

Finnish popular music, culture and national identity

Some questions by an outsider

Some sociologists of music and ethnomusicologists have quite a lot in common: they examine and analyze the popular music of common people a type of music that is not considered to be serious art music, not a part of the official culture.²

Although the prototype subject of ethnomusicological studies might be 'folk music' and the prototype subject of sociological interest may be 'pop (or rock) music', the fields of research of both sociologists and ethnomusicologists do, especially when they study the music of modern industrial society, come very close to each other; they hover on the border of each other. Despite the fact that the sociologist is studying music as a form of human interaction and communication, practised and organized in institutions, while the ethnomusicologist is probably much more interested in music as an expressive and aesthetic art form, and despite the fact that the sociologist might be the academic victim of (too much) economic and political theorizing, while the ethnomusicologist might be the intellectual prisoner of (too much) ethnographical description, their focus of attention, their intellectual perspective on and scientific attitude towards these fields should in my opinion exhibit strong affinities and similarities as well. They both try to understand, to discover and grasp the typical peculiarities, the characteristic features of a people's music, whether it be a group, a village, a community, a tribe, a social class or a nation-state. In today's world, they both are confronted with the same difficulty in this respect: the on going process of the globalization of culture (which in the field of popular music is mainly a process of Anglo-Americanization), that is supposed to push away all local particularities.

So both the sociologist and the ethnomusicologist pursue the question of cultural group identity.

1) Thanks to Hannu Eerikäinen, Erkki Pekkilä and Jorma Puuronen who were very helpful in providing me with information and co-shaped my ideas in personal discussions. Of course I am responsible for the views expressed in this text.

2) The distinction between official and popular culture (between high arts and popular mass entertainment) as it is linked up with a strong social differentiation between elite and common people is of course much more typical of modern industrial than of 'primitive' or 'developing' societies. Consequently the concept of folk is much more complicated in sociology than it is in ethnomusicology.

Let me first of all clarify my position and explain my intellectual objectives. I am a sociologist studying popular music developments in Finland from the point of view that Finland, because of its peculiar geographical and geopolitical relation to the rest of the world, and because of the idiosyncracies of its own domestic social development³, exhibits an interesting mixture and balance of tradition and modernity in cultural developments.

Apart from the practical (language) difficulties in the study of a particular culture by a foreigner outsider, there are on different levels of abstraction quite a few meta-theoretical and methodological issues involved in this kind of scientific enterprise that have to be resolved. In this article I will discuss at least some of them; I do have to emphasize that I am asking questions here, rather than providing (definitive) answers.

One of the basic assumptions of my research is the idea that studying popular music is a good door way, even a strategic road, to understanding and grasping a society. There are many indications that popular music plays a peculiar role in the everyday world of many people of different class, age and sex. It seems to convey the central and dominant ideological representations of (modern) social life, and in doing so it is a strategic symbolic field for expressing personal life in (mass) society conditions. So at the very basis of my project lies the idea that popular music tells us about social life.

In assessing the validity of this assumption, we have to take two different academic positions into account. Firstly, in classical cultural anthropology, studying 'primitive' society, there has always been the notion that researching a society's symbols, rituals, customs and artefacts (that is: its culture) is the main procedure to reveal the typical features and qualities of a group of people that form a society. As a matter of fact cultural anthropology is based on the point of view that studying culture is the only way to study society. This supposition still is the (legitimate) *raison d'Être* of ethnomusicology. Secondly, and to the contrary, into day's sociology the idea of the autonomy of culture exists. A society might be analytically divided up into two separate dimensions: social structure and social culture. Society's structure is the social network of formal relations, made up by the institutions of work (economy), power (politics) and kinship (family), while culture is society's system of values, norms, beliefs, religious and artistic symbols and rituals. Some idealist schools of thought hold that culture is indeed a distinct sphere of its own, having its own dynamics, following its own laws of development. They adhere to the theory that culture and structure are two different phenomena that do not have very much to do with each other. If one really sticks to this idea in its extreme form, then my assumption is completely

3) As far as sociology is concerned the internal development of a society is closely interconnected with its relationship to the external world, since every nation is (becoming increasingly) part of a global social system. If we take this argument seriously, then it is evident that we can ultimately only understand "typical Finnishness" by relating it to what is considered to be typically Swedish, typically Russian, typically German and so on. National character or national identity is an interactive category referring to the (cultural) relations between different nations and their respective histories.

false: culture, like popular music, is a world of its own and it does not reveal anything about the social structure of society. Yet most sociologists think that if culture is autonomous – then it is only relatively autonomous. The most general statement on this matter is that culture somehow symbolically represents or reflects social life as it is determined by the basic structures of economy, politics and family. Consequently from this point of view Finnish popular music mirrors Finnish society on a symbolic level.

