schlager lyrics in Swedish popular music.

Fredriksson highlights the *multidimensionality* of such shifts in his discussion of how the local history of a north Swedish religious cult was transformed to a stage performance by a black metal band, and how this led to a shift from "out" to "in" within aesthetic hierarchies and public art funding systems in Sweden.

The case of Arab musicians in south Sweden discussed by **Wessels** and **Hedberg** deals with a type of *spatial shift* that has become increasingly common in today's world: migration of music and musicians.

Nikolaeva's article discusses how experiences of trauma can be communicated in a staged dance performance, which concerns yet another basic form of shift, from *inner, cognitive realms* to *manifest outward representations*.

Shifts like these occur constantly, in an abundance of forms and in all kinds of contexts. No wonder then, if there are already a large number of words for such processes. Many come with a prefix that points to what is going on. There are the "trans-words", such as transmission, transition, transposition, transfer, translation, et cetera. And there are the "re-words", revival, retrieval, remake, reuse, et cetera. And to that a number of common words for major forms of shifts with less obvious semantic connotations, among them tradition, heritage, loan, gift, visit, tourism, imitation and theft. All these words entail mobility and motion, as they stand for processes or results (or both) of when something or someone is moved, shifted, from one place, time, context or realm to another.

Towards an outline of a theory of shifts

Some of these words have long been used as analytical concepts. Tradition, revival and heritage belong to the basic conceptual repertoire in ethnology, cultural studies, folklore, ethnomusicology and related disciplines, and have as such over the years become well researched and theorized. What would happen if we were to move on from understanding these concepts as different, separate, and instead place them next to each other, or on top of each other, and deal with them as variations of one and the same basic process? Such an operation would require not only a shift of perspective, but rather a shift to an eagle's eye view of perspectives, a meta-perspective, which in turn will require a theory of theories, a meta-theory.

In the recent anthology *Creative shifts. Musical Flows in 1960s and 1970s Sweden* (ed. Hyltén-Cavallius 2023), a group of Swedish ethnomusicologists have set out to discuss what happens when music and musicians are set in

motion and moved. As indicated already by the title the ambition has been to stretch out beyond today's mainstream occupation with origins, ownership, identities and linear development stories from A to B, and instead focus on the creative potential of shifts, when existing life worlds are expanded and new possibilities open up, due to things set in motion. What characterizes such a process? A review of the anthology's chapters, supported by the close reading of the five papers in this volume, provides a number of empirical observations and theoretical propositions for a first outline of a theory of shifts.¹

- A starting point is the observation that a shift in one aspect or dimension – from one place, time, social context, realm, or world to another – always seems to imply shifts also in other dimensions. Shifts tend to be multidimensional.
- The process begins when something or someone is actively and intentionally uncoupled, (dislocated, disconnected, disembedded) from its previous context, in order to be recoupled (re-located, re-embedded, re-adapted) in new spatial, temporal or social contexts.
- Since shift is a basic process of change (of form, content, usage, significance or symbolic meanings), it implies motion and movement (social, temporal, spatial, mental et cetera).
- Shifts do not come about by themselves. A shift must be set in motion, which requires active agents with a minimum of energy, engagement and propulsive force.
- Shifts imply (presuppose, postulate) some sort of space, a real or imagined world, realm or scape, that can be set up as the point of departure, and another set up as point of arrival.
- Thereby basic directions and orientations in time and space are established, which in turn make shifts appear as movements from A to B, away *from* something and *towards* something else.
- Rather than linear, completed movements, shifts are multidimensional and multidirectional. Shifts tend to bring about feedback systems, through which what is produced in the new contexts will come to influence the old in continuous loops.
- Shifts activate notions of primary and secondary existences, which tend to bring about notions of origins, original and authentic, which in turn may activate impulses of preservation, storage, and archiving.
- Shifts enables things to be seen as simultaneously different and yet the same. When re-embedded in a new context, things may be presented and treated as "the same", while usages, functions and meanings are changed.

What stands clear is that shifts not only bring along change, shifts are change. What is moved and shifted may be produced anew to appear as same (authentic, original) but is nevertheless fundamentally changed. Such changes may be understood negatively or positively, but as underlined by the authors of the anthology, more important is how changes entail a creative

1. See especially Hyllén-Cavallius 2023c: 13–16.

potentiality that can be used to enhance and improve existing life worlds, or simply to try out alternatives and investigate what life could be about.

The human world is a world of shifts. Mobility is the basis of life on planet earth, from day one an inherent characteristic of all human civilizations. And when people move, ideas, experiences, habits, customs, forms and artefacts are set in motion and shifted. Shifts, whether in terms of travel and transport, or in terms of borrowing, imitation, gifts, appropriation and theft, are engines for creativity, for the development of art and culture, not least for music and dance. It is for good reasons, then, that "creative shifts" aspire to become yet another of the many "issues and concepts" that ethnomusicologists are currently dealing with.

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