Even if we agree with this idea, there are still some major puzzles: what is it exactly that is reflected by popular music and precisely how, in what way, does popular music represent it? To a certain extent this is a question of the function or role of popular music in society. Is popular music a form of amusement and entertainment, relaxation from work and other daily troubles of life – is it a form of escapism? Or is it an aesthetic reconstruction and artistic transformation of everyday life to re-experience, to re-live, and confirm it? Is it ideology, the same theorists would ask?

Trying to answer these questions involves going into the problems of signification and meaning in popular music and here we run up against a second basic assumption of my research: the idea of music as a meaningless form.

Music, popular music too, is a typical cultural form quite distinct from for instance literature or the plastic arts. One might say that Kivi's novel "Seitsemän veljestä" (The Seven Brothers) or a painting by Gallen-Kallela tell us something about Finnish society, precisely because they symbolically re-present some characteristics of the Finnish national cultural identity. The meaning of these works of art is to be found in the very process of symbolic representation. Now, I am not going to work out a definitive theory of music here, but – referring to Langer (1942) – briefly explain that in principle music has no meaning at all, because music is not a matter of representation. Music is not a form of representation, but a form of expression, and representation and expression are quite different ontological and psychological phenomena. Language and words represent meanings, music expresses feelings or let me say: the infrastructure of our capacity to feel. Music is a vehicle for the expression of emotionality. The music of Sibelius as such does not mean anything; it is just an 'empty' (meaningless) expressive form. According to some music theorists the expressive form of music is ultimately related to bodily processes of rhythms and moods. This is not to say that Sibelius' music has no meaning at all. It is only to say that the meaning of Sibelius' music is constructed outside the musical process itself. It is constructed in a language discourse, in which the composer himself, his reviewers and critics and the audiences have taken part over a long period of time, and of course this discourse on Sibelius' music – this interpretation (!) of what it means – is linked up with discussions about the Finnish national identity.

What goes for serious classical art music, is even more true of popular music. The meaning of popular music is constructed in communicative interaction between artists and audiences, mediated by "taste experts" such as pop

journalists, rock critics and so on, in all kinds of extra-musical discourses.

Now according to many ethnomusicologists I just might quite wrongly have tried, in a kind of essentialism, to give an absolute definition of music, fixing what music is. They would prefer to start much more relativistically with an investigation into what musics (plural!) are by working out an ethnographical description of concrete musical practices and of what different kinds of people, with different interests and views consider to be (their) music. I am not saying that this idea has no relevance at all; of course it is a sound basis for empirical research, especially when exotic cultures are involved. Yet it is not to the point here. The point is that it is very important to make a distinction between the representation of cognitive meaning and the expression of emotion, between the (cognitive) meaning of popular music and its phenomenology as an expressive form, because the question of national cultural identity in Finnish popular music has methodologically to be located on the level of cognitive meaning and extra-musical factors play a central role in it.

Popular music is a very broad concept. It includes many different types of music from folk to pop and rock, each with their own different sub-styles. As a form of entertainment, popular music in general really is a mass phenomenon in Finland – indeed from Koinurit and Värttinä to Katri-Helena, Topi Sorsakoski and Dingo or Lapinlahden Linnut⁴. In most of the industrialized, modern societies popular music is almost omnipresent. It is difficult to imagine a type of society in which more popular music is produced, distributed and consumed than ours. So far sociologists and ethnomusicologists have not yet constructed a popular music index, measuring the degree of pop-musicality in different countries, but my guess is that Finland would be high in the Top Ten. Radio listening figures are fairly high, in spite of the relatively small domestic market record sales are proportionally big and a very great number of concerts, festivals and other pop music happenings are organized, at least in summertime. In this last respect Finland even out rates many other European countries, even the ones with a big pop music reputation.

In a very brief and far too rough outline, that will, however suffice for what I am trying to argue, one could make the following distinction in typical Finnish forms of popular music, as be distinguished from international trends:

Perinteinen Populaari Musiikki: old-fashioned mainstream popular music, a mixture of popular song and dance music (like the humppea, jenkka, valssi and above all tango) as exemplified by Olavi Virta. It is 'traditional' because it has for quite a long period of time already linked up with the typical leisure and

4) Between September 1992 and May 1993 I studied the karaoke phenomenon. In Helsinki, Tampere, Joensuu and Rovaniemi 358 people (both singers and non-singers) were asked about their musical preferences. From their answers a popularity poll of Finnish popular music artists can be constructed. The first twenty positions are taken by: 1) Juice Leskinen (mentioned 29 times as a favourite), 2) Eppu Normaali (27), 3) Arja Koriseva (25), 4/5/6) J. Karjalainen, Katri-Helena, Kirka (23), 7) Hector (19), 8) Neljä Ruusua (17), 9) Kolmas Nainen (16), 10/11) Paula Koivuniemi, Neon 2 (14), 12/13) Tapani Kansa, Topi Sorsakoski (10), 14): Suurlähettiläät (9), 15/16) Reijo Taipale, Popeda (8), 17/18) Joel Hallikainen, Anna Hanski (7), 19/20) Miljoonasade, Olavi Virta (5)

entertainment patterns of an (weekend) evening-out in restaurants or other dancing places such as. The tango became popular in Finland in and has recently won popularity again. The open-air dance parlians with all their upsand downs over the past few decades are still alive and the Seinäjoki tango contest and the Lappeenranta humppa happening annually foster this type of music as very popular mass folklore. The main venues and outlets of this dance music and songs to listen to are Radio Suomi, local radio stations in the countryside, juke boxes in pubs and dance orchestras in restaurants.

2. Suomi Rock: middle of the road rock⁵ with Finnish lyrics, like that of Juice Leskinen and Eppu Normaali. Rock may be an alien musical form within Finnish culture that had its definitive breakthrough in the country only as 'late' as in the middle or rather at the end of the sixties, but it is a big thing now, very much dominating the everyday "soundscape" and much discussed in big media and small talk. If traditional popular music is the music of the older generations, then Suomi rock belongs to the young. Besides juke boxes in pubs and the modern stereo sound equipment replacing them, the main venues and outlets of Suomi rock are: Radiomafia, local radio stations (especially in urban areas), rock clubs, discos, concerts and festivals and of course records, cassettes or compact discs.

3. Neo-Kansanmusiikki: the broad (although relatively small in number) spectrum of revitalized and restyled popular music, rooted in or referring to traditional folklore. It is not so easy to outline the whole field of traditional (genuine) folk music in Finland and to indicate what is typically Finnish in it, because of the historical variety in regional cultural differences, manifesting themselves in choices of instruments and ways of singing and dancing. Since the first new wave of folk music in the 1970s by an older generation of amateur musicians (personified by Konsta Jylhä), this type of folk music has mainly been performed by (semi-)professional young artists, strongly influenced by international pop and rock music. Although a fiddle-band like JPP (Järvelän Pikkupelimannit) still sounds rather traditional and a singing group like Angelin Tytöt tries to preserve real old exotica, most of the musicians (Veli-Matti Järvenpää, Koinurit, Värttinä) exhibit a very liberal attitude to the traditions of folk music, carrying it away from being committed to specific rural areas or communities and converting it into urban entertainment folk music. The main outlets and venues are: folkmusic festivals and cassettes or compact discs produced by specialized music companies such as Amigo, Mipu Music, Olarin Musiikki and the Folk Music Institute in Kaustinen.

4. Iskelmä: Schlager or Evergreen in Finnish, the repertoire of melodic and rather 'melodramatic' songs about personal human affairs, as it is performed nowadays by for instance Arja Koriseva and Tapani Kansa. Although its most

5) I do not use the term "middle of the road" to express a (negative) value judgement of the quality of Suomi rock. It is to point to the fact that this kind of music is popular among broad masses of the population, irrespective of class background or sex. Of course Finland has its own 'alternative (avantgarde) rock scene' in the margins of society, often very popular with some specific youth groups. I omit this aspect of Finnish rock out here.

frequent themes are love, friendship, home, country and the troubles of daily life, it is my strong impression that – in spite of a lot of melancholy in Finnish popular culture – an iskelmä song is much less a tear-jerker than its Central or West European equals. The first wave of popularity of the iskelmä linked up with the emergence of the radio in the 1920s, it had a boom in the fifties and nowadays is frequently mixed up with transnational pop music entertainment. These songs are quite popular in the age category of 25–45 years, especially among women. The main venues and outlets are: all Finnish Broadcasting Company radio stations, juke boxes, (performances of artists at) dancing parties in restaurants and records, cassettes or compact discs.

These types of Finnish popular music do not represent mutually exclusive categories and the typology is not exhaustive. Some artists cannot be classified within this scheme and the repertoire of others has to be put in more than one category. The main thing is that we have to understand and research the field of Finnish popular music, as it stands today, as a socio-cultural whole or unity ("Gestalt"), in which all forms have their special place and from which one cannot isolate a particular phenomenon. They are all aesthetical and behavioural (practical) manifestations and expressions of human communication within society and they belong to the same history and tradition of popular entertainment in Finland. They all presuppose the existence of each other and they mutually influence each other. The dark and 'dirty' way of singing in rock music, for instance, has to be understood as a culturally dialectical antithesis of (maybe just plain rejection of and rebellion to) the open and clear use of the voice in the tango style – I will come to this later. Conversely the arrangements of iskelmä and neo folk songs show clear rock influences.

Now the question is whether these types of popular music reveal something that is indeed typically Finnish: do they reflect (elements of) the Finnish national character or cultural identity?

I will briefly discuss the tango, Suomi rock and neo folk.

Ad:1 (Musical example:Taneli Mäkelä/Askelees kuulu ei, Tango)

To me as a foreigner this is typically Finnish popular music. Yet the question is: what is so typically Finnish about it, since we have a German, somewhat march like version of the Argentinian tango that was imported to Finland. Typically Finnish is to me the way in which the human voice is used as an "extension of the body". It results in a melodic and rhythmical 'openness' or even 'spaciality'. First of all there is of course, the sheer sound of the Finnish language itself – a language that does, by the way, go very well with modern pop music. There are many open vowels such as a, e, o, u, and even ä and ö, that, especially in combination with i, bring about a spatial quality of sonority and clearness in the words and their musical use. Secondly, but most important, there is the way of singing. Taneli Mäkelä tends more to follow the melody rather than being in tune or 'harmony'

with the way and tempo in which the melody develops. He certainly does not lead the melody, he is just a little bit late – not too late, just late: it is singing with delay. One might say that Mäkelä (an actor!) represents the image of the slow Finn.

Because of these features there is a clear transparency, indeed a spatial openness ('emptiness') both in the voice and in the way of singing that reminds the listener of the vast, open spaces of the Finnish landscape.

Ad:II (Musical example: Eppu Normaali/Akun tehdas, Suomi rock)

Referring to Eppu Normaali amongst others, Kimmo Sarje (1991:2–3) recently labelled Suomi rock as "red ochre (punamulta) rock". Red ochre is traditionally used to paint country houses and farms in Finland. Psychologically it is an ... "amazing substance ...It takes you to back to your ... origins, to a timeless, archetypical, fundamental state." Suomi rock, according to Sarje, radiates the colouring – let me say: the timbre of red ochre. It goes back to "the native soil of Finland ... When Inkinen sings 'Interrail minun tyttöni vei' (Interrail took my baby), you know you are right in the heart of Finland."

Taking up the reference to Finland's countryside, I would like to label Suomi rock "woodlands rock" or "forest rock", as Eerikäinen (1991) did. From a sociological point of view the domestic social development of Finland presents an interesting case: not yet so long ago and almost within the life cycle of one (or two) generation(s), the country has made the transition from a rural agrarian society to a post-industrial urban service economy society, nearly leaving out or passing over, so to speak, the phase of industrialization. Of course Finland is industrialized, but it took a relatively short period of time – hardly time enough to produce the kind of genuine (blue collar factory) working class culture that has strongly co-shaped public life in most of the modernized western countries. Rock music is frequently associated with or even directly related to this industrial working class culture and by logical implication Finland could be expected not to have developed a real rock music culture. Echoes of this kind of reasoning, summarized in the notion of "the agrarian character of Finnish youth" at the end of the fifties, resonate in Toivonen's and Laiho's study (1989) of the retarded breakthrough of Elvis Presley in Finland. Now theory is one thing, reality another. The problem with the industrial (working class) culture thesis of rock music is that it is supervised or at least 'chaperoned' by a false assumption. In some pop sociology rock music is, quite wrongly in my opinion, labelled as "the sound of the city". Now, rock music is not the sound of the city as such, but the sound of social mobility and cultural migration to the city – it is the music of (young) people from the country who orient themselves or actually move to the city. Their urban experiences, as they are mediated and nourished by their rural life perspective, are the stuff the rock idiom is made of. The early career of Elvis Presley (moving from his mother's kitchen to the big city of Memphis – "It's All Right, Mamma") is a

good illustration, as is the life story of many golden rockers. Finland proves the adequacy of this idea and reversely this notion could be a starting point in explaining the 'greatness' of Suomi rock, which had its golden age in the seventies and (mid-) eighties – precisely the period of huge urbanization and migration to towns and cities. Even today the dialectics between city life and rural background play an important role in Finnish everyday life: the Finns are still in the process of establishing themselves in the cities (Eerikäinen, 1991:80), but apart from a few, Finnish cities are merely country towns; many Finns still have direct relatives (parents, uncles and aunts) living in rural areas and the cult of the countryside (sauna, summer cottage, fishing, hunting) is passionately celebrated by urban dwellers. A great part of the Finnish population psychologically commutes in a kind of "magical mystery tour" back and forth between countryside life and urban experience.

There is indeed a strong rural, country side flavour in Suomi rock. It is rather simple, elementary, orthodox, or 'classical' – if one likes to say so – rock music: strong, solid countryside noise, with the pure fermentation of rock'n'roll, hardrock and sometimes even heavy metal – exemplified by the way the drums and especially the guitar is played. There is an influence of (American) urban country folk as well, but to a lesser extent. Most of the popular Finnish rock bands play in this style, which is really very well-liked. I expect the percentage of foreign hits in this genre within the Finnish hit charts to be much higher than in the rest of Europe. An analysis of these charts in the 1980–1992 period might produce further empirical evidence of the Finnish preference for this kind of rock music.

Something should be noted, finally, about the verbal content, the texts of Suomi rock, which seem to be most important in the way the fans perceive the music. In a kind of informal (explorative) research strategy, in pubs, rock cafes, discos and restaurants, I frequently start to discuss the (rock) music that is being played with Finns I meet. Almost everybody first of all points to "the beautiful lyrics", that are so well chosen and pregnant – often said to be untranslatable ("You have to feel it") since they express "typical Finnish things in a typical Finnish way". I am still rather handicapped as far as the Finnish language is concerned, but the lyrics of many songs like the music itself appear to be elementary, basic and down-to-earth as well. They exhibit a straight-forward quality of integrity, cherished by a need to express honesty and authenticity. Yet there is a lot of irony too. Especially in comments on personal troubles or social problems the figure of speech of double meaning (saying one thing, meaning another) is rather frequently used, resulting in "mad seriousness mixed with serious madness ... the Finnish blues ... with a blend of crazy humour and sense of absurdity". (Eerikäinen, 1991:82)

In a provisional summary we might conclude that on the level of text Suomi rock is a mixture of rural honesty and urban sophistication. Content analysis has to substantiate this thesis, of course.

Ad III: (Musical example: Veli-Matti Järvenpää/Särkijärven bolero, Finn Mex)

At first hearing this is (Cajun) Tex Mex pop music with Finnish lyrics. Of course an instrument that still is rather popular in Finland too, the "haitari" (accordion), plays a central role and of course it is music to dance to – and these features may very well explain the popularity of this type of music – but the sound remains rather French-American to me. Soon only the text is purely Finnish, yet Veli-Matti Järvenpää is considered to be one of the prime exponents of Finnish neo-folk music. As a matter of fact the basso-player and technical co-producer of Järvenpää's latest album personally told me that they have been trying to make the music sound really Finnish – "It is Finn Mex", he stated.

I will come back to Finnish neo-folk later and now just briefly comment on this with a quotation of a Finnish scholar: "An interesting thread runs through out our cultural history – the various ways in which Finnish culture has been able to transform ... external impacts into Finnish." (Tarasti, 19...:204) Indeed, Veli-Matti Järvenpää, Suomi rock, the tango, humppa (being the Finnish version of the foxtrot in the 30s) and even Sibelius, indicate Finland's great capacity to absorb alien influences and to amalgamate them into something that is experienced and recognized by Finns as being of their own.

So far I have been connecting popular music and typical Finnishness in a rather suggestive, quasi-poetic way metaphorically using for instance (like Sarje did and as is often done) some features of the Finnish scenery.

Behind it lies the difficult question of national cultural identity, which is from the point of view of sociology as a science indeed rather problematic. Is there such a thing as a Finnish national character? If yes, what is typically Finnish and is it open to empirical measuring and logical theorizing? In treating this issue I think we should make a distinction between two kinds of people that somehow utilize the notion of national character: academics and normal(!) people. Most of the academics I meet find it very difficult to talk about what is typically Finnish – they say that "national character" is a tricky concept and express the opinion that typical Finnishness does not exist. From the point of view of cultural history this is quite remarkable since it was precisely the intellectuals who were in the middle of the previous century very much concerned with constructing a thing like national identity during the formation of the Finnish nation-state – and 'popular' music, Kalevala rune singing, played an important role in it. The common people, on the other hand, in all kinds of everyday situations continuously tell me about things that I have to understand, being a foreigner, because they are "typically Finnish". Nowadays the intellectuals, orienting themselves to at ransnational culture scene, seem to deny and to take away from the common folk what very much belongs to their life world, while about a hundred years ago they were in the business of imposing it on the masses, lacking such sentiment. This illustrates the intricate interplay between high culture and mass culture, between elite and common folk, in the birth and gradual decease of a nationalist sentiment, depending on access

to formal education transmitted culture, the separation of culture and politics and the social conditions of the industrializing mass society (See: Gellner, 1983:39,43,48,89,96).

In an article "Finland in the Eyes of a Semiotician" the musicologist Tarasti (203–205, 209–211) turns out to be an intellectual who takes 'typical Finnishness' seriously. Pointing out that a national culture, conceived of as a semiosphere (context of signification), is rooted in "a certain physical unity, a spatially, temporally and actionally definable landscape, climate, race, etc. ...", he mentions a list of cultural items ("texts" as he calls them), ranging from the Kalevala to a Finnish design bottle, that represent national culture. Since he believes that biographies are the constant and central textual genres of a national culture, he uses Zacharias Topelius' "Maamme kirja" (The Book of Our Country) to measure the Finnish national character through patterns of emotions.

Using emotions as parameters is a very good idea as far as I am concerned, since it fits my own everyday pre-possessions (or prejudices, that might be turned into a hypothesis) and observations: Finnish people are rather emotional. At the crossroads of introvert and extravert and behind the socially standardized mechanism of how to cope with positive as well as negative feelings (such as 'being shy'), there are outspokenly strong affections and emotional involvements. The Finns are a people of sentiments and that is probably why music and especially singing are so popular. Music and singing are vehicles of emotion and emotions are dealt with in a collectively acceptable way by music. Music allows people to express themselves and it is an integral part of the Finnish soul.

According to Tarasti emotions can be reduced to some few modalities, limited in number. Altogether he mentions seven: being, doing, willing, knowing, being obliged to do something, being able to do something and believing. With the help of these categories Tarasti passes on the following description of the Finns and the Finnish nation:

The Finns are dominated by a deep and true fear of God (= a positive articulation of the modality of believing) ... 'it (the nation,) is diligent and persistent (=the modalities of willing, doing and being able to do); 'it is hardened and strong' (=the modality of being able to do); 'it is patient, unselfdemanding and vital' (=several modalities in different constellations); 'it is a peaceful nation' (=the modality of being dominates that of doing); 'it is also courageous and capable of fighting in awar' (=modalities of doing and being able to do); 'even when conquered and subordinated it has always maintained its own way of living and thinking: it is therefore an extremely durable and obstination' (=a complex combination of the modalities of being able to do and doing something); 'once it has placed itself under a government, a foreign one or one of its own, it has never rebelled against it – therefore, it is faithful' (=modality of being obliged to do); 'it has often neglected the use of its rights and power when there has been a need of them: consequently, it is a slow and hesitant nation' (=modalities of willing to be (vouloir être) and willing not-do (vouloir non-faire)); 'but under the violence and subordination it has not accepted to

remain under the yoke of the oppressor – it is a nation which loves freedom' (willing to not-be (*vouloir non-être*) and willing to do (*vouloir faire*)); 'and finally it has in its lonely forests, far from the centres of the civilized world, raised itself to enlightenment – it is thus a nation which desires knowledge and culture' (=modalities of willing and knowing (*vouloir savoir*)). Topelius 1981:126

It is not so difficult to recognize the features of "sisu" in the above description. It recapitulates (the ability to) "mennä läpi harmaan kiven" (to go through a granite greystone), it summarizes the character of a people with inner strength, that is courageous, determined, tenacious, reliable and trustworthy, but can be stubborn, obstinate and taciturn as well. It provides "the measure of a man", as it is with some bitterness expressed in "Miehen mitta", a song by Timo Turpeinen. (Eerikäinen, 1991:81)

Yet this portrait of the 'Finnish mentality' is far from complete – and in stating this I deliberately leave out the question of how to know and decide what (the requirements of) a sufficiently exhaustive description is (are). It is for instance, mainly derived from the icons of high culture in Finland. With the exception maybe of the design bottle and an Alvar Aalto building, the cultural items Tarasti is referring to belong to the world of high arts. There might be some elitist bias involved and because we are dealing with the common people's (musical) culture, I would at least add an Uuno Turhapuro movie to get the Finnish sense of selfhumour included. And from my own experience in meeting Finns, I could contribute the self-autonomous individuality of the people – although that might already be incorporated in "sisu" – or their everyday life mysticism, which on the one hand is a sensitivity to the unaccountable events of life and a kind of resigning melancholy on the other.

In making this kind of contribution we are entering the field of social psychology. The main problem of semiotics, used in the above way, is that it is merely a literary formula, based upon or employing a vague quasi-psychology of the individual and lacking the kind of empirical precision that social science asks for. It really needs to be supplemented by more detailed social psychology⁶ and life style research to reveals the basic motivations and attitudes of the Finns, the values, norms and ways of perceiving things characteristic of Finnish social life.

Now, suppose social psychology and life style research could in fact provide a more or less complete list of character traits – most of the time the idea of national identity is based upon a social psychology of a personal character or upon a psychology of the self – we would still have major methodological problems to solve. For the question indeed is how these personality characteristics are reflected in popular music. Is it, for instance possible to find some of these characteristics in the songs of Arja Koriseva?! Do we have to look at the level of the music itself – at its melodic, harmonic and rhythmic structure?

6) So far I have only come across Anja Vornanen (1992), who mentions "prudence" as a psychological quality important to Finns.

Do we have to look at the level of the lyrics or even more complicated – do we have to look at the level where both music and text interact to shape the 'total sound' of the songs? And what if, even with the most sophisticated and diverse research strategies, we do not find these characteristics?! Do we have to draw the conclusion then that Arja Koriseva is not typically Finnish?

Let me say at least this: the personality characteristics that are attributed to Finnish people in general are basically individual motives or motivations. They are personal categories and we hardly know how individual motivations are exactly related to a culture's main values and symbols. So first of all that kind of research is needed. Secondly we need to know how individual motivations are symbolized in a specific cultural form, in our case in popular music. How the symbolization of these motivations goes on as a process, what social and aesthetic mechanisms are involved, needs to be studied. And as I pointed out earlier, the process of meaning construction in (popular) music is a process of secondary signification, depending mainly on extra-musical factors.

So it turns out that the psychology of individual personality as a basis for studying national character (in popular music) presents quite a lot of methodological problems. Yet, there is a more fundamental issue at stake. So far in my discussion the motivations and expressions of the artist have been the implicit focal concern. Whenever the psychology of the self is used to research national cultural identity indeed the position of the artist functions as a point of reference. The meaning of popular music – and that is what we are ultimately contemplating here – is, however, a product of the communicative interaction between the artist and his or her audience. Consequently the question of national identity can be approached either by studying the artist or by studying the public – by analyzing how it perceives the music and how it relates to it.

For of all the reasons discussed above I would prefer to turn to the audience(s) and to the consumption or reception of popular music in order to explore the Finnish national cultural identity. In that way we might not only overcome or at least compensate for (some of) the problems posed by semiotics and social psychology, but we may be in a better position to find out what institutions come into play that make for "typical Finnishness" as well. The study of institutions is the proper domain of sociology, anyway. (yet, in taking this position we have to exercise some care. The grand old maestro of Finnish sociology, Erik Allardt (1989:225–226), discussing the country's main institutions, recently drew the conclusion " ... that Finland in most essential respects manifests the same basic features as the Nordic societies ... These general conclusions apply not only to welfare policy, but to the whole of Finland's institutional and structural character, culture and politics."⁷ If he is completely right, then the matter of typical Finnish

7) Allardt (1989:225–226) admits that there are some "divergences" between Scandinavian countries – in the case of Finland, "due to its particular history and social structure." He does not discuss these particularities, however, and even points to similarities between Swedish and Finnish (culture and) language. I am so free as to disagree with him: in terms of culture and society Finland is quite a different nation than Sweden.

institutions is out of the question. Now, in their formal dimensions the main Finnish institutions, especially in the field of economics and politics, may look like the ones in the (other) Scandinavian countries, but institutions are meaning-patterns ("Sinngelände", as Weber called them), configurations of values, norms, definitions of the situation, motivations and behavioural codes as well, and in that respect in my opinion they exhibit some particular Finnish idiosyncracies. This is certainly true of some institutions in the field of (popular) culture. In the disquisition about Suomi rock I already mentioned some of these institutional in-depth structures of Finnish social life.

I will, to end this discussion, briefly go into the main outlines of my current Värttinä audience research in order to explain the institutional approach to popular music and national character.

Värttinä is an interesting case for two reasons. Firstly we have to do with neo-folk music, the study of which intersects the interest of both ethnomusicology and sociology when it comes to investigating the development of musical traditions, style and authenticity. Secondly the Värttinä repertoire really puts forward the question of what is typically Finnish since their songs not only stem from the Karelian Kanteletar-Kalevala rune- and Groundsley-traditions, but are mixed up with influences from Ingria, Setumaa (Estonia) and even the Russian Mari-Republic – all places outside Finland – as well. Of course one might answer that these are all sources of Finno-Ugric folk culture, but it still remains troublesome why and how people identify this music as typically Finnish since the political map of today's world situates these areas outside the Finnish nation-state proper, and since the awareness of cultural history generally is not very much alive among modern citizens.

The main Leitmotiv of my research is accordingly what Värttinä means to its audiences.

The first question we have to answer is what kind of people actually go to a Värttinä concert. The main thing in this respect is how a Värttinä concert is institutionally organized from the point of view of the audience. Apart from appearing at folk music festivals, Värttinä mainly performs in restaurants, rock clubs, school auditoriums and sports halls. These are all different places in terms of cultural life, with specific codes selecting and attracting different kinds of people. Each of these places is a distinct performance setting consisting of several factors that influence the decision to go to a concert. Consequently, we ultimately need information on how the concert circuit in general is organized in Finland. The second issue involved is related to the everyday life situation of the public itself: people that attend a concert are acting within the framework of all kinds of institutions. At this point we can return to a more sophisticated effort to use the psychology of the self in studying national identity. Smith (1991:3-15) points out that collective identity, like the individual self, is multidimensional and composed of the following role-categories: family, territory, class, religion, ethnicity and gender. These role-patterns are the basic elements of a society's

primary institutions and as meaning-patterns they have direct effect on everyday life, the reception of popular music included.

I will shortly mention three of these institutional patterns, which I consider to be rather distinctly Finnish. Although their constituent elements, educational level and type of work (experience), strongly determine living conditions, class-distinctions as such are not very important in everyday life interactions between Finns. Religion is not a decisively discriminating factor, either. The family, regionality and gender are complex behavioural patterns that differentiate between people who visit a Värttinä concert by shaping their mental make-up.

- The family: Blood and kinship relations through marriage and other types of sexual intimacy ('living together') still play an important role in Finnish society, probably because they symbolize (traditional) communal life. Even the high divorce rates do not change this. It is rather surprising to note how strongly the contacts between ex-spouses are maintained as a kind of informal 'social networking'. The family- or household background or in whose company an individual comes to a Värttinä concert makes quite a difference.

- Territory (and ethnicity, to be understood in terms of 'community') or regionality: Far more than class background the area from which a person comes and the stereotypes about this area regulate the daily contacts between Finns. Again it makes quite a difference whether one is from Ostrobothnia, Savo or Lapland. Since the band to a certain extent radiates Karelianism, the images of Karelia within the national cultural configuration are an important factor in how people in different parts of the country perceive and experience a Värttinä concert.

- Gender: Commonly the notion of the "battle between the sexes" is a phrase to recapitulate the dialectics of attraction and tension between men and women. In Finland it is not just a metaphor: there is a strikingly strong antagonism, even within the context of marriage, between both sexes in this country. On the level of everyday life there is an overt struggle for symbolic (and practical) power or domination going on, in which women, schematically summarized, represent civilized culture and men 'natural' authentic sincerity. It is linked up with an open-minded easy-contact attitude of women and a reticent aloofness of men in public behaviour and with differences in educational level and labour employment between both sexes. The Värttinä repertoire explores this battle between the sexes and whether an individual is male or female and what opinions he or she holds about the opposite sex strongly influence the attitude towards the band.

Now, what I am doing is simply asking a representative sample of the Värttinä concert audience all over the country whether or not they consider the band to be typically Finnish. As a matter of fact some statements about possible motives for going to a concert and about the image of the band are submitted to the respondents, which in a pre-coded way have to answer a questionnaire. So far 679 people have been interviewed. 17.8% of them answered that the statement "I am here because I am interested in typically Finnish things and Värttinä is typically Finnish" did not apply to them, 38.4% answered that it applied "a little",

25.2% indicated that it applied "strongly" and 9.4% could not say. So 63.6% more or less agreed they were interested in Värttinä as a typically Finnish phenomenon. 5.9% "strongly" disagreed, 11.2% disagreed without any further qualification, 42.4% agreed "somewhat" and 12.2% "strongly" agreed with the statement "At a Värttinä concert you really can experience what being Finnish is all about". So 54.6% more or less agreed. Yet only 12.2% strongly agreed, whereas no fewer than 25.9% could not say. 1.9% strongly disagreed, 4.9% disagreed, 34.2% agreed somewhat and 40.2% strongly agreed with the statement "Värttinä is about Karelia and the eastern elements of Finnish culture". 74.2% of the respondents more or less agreed with this item, 40.2% even strongly. With the statement "Värttinä's music is the Kalevala" 4.9% of the respondents strongly disagreed, 13.1% disagreed, 36.2% agreed somewhat, 18.1% strongly agreed and 24.9% could not say.

This is not the place to analyze these data, I just present them to emphasize that on an empirical level the institutional approach is first of all opinion- and attitude-research. In the end, in terms of theory, Weber's *Verstehende Soziologie* could be helpful in finding out whether or not there is a "Wahlverwandschaft", a cultural resemblance and affinity between the opinions and attitudes of the concert visitors and the basic features of the institutional patterns they are caught up in.

In order to solve the problem of national identity in Värttinä, like in other types of Finnish popular music, in terms of a theoretical interpretation, we need ideal typology constructions, that link the structures of social life with the concrete musical experiences of the audience.

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Discography:

Eppu Normaali: Akun tehdas, Poko Records, Po-LP 12.

3. Suomi-ilmiö, 4. Poltan loppuun tupakin, 5. Puhtoinen lähiöni, (sivu 1),
1. Akun tehdas, 2. Puhtoiset vesistömmä, (sivu 2).

Veli-Matti Järvenpää: Särkijärven Bolero, AMIGO-cassette AMFK 2003/4.

1. Heittopussi, 2. Särkijärven Bolero, 3. Sua muistin jääkukkasin

Taneli Mäkelä: Askelees kuulu ei, SCD 722 AAD (Scandia).

3. Syysillan muistoja, 5. En enää vaieta mä voi, 7. Tango Humiko,
10. Sateen tango, 12. Syvä kuin meri.